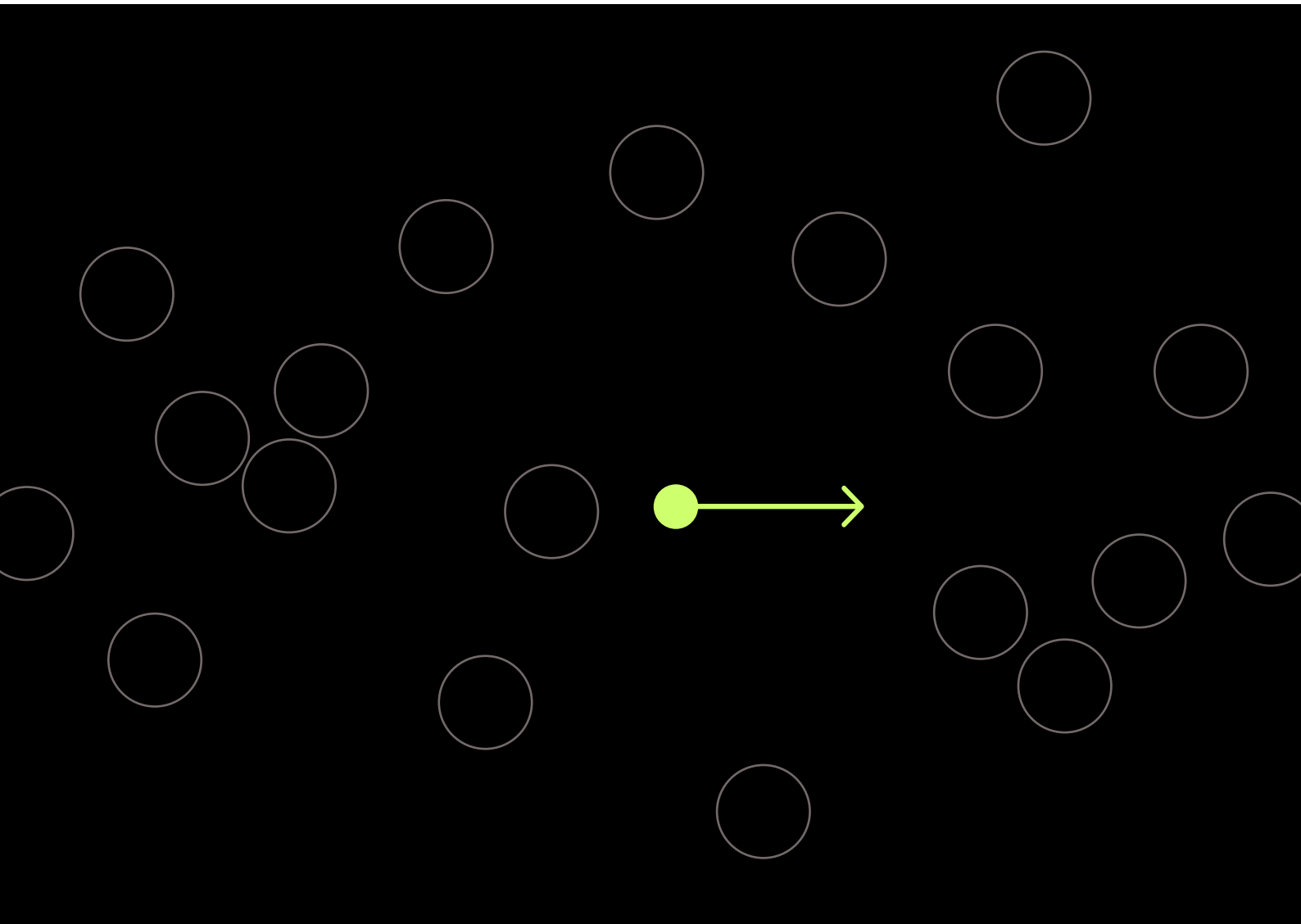
Matthias Kolbusa

SECRETS OF EXECUTION®

Stop Starting! Start Finishing

Kolbusa's Principles and Tools for More Speed and Execution Strength



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1. Management Summary

Most organisations don't have a problem of insight, strategy or ideas but a problem of execution. In itself, this is not a new phenomenon. Weak execution is all too human, and it has always existed.

In the past, this was not a real problem: whether a product came to market a few months later, costs turned out somewhat higher than planned or another competitor appeared – it made no decisive difference in competitive terms. You still made good progress. Markets were slower and the slices of the pie big enough.

Today things are different: established markets are increasingly saturated, competitive boundaries are blurring more and more through technology and globalisation, whole industries are disappearing and new ones are emerging. This has two effects:

- The opportunities for entrepreneurial engagement have become almost infinite. That's positive, because managers have never had more opportunities!
- The flip side is exactly the same thing: the incredible number of opportunities and the longing to do as many of them as possible – or the fear of doing too little and being left behind.

The consequences include:

- The courage to select and prioritise plays a much greater role than it used to.
- The ability to execute things quickly and be faster than the competition is more of a differentiator than ever.
- Remember: speed is just as important as content.

The execution weaknesses that have always existed, most of which can be traced back to very human, emotional patterns, must be overcome at all costs if you want to compete at the front rather than settle for mediocrity. They are:

Ten execution weaknesses to overcome:

1. Activity focus
The “how” is managed instead of the “what for” and the “what”.

2. Perfectionism
Numerous aspects irrelevant to value creation tie up resources, and topics are set up unproductively from the start.

3. Pseudo-priorities
If everything is a priority, nothing is. And managers usually prioritise the wrong way (human constraint of thinking).

4. Anaemia
A failure to understand that high execution performance is an emotional, not a rational, matter.

5. Never-ending stories
Projects are designed wrongly and so turn into do-everything monsters.

6. Wild Wild West
A culture of unreliability and non-commitment in which much is promised but little is actually kept.

7. Prisons of experience
Routine and professionalism are good and bad at the same time! When it comes to execution performance, people often take not the fastest, best and simplest way but the familiar one.

8. Comfort-seeking
Humans are lazy and cowardly (Immanuel Kant), yet it’s the uncomfortable things that move us forward fast.

9. Craving for harmony
Appreciation and dignity are often confused with harmony. Exceptional execution strength needs friction!

10. Ego
The execution killer par excellence: everyone’s ego. The task is to master – or introduce – management beyond ego.

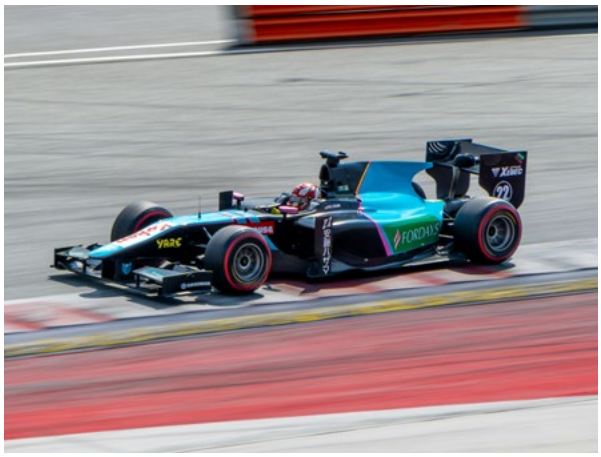
Both the symptoms and the causes of these ten execution weaknesses can be addressed in a targeted way – in the small (day-to-day management) as well as in the large (change, strategy, projects).

There are a few core principles for greater execution strength. Applied consistently and permanently, Kolbusa’s four HERO principles double execution performance:

H No How **E** Management Beyond Ego **R** No Right or Wrong **O** Overcome Comfort







Courage

Openness

Speed

Reliability

Trust

To systematically establish a performance culture geared to execution strength, the behaviour of key people in groups of seven must be aligned with five values:

Kolbusa's execution codex.

Each of these values involves two concrete behaviours, so-called phenomena, that need to be developed or eliminated.

Communication is overrated here! What matters is not what is written or said somewhere but only what people experience. Motto: "Stop talking, start doing!"

Socialisation effects appear after about four to six months, so that execution performance becomes a "culture".

Very few manage this difficult establishment phase, during which no effects can yet be felt (they usually appear after three months and become clearly noticeable after six to nine months), and they fall back into mediocrity. There are two reasons for this:

- **Reason no. 1:** lack of discipline.
  The formula is: "smart structure + discipline = success".

- **Reason no. 2:** lack of will (rooted either in cowardice or in laziness) to go into the necessary discomfort. There is a clear correlation between the degree of discomfort you are prepared to accept for the sake of the cause (!) and the degree of success.

2. The Curse of Variety: Execution Then and Now

When Adolf Würth laid the foundation stone of the Würth Group in 1945, there were a good 50 different kinds of screws, for a handful of relevant markets. The company was steered by three simple key figures. Today there are many thousands of different screws, which of course make up only a small segment of the product range, and the target markets are spread across the globe.

Today, not only business leaders but almost all employees face a more complex world. A head of department is involved in four or five projects, or is even responsible for them alongside their "normal" job; a divisional head often sits on eight to ten steering committees and perhaps leads two projects at the same time; and an executive board member is really only busy rushing from one steering committee to the next. It often no longer feels productive.

Symptoms: from "more helps more" to perfectionism

In Würth's early days, a project manager identified completely with his "baby", because this one project got his full attention! So he did everything he could to keep the goal in sight and keep things moving, in order to reach the goal on plan, however much effort it took. If there were delays, there was a serious conversation with the boss, and consequences followed. There were no excuses.

How is anyone supposed to seriously work on three projects with 20 per cent of their working time each and do their regular job with the remaining 40 per cent? It may look possible on paper, but it doesn't work in reality.

The consequence: because everything has priority, nothing has priority any more, and there is understanding everywhere for omissions and delays, because what is asked simply can't be done.

That this negative attitude then spreads and a culture of inconsistency and unreliability takes hold – in which, "on top", the variety of topics and overload are happily used as excuses – is one of the ugly consequences of trying to do everything somehow, with the result that nothing really gets done properly. In the end, things get worse rather than better: performance and productivity go down, not up!

The causes are all too human

- It's managers' fear of being left behind by the competition, whether external or internal. They lack the courage, so to speak, to commit to the few topics that will decide the battle.
- Out of fear, all sorts of things are then set in motion.
- Nothing really has priority any more. The organisation learns to live with this and only half takes things seriously.
- Since we are all comfortable, this makes a welcome excuse along the lines of: "Obviously that was never going to work with so many topics!" – even if it could have worked.
- The blessing and curse of growing complexity is the infinite number of opportunities, none of which you want to miss, of course. Producing ideas is comfortable. Finishing things, however, is uncomfortable! And we humans don't like "uncomfortable". But success takes only 10 per cent inspiration and 90 per cent perspiration!
- It's time to break these cycles!



