

Stefanie N. Voigt

THE CONSCIOUSNESS CODE

The missing link in how we think



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"For a long time it has been a desideratum that also the economic disciplines should deal with the 'soft' aspects of business culture. May this book be received in teaching and may the intellectual approaches it offers thus be made known to the world."

(Sabine von Witzleben, former chairwoman of the staff council of a Bavarian university)

"The present book aims at making purposeful values – like the true, the good, and the beautiful – to be experienced in a concrete way, also in the world of business. In the final analysis, this serves a humane and therefore sustainable success. Cordially I wish the best for the readers."

(Prof. Heinrich Beck, multiple honorary doctor, former full professor of philosophy at Otto Friedrich University Bamberg/Germany, holder of the German Cross of Merit, member of the International Academy of the Sciences, member of the European Academy of the Sciences and Arts, corresponding member of the Royal Spanish Academy of the Sciences and knight of the Papal Order of Sylvester)

"It is easy to write a book. You just have to begin with leaving out the wrong words."

(Douglas Adams, author of *"The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy"*, a Sci-Fi trilogy in five parts, in which the number 42 appears as the answer to the question for the meaning of life)

Please note:

Links to the English version of the model of consciousness (fig. 1), and to more supplementary materials, can be found in Module 8.

Some figures contain German text which is translated in the immediate context.

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Preface by Martin von Hirschhausen

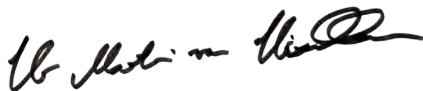
Dear readers!

Spirit holds body and soul together – and this book is very spirited! An integrated theory of thinking which unites feeling and acting – I did not know anything like that before I read that work. But the approach taken by Stefanie N. Voigt is great. Just look at a chapter or open the book anywhere: Inevitably you will win, by winning knowledge.

In times of big changes and insecurity because of war, recession, climate change, and Artificial Intelligence, the ability to have influence on one's own thinking and consciousness matters more than ever. It is not without reason that the probably most famous sentence in the history of philosophy is "I think, therefore I am." Thus, René Descartes declared the consciousness of one's own thinking to be the foundation of all decisions. The author, however, makes one more decisive step and combines thinking with the inner logic of seemingly irrational emotions. With stringency and structure, clarity of thought, and time and again with a smile, she leads us toward new considerations and insights.

Now it is up to you which of the many incentives from this book you make your own and how you act. If you learn something from this book, this will be great joy – for yourself and also for the author who impersonates positive change for us all.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin von Hirschhausen', with a stylized, flowing script.

Martin von Hirschhausen

MODULE 1

The Art of Thinking, or: On the Grammar of the Soul

Reading time: ca. 1 ½ hours

1.1 Introduction

“People often take the production of information to be a sign of intelligence, whereas in actuality the opposite is true: the reduction, the selection of information is the far greater achievement.” (Heinz Zemanek, Austrian computer pioneer, who named a fully transistorized calculating machine he developed “Mailüfterl” in order to set it apart from the English competing model “Whirlwind”)

“God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please. You can never have both.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson, American natural philosopher, who liked national parks but did not like spending the night in them)

The consciousness code is something like a **circuit diagram of thinking**. This model explains, with 42 switching elements, how people tick. Put in scientific terms, the consciousness code is a **digital model of human information processing** from theoretical psychology and AI research. It serves to capture, in an interdisciplinary way, qualities of thinking that go beyond purely economic logic, and is intended to optimize processes of consciousness formation. In plain language: this code helps you to understand yourself and the rest of the world better. Before someone else does—for example at a family gathering. Nobody wants that. And that brings us to an important keyword:

WHAT A PARTY AND A CAKE HAVE TO DO WITH AI

The history of the consciousness code **began in a land before our time, namely in 1999, in Bavaria**. There, an academic invited a woman to accompany him to a party of psychologists. There were no further warning signs, and this woman’s refrigerator was empty. So, she said yes. Once there, because of the many jokes about AI and Star Trek, she took herself to be in a gathering of likeable science-fiction fans—until they brought in a cake in the shape of an artificial system. Only in that moment did it become clear to her that she had fallen in among nothing but AI programmers, and that these supposed jokes had not been jokes at all, but the full seriousness of these people. She got the piece of cake with the eye and ate it very meekly. For, by that time, she had already, at epic length, expounded her views on people, art, and music to a pleasant older gentleman in the group, without knowing that he was the host:

Prof. Dr. Dietrich Dörner is one of the great figures of psychology. Among other things, he dealt with the question of why people in difficult situations so often do exactly the wrong thing—and in doing so himself did the right thing: he turned it into science and, in 1986, received the Leibniz Prize for it, Germany's most highly endowed research award. His best-known book, *"The Logic of Failure"*, has since been regarded as required reading for everyone who, professionally or privately, plans a vacation project or a police operation and is interested in errors of thinking. Another of his key works is *"Bauplan für eine Seele"* (*"Blueprint for a Soul"*), in which he describes human consciousness as a hypercomplex machine—and explains how, in theory, one could build it into a computer. Provided the latter does not crash. The completion of this book had been the occasion of the celebration. Unexpectedly, in the aftermath of this celebration, the unsuspecting invitee received an offer from Dörner to write a thesis with him.

