

Racer at the wheel?

Get in a car, drive through Zurich downtown with eighty kilometers per hour, and while doing so keep staring at the ground three meters in front of you.

How does that sound? Do you feel like having a go at this? Of course, you don't, you're not bananas, after all. And yet, some eye-witness accounts from inside companies suggest that this is quite an accurate description of what is regularly going on in organisations.

How many times are you supposed to raise your eyes when driving through Zurich City? Once? Twice? More often, of course, all the time, of course, and naturally eighty kilometers per hour is far too much. So: pausing and looking ahead is required, no matter whether you drive a car or a company.

All right, „pausing“ might be asking too much of a racer who thinks that everything below one hundred is called parking. You might hear analogous arguments from inside organisations: “We can't go slower, or else we are immediately whipped out, competitors are not sleeping.”

But let's look at it logically: If you say that while being in the racer mode, then it follows that your competitor is in this mode, too, as probably you are not completely incompetent, are you? Now the thing is: if you intend to be in business in the long run, you cannot constantly operate at your limit. Nobody will be able to sustain that, and no organization will. Your competitors won't either.

So, if your competitors are in the racer mode, it could be an option to reduce the gas, wait until they all have hit the wall, and then overtake them gently and relaxed.

This takes quite a bit of courage, I admit: Courage to delay and to accept short term leeway. This is hard to sell. Hectic bustle – sometimes linguistically shrouded as total commitment, going the extra mile etc. – seems to be much more socially accepted in the business world than sitting down to think thoroughly. But management by firework doesn't work either, does it: going off like a rocket, and it all ends in a big bang...

What does pausing and looking ahead mean, after all? I simply means working on the system instead of in the system; strategic work; reflecting the way collaboration is taking place; finding out where you have installed, probably with the best intentions and without realizing, obstacles to efficiency, innovation, and cooperation; creating conditions that allow to fully unfold the potential of your employees. There are the strong levers, there leaders can make the impact that justifies their salary. If no time is left for that, something is going wrong.

If you are caught racing in the street, you are fined or even might lose your driving licence. Why should racing be possible in management and without being punished? With regard to endangering others you easily exceed every racer by far.

You know the proverb about the dead horse. In this sense: If you feel that you have no other choice than racing around with a downcast look...get out of the car before the crash occurs, because cruisers will live longer.

Living longer, and even with higher quality – that doesn't sound bad, does it? And if anybody thinks that you can't deliver high performance that way: I bet against it.