Economic complexity has increased a hundredfold between 1945 and today.

3. Ten Execution Weaknesses and How to Overcome Them

Whether in day-to-day business, in ongoing projects or in complex strategy or change initiatives, in my experience it is always the same ten execution weaknesses that keep organisations from achieving exceptional performance.

The chart below gives you an overview of how relevant each execution weakness is for "daily business" and for complex projects (strategy/change/transformation).

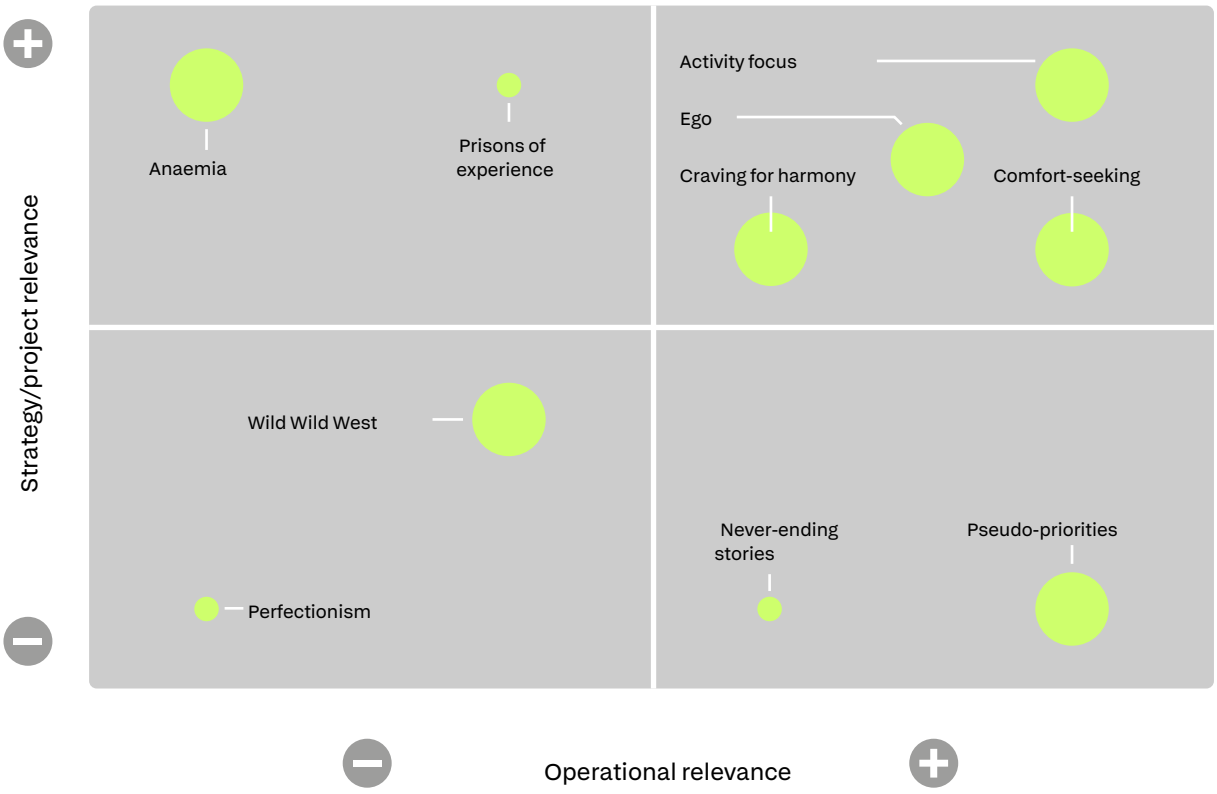


Fig. 1: The ten execution weaknesses by "daily business" and strategy/project relevance

Bubble size:
How persistent the weakness is, i.e. the effort needed to overcome it.

1. Activity focus

One of the most widespread execution weaknesses, because it is simply all too human, is the fixation on activities. We have a goal or a problem? What does the usual "approach" look like? We lock ourselves in a room, discuss, brainstorm what we could do, arrange the cards in a certain order, use a few coloured stickers to prioritise, and we have a master plan. And that's exactly what we then work through. And – bang! – execution performance drops! Why? Because an input element, a plan, takes over what we do. Not so bad, you think? Then stay loyal to mediocrity. If you don't want to, be sure to watch the following **video.** We prefer the doer to the thinker! Instead of focusing on the "what for" (What are we actually doing this for?) and the "what" (What exactly do we want to bring about?), we focus on the "how" (activities, milestones, etc.) when steering our topics, whether small or large, **and so deprive ourselves and our projects of the chance to achieve what needs to be achieved faster and with less fuss.**



Video "Results orientation: input, output and outcome" (German):

www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3Xgq6RZ8Pk

White paper "Results orientation? Not a chance!" (German):

Free download

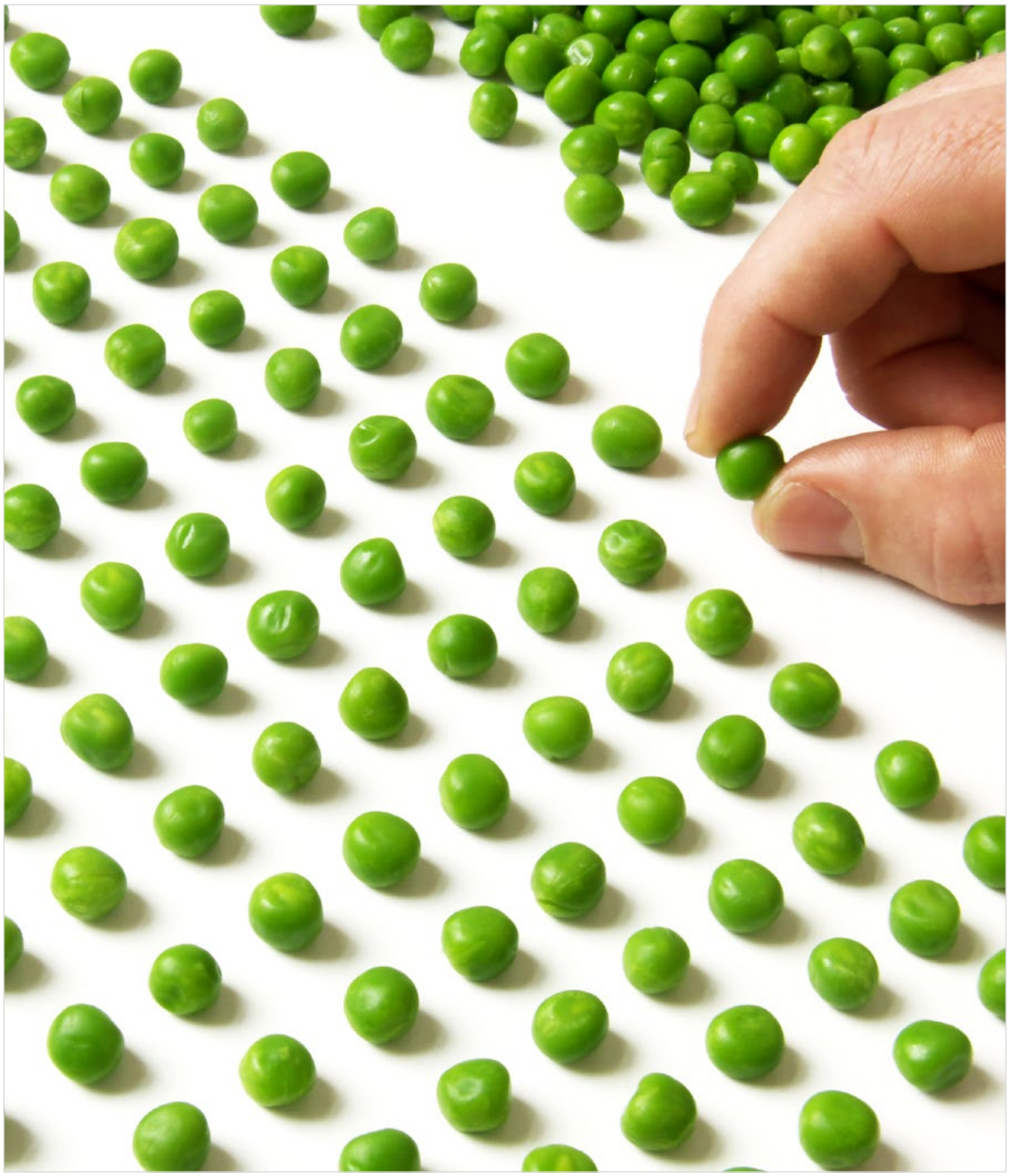
Symptoms	Causes	Kolbusa's remedies
In steering committees, plans and milestones are discussed	• Human longing for action	• Write "HOW" in big letters on a flip chart and cross it out boldly. Refer back to it again and again
Planning pseudo-certainty	• Fear – striving for felt (pseudo-)certainty	• Address complex projects with OKR, not project plans • Complicated projects can be handled "classically"
Planning orientation	• Longing for planning and control – lack of trust • Trust means consciously taking the risk of being disappointed! Whoever takes no risk does not trust	• Apply the management triple jump: 1.) What is the project meant to achieve, and what for? 2.) How do we recognise progress in results? 3.) What conditions are necessary (!) for further progress up to the next meeting?

2. Perfectionism

Perfectionism is not a virtue but a weakness that stands in the way of speed. A culture needs to be established in which speed itself is regarded and lived as a value. It is just as valuable as the content in question. In small things as in big ones: why write detailed minutes? Take a photo of the flip chart with the main to-dos on your smartphone, send it, done! Why produce yet another detailed portfolio analysis when it's essentially clear where things need to go? That is nothing but the reflexive need for absolute certainty that you are doing the right thing! Forget certainty, learn to deal with vagueness and uncertainty, and step on the gas! Produce results! And fast!

Symptoms	Causes	Kolbusa's remedies
A-to-B approach, i.e. dealing with situation A, analysing, deriving, doing, etc.	• Focused thinking is trained, diffuse thinking isn't • Something good – namely diffuse thinking – doesn't feel like "work"	• Apply the B-to-A approach, i.e. develop everything, absolutely everything, from the result • What does the result look like? With dummy content? Then start filling it in/working it out in detail
Useless work/waste of time	• "Fine feathers make fine birds" principle: the attitude that "things have to look good to be good"	• Ask about everything: does this have anything to do with value creation? • Why write minutes afterwards even for little things? Just send everyone a photo of the flip chart, done! No unnecessary perfectionism!
PowerPoints/"slide labour"	• Reverse it: it's about content, not form!	• Flip chart: make sketches and photograph them • Perfect analysis, perfectly presented? What for? What are the essentials?