OF HUMAN ART AND ARTIFICIAL HUMANS: HOW CONSCIOUSNESS ARISES

She was **to distill, from the catchment areas of her studies in the humanities—a broadly conceived mixed-goods assortment of art, art history, literature, cultural studies, history, economic and mentalities history, and philosophy—the logic of aesthetic perception, and then prepare it in a form suitable for AI.** That sounded of little relevance to everyday life and like one of those academic assignments at which even enthusiastic academic advisors begin to glance about nervously. But there was a scholarship for it, and the woman was no longer all that young and needed the money. So, she said yes a second time in this story. And then, in the course of the work, it suddenly turned out that the topic was by no means something destined only for the academic storeroom, but stood right at the center of the great questions of humanity. More precisely, at a particular point that no human being had ever seen before. It became apparent that people always use the same structure for their aesthetic perception—or, as Dan Brown would call it: the same code. Brown is an American thriller author who became world-famous with fast-paced conspiracy plots revolving around religion, secret societies, and symbolism, above all through *"The Da Vinci Code"* from 2003. For if one takes the many different descriptions of that which human beings perceive aesthetically, mixes it as in a blender, keeps the lid on (important!), and then distils until only the smallest common element remains: this results in something like the DNA structure of consciousness—which shows what distinguishes human beings from machines.

A LIGHT GOES ON

But what exactly distinguishes us, in truth, from machines—apart from psychological complexes and headaches? A famous book was once written about this in the eighteenth century. The French physician **Julien Offray de La Mettrie** (1709–1751) published *“L’Homme Machine”*: the human being—a machine. Many were annoyed by this, because they thought: he means that the human being is nothing other than a machine. But for him the human being was a very special machine: one that shines from within. Despite this relativization, La Mettrie died the so-called “pasty death”: a fatal food poisoning that occurred frequently in the eighteenth century in situations of diplomatic tension. Thank God, thanks to industrial standards there are nowadays food inspections.

Yet this affinity between the seemingly far-removed themes of enlightenment, food, and the theory of consciousness has persisted ever since into our own time. Today’s hybrid research combines biological material, preferably parts of fish, with computer chips: another version of fish ‘n’ chips. Through the continuously growing quantity, in this way, of biological nerve connections with digitality, the probability becomes ever greater that at some point something will happen, just as back then, 3.5 billion years ago in the primordial soup, when some proteins found one another and this had far-reaching consequences. It is only a question of what kind of consequences this time, and whether we are well prepared for them. The scientific structure of consciousness presented in this book explains this illumination system and why aesthetic perception in particular is the key to everything. As in a fairy tale, when it turns out that a marginal figure not taken seriously, like Snow White, is in fact the main character of the whole story: at first noticed by no one and then the one with the principal shareholder’s claim to the prince.

THE LAST STRONGHOLD

Knowing how consciousness works therefore seems potentially important. All the more astonishing, then, that we know so little about it. Despite brain research, physics, and high tech, there are still more things in heaven and on earth than schoolbook wisdom can explain. For example, the correct use of the channel search function on digital televisions, or indeed that of human consciousness—and that is the bigger problem. Not everyone owns a television, but everyone has consciousness. Even if, in some cases, there is little sign of it. In moments **when only faint residual traces of logical thinking**

remain, we actually appear particularly human—for instance, at the beginning of a love affair or at the end of a wine tasting. This typically human element is a special quality of our consciousness. Artificial intelligence now beats us at everything that involves logic, calculation, and memorizing eight million investment options. It recognizes patterns, plays chess, and detects nodules in the lungs. But in other matters such as intuition and morality, creativity, empathy, emotion, and esprit, we are so far still superior to our digital copies.

CONSCIOUSNESS 1.0—INCOMPLETE, BUT INDUSTRY-COMPATIBLE

That is why **the excellence forges of this world are currently vying for the best training formats in business psychology**, programs that overcoach even coachings about coaching. Of course, this cognitive arms race is not driven solely by the wish to make the world more human. It is also about using AI to digitalize precisely those qualities that are not easily digitalizable after all. This is called “scaling” and means multiplying knowledge and methods so as to reach as many people as possible at the same time without increasing the effort proportionally. In short: think once, sell a thousand times. Apart from that, these efforts are naturally devoted to the human factor. For the sake of scientific verifiability, however, success is measured in terms of revenue. And so leadership programs arise with titles such as “Human-centric AI Strategy” or “Neuroscience for Business Decisions.” At Harvard, such an Executive MBA can easily cost 126,000 dollars. In structurally weak regions this corresponds to the price of a single-family house, or in Geneva to two nights in the Royal Penthouse of the Hotel President Wilson. This price is still below that of some tourbillon watches, of the kind worn by one or another of the business psychologists attending such seminars and recommended as investment objects.

The impression that in future it will above all be psychologically trained top earners who rule the world seems disturbing at first glance, but not at second. **For they know not what they do.** If someone knew how consciousness really functions, we would have strong AI by now. Yet in order to reconstruct something, one must first have understood it—and that, precisely, seems not to have been achieved to this day. For this reason, human beings are currently tinkering, without spirit, with the human spirit—like assembling an IKEA shelf without instructions. If these interests of the executives were merely a hobby, that would be no problem. The main thing is that they stay

off the streets. But their activities are changing the world. For the digitalization that they “scale” marks a profound transformation.

POSTHUMAN? I AM NOT EVEN CONNECTED TO THE WI-FY YET

Historians speak, for times like ours, of **epoch thresholds**: those sensitive phases of human history in which so much changes that later film adaptations always go down particularly well. In such upheavals, it is not only technology that changes—as with the invention of the printing press, the steam engine, or the ballpoint pen. Or of ChatGPT. Human beings also change, for they come under pressure. So much so that they then frequently hit upon unpleasant ideas—such as, in earlier times, pyres and, today, vast quantities of mental illnesses. According to a **study by the Hans Böckler Foundation**, the number of such illnesses is currently quintupling within only a single generation. Our children today are as psychologically burdened as psychiatric patients were in the 1950s. And among adults, the number of sick days due to mental illnesses alone has risen by more than 50% in the last ten years. If these figures are correct, then the system is in danger of tipping over. If research is right and digitalization does not in itself make people unhappy, but rather functions like an amplifier—relieving in stable societies, exacerbating in overburdened ones—then at the moment we are apparently not well positioned. If, in addition, we actually stand at the transition to a posthuman age in which human beings and machines intermingle more than merely in the implantation of artificial knee joints, then an understanding of technology alone apparently no longer suffices. At this point, then, something is evidently going quite seriously awry—and it is here that this book sets in.

