

It's the Brake, not the Gas

The lists of ideas, when it comes to improve the performance of an organisation, are alarmingly one-sided. Mostly they follow the motto of „faster, higher, further“, and the resulting programmes have topics like „enhancing productivity“, „streamlining processes“, or „finding synergies“ etc.

Olympic Management: faster, higher, further. In the worst case a management whipped to euphoria by this perspective meets a more and more weary staff. You could of course stop at that point, but stopping is not olympic, so there can be no retreat – the beginning of many a sad story, and when working memory is overloaded, things get very slow, of course...

But in nine out of ten cases it is not about stepping on the gas with more vigour, but about taking your foot off the brake. The extent to which people and organisations stand in their own way and in the way of each other cannot be overestimated.

Normally people have quite a good idea about what works in the daily operative work, and what doesn't. They don't lack ideas neither, or good will. All too often there are simply too many obstacles in the way, and these are very often based on structures and professional relationships that obstruct collaboration instead of facilitating it.

In such environments illusions, irritations, and conflicts flourish, up to extreme forms where seemingly adversarial groups spend themselves in trench-war-like manoeuvres instead of using their different perspectives to gain an integrative understanding of their situation – an organisation caught in cold civil war, so to say.

So in the first place it's about taking the foot off the brake. How about a programme that would not be named „Ikarus“ oder „Leopard“ oder „Superman“, but, say, „stopping stupid things“? That would open up a space for thinking about what you could do instead.

The ingredients have long been ready, and sometimes it is truly saddening to see them mouldering along. Just imagine: the most sophisticated mise-en-place, but the cook ignores it and keeps grilling burgers. Somewhat a pity, isn't it?

Mostly we are still in the mode of „more of the same“. In the last years this may have been disguised as „the same, but more sophisticated (Big Data, Bigger Data, Neuro, more Neuro). But this is of no use if you still have the same basic patterns underneath: control, calculate, regulate, limit etc. We are still trying to tame systems instead of dancing with them.

What is missing? Quite simple things, in fact: massively more dialogue across the organisation, strategic and decision making processes involving diverse groups constituting a microcosm of the system, expanding the autonomy zone of any individual, decentralized networks. These can still submit proposals to management, or, if it is important, involve management from the start. It doesn't necessarily mean that you have to abolish hierarchy. That is just the next doctrine of salvation anyway, but that's an other story.

So for a start you could just simply try management by go-kart: If you want to accelerate, step off the brake.

Stopping should become olympic.