Perfectionism is not a virtue but a weakness that stands in the way of speed.



Nothing would be done at all if a man waited till he could do it so well that no one could find fault with it.

John Henry Newman

3. Pseudo-priorities

Pseudo-priorities exist when everything is a priority and therefore nothing is a priority any more. As a result, a hundred things move forward a tiny bit instead of three things making real progress!

The root evil behind this phenomenon is cowardice. Or, to put it another way, not having the courage and discipline to really concentrate on a few things for a certain time and simply leave everything else aside. To resist the temptations, the curse of ideas and suggestions for improvement, and simply see a particular project through! It is the fear of not doing something and thus failing that drives managers to give “priority” to every thought and every idea. Everyone knows that in the end we achieve exactly the opposite, but the temptation is simply too great.

Another facet is the human constraint of thinking: the belief that there is such a thing as absolute priorities. But there isn’t! Priorities are always relative: a new project can be given the highest priority (e.g. 10 points), and the other projects then have to be adjusted accordingly (current “10-point” projects must be downgraded to 9 or 8 points). Good priority lists are dynamic – new projects even push out ongoing topics!



Symptoms	Causes	Kolbusa's remedies
Absolute priorities	• Human mental barrier	• Introduce dynamic priority lists/portfolios that force a distribution across the scale • When a new element is added, things are reordered or realigned
Minced-up employees: 20 per cent of working time goes on project A, 30 per cent on leading project B and 50 per cent on day-to-day business	• Technocrat management	• Employees are not spread across four, five or more projects in percentages of their working time. Instead, they are involved in two or three projects at most • A project manager does nothing but look after their project!
The myth of infinite resources	• Failure to engage with what success requires	• No project starts without meeting the necessary "killer conditions" (skills, resources, etc.)
Priority corpses	• Collecting, hoarding, not forgetting, "some day" thinking	• Kill boldly: whatever can't be tackled in the foreseeable future (6–9 months) comes off the list! • Keep everything lean!
Pseudo-parallelism	• The "more helps more" fallacy	• Rule of four: no manager or employee is ever busy with more than four topics at any one time!

Pseudo-priorities exist when everything is a priority and therefore nothing is a priority any more.

4. Anaemia

Whether you like it or not: people may be interested in logic, but in the end they only ever act on the basis of emotions. People who tell me, “No, no, Mr Kolbusa, I’m a completely rational type,” are not rational but simply immature.

Whether from positive emotions (passion, happiness, trust, etc.) or negative ones (fear, envy, despair, etc.), an action or statement arises – after more reflection in some, less in others. Anyone who doesn’t believe this will never achieve exceptional execution strength.

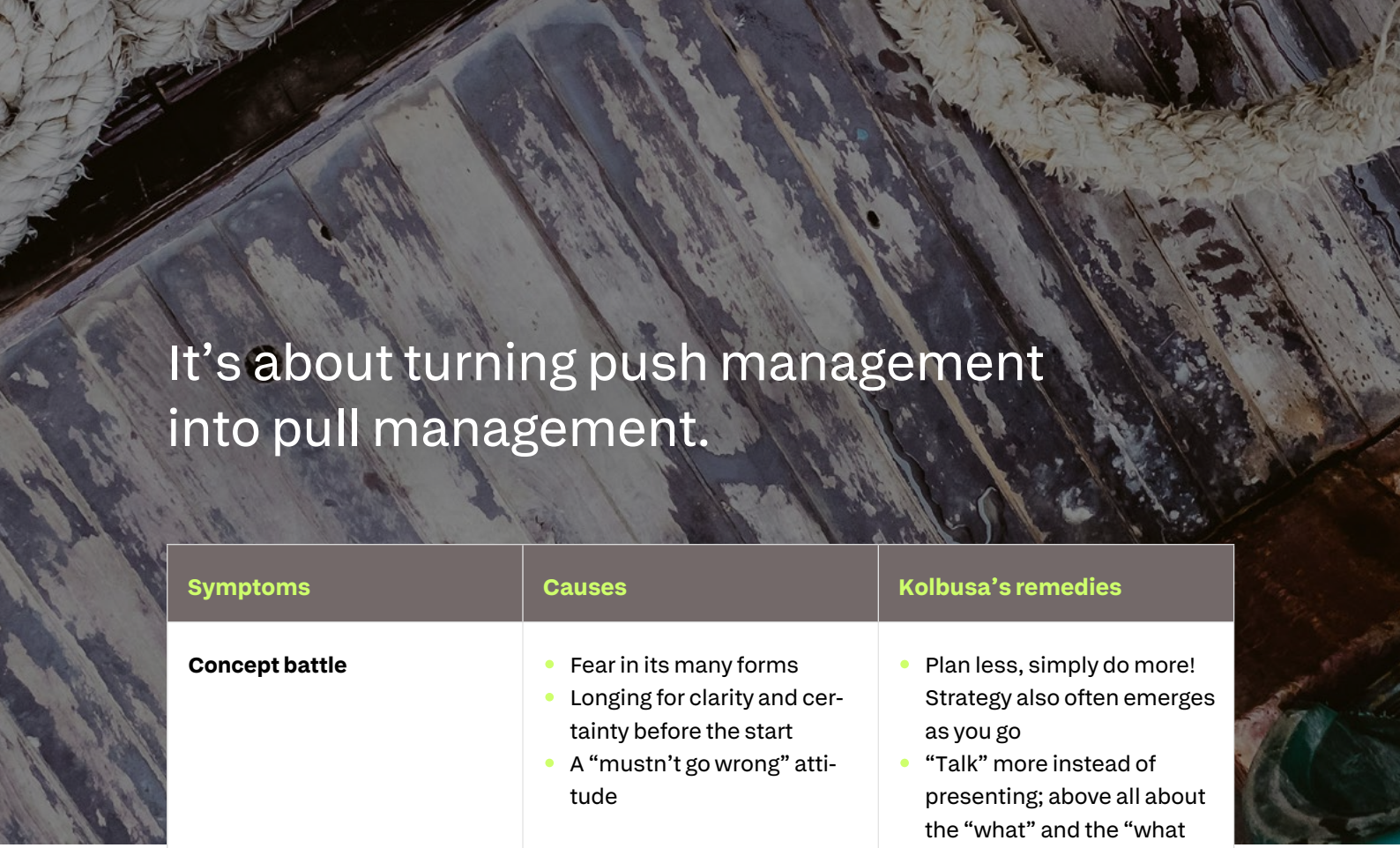
Because exceptional execution strength is about turning push management (planning, control and co.) into pull management: a management culture in which you get into the wonderful performance cycle of passion (“something you burn for”), trust (the feeling that you’ll make it and get help if things get tight) and pride when something has been achieved, which in turn strengthens passion and trust.

This performance cycle remains out of reach for most managers. Instead of deliberately entering it, they do the exact opposite: **they plan, control, keep asking for updates and create fear (whether consciously or not) as well as shame and guilt. Mediocrity is the consequence.**

The issue “Emotions in Management”:

» **Free download**





It’s about turning push management into pull management.

Symptoms	Causes	Kolbusa’s remedies
Concept battle	• Fear in its many forms • Longing for clarity and certainty before the start • A “mustn’t go wrong” attitude	• Plan less, simply do more! Strategy also often emerges as you go • “Talk” more instead of presenting; above all about the “what” and the “what for”, not the “how” • Draw certainty not from the approach/concept but from the picture of what will be different once the project has been completed successfully
Fear in/of status meetings	• Shame and guilt from having to justify yourself	• Away from milestones and co., towards OKR-based progress management
KPIs, Gantt charts, portfolios and co. as primary management tools	• The fallacy that people act rationally • People may be interested in logic, but in the end they only act on emotions	• Bring in emotions deliberately! Write essays and hold discussions along the lines of “What will we be really proud of when the project is done?” What does it look like? How will we notice? How will we celebrate? What will we do with the extra profit? – Address imagination, passion and pride

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5. Never-ending stories

“Never-ending stories” are one form of inconsistency. They are characterised by projects that drag on and on. Execution speed? Not a chance! You do make progress, but the hoped-for effects fail to materialise, and the feeling is that nothing ever really gets finished.

Symptoms	Causes	Kolbusa’s remedies
Projects/initiatives keep being extended	• Projects are designed too big; this goes hand in hand with denying reality through overly long-term assumptions	• Design initiatives for six months at most! • CAUTION: after six months there must be effects (not just concepts, etc.)! • Not possible? It’s always possible! It “only” takes different ways of thinking and attitudes
The budget has to be topped up again and again	• See above	• See above • Set and stick to a maximum budget for all projects! No project may have a budget of more than x million euros, with which it first has to deliver a result in the sense of a business effect
Thinking big, starting big	• The belief that everything has to be achieved at once • Often paired with the perfectionism weakness	• Thinking big: OK! But please produce results quickly instead of starting with a four-month concept phase! • Limit projects to six months at most; after this period, a business effect must have occurred!

“Never-ending stories” are one form of inconsistency. They are characterised by projects that drag on and on.



Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe.

Albert Einstein



6. Wild Wild West

The other, second form of inconsistency is the “Wild Wild West” weakness: regardless of all announcements, commitments or agreements, everyone basically does what they want. In good faith and to the best of their knowledge, no question. But not in line with what was agreed.

Symptoms	Causes	Kolbusa’s remedies
Excuses and understanding for everything	• No focus! • No real prioritisation (see point 3 – pseudo-priorities), so understanding is shown too quickly for what can’t be done • Craving for harmony (see point 9)	• Rule of four • Clear prioritisation
Rules of the game are not kept (from “no parking in customer spaces” to failing to stick to budgets, leadership guidelines or other commitments)	• Abstract, non-binding leadership guidelines or the like	• Focus on a few concrete rules of behaviour (What really matters in working together?) and then: • FOLLOW-THROUGH: “Where nothing happens when nothing happens, nothing happens!” – IMPORTANT: agree as a team beforehand what the consequences will be (even if it’s just two euros into the “phone piggy bank” during meetings – that keeps things present)

The “Wild Wild West” weakness: regardless of all announcements, commitments or agreements, everyone basically does what they want.