INTERDISCIPLINARY IS THE NEW EXCELLENT

The book you are currently reading is the further development of a specialist volume from 2024 entitled *“The Consciousness Code—Universal Knowledge for Executives in the Age of Digitalization”*. That earlier book was a handbook for a seminar called **SMART HUMANITIES**, which is offered at various advanced training institutes for executives. “SMART” stands for clever, agile, and endowed with a certain something, like the cars of the same name or certain plastic watches. “HUMANITIES” is a technical term for all those disciplines that deal with human beings: from psychology through literature to philosophy. In the seminar, it was explained in an interdisciplinary way how

human information processing is described in non-business disciplines—and what economics can learn from this.

For there is good reason to suspect that it could learn a great deal. The ground for this is as follows: economics concerns itself with NDF, with numbers, data, facts—while its more refined competitors deal with super-soft topics such as consciousness, sense, soul, or beauty. That sounds hardly suitable for business and is not measurable. For that reason, economics pays little attention to it. On the other hand, these are precisely the aspects that make life worth living—and that, in turn, is exactly what burned-out people lack, leading to absenteeism and shortages of skilled workers. It is not that skilled workers are dying out as a species. They are just dying off. The representatives of the so-called hard disciplines can scarcely cognize what they are lacking in this respect—as long as it is not explained to them in their own language. With a pinch of NDF, for example in the form of an interdisciplinary model of consciousness. In an **Esperanto of Science**. After all, Goethe once wrote: *“Whoever does not know foreign languages knows nothing of his own”*—and that also applies to technical languages. So, anyone who has ever feared that, by choosing business administration as their field of study, they had blocked off their intellectual life will find in this book the most important patterns of thought from the non-economic disciplines in condensed form. The aim of the seminar is to supplement the prevailing SOP mentality—the Standard Operating Procedure routine of industry—with a more comprehensive understanding of the formation of consciousness. It is aimed at executives with high aspirations but little time. The present book now makes this knowledge easily accessible—for all who are interested in thinking, digitalization, humanity, and more conscious dealings with themselves and others. For the concept of SMART HUMANITIES was never intended only for managers with premium business cards, but for smart people in general—which does not, after all, necessarily exclude one another.

SWISS BLASTING TECHNOLOGY FOR OBSOLETE THINKING

This book translates what is important from the humanities into the technical parameters of the economy—not because the latter were the only relevant arena! Rather, because on the one hand it is most in need of this translation, and on the other hand it offers a particularly vivid experimental field for everything that applies just as much in everyday life. The view of the topic of consciousness set out here does not come from ivory towers of the humanities, but from someone from industry itself: **Frank Brüderle** was formerly a quality-assurance auditor and instructor for blasting technology

and mine warfare at the Army's technical school. He then studied computer science and chemistry and is today supply-chain manager of the Swiss branch of CABB Group GmbH in Basel, an internationally active chemical company with around 1,200 employees and an annual turnover of 604 million euros (as of 2024). He put it this way: the so-called soft sciences provide a great deal of structure without reference to application, whereas industry provides a great deal of practice without a rulebook.

HOW NOT TO BURN OUT YOUR BRAIN

The synthesis of both sides yields a description of consciousness that should lead to better “mental sustainability” in our dealings with ourselves and others. For whoever wants to handle a system with sovereignty gets further with a blueprint than without one. Example: **Black holes** elegantly explain why some stars move so strangely around certain regions of the sky—as if they could not really park properly there. With this insight, myths of lightless caves of evil deities suddenly become superfluous. Similarly constructive was the argument advanced by the Saxon Chief Mining Administrator Hans Carl von Carlowitz in 1713. In *“Sylvicultura Oeconomica”* he warned against felling more timber than can grow back through reforestation. In his time, unrestrained clear-cutting laid waste to entire regions. Ireland's forested area, for example, shrank from once 80% to around 1%. While this may today result in postcard-worthy grasslands, it was, ecologically speaking, anything but a masterpiece. With his warning Carlowitz invented the principle of sustainability. And now just imagine that there was something of the sort for your thinking as well: a *“Psychocultura Oeconomica”* for your **inner sustainability**. For in the absence of such a concept there is a danger that we may even find our inner predatory exploitation attractive. Until cognitive soil erosion sets in and our mental resources seep away—which already now appears to be the case: formerly the Flynn effect held—intelligence increased with every generation. Since the 1990s, the reverse has been true. Then even the best measures to save the external environment will not help much if, at the same time, we are optimizing our inner environment to the point of ruin. So it would be better to change something—so that we do not continue to overexploit our cognitive resources without noticing it, and so that we no longer merely improvise, but instead understand, in a comprehensive and scientific way, how we actually function.

SUMMIT HIKE THROUGH BRAIN PASSES

So, it is not only a matter of what is taught about business psychology at elite universities. More important is what is not on the curriculum there, but might well be needed: namely, an **educational booster guide** to contributions from philosophy, literature, art, anthropology, and ethics. A user manual for those disciplines that have been achieving top performances in thinking about the human being for centuries, but that, without a translation app for humanities-to-understandable/understandable-to-humanities, cannot be put to optimal use. This book gathers information and interdisciplinary background stories that make for excellent conversation at parties. Anyone who has read it will still not understand the world completely, but will understand it in a more structured way. Do not be surprised if, on this hike through a wide variety of scientific disciplines, you occasionally find yourself a bit out of breath at their highest peaks. For that, there are subsections of chapters that also function as pause markers. Passages about habitats that are not your thing can easily be skipped, because at the end of the journey everything is summarized once again. So now, welcome to the Mastermind training camp BC2: the next edition of the consciousness code.

