



# Bio-logical management

**CEO:** Felix von Cube, you say that management training must be based on scientifically grounded methods – a tough challenge for most people offering management seminars, most of whom trained as psychologists.

**Felix von Cube:** Yes, much of what goes by the name of management training has more to do with personality development than management training as such. And many people providing this training simply don't have a basic grounding in behavioural biology. For me it goes without saying that we humans are also subject to the laws of evolution.

**CEO:** So what, according to this view, differentiates humans from apes?

**von Cube:** The fact that humans can no longer rely on instinctual programmes alone. A characteristic of humans is their ability to reflect. A reflective being is not merely aggressive – he knows he's aggressive. This is why statements like “he's out of control” or “he has no self-control” can only apply to a human being. The mutation which brought about this ability to reflect actually marks the emergence of humans. It's a product of evolution, but at the same time the end of evolution. Now we

Unlike humanistically oriented management training, the BioLogik approach also takes account of instinctual programmes and drives. Felix von Cube describes the potential of primordial urges.

BY JÜRIG VON INS (INTERVIEW), LORENZ MEIER (ILLUSTRATION) AND PETER VOGEL (PHOTOS)

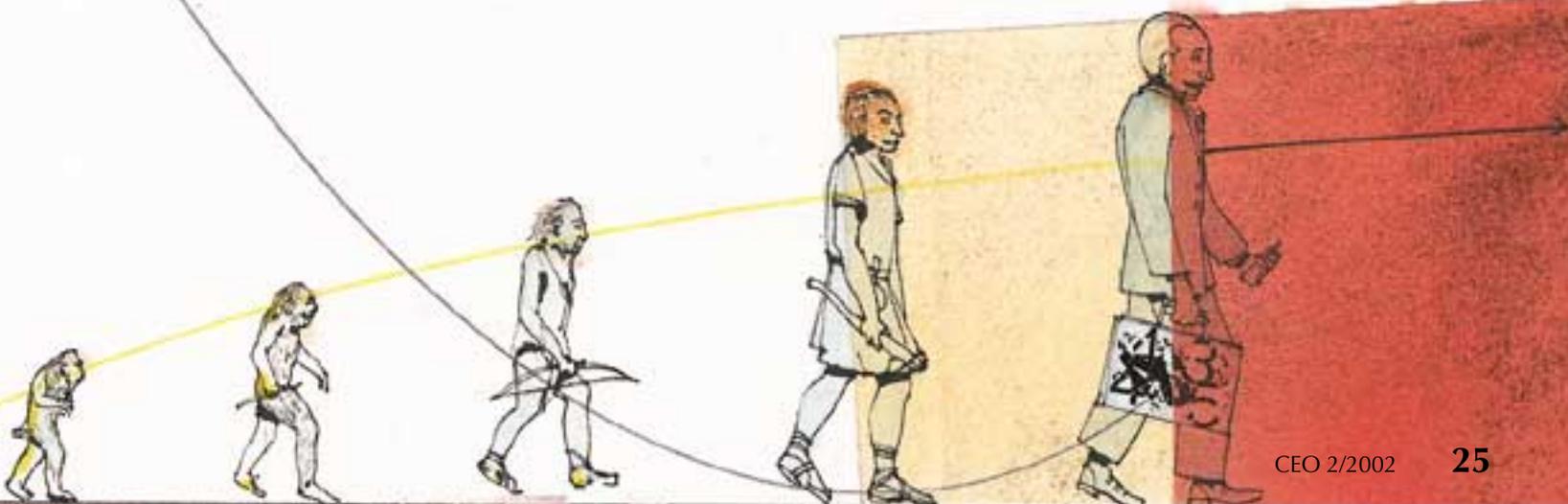
have to take charge of managing our behaviour ourselves.

**CEO:** What does this mean in practice for managers?

**von Cube:** There are talented craftspeople, artists and managers. Their genetic disposition plays a large part in this. But they must also be trained and given specific professional tasks. In business, however, managers are often selected purely on the basis of their professional qualifications.

**CEO:** So what is most urgent for managers to learn?

**von Cube:** Skilled managers are able to ensure performance by addressing and exploiting drives. Our system, which is called BioLogik, enables us to fully understand the behaviour of people and their motivation. Logically, this method puts human behaviour at the centre. As we have already mentioned, there are two factors at play: firstly the evolutionary instinctual programs, which



## FELIX VON CUBE

Felix von Cube, born in 1927, studied mathematics and natural sciences. In 1957 he received his doctorate, in 1963 he was appointed Professor at the Pädagogische Hochschule in Berlin, and in 1970 moved to Bonn. Since 1974, Felix von Cube has been Professor of Educational Science at the University of Heidelberg. The mathematician thus became an educationalist with a solid scientific background. In 1997, von Cube founded Prof. v. Cube & Kollegen GmbH, a Heidelberg-based company offering training for managers. Von Cube is famous for his numerous publications. His bestsellers “Fordern statt Verwöhnen” (“Challenge, don’t pamper”) and “Lust an Leistung” (“Joy in performance”) are in their 13th and 10th editions respectively.

are the primordial motive and motor of performance, and secondly the human cerebrum, the reflective organ with which humans manage their behaviour and which, to a certain extent, allows them to control it.