7. Prisons of Experience

Experience is both a blessing and a curse. A blessing, because routine also means professionalism, and processes run ever more smoothly and quickly – thanks to the industrial experience curve. A curse, because the tendency to surrender to this experience and let the "automatic programme" run is strong and at the same time dangerous. Because there are always other, smarter, faster ways to the goal than we think – really, always! That is my firm conviction and my experience from hundreds of problem solutions, projects, strategy and change initiatives. But the doer is closer to us humans than the thinker, because thinking is hard work. So resist the temptation to want to get going too quickly – however well meant it may be and however good it may feel.

Symptoms	Causes	Kolbusa's remedies
The main thing: get going!	• Lazy thinking • The belief that "When there's a fire, we all pull together and get it done" is a strength • Adaptive versus preventive actions	• STOP! Thinking helps! Interrupt the meeting. After a set period, every participant comes back with at least three different (!) approaches, which we then discuss. A blank sheet of paper and pens are the "tools"
"Now let's finally get down to what matters!"	• Actionism • Fear of being too slow	• Schedule pure "thinking meetings" in which discussing measures is forbidden • Hold discussions along the lines of: "Ponder first, then plunder" • There are always (!) shorter, better ways to the goal
"There is no other way" or "I can't think of anything"	• Supposed (!) lack of creativity	• Think diffusely like Leonardo da Vinci: get out of the office and into a museum or onto a park bench and muse diffusely (without focus) on the problem. Even if the pressure is high: this is how the coolest solutions come about

Prisons of experience are a curse, because they create a strong tendency to just let the "automatic programme" run.

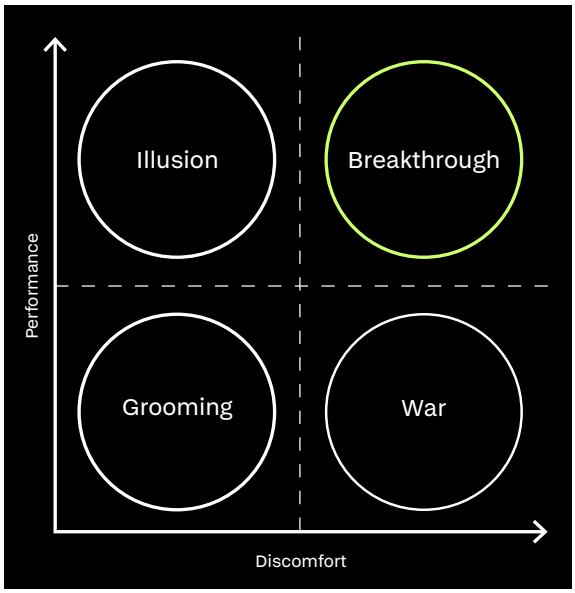


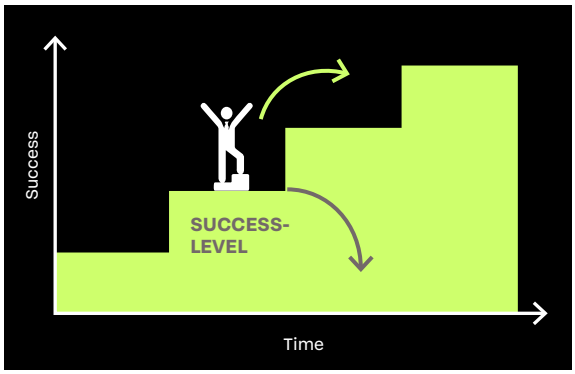
Experience is a lantern on your back that only ever lights up the part of the path you have already travelled.

Confucius

8. Comfort-Seeking

There is a clear correlation between the degree of discomfort you are prepared to accept, personally and as a business, and the success you have. True to the motto “What got you here won’t get you there”. It’s like sport: if, for example, you run ten kilometres in an hour twice a week and want to get faster, you ask yourself: does it help to run the ten kilometres in an hour four times a week? The answer is: no! Instead, you have to move into the discomfort zone. In this example, that means interval runs of, say, 400 metres easy running and 400 metres sprinting in 1.5 or two minutes. Is that fun? Is it easy? No! It is absolute discomfort! But it moves the runner forward. After one or two months, the ten kilometres are done in 50 minutes, and the runner is proud of the performance and the result achieved! So, for more execution strength, accept the discomfort! It is incredibly satisfying and good for you!





Figs. 2+3: To jump to the next success level, you really have to do things differently. Anyone who only ever optimises will crash sooner or later.

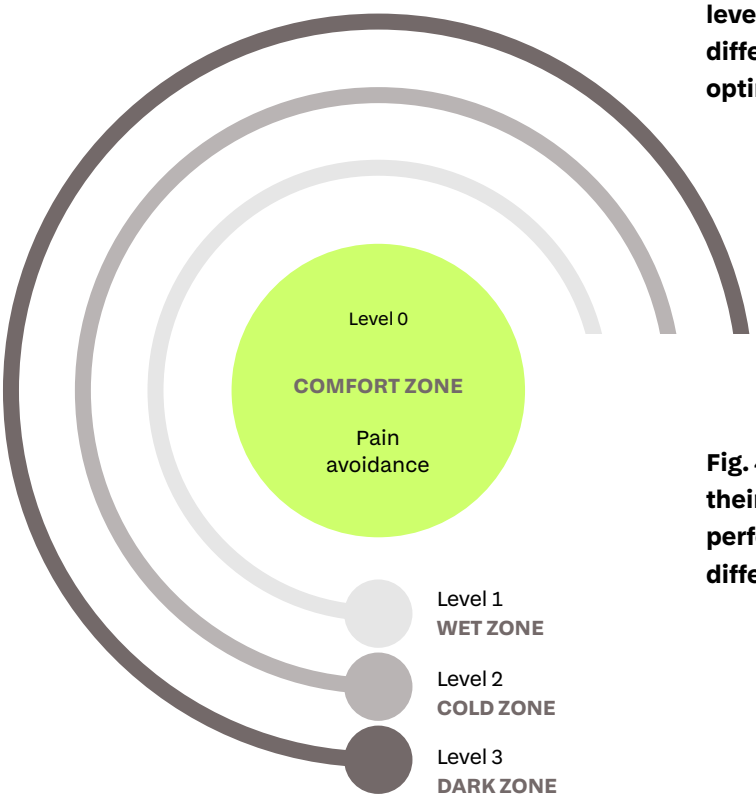


Fig. 4: Many managers move primarily in their comfort zone. For real execution performance, you have to enter the different levels of the discomfort zone.

Symptoms	Causes	Kolbusa's remedies
Success plateau – things are running, but there is no leap in success	• Lazy thinking (see point 7 – prisons of experience) • Craving for harmony (see point 9) suppresses good ideas	• Get uncomfortable: what are three things that are extremely unpleasant but would make a huge difference? • Is it clear what they are? Then have courage! Do them!
It's "change", but nobody joins in	• When managers talk about change, they usually mean the others • Their own inability to really go into personal discomfort for the sake of the cause	• Assemble a band of heroes who lead the way (teams of seven people; top-down) • Don't communicate! Just lead by example!
Grooming: everyone shows understanding for everything	• Craving for harmony versus a culture of criticism and the courage to rub up against each other honestly	• Live courage as a value: "Give me something to hate you for" rounds • Of course things go wrong! Sometimes through no fault of your own – but you are still responsible! Don't be shy about making that clear, and please don't show understanding for everything

There is a clear correlation between the degree of discomfort you are prepared to accept, personally and as a business, and the success you have.



9. Craving for Harmony

For execution strength, what matters after weighing up the relevant options is to step on the gas quickly, gain traction and not drag anything out unnecessarily by spending time and energy discussing everything with everyone so that each individual feels included and part of the cause. The longer things are discussed and the more people are involved, the more lazy compromises have to be made that turn an originally great idea into mediocrity – and the longer the whole thing drags on, until the momentum is gone. Performance management is not a democracy! Although leadership can change hands!



Symptoms	Causes	Kolbusa's remedies
Decision bottlenecks – decisions are not made where most competence is gathered but where the biggest egos or fears sit	• Ego gratification (see point 10)	• Train "ready to lead, ready to follow": everyone has to lead, and everyone has to learn to follow. The supreme discipline is to establish this across hierarchy levels (prerequisite: mastering your ego; see point 10) • Don't just draw up decision matrices – live them consistently • Beyond that: demand and encourage initiative (very few can do it)
Turning those affected into those involved	• An exaggerated need for legitimacy instead of leading from conviction • Hence your own insecurity	• A good approach in principle, but please don't try to take everyone with you: concentrate on the few who matter and then step on the gas. The others will follow (despite initial resistance)
Endless decision meetings	• Structural weakness • Exaggerated need for harmony	• Before every meeting, clarify: "Who owns the decision?" Discuss with the relevant people and then decide • "Who" can also be a group of people. So clarify beforehand (!) whether the decision must be unanimous, by simple or two-thirds majority, or what minimum majority is required
Decisions take a long time	• Lack of trust • Structural weakness	• The question "Who owns the decision?" must be clarified before the decision is prepared • Always define three options • Courage! Decide!
No real leaps in success	• Craving for harmony	• A strategy that meets no resistance is usually not worth talking about! • Real success always comes with resistance that has to be endured! Just as important: persevere!

A craving for harmony stands in the way of performance.

Critical Dialogue. Finally talking about the right things.

Progress meetings are good for pace. But they are the wrong format for depth. Anyone who really wants to break up a craving for harmony, ego and deference to authority needs a different tool: the critical dialogue.

Critical dialogue is not a workshop. Not a facilitation format. And not a discussion circle. It is a structured dialogue of insight for leadership teams, with a single task:
finding out what is really thought but never said.