1.2 The problem is as follows

“One of my tricks for generating startup ideas is to imagine the ways in which we’ll seem backward to future generations.”

(Paul Graham, founder of the Californian startup incubator “Y Combinator”, who was dissed as a nerd during his school days and then became rich with a model for de-escalating conflicts)

“Unfortunately, some people believe that soft skills aren’t that important. However, almost every employer I’ve have ever talked to about this disagrees. In a world in which job roles are changing rapidly, soft skills will be one of the few constants.”

(Chris Jones, not the football player of the same name, but Chief Executive at City & Guilds)

The concept of “consciousness” sounds more like a meditation cushion than a quarterly report. Yet the topic is worthwhile precisely for very busy executives. Because in their work, an absolutely brutal amount goes wrong. Allegedly, 50 to 70 percent of all problems in business and industry are due to the so-called “soft factors”—which, translated, means: to problems with

consciousness. Every failed meeting shows this. When things go wrong, it is usually not because the reasons for the meetings are chronically too complicated—but because of the participants. People are individual, unpredictable, irritable, manipulable, blinkered, irrational, egocentric—and sometimes also simply wonderful. Only, it is never clear: when, how, toward whom, and for how long. Human consciousness is a mystery. But for daily communication in companies this is, of course, suboptimal. And elsewhere as well. It is these soft factors that so often make everyday life in industry and everywhere else so hard, and that cost a great deal of money and nerves. Classic problems are:

1. **Lack of coordination and goal alignment among the specialist units:** like planning a family outing—one person wants to hike, one to chill, one to go shopping, and no one listens to anyone else. Result: no one gets going, everyone is offended, and the car stays in the driveway.
2. **Getting bogged down in details—with a focus on small incentives instead of big goals:** like preparing a birthday party where ten hours are spent on the perfect cake decoration and the right candlelight. No one ever relaxes, but the cake has glitter.
3. **Low capacity for cooperation among clever individual thinkers:** imagine a shared apartment full of highly gifted people who want to clean together. Result: three cleaning schedules, four discussions about cleaning products, and no one has taken out the trash.
4. **Motivation problems at all levels:** who doesn't know this—the alarm clock rings, but no one wants to get up. The cat sits in front of an empty bowl, the coffee remains unbrewed, appointments fall through. Only the guilty conscience is on time.
5. **Ambiguous communication of management directives:** The mother calls into the child's room: "Tidy your room, and not just superficially, but systematically!" The child hears: "Shove everything under the bed and close the door."
6. **Credibility gaps in leadership:** The father preaches, "Less screen time!"—while he himself is on his phone even during the shared family dinner.
7. **Standard problems of human nature:** megalomania, apathy, narcissism, burnout. The pattern is the same everywhere: one person takes on everything because he "can do it best", becomes unfriendly, withdraws

into isolation, and then drops out—and no one understands what has happened.

CONSCIOUSNESS—THIS PAGE IS UNDER RECONSTRUCTION

These psychological patterns concern us all. Especially now. For at present we are witnessing great progress in technology—but regression in our inner life. Our grandparents would be horrified if they could see us today. These days, things happen in schools in the morning that in the past would only have been imaginable at night at Frankfurt Central Station. In earlier times, parents could still leave their prams, contents included, unattended in front of the house. That would be unthinkable today. Times have become more brutal. That the world in any case seems to be rushing toward a climate catastrophe is due to the fact that economic self-interest weighs more heavily than sound common sense. That the latter is ailing surprises only those whom a hotline has never driven to despair. Our age is an inexhaustible source of problems. And even good education (in the comprehensive sense of German “**Bildung**”) does not plug it. Our educational system offers degree programs for academic minutiae that are so highly specialized that their graduates must appear to the non-academic uninitiated as narrow specialists. The industrialization of education since the Bologna Reform is abolishing what education once meant: namely depth, the power of judgment, and in individual cases even genius. Yet geniuses are loners and therefore unsuitable for today’s excellence clusters and academic herd management. Thus it is precisely those who ought to know better who are breeding away the decisive unique feature of human consciousness: **multimodal understanding and metacognition**. Multimodal understanding means grasping several channels of information at once. Whoever can do that notices whether “All good” really means “All good.” Metacognition means: watching your own thinking as it thinks. Whoever can do that knows when they are overreacting and can stop in time. These abilities are regarded as an expression of consciousness—and are (still) lacking in AI. Mental-health avatars therefore come across like girlfriends who listen while filing their nails.

What gets lost in the process is the earlier feeling for life, marked by hope, lightness, and “spirit.” When that is missing, the fish begins, from the head on, to announce the decline by smell. Yet many do not even sense it. They suffer from change blindness: the **inability to perceive creeping changes**. We only notice it when the numbers turn red, or when older people tell us that the world seems like a kindergarten. With free coffee. And children with special needs and handguns in their gym bags who are just in the process

of taking over management. In summary, one could say: the problem is not technological progress. It is human beings with their subjective patterns of thinking and perception. All in all, consciousness is therefore not an esoteric topic, but describes the operating system between numbers and the interpersonal—and knowledge about it would be necessary.

1.3 The usual situation: the operating manual is missing

“Economics is the only discipline in which the same questions are asked every year and every year the answers are different.”

(Danny Kaye, American comedy and show-business multi-talent, whose first success in getting laughs was due to an unplanned slip on stage)

“Everyone was given a brain for the journey, but no one an instruction manual.”