**CEO:** So you could say that humanistically oriented management training restricts itself to addressing the cerebrum directly? These trainers work exclusively on reflection, leaving the potential of the drives unexploited because they fail to channel this potential into performance?

**von Cube:** Yes. Appealing to the cerebrum alone all too often fails to produce the desired behaviour. Conversely, circumventing people’s ability to make decisions and speaking directly to their drives quickly degenerates into manipulation. BioLogik combines the two levels. It combines a recognition of evolutionary behavioural programs – such as motor programs, drives and social behaviour – with an analysis of how these programs are incorrectly dealt with. These errors find expression in problems like lack of exercise, self-indulgence, boredom, mobbing and stress.

The systematic cognitive basis underlying BioLogik allows us to identify errors, i.e. demands such as “learn to live with uncertainty”, “get

rid of hierarchies”, “be permanently flexible” and “think positive”.

**CEO:** So you’re saying that these are merely popular clichés which we can’t live by because they fail to take account of the motivational basis of our drives?

**von Cube:** Precisely. Staff have joy in performance if they experience belonging as a fulfilment of their bonding drive, if their curiosity drive is satisfied by challenges, and if they receive sufficient recognition to satisfy their aggressive drive.

**CEO:** What, in your view, is the connection between recognition and aggression?

**von Cube:** Aggression is the victory drive. In a group, the most humane and useful form of victory is recognition. So we recognise this as one of the three most important sources of joy in performance. In this way we distance ourselves from the traditional principle, which could be put something like “it’s praise enough if they’re not grumbling”. Praise and recognition are very efficient forces governing behaviour.

**CEO:** And what about curiosity? Is there a biology of curiosity?

**von Cube:** Oh yes. It’s only because of curiosity that we can become



completely absorbed in a task. The psychologist Csikszentmihalyi talks of “flow”. Flow is one form the satisfaction of a drive takes. There are many popular ways of describing this phenomenon, but very few scientific ones: to be “in flow” means enjoying your work, being absorbed in it, being involved in your work.

**CEO:** Is it possible to cultivate this flow?

**von Cube:** Yes. The key is to find how to bring each individual into flow. By asking what state the employee is in you can draw up a so-called flow profile. This profile shows what circumstances put a person in the fear or boredom zone, and what brings him or her into flow.



**“If managers succeed in building in the right degree of insecurity for each member of staff, the team will generate maximum utility for the organisation.”**

On the basis of this analysis you can work out the optimum position for this person within the organisation.

**CEO:** Being overstretched makes people anxious, but not being stretched sufficiently leads to boredom. How do you get the balance right in people’s jobs?

**von Cube:** An anxious employee is no longer capable of innovation, and they withdraw. There are three ways you can go about solving this problem. You can reduce the demands on that person, but this is not very attractive for the company. Another alternative is to train the employee. Or you can involve them more in the team. Only when you can combine the performance of individuals in a way which increases the overall “fitness” of the organisation can you achieve top performances.

**CEO:** Is there any end to this?

**von Cube:** No, it’s a process. Once a person’s ability to perform increases, you have to step up the demands. You can only stay in flow if you can constantly convert uncertainty into certainty. At the highest level, in what we call the “expert flow”, an employee must constantly create new uncertainties to be able to transform them into certainties. This makes them creative.

**CEO:** But doesn’t this mean in practice that every employee has to continually take risks which could pose a serious threat to the organisation?

**von Cube:** On the contrary. If managers build in the right degree of insecurity for each member of staff, the team will generate maximum utility for the organisation. On the one hand we all strive for security, but on the other hand curiosity drives us to seek out new, uncertain, unknown things to make our own. Curiosity is a drive which seeks satisfaction in this way. By taking risks we create new certainty. And when we enjoy the process of satisfying the urge for security, we experience this as flow.

**CEO:** But aren’t people victims of their drives?

**von Cube:** No. Although our structure of drives means we are rooted in nature, evolution has to a certain extent abandoned us. We manage our behaviour ourselves, but this doesn’t mean that we have left our drives and instincts behind. Quite the opposite, in fact: responsible human beings know that they have an emotional “substructure” which has evolved over millions of years, over which we have only limited influence.