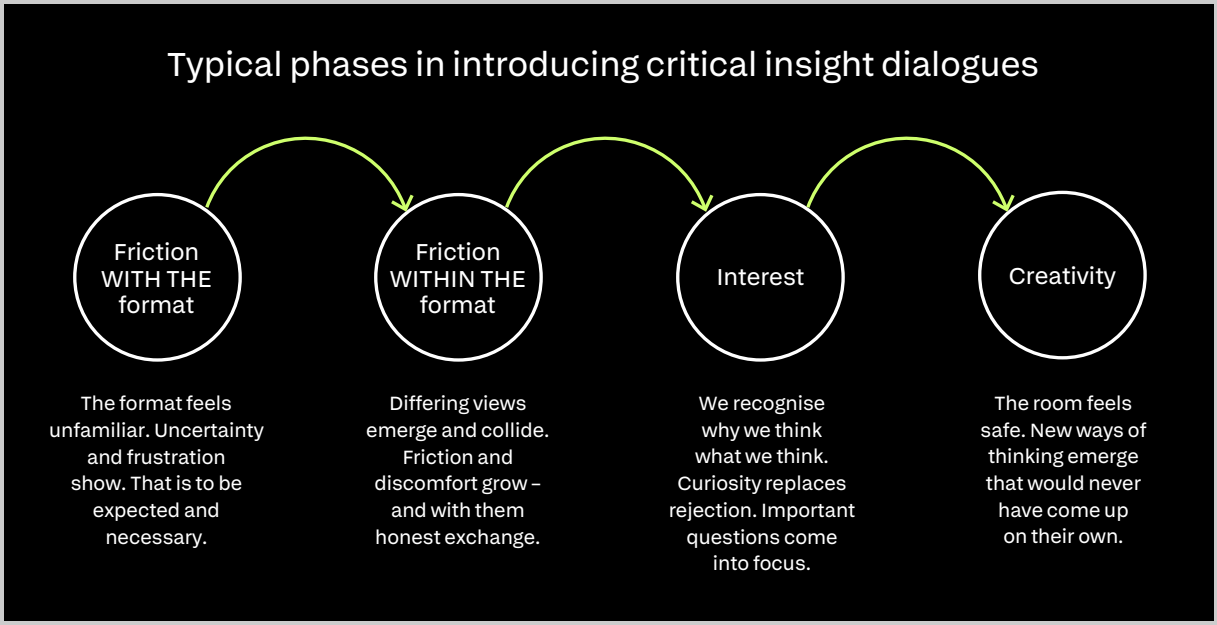
No hierarchies. No agenda. No ready-made answers.

Instead:

- Guiding questions that get to the point.
- Silence that is endured.
- Friction that produces something.

The side effects are remarkable: more trust, more robust agreements, an ability to decide that rests not on consensus but on real understanding.
Matthias Kolbusa supports leadership teams in building this format – from the first uncomfortable question to cascading it throughout your organisation.

Find out more – please write to me at: **matthias@kolbusa.com**



10. Ego

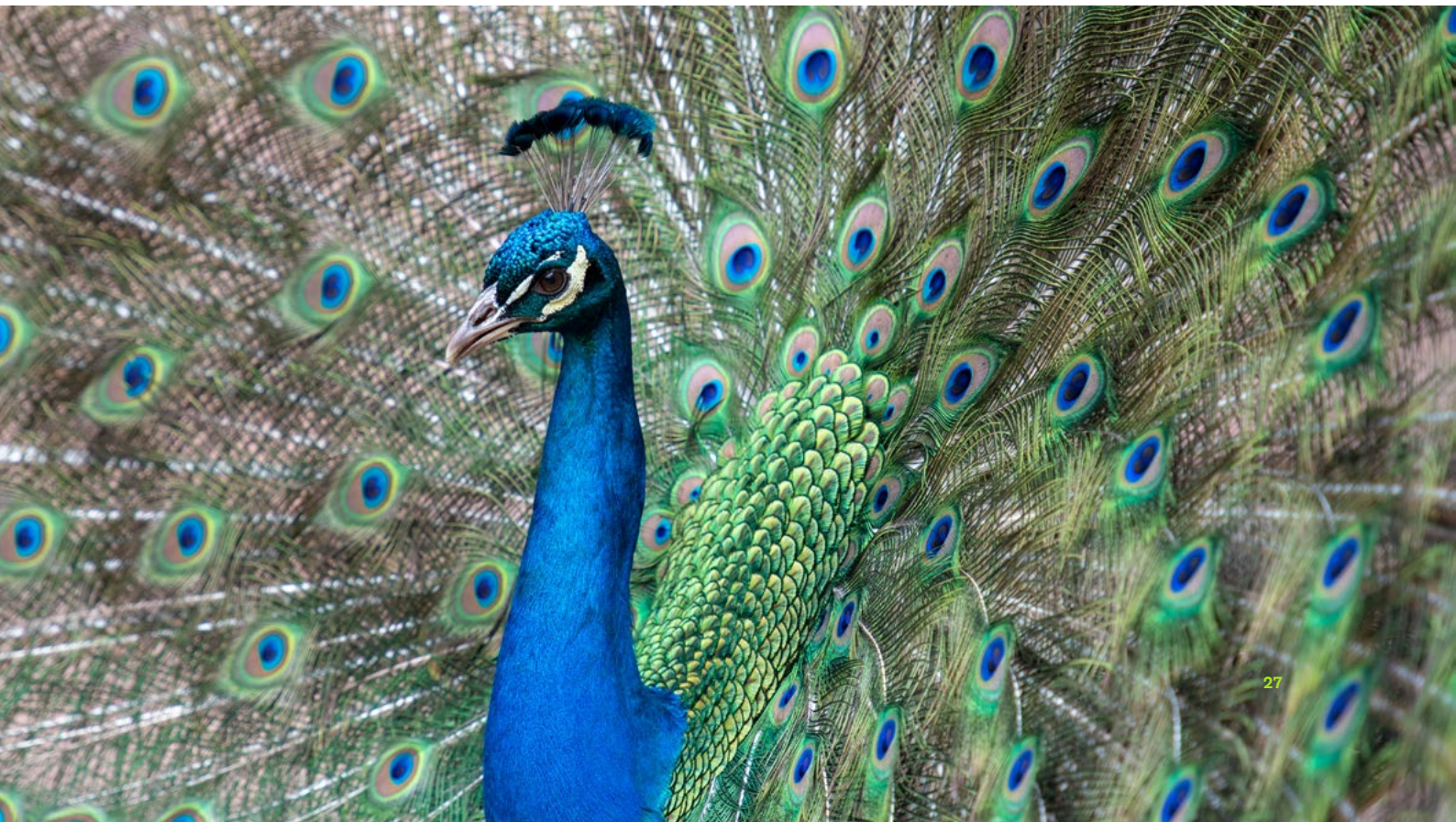
Last but not least, the most difficult and usually most deeply entrenched brake on performance – the one that, once released, really gets things moving: the ego. It is the ego of each individual manager that prevents innovation, speed and thus the exceptional competitive strength that would actually be possible. Whether it's the reflex to justify yourself when criticism comes up, the cowardice to say what really needs saying, the meanness that leads to internal friction or whatever else: the list is almost endless. Below are four key symptoms that can make a significant difference to execution strength. They are not easy to overcome. But once you have done it, the harvest is enormous!

Kolbusa's Board Dialogues

A sounding board instead of an agenda. Closeness instead of networking. Clarity instead of keynotes. For more than 15 years, a protected day of dialogue for executive board members and managing directors – with real peers at eye level, two guiding questions and insights that find no room in day-to-day business. No minutes. No sales. Chatham House Rules.

» **kolbusa.com/en/board-dialogues**





Symptoms	Causes	Kolbusa's remedies
"Right or wrong" discussions	• Identification with/attachment of those involved to the "things" (concept, opinion, project, position, etc.)	• Observe yourself: do you want to be right (kindergarten behaviour!), or are you looking for insight? • There are no "positions", no "opposite side"; there are theses and conditions under which they can or can no longer be upheld • Train yourself in dialectics (books by Rupert Lay) • Develop mental strength
Justifications	• An untrained and therefore reflexive way of dealing with feelings of shame and guilt	• Everyone claims not to be looking for someone to blame; in fact, it happens anyway • Justifications are a reflex to a feeling of shame or guilt • Don't let it arise! Build bridges!
The others	• Human tendency (narcissistic homeostasis)	• Lack of ownership: it's always the others who are responsible for things not moving forward, who behave the way they shouldn't, etc. • Turn it into TOTAL ownership: "The others" are the way they are because I want them to be. Now act and live from this perspective!
What's in it for me	• Egocentrism	• Human, but weak. High-performance teams live by the motto "Mission first": 1. mission, 2. team, 3. me • Most organisations – and therefore average ones – live by this order: 1. me, 2. team, 3. mission • That has to change! But this only works by leading by example!

It is the ego of each individual manager that prevents innovation, speed and thus the exceptional competitive strength that would actually be possible.

4. Kolbusa's "HERO" Principles for 100 Per Cent More Execution Strength

H No How **E** Management Beyond Ego **R** No Right or Wrong **O** Overcome Comfort

In addition to the "remedies" for the ten execution weaknesses and their symptoms listed above, I would like to give you my BIG FOUR for more execution performance here. In my experience of forging numerous high-performance organisations, each of the four HERO principles leads to 25 per cent more execution performance. Does the sum 4 × 25% = 100% really add up in the end, you are probably wondering now? It doesn't matter! The difference is dramatic.

Where most people fail, however, is in summoning up the necessary discipline (I'll come back to this point later).

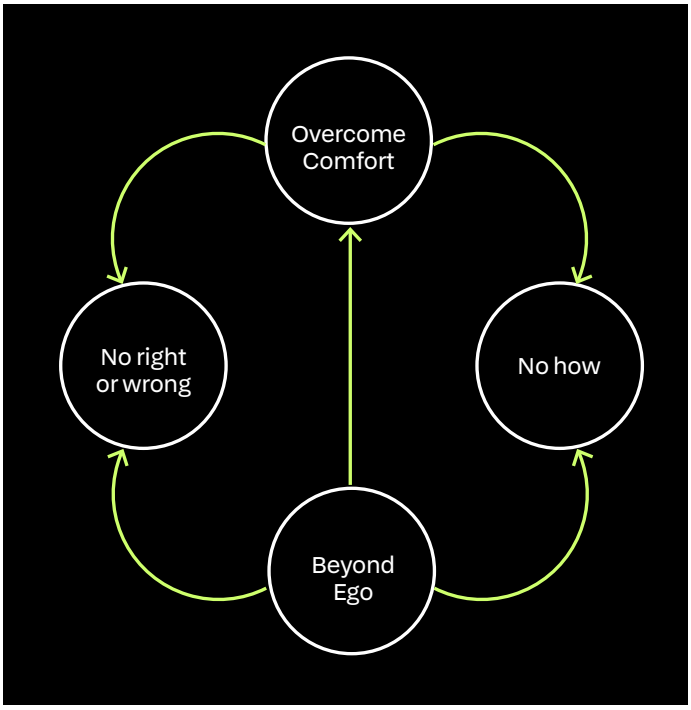


Fig. 5: How the HERO principles fit together



1. The “No How!” Principle

It is one of the four HERO principles for more execution strength – if not the decisive one. Train yourself and others never again, whether in small things or big ones, to be seduced by the “how”! Because then the “how” leads you and makes you and your organisation unproductive.

In small things, this already shows in private life: why argue about whether to go to the cinema or the theatre tonight? Both are “how” and therefore not worth talking about. Always ask first about the “what for” and then about the “what”. What do we want to achieve, and why? Then you and your partner might come up with simply getting comfortable on the sofa tonight with a delivered pizza and a glass of red wine.