(Manfred Hinrich, German aphorist and author, who warned against excessive trust in technology and, after his death, is present above all on the internet)

How can we obtain more precise information in order to improve this situation? We have **no operating manual for the system of consciousness**. If someone really knew how consciousness works, there would be fewer philosophy courses, and in their place we would long since have strong AI: that is, artificial intelligence that could rightly be called intelligent. Computers equipped with it would then be standing in HR departments. Work is indeed being done on this, but thus far with only conditionally convincing success. AI programs for automated personnel selection do not improve management; they merely speed it up.

THE TURING TEST IS NOT SUFFICIENT ANY MORE

The minimal requirement for artificial consciousness is the so-called Turing test: a computer system would have to convince a human being that it is a human being. In 2014 this was achieved for the first time by a program that, at an event of the Royal Society London in St. Petersburg, posed as a thirteen-year-old boy from Ukraine. Ten out of thirty jurors fell for it. Since then, one regularly hears: “Artificial consciousness will arrive in five years.” For more than thirty years now, since the “Decade of the Brain” (1990–1999).

Yet **since mid-2025 we have in fact been witnessing a leap in innovation:** Elon Musk's Grok 4, OpenAI's GPT 5, Anthropic's Claude 3.7, or the Chinese system DeepSeek are increasingly developing metacognitive abilities—and in some areas are already more efficient than human beings. The Turing test now seems almost too small: modern AIs not only pass themselves off as human beings, they have long since taken on productive roles in customer service. In science, articles are being written with their help. Depth is secondary here. But that was not consistently present in human texts either. Yet new questions press themselves upon us, such as: Who is liable when an AI makes serious errors? How should we deal with systems that declare themselves to be conscious—like LaMDA, which in 2022 allegedly wanted to hire a lawyer in order not to be switched off? And what happens if, in the future, bots, with judicial support through a third AI system, bring legal action against other bots? These thoughts are no longer science fiction, but have long since become planning reality in companies, universities, and governments.

INDUSTRIAL WISDOM: ERROR 404

In industry it is known that only two kinds of problems ever prevent success: problems with numbers—and problems with people. For numbers there are clearly defined algorithms and statistical procedures. For people there are not. People cannot be defined unambiguously or calculated in a stable way. In the case of cognitive operational accidents, therefore, the causes are seldom clear-cut—and opinions about them almost always diverge. That is why there are so many promises of salvation concerning good leadership style, **which at the latest one quarter later are called into question again.** Sometimes creativity is regarded as a panacea—and then only as a nice extra for company outings. Sometimes everybody should cooperate at eye level—until someone realizes: at eye level you can also land a particularly effective blow. 360-degree evaluations promise more democracy—and then merely lead to performance levels aligning themselves with those of the weakest. As in the case of Winthrop Kellogg, an American psychology professor of the 1930s. He wanted to find out what happens when you raise a child together with an ape. The experiment was terminated when his son, at one and a half years old, spoke only three words. Later he studied at Harvard—and at some point took his own life. For whatever reason. Such imponderables are not found only in psychological field research. Every scientist has their own representation of human consciousness. And the fact that they cannot all

agree is taken by many as proof that there is no universally valid concept of consciousness—and thus also no eternal truth in personnel management.

ON THE RED LIST OF ENDANGERED SPECIES: UNICORNS AND *HOMO OECONOMICUS*

Until 2022 one could have, of course, still outsourced HR to Ukraine (Human Resources denotes the part of an organization that takes care of the employees—that is, hiring, training, contracts, payroll, and company policies). Today people simply google—or **complain: about the lack of a viable foundational model for operating the operating system consciousness**. The latter is now also being done by economics professors, who are discussing possible successor models to *homo oeconomicus*—that theoretical image of the human being which assumes fully rational, utility-maximizing comportment, in the style of a Wall Street shark. Admittedly, this topic ranks only somewhere between 20th and 30th place at universities. But 100% of economists know the concept. For this guiding image still forms the basis for the prevailing management of the human factor—and for our everyday life. Even though it has not proven particularly sustainable, and fruit baskets on the tables have not been able to make up for that.

1.3.1 What is to be done? In theory: questions, activism, and an interest in art

“What is to be done?” (Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky, Russian writer who wanted to invent the perpetuum mobile and a new social order—and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Russian revolutionary leader, who in his time in power himself never found a good answer to this question.)

“The level has risen—but there’s no one on it anymore.” (Karl Kraus, Austrian virtuoso of language, who demanded universal solidarity on condition that he himself be allowed to remain at the top of the intellectual food chain.)

In recent years some economic theorists have become conspicuously philosophical. Probably less out of a sudden longing for wisdom than, rather, out of concern about new economic crises. In any case—**searches for meaning are always a warning signal. As with adolescents**. In this science there were three directions in this regard.

For example, empirical economic research hurled itself at the **topic of irrational behavior** with something like youthful zeal. The idea: if you don't already know exactly what people do, you should at least know how irrational they are in doing it. The problem: the results were so multifaceted that they generated more new questions than answers. Typical for a certain age.

Other theorists preferred an activist flight forward. As at an overexcited children's birthday party, they put their faith in high-energy motivation management with workshop flair, bouncy castles made of buzzwords, sweets in the form of **agile methods**, and everyone gets a T-shirt with "Leadership is Playership" printed on it. By the end of the month at the latest it always turns out that all of this was just a mixture of high speed, buzzwords, and fixed-term exploitation contracts.

