

## CIM 6/2003 - Monitor

### Fairs and conferences as truffle pigs

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**Prof. Dr. Peter Kruse, brain researcher and Honorary Professor for General and Organisation Psychology at Bremen University, on the brain's reaction to change, change management and truffle pigs.**

**CIM:** How do people react to fundamental changes?

**Kruse:** When we are under pressure we try to do what we have always done, but better. Best practice, the optimising of that which already works, is the focus. Yet the problem is that the brain discharges reward hormones for things we do well. If we are successful with a certain pattern, then we try to maintain it. This success is the first step towards failure. Best practice leads to a limit on performance, since great efforts only bring us minimally forward. For what we need is not best practice, but next practice, not the optimising of functions but changing the patterns of process.

**CIM:** How can change management bring about such changes of process patterns?

**Kruse:** The aim of change management is to initiate, guide and form fundamental changes. In this one has to take into account how the brain works. Favourite habits – in the form of ordering patterns which have inscribed themselves into the brain's structure – have to be given up. One needs the willingness of the brain to go through a crisis. Without this crisis new experiences are not possible. There are two situations in which the brain switches to change: in flight and in curiosity. This means you create a crisis situation in which people are afraid enough to try out something new; but motivation through fear only has an effect as long as the stimulation provoking fear lasts. Much more natural is to awake the brain's willingness to approach the new via fascination.

**CIM:** How does a successful change manager work?

**Kruse:** The brain is actually a highly unstable system and stabilises itself through the emotional evaluation of its limbic system. Good change managers thus achieve a balance between stability and instability. Through understanding and positive rewards they create the conditions so that employees can be drawn into the process. They also provide balance by creating stabilising factors at the highest possible level of identity. People can stabilise themselves via an identity ("we are a firm with a philosophy") and then bear with operative instability. This highly placed stability increases the ability to deal with instability. To this extent religions were an immense relief in unstable times. They offered a vision (life after death), a high level of identity ("we are Christians") as well as rules and symbols.

Three factors are decisive in transformation processes: understanding, as when people understand what is going on they will deal in a better way with it and fear decreases. Transparency, since transformation processes only function when what should change is also visible. And involvement, for when you simply present people with a concept, the "it wasn't invented here" syndrome destroys everything and there is no change. The intelligence of the system has to be used and people have to be involved in the mental processes and development. If they are present when the idea is born then they will also implement it.

**CIM:** What transformation processes are in store for fairs?

**Kruse:** In fairs we have a similar transformation as in commerce. For many years commerce provided people with access to goods, which today they can acquire directly from producers via the Internet. Commerce is developing into either a price dealer (discounter) or it brings intelligent groups together (category management). As a 'truffle pig' it provides the consumer with intelligent reduction of complexity. Fairs should

not only open up access to information for me, in other words function as a platform on which an incredible number of people present themselves, but instead provide me with information and contacts in an intelligent form. I expect a fair to have a 'truffle pig' character: It has to provide a reduction in complexity, so that among the variety of opportunities I receive evaluations (the right partner, the right product). As a producer I realise a fair only makes sense for me when I am already visible and people purposefully approach me. In this case complexity reduction has already taken place. Or I try to make a difference and attract attention by unusual positioning. But when 2000 people try to make a difference at the same time, what makes a difference ...

**CIM:** You are referring to events?

**Kruse:** Events just to arouse emotions will not be enough in the next few years. Much more important is making the complexity reduction as regards content itself an event. Events for executives with permanent new gimmicks from agencies will have no chance anymore in a world which has to increasingly defend budgets harder. Whoever brings together 600 executives has to deliver serious value for the development of the firm and not just a global motivation push.

**CIM:** What is in store for the information function of conferences?

**Kruse:** Conferences, where one talk follows another, are not only marred by vanity ("see and be seen") but also the information platform is disturbed, like at fairs. What will always remain however is the discourse platform. Virtual discourse platforms have the problem that participants can not agree on a common identity. If this identity level does not exist then people do not provide their true information, as they do not know who will receive it on the other side. One can use the eroticism of large groups at conferences for intelligent discourse. This is a real value. Searching for network nodes and evaluating information in joint discourse shifts to the foreground.

When I imagine a conference however, where every half an hour there's a new talk, and the break becomes the most important event, then I ask myself, why are there no discourse opportunities in a more official space? And I do not mean panel discussions, but true maximum participation. Moreover, conferences are not always marked by an intelligent selection. I should think over what mechanisms I use to invite people. Do I invite the same old speakers or do I follow criteria coming from the community? The mechanisms at work there are much too oriented towards stability for me.

**CIM:** Thank you very much for the interview, Professor Kruse.



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