It’s the same in a project: in the steering committee, don’t ask about the plan (remember that a plan is only ever a “how”!) but first and foremost about the “what for” and then the “what”. What are we doing the project for in the first place? Seems pointless to you? Just watch the following phenomenon: the more complex projects are and the longer they drag on, the less people ask about the what for over time. The purpose fades into the background, and plans, task lists and some kind of traffic-light status take over. Effectiveness declines! So don’t look at the project plan; instead, be clear that the CRM project is meant to increase customer satisfaction.

Then turn your attention to the “what”: how do we notice (weekly or monthly) that we are really making progress? A CRM concept only supposedly brings us closer? Two or three variables assessed monthly and directed at output will do so more. Perhaps you simply assess the number of cross-sells via the new CRM (outcome) or, if that isn’t possible yet, the number of customers contacted for the first time via the new CRM system (output), or, or … Think! But under no circumstances should you measure progress by working through activities such as the number of “lines of code” (input!) or of scenarios developed (also input – “how”)! **Be sure to watch my video on the difference between input, output, outcome and result.**



Video “Results orientation: input, output and outcome” (German):

www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3Xgq6RZ8Pk

Google's OKR methodology also applies and implements this and other principles consistently. Most organisations that follow OKR (and even most of the literature on it!) have not understood the "How? No!" principle and consequently apply OKR wrongly.

» **How to do it right: read SoE issue no. 14, "Strategy + Innovation Speed!".**

Kolbusa's "No How!" everyday rules:

1. Only talk about the "how" when asked!
2. Keep focusing on and discussing the "what for" and the "what"!
3. Ask "What are the necessary conditions for further progress?" and then take care of them!
4. Don't control plans; enable and manage progress.
5. Key question: "How do we notice that we have moved further forward?"
   (This is about the effect, not the doing!)
6. Always think from the end: B-to-A thinking: "What is different when we have succeeded?"

---

2. Management beyond Ego

The more I deal with management, its inefficiencies and ineffectiveness, the more I notice – among other things – that

- in decisions, it is often not the best idea that wins but the one argued most loudly;
- as a result, there is far less innovative strength than would actually be possible;
- silos can be observed, with the result that the "war" takes place within the organisation rather than outside against competitors;
- things move at an inadequate speed because people get held up by useless formalities.

And the more I realise that behind all these and many other negative consequences lies the ego – our "I" with all its immature manifestations. For example,

- when your own self-worth depends on position, budget, the number of employees or even just a concept, so that you act not in the interest of the company but to preserve your self-worth – without realising that this only supposedly preserves it;
- when failing to perceive, and therefore to master, completely normal, natural emotions such as anger, envy or despair leads to mean actions or hectic actionism against all reason;
- when the players fall into micromanagement out of fear;
- when, out of a lack of courage, the players don't criticise each other and, out of a lack of openness, merely justify themselves.

All these aspects are phenomena of "management before ego": an immature management in which the managers' store of thoughts and emotions takes control. Here, managers believe that the concept "I" – that is, they themselves – is the sum of their thoughts and feelings, without being aware that this makes them the plaything of circumstances, and that they manage and deal with each other almost unreflectively, like animals, and unproductively. In this case, authenticity does not mean standing by your values but turning your mental and emotional rubbish – which, by the way, is completely normal – outwards.

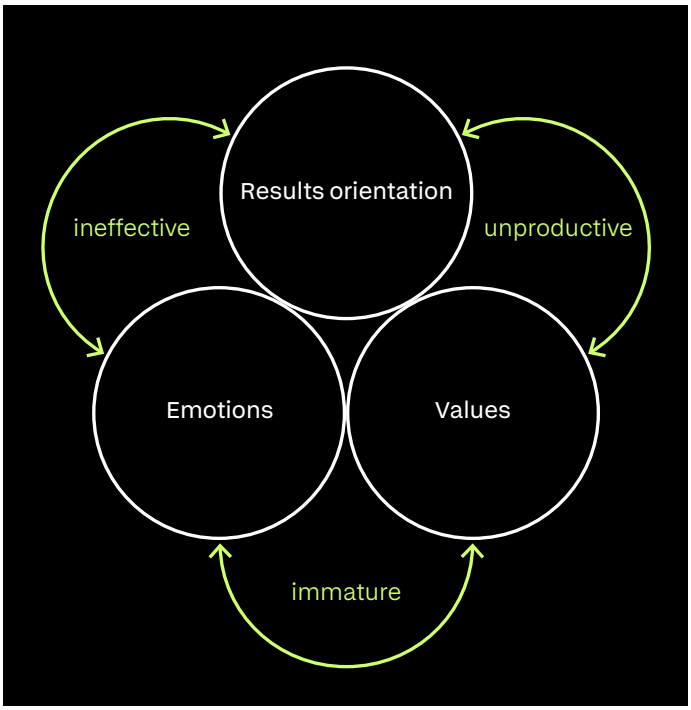


Fig. 6: True peak performance is always emotionally driven, never rational! Only those who master the triangle of performance dimensions can establish a high-performance culture.

It's time for "management beyond ego", in which these things are overcome, leading to massively increased execution strength and therefore competitive strength! Not to mention "insignificant" side effects such as a much greater degree of composure, which brings you a wonderful increase in productivity!

What isn't discussed openly in your company?

Every organisation has topics that never reach the necessary depth in progress meetings. Critical dialogue is the format built for exactly that. Matthias Kolbusa establishes it at leadership level and cascades it throughout the organisation.

Get in touch: matthias@kolbusa.com



If you want to make a real leap here, take the following five everyday rules to heart, first for yourself and then together with colleagues and employees. You'll be impressed by how much execution strength increases.

Kolbusa's "Management beyond Ego" everyday rules:

1. Develop mental strength. For example, through the daily "box breathing" exercise (practised by the Navy SEALs, among others).
2. After meetings, briefly note down the answers to the following questions: "What did I feel?" and "How did I react to these feelings?"
3. Gradually build this technique into the moment itself, so that you distinguish between stimulus and response, even under pressure! Along the lines of: "Oh, how interesting, I feel guilty" – and then consciously (!) decide how to deal with this feeling.
4. Align your own actions, especially under pressure – when you are in the phase between stimulus and response – with "Kolbusa's execution codex" (see next chapter).
5. Expose your own motives: "Why do I say or do what I say or do?" Be ruthlessly honest, without judging yourself for it!



3. No Right or Wrong

When I'm asked, "Mr Kolbusa, if we could change only one thing to increase our performance, what would it be?", my answer is clear: "Stop trying to be right!" Because behind this phenomenon – so simple in itself, yet not easy to master – more mismanagement and unproductivity can hide than behind any other! No other mechanism leads, among other things, to

- people feeling lousy after meetings,
- internal "wars" being fought,
- "revenge" being taken – whether in small ways or big ones,
- excellent ideas either not winning through or not even being voiced,
- employee satisfaction declining,
- working together, especially across divisions, not being really productive.

What needs to be done if you want to apply this enormous lever? Does "stopping wanting to be right" mean I'm no longer allowed to have an opinion? Of course not. It simply means that I don't just say, or flirt with the idea, that I haven't swallowed all the wisdom in the world – I actually mean it and live it!

Kolbusa's "Right or Wrong" everyday rules:

1. Be clear that this is not about "right or wrong" but about gaining insight.
2. If someone says "I see it this way", you must not counter with "Well, I see it differently!" (kindergarten discussion!). The only legitimate answer that shows genuine (!) interest is: "Please explain how you arrived at that!", because then either I or the person I'm talking to will learn something!
3. Linguistic non-words to be eradicated are:

    - "Yes, but …": every "yes, but" is a lie!
    - "They" in the sense of "the others": it's about working with each other, not against each other!
    - There is no "opposite side" – we are one!
    - "Our position": there are no positions to be pushed through, only insights.

4. Dialectics with so-called "flag-raising" has to be learned:

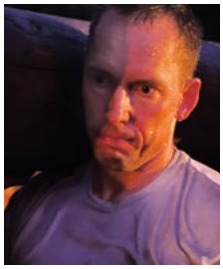
    - A thesis is placed at the centre, for example: "Sales performance can be increased by 30 per cent."
    - Even if – and with relevant topics this will always be the case – some participants inwardly reject this thesis!
    - Now the discussion is about the necessary (!) conditions under which this thesis could be upheld.
    - The art now lies in identifying all the necessary conditions (even for very complex topics, there are usually only between six and ten of them).
    - Now check whether these conditions (possibly second-order ones are needed too) can be met.

- If so: let's go! Off you go to meet the conditions and then increase sales performance by 30 per cent.
- If a single necessary condition cannot be met, it doesn't work! Necessary conditions are "killer conditions"!
- This is how insight comes about! Schopenhauer sends his regards.

4. Overcome Comfort

The fourth HERO principle can be summed up simply as follows:
The more discomfort you are prepared to accept, the greater your success.

So the more willing we are to go into discomfort, the more successful we are. Whether privately, in sport or at work: anyone who sets about this energetically will achieve the seemingly unbelievable. The problem is: it feels great in theory! There is something heroic about entering discomfort, and who wouldn't like to be a hero for once? But unlike hero spectating, which we all like to do not only with the Avengers & co. or in sport, it's no fun to take on the efforts it takes to be a hero yourself! Don't kid yourself about that! My everyday rules for discomfort are kept as simple and practicable as possible – yet they increase execution strength enormously.



SEALFIT:
In the boot camp of the Navy SEALs

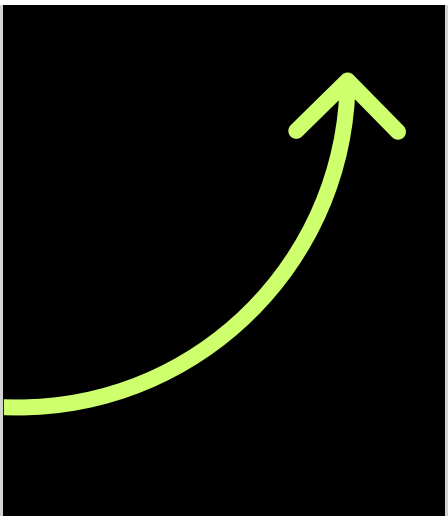


Get in touch with Matthias

Work with Matthias Kolbusa:
Keynotes · Strategy · High-performance culture

Matthias Kolbusa works with leadership teams that don't want mediocrity. From practice, not from the textbook – in projects around the globe.