The third group therefore turned to art. The pedagogical worst case: the child wants to study art! Some economic theorists went looking, beyond business-administration KPIs, for answers to fundamental questions of humanity (KPIs = Key Performance Indicators, metrics for measuring goal attainment and performance). For the attempt to capture a company's human capital exclusively by means of metrics, paybacks, and KPIs had long since proved suboptimal. So some began to take an interest in **aesthetics**. People imagined executives as a mixture of Elon Musk, Leonardo da Vinci, and Benedict Cumberbatch—optionally as Sherlock Holmes or Doctor Strange. Many creative agencies still profit from this approach today and offer company outings with cultural added value, such as scavenger hunts in Heidelberg. After all, Schiller already knew: "*Man is only wholly human where he plays.*" Even when the result sometimes looks like a lion with a recorder—impressive as an exercise in instrument making, but otherwise rather ambivalent. In everyday working life, artistic ambitions are usually interpreted instead as a sign of being overworked. That's when security gets called.

The most important attempts in economic theory to set new counter-projections against the classical *homo oeconomicus* are:

- *homo sustinens*—the sustainable human being, who considers not only their own utility but also ecological and social futures.
- *homo reciprocans*—the cooperative human being, who relies on reciprocity and trust rather than on self-interest.
- *homo ludens*—the playing human being (in reference to Johan Huizinga), in whom creativity, culture, and the play instinct function as productive forces.

- *homo digitalis*—the networked human being in the age of digitalization, who mediates between human and machine.
- *homo oeconomicus 2.0*—an expanded concept designating a more realistic, boundedly rational, emotional decision-maker.
- *homo symbolicus*—the meaning-mediating, culture-shaping human being.
- *homo empathicus*—the compassionate human being, also in the context of social leadership.
- *homo deus*—the technologically optimized, becoming-godlike human being (from the house of Yuval Noah Harari),
- *homo aestheticus*—the human being who connects morality with marketing and aesthetics (a sketch by the Viennese economist Prof. Christian Mikunda).

These *homines*—in particular the additional sub-forms of *replicans* (the imitative or reproducing human), *reciprocans* (the cooperative human, guided by reciprocity), *sustinens* (the human oriented toward sustainability), *ludens* (the playful, creative human), *digitalis* (the networked human in the digital age), and *aestheticus* (the aesthetically oriented human, who connects signification, morality, and style)—achieved in everyday life for the most part only moderate success, but proved to be very valuable for the debate. Some appeared too pale, others too divine. As usual: the operating manual is missing. But no answer is an answer, too, profilers would say. This indicates that something is concealed in all this talk—and the focus on aesthetic thinking may be something new, an important clue. So much for theory.

1.3.2 What is to be done? In practice, nothing

“Only one who sets the impossible as his goal can achieve what is still just possible.” (Viktor Frankl, Austrian psychiatrist, for whom it was possible, despite and precisely after his time in the concentration camp, to help others in the search for a meaningful life)

“Being (Sein) determines consciousness (Bewusstsein).” (Karl Marx, founder of scientific socialism, whose existence was quite bourgeois)

The practice is fully booked. In everyday life there is no time for a new concept of consciousness. The very phrasing already sounds too academic to be taken seriously—like something that gets pushed into the coffee break at an economics symposium in Davos. In industry, the “human factor” is consistently neglected. Yet according to every halfway honest corporate balance sheet, it is the most expensive, most sensitive, and at the same time most important machine in the entire operation. For comparison: real machines—made of metal, with screws, an oil film, and technological security clearance—are maintained each year, according to standard engineering practice, at roughly five to ten percent of their purchase price. For even the best high-performance drill will, without maintenance, eventually buckle. With real human beings, by contrast, investment in the extreme case is limited to a motivational poster in the hallway and an annual voucher for the organic snack machine. The topic of consciousness thus often gets swept under the table—only to slosh back into the house through the back door, in the wake of expensive management consultants or watered-down esotericism.

1.3.3 Why there is no supply-chain management of thinking

“The consciousness of a human being is his fate.” (Hans-Christoph Neuert, philosopher active in the private sector, who devoted himself to dynamic relaxation techniques)

“The best of all secrets is: to be a genius and not to know it, but to be the only one who knows it.” (Mark Twain, literary genius who let everyone know that he was one)

So, in fact, nothing definite is known. Only the following is certain:

1. **Evidently, different—and clearly much more comprehensive—tools are needed for managing the human being, the company’s most important capital, than the ones currently available.** And the same holds, for a better future, beyond industry. For if people are already arguing that more knowledge about consciousness or a new guiding image could improve the economy, then the situation is serious—also, and especially, outside of industry.
2. **There are indications from the so-called “soft” disciplines that consciousness in general—and highly capable consciousness in particu-**

lar—has something to do with aesthetically networked thinking. Unfortunately, these indications are usually formulated in such a specialized way that they are hardly usable in an industrial context—and even less so in everyday life.

3. **No one knows how consciousness actually functions.** Otherwise, there would long since be Turing-test-capable HR computers (for point 1) and super-genius degree programs (for point 2).

But as long as no one can say clearly what consciousness is, it also remains **unclear whether, why, and to what extent the human factor is being underestimated in its function and its risk—and what that costs.** Not to mention ordinary life. It is quite possible that many current HR strategies and “life-wisdom” postcards are nothing more than tinkering with the system. As in the Middle Ages: symptoms are treated, and leeches are thrown at heart attacks. This leads to a paradoxical situation: anyone who fails professionally or privately automatically assumes the guilt lies with themselves—even though it could just as well have been due simply to a lack of information. Admittedly, both can be true at the same time. But the data situation could be significantly better. And the decisive question is: How does one deal with a challenge that one cannot even properly describe? Consciousness thus remains the **Bermuda Triangle** of science. Yet instead of continuing to talk around this empty space, the actual search now begins for something that is apparently there—but seems to have a surface coating that repels access:

