



WHY IS JUMBO VISMA THE EXAMPLE OF A HIGH PERFORMING ACTION LEARNING TEAM? (PART 1)

Over the summer I took a month off for vacation. I managed to distance myself from my work quite well. But ignoring sports successes is impossible for me.

In 2021, it was TeamNL at the Olympic Games, but in 2022 it was the performance of the Jumbo Visma team during the Tour de France that caught my eye. Jumbo Visma is a Dutch cycling team with cyclists from several countries. After several years of being close to success, where things often went wrong at the last minute, they were very successful that summer of 2022.

I went to watch, listen and read. What an Action Learning Team that is! A nice touch is that the environment has already determined that the team consists of eight riders, the ideal number for a team, at least that is step 1.

Action Learning = P + Q + R

I have written seven blogs about this on LinkedIn. In each blog, I focused on: (P) programmed knowledge (R) reflection and (Q) questions. I have put these blogs together in this article. Enjoy reading!

What are the elements that Jumbo Visma says contributed to their excellent results?

1. You have to have a vision and go for it together;
2. The leadership of the team reflected well and honestly;
3. You have to learn from loss;
4. You have to learn from what goes well;
5. Don't take anything for granted;

6. Not waiting for the Dutchman on their team to win the tour;
7. Use science.

In the blogs I went into a bit more detail about the similarities with action learning in the seven individual elements. For me as a team coach, this is very interesting.

When is it interesting for you to look at a team like Jumbo Visma?

1. Jumbo Visma has a vision that revolves around individual performance and cooperation as a team!

Vision is the first element of seven that I describe, following the success of Jumbo Visma's cycling team.

Your best bet, if you want to win a yellow jersey or get any kind of result, is to focus on improving your own performance: getting just a little better every day. A vision that many embrace. In sports one team does this better than another. In organizations, this is often less the case. There is often a lack of patience for this, in my experience.

When I coach a team in an action learning pit stop, getting better a little bit every day is not so difficult, because we work outside of practice. So that's not playing a game but that's just training. And that's where it starts, simple by having everyone at the beginning of the session answer the question: what skill are you going to work extra on today? And answering the question: what do we want to learn as a team?

In daily routine, however, it becomes a lot harder, the team is less concerned with the performance and more concerned with the result. Despite that everyone on the team knows that if you improve your performance every day, you get the best out of yourself. And so that's maximum results. And yes, on one team the coach gets more time and is allowed to fail more than on the other team. Just look at how long a coach or manager is allowed to keep working with a team when results are not being achieved (yet). If you believe in this vision, make sure you also name performance and progress in performance! The results will then come naturally.

"If you make more crosses (performance) you automatically start scoring more, if you ask more questions (performance) you automatically become more innovative!"

Which makes me wonder: in today's dynamic and uncertain (VUCA) times, does a team have any other more sensible choice than to get one percent better every day?

This vision has not harmed the Jumbo Visma team. One success followed another. For the simple reason that they work with people who are only concerned with one thing, getting one percent better every day.

Where in the process of Jumbo Visma do you recognize your own work situation?

TIP: a very readable book on this is Atomic Habits by James Clear

The next section is about element 2, reflection and experience, how did this vision come about?

2. The team's leadership reflected well and honestly.

Reflection and thus experience is the second element of seven that I describe, following the success of Jumbo Visma's cycling team.

After several years of varying success, the Jumbo Visma leadership came to the bold conclusion:

"With little experience and rash behavior, you can kill everything."

Honestly, I sometimes hold my heart when I see people who start working confidently with barely or no experience, with sometimes quite a lot of theoretical (books or course) knowledge. So is that an example of rash behavior that Jumbo Visma is talking about? And what are you helping to kill? A sports team's victory, a company's profits, someone's career or a human life? Over the years I have come to the realization that if you want to grow and gain experience you cannot avoid taking risks. Indeed, a team in which people are allowed and dared to take personal risks, is essential for growth. It is not for nothing that psychological safety so trending!

Pretty complex huh!

I think it is a moral responsibility of everyone, at all times, when pursuing something, to identify the risks. Any executive who wants to lead from experience, can then ask you two questions:

1. is the risk acceptable?
2. is the risk real or is there a (limiting) belief behind it?

Only then can you as a leader work on experience and can you as a leader continue to learn, I think.

With the current staff shortage, in almost all sectors, extra focus is required! Due to high workloads, more and more people are being inducted faster with minimal supervision. They do gain experience, and what is own reflection and peer reflection on the experience really worth? Without reflection it is worth less in any case, or how would you see that?

"EXPERIENCE IS A LONG CHAIN OF REFLECTIONS"

So how much risk are you consciously running as a manager if you do not encourage the chain of reflections? And how reckless is that behavior? In the vision of Jumbo Visma, shouldn't you at least reflect daily on what you are and on how you have improved another percent in today? Then at least you have one guarantee. You become a little more experienced every day, with experience that matters. And that is Action Learning. Not going straight into the classroom and getting certificates, but learning in practice by actively reflecting experience together.

In the past, Jumbo Visma did kill an apparently certain victory. And that through inexperience and rash behavior. But by sticking to the vision, getting a little better every day, the results, it seems, have come naturally.

What do you want to get one percent better at every day?

TIP: very worth reading are Amy Edmondson's books on psychological safety and Teaming.

The next section is about element 3, You have to learn from loss.

3. You have to learn from loss

Learning from loss is the third element of seven, which I describe, following the success of Jumbo Visma's cycling team.

"To win a Tour de France, it helps to lose a lot first," said Jumbo Visma's technical director. The team has twice just missed out on victory, sometimes in a clumsy way. Pretty tough when that happens to you and because then to see it mainly as a learning process. Indeed, half of the Jumbo Visma team left the team disappointed. Years of building gone, or did they? The other half, who stayed, suddenly showed much more resilience. And that resilience was exactly what was needed. This realization grew with the circumstances, over which the team had little influence. Like the opponents as the best example. Besides the sport, the present time teaches us more and more that social engineering, let alone guarantees for success, are not realistic. The only not insignificant guarantee of failure you have is that you gain more experience.

In my view (see previous blogs), experience is precisely what can make the difference. If unexpected, sometimes dastardly moments happen to you as a team, it helps if you have experienced something similar before. The Jumbo Visma team, believe me, have encountered them again this tour. They just handled it differently.

How do you get your team to turn loss and mistakes into learning opportunities?

"Sometimes you win sometimes you learn"

From my experience, some organizations handle this completely differently than others. This often has to do with people's beliefs and mindset. Both leaders and team members. Last but not least, this often determines how loss and mistakes were handled in the past. Did dealing with losing energize the team? Perhaps unremembered traumas actually emerged? Another obstacle, perhaps the biggest, is that team leadership only judges by results and there is no turning back. Also, or especially, sports excels at this in a negative sense. And as happened at Jumbo Visma, that half the team dropped out? How is that a loss. I'm curious, how the leadership of Jumbo Visma looks at that now.

What weighs more heavily for the management: the loss of half or the increased resilience of the other half?

This question will never be answered unequivocally. The answer to this question is the beginning of what it all started with at Jumbo Visma: VISION!

How does your organization deal with loss?

My next blog is about the opposite, learning from what goes well (to be continued...)



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