» matthias@kolbusa.com » kolbusa.com/en



Kolbusa's discomfort everyday rules:

1. Once every one to four weeks: agree discomfort actions for everyone in the team or divisional meeting. What is really unpleasant for each participant (personally, too!) but would be an enormous lever for further progress? Team friction/feedback on it.
2. Freedom discomfort: great ideas don't come about in meetings or at the desk but in places where we think diffusely. Because it doesn't feel like "work", it is real discomfort for many to send themselves and their team away to think for a whole or half day every one to two months: everyone goes for a walk alone, to a museum, watches a ballet rehearsal or whatever! Three rules apply:

    - Everyone goes alone!
    - No communication (electronic, by phone) – with anyone!
    - Take pen and paper with you in case something occurs to you while thinking diffusely.

3. No-go feedback: it's now considered good form to ask for feedback after almost every meeting. How awful! Most of the feedback you get is either irrelevant because it comes from people who don't really know what they're talking about, or from people whose feedback serves their own interest – that is, the sender's rather than the recipient's. That's why the "no" in the no-go feedback rule is real discomfort for many, as they have to break the habit of asking for or accepting feedback from everyone! The "go" in this rule stands for actively seeking open feedback at least once a month from someone whose opinion you really value, with the clear instruction: "Don't butter me up – tell me what to do better or differently!"
4. Clarity: many managers stay silent about team members' non-performance, simply pass over it and turn a blind eye. No! Get uncomfortable: address poor performance – even in small things – and demand more! Say unmistakably: "I'm not satisfied with that; more was possible! What do you need from me so that it goes better?" For many, a statement like this is a real hurdle that takes effort to overcome!







“Real competitive differentiation in transformation strategies comes from jointly supported approaches and attitudes shaped by high standards. Kolbusa challenges management teams to step out of their comfort zone; not always pleasant, but very effective.”
Axel Harries,
Head of CASE, Daimler AG



“Kolbusa is one of the few consultants who know how to put ‘soft’ factors consistently at the service of the business. Change is not an end in itself here but methodically and swiftly creates more competitive strength!”

Raimund Winkler,
Director Enterprise Services, Vodafone



“Kolbusa drives management teams to success rigorously and consistently! It’s demanding, but it’s fun and, above all, it moves things forward.”
Björn Schniederkötter,
COO Nagel Group



“Anyone who wants to experience how to bring people and entire organisations to high performance beyond the usual consultant rhetoric can’t get past Kolbusa.”
Jürgen Hermann,
CEO, QSC



“Matthias Kolbusa took our management team to the next level in no time at all. Effective and sustainable.”
Marc Meier,
CEO, Fr. Meyer’s Sohn



“With unconventional structures and approaches, Kolbusa brings momentum to strategy execution.”
Dr. Frank Stieler,
CEO KraussMaffei Group



“Strategy work with Kolbusa isn’t comfortable, but it’s enormously effective!”
Rainer von Borstel,
Executive Board Member,
DIEHL Stiftung & Co. KG

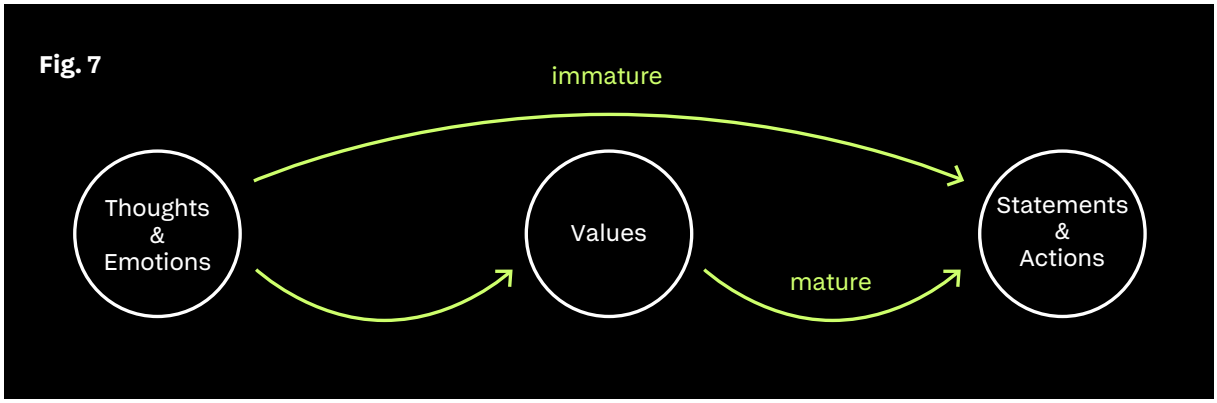


“Kolbusa is one of the few who not only know how agile strategy execution works but also achieve results in practice.”
Markus Reithwiesner,
CEO Haufe Group

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5. Kolbusa's Execution Codex: Five Values and Their Consequences

If you break human behaviour down in a very simple way, you get a sequence of emotions and thoughts that condition each other: anyone who mentally lies down in a deckchair on the beach with their eyes closed for long enough will sooner or later start to grin and so generate feelings of happiness. Conversely, anyone who is angry for some inexplicable reason will automatically tend to develop angry thoughts – we all know that too. Then our value system comes into play, which is partly genetic, partly instilled or formed through conscious reflection, and finally we say or do things.

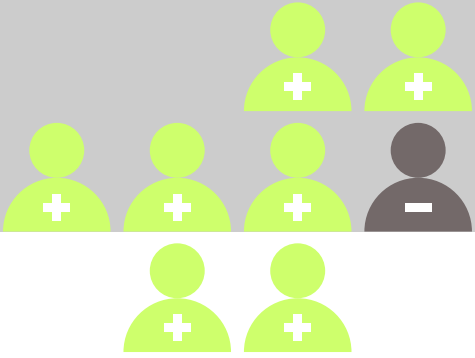


Mental strength: getting between stimulus and response

As mentioned above, mental strength means, with a clearly developed value system, not merely distinguishing between stimulus (emotions/thoughts) and response (statements/actions) but getting in between them, so that you can act maturely.

What is "maturity"?

Maturity is nothing other than always acting in such a way that you benefit more people than you harm.





Scene from the 2000 film "Gladiator", directed by Ridley Scott.

This requires a consciously lived value system. What matters decisively, therefore, is not to react to an emotional trigger such as a feeling of fear, guilt or shame with an unreflected reflex (stimulus → response) but reflectively (stimulus → reflection → response/action). For example, a feeling of shame caused by the criticism "I think you failed to tell sales in time that …" should not be answered with a justification. Rather, the answer should be well considered and take the values of openness and honesty into account. The only appropriate answer to this criticism is therefore: "You're right, I made a mistake!" And that even if you are not the main cause of the problem!

High-performance cultures are forged with hero teams of seven people

This is the supreme discipline of performance culture: managing, with a few "heroes", to truly internalise a few central values, so that if push comes to shove you have the mental strength to really live these values rather than just having them written down somewhere. And because that isn't easy, you need comrades-in-arms who, when in doubt, help you critically – for the sake of the cause. Initially, you need one or more bands of heroes of up to seven people at most to consciously educate each other as a team with regard to these values! And seven because anything beyond that is merely a group of people who may be logically compliant with something but never really committed. Team spirit – and a performance culture needs it – only works with seven participants at most. Given our social competence, we humans can be connected in a network with at most six people and aligned towards a common goal, that is, function as a team. All special forces in the world know this: the Navy SEALs have teams of seven, the British SAS even only teams of four.

Kolbusa's execution codex: five values

The execution codex you have to stick to if you want to establish a performance culture and thus pronounced execution strength consists of five values, each with two very practical phenomena to be avoided or established:

Value (execution codex)	Definition	Phenomena (concrete behaviours)
Courage	Courage is saying or doing what is right despite fear. What is right is what benefits more people than it harms.	• Practise criticism aimed at insight and development; criticism is nothing negative! • Discomfort: what is uncomfortable for the individual (possibly yourself) but very helpful for success? Do it!
Openness	Openness means really wanting to understand other perspectives and opinions.	• "Yes, but …" • "The others"
Speed	Speed is the narrow ridge between prudence and carelessness at maximum pace.	• Maxim for action: progress, not perfection! • How can we do this in 50 per cent of the time? Ask again and again!
Trust	Trust is consciously taking the risk of being hurt or disappointed. Whoever takes no risk does not trust.	• Increasing, assessed decline in queries/escalations • Targeted reduction of checkpoints (assessed)
Reliability	Reliability is keeping agreements bindingly or renegotiating them in good time. An agreement is an understanding reached in dialogue.	• Track the number of broken agreements • Ask colleagues/employees how they perceive your own reliability (scale on request)

Establishing the execution codex in four steps

To establish the execution codex, four things are necessary:

1. **Internalisation:** definitions – strange as it may sound – have to be learned by heart. Anyone who doesn't know exactly what they mean by trust, openness, etc. has no chance of distinguishing between stimulus and response – especially under pressure – with a clear understanding of this value as a maxim for action, and of acting appropriately. So: create pocket cards and hand them out. Everyone involved should carry them in their pocket.
2. **Few things, one after the other:** under no circumstances should you tackle the ten phenomena above (two per value) at the same time! Limit yourself to two phenomena at most at any one time. Experience shows that reliability is a good place to start, because it can be developed quickly and in a targeted way and involves the least discomfort with a big effect at the same time. Then move on to courage and openness, and after that to speed and trust.
3. **Teams of seven:** if you want to establish the execution codex, you need support! Only a good team can give you that – with the necessary pointers when you don't keep agreements, with mutual exchange and the motivation to stay on the ball, and with a shared reward when a certain level has been reached, and so on. As described elsewhere, you have to trust each other for this (see above for what that means!) and educate each other. Because of the social complexity and the demands of such a process, this only works in groups of seven people at most. So form teams of no more than seven people each, or let them find each other. Here, too: few things, one after the other! Perhaps you should start in top management, because when managers talk about change, they usually mean the others.
4. **Stop talking, start doing!:** communication is massively overrated in change processes. The same goes for establishing execution performance. Too much communication often does more harm than good, because it raises expectations that are then not met. People find it exciting to hear about such things, but in the end they are only really interested in what they experience. So: discuss changes in the small team (see point 3), start living them and wait. The best feedback you can get from colleagues or employees relates to one of the five values of the execution codex and goes something like: "Wow, what's up with them? They're so much more open!"

In everything: perception is reality

6. Where Many Fail: Discipline

If there's one thing I've learned in life, especially when building high-performance cultures, it's this: **structure + discipline = success.** There is usually no shortage of smart concepts. On the contrary: too many of them are always produced, only to then want far too much at once. That's why Kolbusa's HERO principles and the execution codex focus on a few but decisive points. Many will quickly grasp the concept, but only a few will really manage to implement it in full and significantly increase their execution strength.