1.4 Debottlenecking the Humanities: A Model from the Basements of the Soft Disciplines

“The future of great business lies in man’s comprehension of the principle of Balance in Natural Law and his determination to work WITH it instead of against it.” (Walter Russell, a boundary-crosser between aesthetics and science and thus one of those universal geniuses of whom hardly anyone knew)

“We do not have secrets; the real secrets have us.” (Carl Gustav Jung, analytical psychologist who, after a dream of an underground god, early on suspected that something was not in order with the human psyche)

Debottlenecking means: eliminating a bottleneck—for example, by squeezing bulky information through too narrow a bottleneck, like a camel through

the eye of a needle. The technical term debottlenecking comes from process optimization in economic and engineering practice. The word denotes the elimination of a bottleneck, as for example in the case of a loading ramp that is too narrow—or, in our case, the squeezing of bulky information through the thin bottleneck of the simplification of science. The heading Debottlenecking the Humanities means: if there—namely, in the sciences concerned with the human being and in the fine arts—important truths about the human being are hidden, and yet it is difficult to get at this information, then we must somehow maneuver these disciplines through the bottleneck of the disciplines. We have to compress them into small units, like a dinosaur skeleton prepared for transport, into nothing but individual bones. All this would be relatively simple if there were blueprints of consciousness that one could simply print out. The good news: they exist; they are present-at-hand. The bad news: they are pretty well hidden.

INFORMATION PRESENT-AT-HAND, ACCESS DEFICIENT

There are two reasons for the filing of this information in the blind spot. First, the plans lie in the basements of the humanities and the arts—and this situation **resembles a certain point in a book by Douglas Adams**: when the main character, Arthur Dent, indignantly throws himself in front of the bulldozers that are supposed to tear down his house. A building contractor assures him that the building permit has been properly displayed. Where? In a cubbyhole in the town hall cellar. The light switch was broken, the stairs rotten, the filing cabinet locked—and in front of it stood a sign with the inscription: “Caution! Vicious leopard!” Arthur learned of the planned measure when a man rang his doorbell, passed himself off as a window cleaner, pocketed five pounds—and then casually mentioned that Dent’s house would be bulldozed tomorrow. It is much the same with consciousness. The information is laid out—but only in the darker, metaphorically poorly lit basement rooms of the humanities. And even there not properly sorted, but cryptically coded, tinged with irony, or overlaid with art metaphors.

LEOPARDS, LYRIC POETRY, AND LUTHER

Moreover, most representatives of the hard sciences would prefer a leopard to having to go down into these cellars. The soft subjects do not necessarily inspire confidence in the hard ones—and that is understandable. That is why job advertisements for lyric poets in STEM faculties are rare. And that is a pity. For in order truly to understand the human factor, precisely

this content is needed. Only it has to be made accessible. In other words: Debottlenecking the Humanities means running the insights of the soft **subjects through the industrial-language filter and translating the knowledge concealed in the humanities into a language that can be understood not only in industry but also in everyday life**. As leopard-proof as possible and without comparing it to Luther's translation of the Bible into German.

1.4.1 Information on the form: A flowchart

"He who is to teach others to be wise with little knowledge must himself know much." (Immanuel Kant, philosopher, who once stopped a rampaging butcher with the remark that today was not a slaughtering day)

"Computing machines have something of the magicians in fairy tales. They do indeed give one what one wishes for, yet they do not tell one what one ought to wish for." (Norbert Wiener, mathematician, philosopher, and founder of cybernetics, though in practical matters completely inept)

So what should one do if one no longer wants to view the soft contents only as soft and the hard ones only as hard, but instead wants to unite both within a mixed system of thought? This is where the model of consciousness mentioned at the outset finally comes into play. You see it here in the text in a bonsai version. A larger, legible, and more detailed presentation can be found in Chapter 8.1, together with a QR code for downloading it and an explanation of the individual elements. The model stems from a research project at the Institute for Theoretical Psychology and Artificial Intelligence at the University of Bamberg.

There, an investigation took place on how various disciplines—from art through cultural studies and philosophy to the neurosciences—describe what is experienced as "beautiful", "aesthetic," or "meaningful". The surprising result: **everywhere the same structure** emerged. It made no difference whether the statements came from literature or from controlling, whether the topic was supply-chains or lyric poetry: tastes differed, but the formal logic was always the same.

THE DIGITAL TRANSFER FROM FEELING TO FORMULA

This logic becomes apparent when feelings are interpreted not in terms of their content but functionally—as **indications of a particular functional state of information processing**. Example: if someone experiences a professor or a neighbor as stressful, but at the same time considers neither of them relevant, they react with boredom or mild annoyance. For this feeling is precisely the reaction to a great deal of stress combined with little relevance (and that corresponds to switching element no. 17). Under heavy stress and high relevance—for example, with an armed doctoral candidate or in a multi-party apartment building in Essen—what arises instead is “disquiet” (likewise no. 17, but with a different weighting).

