

Human Systems Management at 20

Human Systems Management (HSM), an international journal, has entered its 20th volume. Such an important anniversary calls for a short reflection, recapitulation and outlook.

The first issue of HSM came out in February 1980. The journal was a brainchild of Milan Zeleny and the two co-founding editors, Manfred Kochen and Erik Johnsen. Both its title and message were quite ahead of its time: very few people knew or cared what ‘human systems’ were and the need for their management was not widely perceived. The journal survived the challenge. HSM covers and their texts were personally designed: they did not have to be changed, amended or adapted since. North-Holland Publishing Company was the first Publisher and Dr. Einar Fredriksson was its Publishing editor.

The first issue started with Nobelists Joshua Lederberg as an author and Ilya Prigogine on the Editorial Board. First Board members also included R.M. Cyert, M.M. Flood, D. Gerwin, K.R. Hammond, P.G.W. Keen, I.I. Mitroff, E. Rhenman, G.R. Salancik and others. Igor Ansoff dropped out and founded *Strategic Management Journal*, extracted from and based on the HSM formula. The first HSM issue carried also papers by R.K. Mueller and J.F. Magee of Arthur D. Little, Loebel on humanomics and Lederberg on EUGRAMS, among others.

The ‘Circle of Human Systems Management’ listed its members also in the first HSM issue. Among the hundreds members of the Circle we find names like Ackoff, Ansoff, Barankin, Bass, Bennis, Carlsson, Gaines, Hertz, Kuhn, Lewin, Pask, Prigogine, Roy, Shakun, Starr, Trappl, Turoff, Varela, Von Foerster, Weick, Zadeh, Zimmermann, Zions, etc.

Among better known or more famous authors publishing in HSM we find Karl W. Deutsch, Edgar Morin, L.A. Zadeh, Marvin Minsky, Myron Tribus, Magoroh Maruyama, Geert Hofstede, Sir Karl Popper, Peter Checkland, Allan H. Meltzer, Jaroslav Vanek, and C. West Churchman.

In 1980 Leonard Uhr proposed knowledge sharing through Computer network-based responsive self-organizing groups. Gorelik wrote on Bogdanov’s Tek-

nology, H.E. Daly introduced Ecological economics in 1981. In 1984 R.W. Blanning introduced Knowledge acquisition systems. In 1985 Marvin Minsky published his Remotely-Manned Systems, Holsapple and Whinston their Management Support through AI. In 1986 Zeleny published High Technology Management and in 1987 his Management Support Systems: Towards Integrated Knowledge Management, where the label of ‘knowledge management’ was first introduced.

Clearly, *Human Systems Management* has enjoyed quite an impressive circle of authors, concepts and ideas over the past twenty years. Its rich history and considerable longevity need no further commentary.

What about its future?

In recent years, HSM has redefined itself in many ways, mainly through incorporating information technology, knowledge management, network organization and human issues of the New Economy as its current areas of interest. HSM has started with the emphasis on human knowledge in business and management – long before its time – and it has been able to complete a full circle some twenty years later. None of its original premises – as stated on HSM original covers – had to be changed, adjusted or amended. They remain even more progressive and on target today than twenty years ago.

The scope of *Human Systems Management* has evolved and become better defined and well established. Its three main components, Human–Systems–Management, have been meshed and integrated to form a unified organism of thought. Human systems are systems with significant or dominant human contents or interactions. Humans are the source of systems interactions. Systems refer to an integrated whole rather than to separate functioning of separate, specialized parts. It is inadequate to manage human business *per partes*. Management refers to human coordination of human action in all their effective modes and forms. None of the three components can be reduced or omitted without ‘killing’ the whole. In the following table we list typical concerns of each of the three HSM components:

HUMAN

knowledge
intelligence
creativity
innovation
brainware
decision making
judgment
intuition
human capital

SYSTEMS

information
data
optimization
organization
structure
communications
reengineering
resource allocation
information technology

MANAGEMENT

goal setting
coordination
teamwork
strategy
tradeoffs
self-management
knowledge
leadership
motivation

The above scheme is still incomplete but it does provide a framework for HSM. None of the concerns can be isolated or applied in isolation. One should not view these themes in a context-free fashion just because it is easy or convenient. Management can only be understood and become successful in terms of its relations to human systems and all of its concerns. Management clearly is not about issuing commands, giving orders, imposing ranks, hierarchies, or any other church/military artifacts. Such commands could often be necessary and effective measures for achieving goals, but they are not management. They surely do not amount to either human management of systems or management of human systems. One does not *manage* through issuing orders – one just issues orders. Commander is not a manager.

Many executives are very good commanders and they do achieve results: gain market share, fool the enemy, bring loot to the troops, win or/and annihilate. They do not manage: they do not enhance human knowledge, experience and aspirations. They are business administrators, not managers. They are not subject

of HSM study or interest; commanders are not a concern of human systems management. Their employees are objects to be fired at will, their customers objects to be manipulated with cunning, and their technologies and systems are weapons to be acquired, hired and deployed.

The journal of *Human Systems Management* is now positioned to enter the new millennium with greater drives towards focused creativity, innovation and knowledge enhancement. Concerns with e-commerce, m-commerce and e-management are going to provide both human and technological embedding. ‘Knowledge’ has become an integrated and important subset of human systems management. Wisdom systems will see their first and much expected development, and self-organization and self-management will continue to stimulate both research and practice of business management.

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