There are two reasons for this:

1. Change isn't fun.
2. Most people hate discipline.

That doesn't sound exactly motivating. But one thing at a time:

Why isn't change fun?

If it were fun, we would have done what we want to achieve with the change long ago. It's that simple. It is not the things that are fun that move us forward but the things we have to force ourselves to do! The "fun" comes when, having overcome yourself, you simply leave things out for the sake of speed, for example. Or when you force yourself (courage) to make a critical remark in a meeting, which then meets lived openness, so that you feel pride and experience it as happiness and thus as motivation to behave this way in the future too. That really is fun! But you first have to get into this "virtuous circle" – and that is exactly what isn't fun. Don't kid yourself about that!

Why do most people hate discipline?

Here, too, you shouldn't have any illusions: it takes discipline to establish the four HERO principles and the execution codex. That means raising the issues again and again, staying on the ball all the time, challenging each other anew, criticising each other and motivating each other to stick to the principles. That takes willpower, which pays off in the form of enormous competitive strength but has to be summoned up first. It's like running: anyone who resolves to go running three times a week at six in the morning before work loves the idea! But when the alarm goes off at five after a somewhat shortened or restless, unrefreshing night, the question is: now what? Stick with it? Be disciplined? Hopefully that's the answer! Otherwise, that will quickly be the end of running, because an excuse and our comfort can quickly wreck our good intentions. It's exactly the same with the principles for execution strength: when there is pressure for results, the project is getting out of hand and you decide just to give orders and push your thing through, and you're in no mood for openness and trust – then that's the end of it here too!

Discipline + structure = success!

Discipline means doing what you don't feel like doing!

If you need a sparring partner to help you establish these things systematically, let me know! I hope you enjoyed this issue of Secrets of Execution® (SoE) too and that it has given you valuable ideas for your business.



Yours, Matthias Kolbusa



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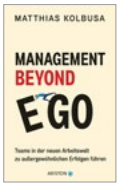
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Konsequenz
Management without compromise – leading with clarity and sincerity (in German)

Matthias Kolbusa is not one of the usual softeners who tell people what they want to hear. With his approach of also voicing uncomfortable truths, he provides valuable food for thought on management. Here he makes a case for more clarity and sincerity and uses numerous examples to convey the principles and methods for achieving success with clear objectives.

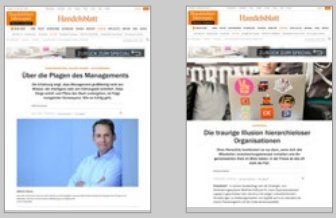
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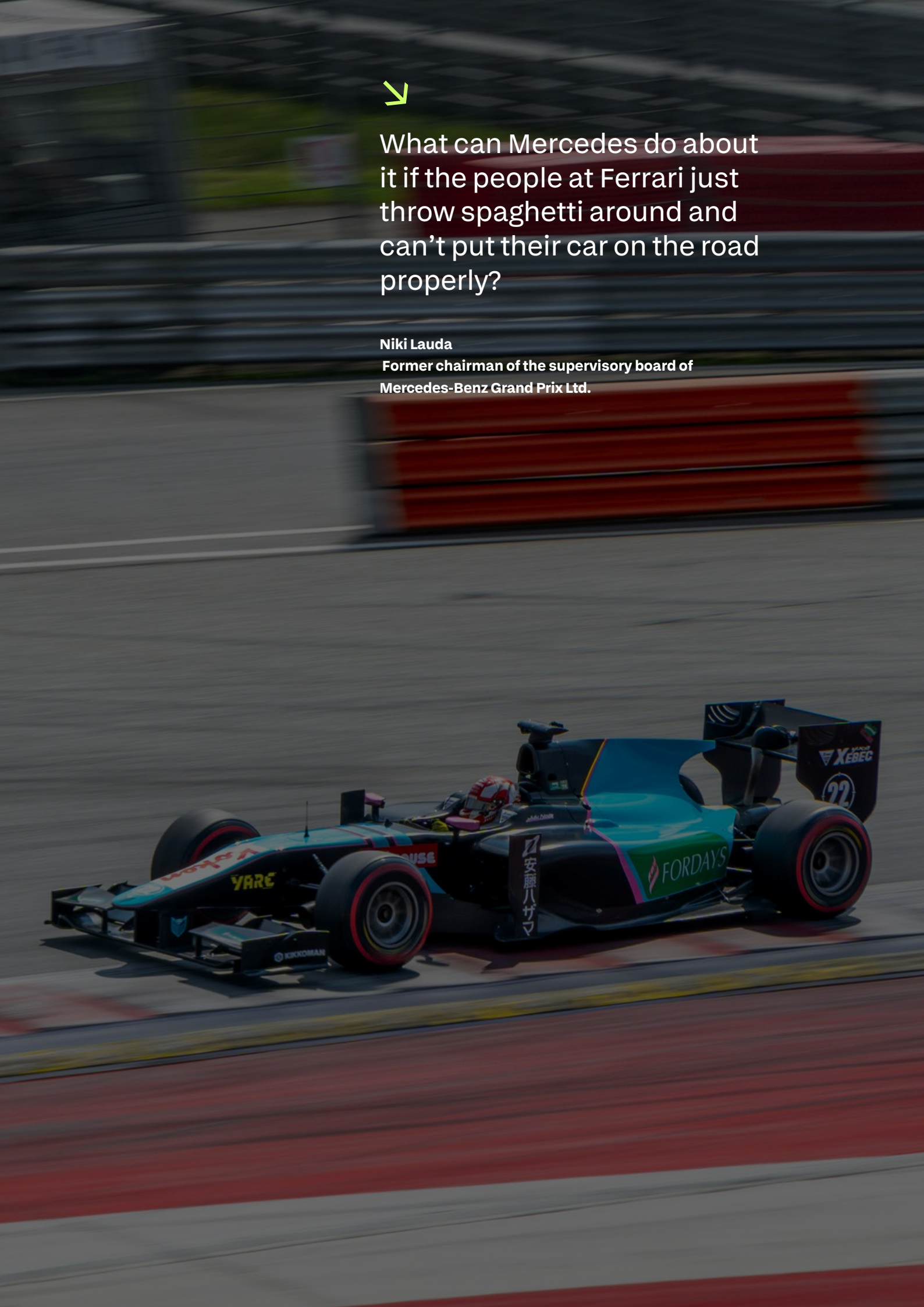




Articles, columns and management blogs in various media

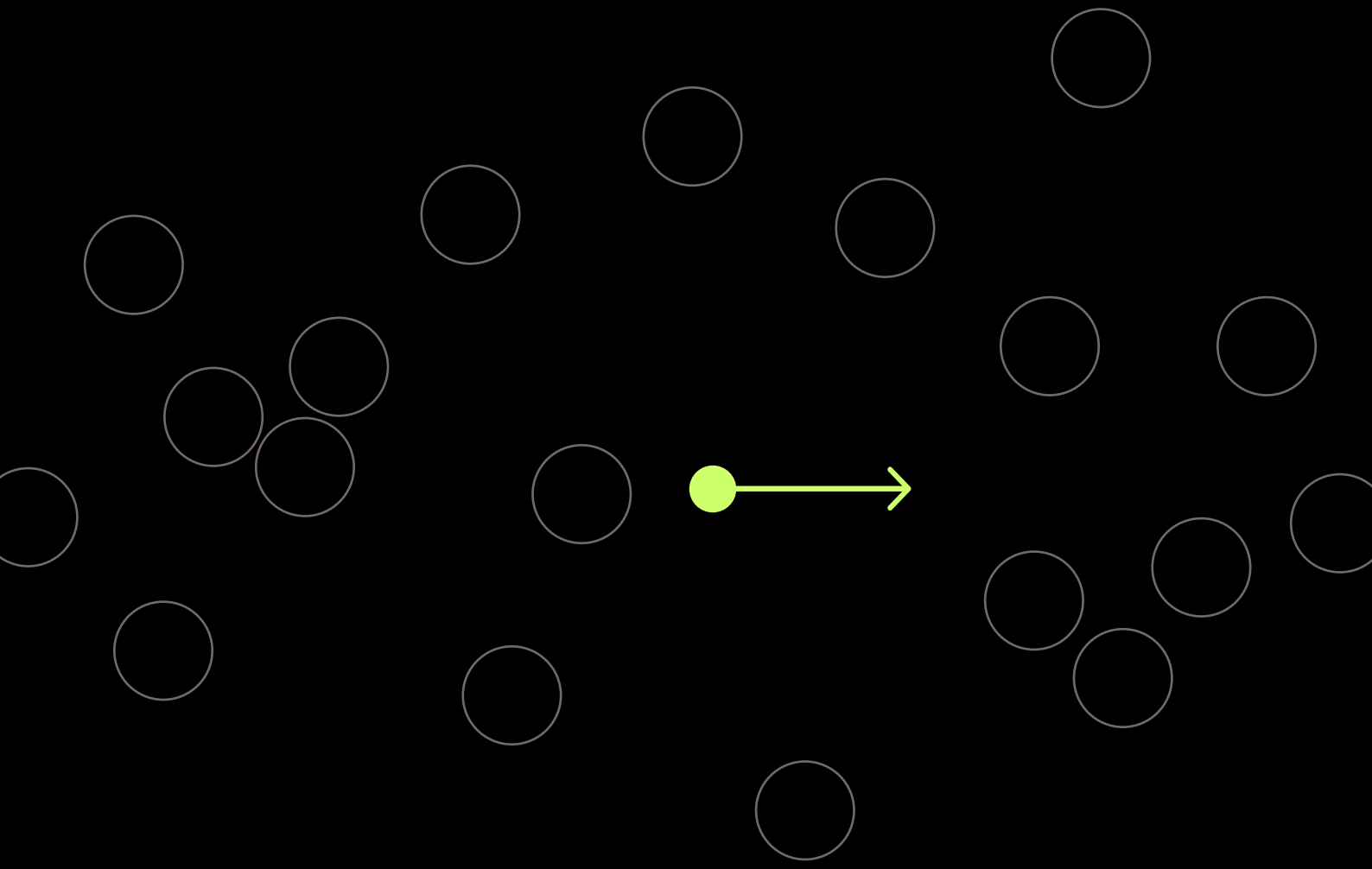
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What can Mercedes do about it if the people at Ferrari just throw spaghetti around and can’t put their car on the road properly?

Niki Lauda
Former chairman of the supervisory board of Mercedes-Benz Grand Prix Ltd.



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