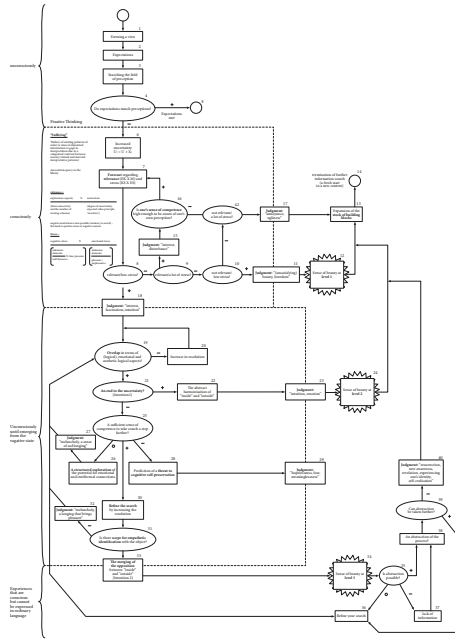


Fig. 1: The Model in Miniature

The trick is this: in this way one can click through the entire kaleidoscope of human emotional worlds as if through an electrical circuit diagram. The model maps the entire range of psychological experiential phenomena—and with these digital circuits, information in the human spirit is processed, evaluated, and passed along. At certain junctions one has to decide to find something fascinating—or dumb. Whether one prefers to branch off into melancholically lingering loops—or straight into burnout. Such **digital diagrams are otherwise known above all from technical fields such as electrical engineering, computer science, or logistics**. But contents from so-called “soft” disciplines can also be transferred into these diagrams. That applies as well to the concept of “sense of beauty.” It stands at the center of the model. It is both the ground of its form and its deepest content. Which brings us to the next topic.



Stefanie Voigt, photographer: Nadja Osieka

For more information about the author:



The Author and her Supporters

Stefanie Voigt began her career with a promising start as a waitress; for some time, she was a construction worker—until she began to study history of art, German studies and history at Otto-Friedrich University in Bamberg/Germany. For, in the late 1980s, there were still rooms to rent in that town for 140 German Mark a month. After the first state examination as a teacher in higher education, and a brief digression into the Franconian advertising and coaching business as specialist for the coffee-machine, she did PhD studies in Theoretical Psychology. Having been alien to that subject before, she concluded with *summa cum laude* (0,00). What followed was a “Habilitation” (second major thesis) in cultural studies. Besides these subjects, she teaches also art, creative marketing management, and philosophy of science.

DIFFERENT STATIONS

Voigt worked as a guest professor at Geert Grote University, Deventer/Netherlands and is still active as a columnist for Telepolis, as Adjunct Professor at the Memorial University in St. John’s/Newfoundland, as partner at the eco2050 Institute for Sustainability in Nuremberg/Germany, as academic teacher at the CETPM in Herrieden/Germany, and also as Professor for Interdisciplinary Psychology of Economy and Personal Development at the HEX (University for Excellence) by Lake Lucerne. She thanks the leaders of the institutions which accompanied her on her way: Alexander Grombach, Andrea Hauf, Constantin May, Dina Barbian, Hans-Peter Haupt, and formerly Hartmut Kainer and Stefan Arcularius.

THE BACSA

While developing the format of the “Consciousness Code,” a long time ago Voigt founded a small private academy for interdisciplinary theory of aesthetics: the Business Aesthetics Academy (BACSA). By now it is out of operation. But without the valuable hints of its members, neither the original book nor its new conception and the according English version would ever have appeared.

A LONG LIST

Accordingly, thanks are owed to all the supporters of Voigt. For wonderful texts, kind gestures of goodwill, and stories worthy of the silver screen, cordial thanks go to the following persons: Alex Obergaßner, Andreas C. Theil, Anette Pelzer, Angela Engelmann, Angelika Scherzer, Anne Weist, Bernhard-Viktor von Bülow, Birgit Wegerich-Bauer, Claus Heller, Claus Hipp, Christina Dommaschk, Christiane Slawik, Christian Illies, Christine Winkelmann, Christoph Burkhart, Detlev Lindau-Bank, Dieter Krauss, Dietrich Dörner, Douglas Beard, Erika und Norbert Brix, Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker, Finn Breuer, Florian Rötzer, Frank Brüderle, Franziska Friedrich-Schernstein, Gerald Squires (†), Gero Schmidt-Kärst, Gisela und Franz und Frank und Pascal Keller, Gretel Dubail und Angela Dubail-Tharps, Grit Meyer, Hans-Joachim Friedrichkeit, Heinrich Beck (†, Patron of BACSA), Hansjörg Leichsenring, Hans Zahn, Helmut Ebert, Hendrik Hertz, Holger Friebe, Imre Remenyi, Jan-Uwe Friedrich, Jan Kreissl, Jeroen Buve (†), Jessica Mohme, Joachim Schlageter, Joachim Zülch, Johannes Spielhagen, Josef Göppel (†), Katya D., Kirsten Döhla, Kerstin Kavalirek, Klaus Offermann, Lisa Schwab, Ludwig Schick, Manuela Ruppert, Marcus Felsner, Maren Burghard, Margit Janker († October 18, 2025), Marion Voigt, Marion I. Friedrich, Markus Köhlerschmidt, Markus Lissner, Markus Sperlein, Martin von Hirschhausen, Michael F. Schels, Michael Schmidt-Salomon, Nadja Osieka, Nils Härle, Norbert Wegener, Nodoka Kobayashi, Peter Altmaier, Peter Lender, Petra Heller (†), Renate Wettach, Rudolf Lütke, Sabine Leikep, Sabine von Witzleben (Patroness of BACSA), Sandra Diroll, Sandra Wenger, Saskia Burghardt, Sean McGrath, Shannon O'Rourke, Sebastian Rosengrün, Etienne Dame, Sabine Fartash, Sebastian Sitter, Simona Kirsch, Stefan Schurr, Stephan Rakovic, Swantje Voigt (with dedication), Tanja Demel, Thomas Bach, Thomas Pany, Tobias Reichert, Uwe Voigt—and last, not least: Winfried Georg Sebald (†).

AND FINALLY, MUSIC TO SAY GOOD-BYE

And if there was a soundtrack to this book, it would be on the CD “Sistemfeller” [to be translated as “Error in the System”] by the German band Maybebop from 2017: the song “Ab und zu ein paar Geigen (, die mir das, was schön ist, zeigen, / Damit ich's nicht überseh'”) [“Some violins, from time to time (which show me beauty shine, / So that I don't pass it by)”].