

Reclaiming our Humanity- a Cornerstone for Better Management

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When we started the Humanistic Management Journal we did so not because we felt we needed yet another journal (Pirson 2016, 2017b). We did so because we felt there is a gaping need to share research, knowledge, insights, and possibly wisdom on how we can reconcile our fundamental humanity with our current approaches to organizing and management (Pirson 2017b).

While we have plenty of outlets that publish research on instrumental aspects of managing teams as well as organizations and an increasing amount of journals that focus on the normative aspect of what should be done, we were hoping to provide an outlet that can follow the maxim that ethically sound management is simply pragmatically better. And we need more insights on HOW this can be done without the constant debate of whether it can be done or whether it IS being done. We also wanted to make this journal a place where ideas can be shared, bigger ideas than what we typically digest in the leading journals of our field. Ideas that can help us reclaim our humanity within the organizing processes that surround us.

Therefore, the Humanistic Management Journal focuses on how *we can protect dignity and promote well-being through our organizing processes*. With dignity we refer to everything that does have an intrinsic value such as life and humanity and therefore escapes the price mechanism or the “business case” logic. Furthermore, the humanistic perspective on management focuses on how we can organize so that we protect the intrinsic value of life and promote wellbeing above a dignity threshold (Pirson 2016, 2017a, b).

This endeavor can seem hopelessly misplaced in a world where dignity violations and threats regain legitimacy and civility is seen as a weakness. At the same time there probably has never been more need for better management theory, research, teaching, and practice. We witness a world with increasing needs for solutions to existential problems. None of these problems will ultimately be resolved with incivility. New conflicts will emerge as a result of dignity violations.

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We need to reclaim our humanity and dignity through a novel civility that is not rooted in fear and politically correct norms; a civility that respects our intrinsic value as human beings and allows us to engage freely with each other based on love and compassion (words normally not used in management journals). A civility that respect the fact that we are unconditionally worthy and not only vessels for power and status games; but rather life forms that wish to flourish and thrive.

True dignity is expressed by acknowledging the human condition, the suffering and the imperfection; the missteps and the potential for forgiveness. An overly rule-based society is a fearful society. Organizing norms of political correctness can help but are often a signal of such fear. Fear of our true human nature and the possibility that we are not only good. On the flipside appealing to our inner weaknesses provides permission to be human but only to the degree that we are expressing the dark side. Is there space that allows for the dark side while appealing to the better angels of our nature. Allowing space for the best in us, without regulating it?

This is what managing excellence typically achieves (Collins and Porras 2002; Drucker 1999). It is a difficult process, an error prone, fragile process with many steps forward and several back, a tiring and exhausting process, but nevertheless one worthwhile. The #metoo debate is a current signal of people reclaiming humanity even though these movements have a tendency to result in a compensatory, ethical zeal that can result in the opposite.

To move forward in a more constructive way (maybe after we have exhausted all the destructive pathways) we need to recognize once more that we need to honor our deep fundamental humanity. Once we recognize ourselves and each other as human beings with shared dignity our relations with ourselves and others change; – management changes.

While this is not a space for self-help pep talks, we want to show that we take ‘being human’ seriously. As editors of this journal we invite everyone to contribute with insights on how we can reclaim our humanity with dignity. We invite research that allows us to understand better how we can develop and reinforce processes that allow people to be heard. We also invite research on how we can rethink our governance processes and can share power effectively. We invite research that explores how we can screen people that get into positions of power, for example by screening for narcissism, psychopathy, and all types of anti-social disorders. We invite research that explores how those mechanisms can be implemented without dignity violations. We also invite research on how we can ensure processes of meaningful co-creation of solutions that allow us to protect our dignity and enable survival and thriving.

This Current Issue

To start this issue off, the editors intentionally include conceptual work on freedom and its relationship with modern managerial practice. The notion of freedom is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of Western civilization. Many scholars view the notion of freedom as it is currently understood in the political and economical discourse (e.g. Friedman 1962) as unenlightened. They argue that it is a stepping stone towards an amoral society where anything goes and where moral principles of community are undermined (Berry 1993; Dierksmeier 2011; Dierksmeier and Pirson 2010; Gould 1990; Gratton 2004; Sachs 2017; Sen 1999, 2002). Claus Dierksmeier presents a more foundational perspectives on how a different understanding of freedom can provide a

theoretically rigorous understanding that can enrich our lives and guide us to better managerial practice (Dierksmeier 2018).

Whereas globalization was largely a process in the name of freedom and progress, Dierksmeier states that “today’s global economic system is in need of a global economic ethos of responsibility so as to assure its social and ecological sustainability (Dierksmeier 2018).” Because not all ideas of freedom equally allow the conceptualization of responsibilities, he argues that we need to pay more attention to our underlying understanding of basic categories that we build our social systems around. Dierksmeier develops further a notion he has labelled a qualitative conception of freedom. He juxtaposes this conception to the dominant conceptualization of freedom which he calls quantitative. As his articles makes clear “quantitative models hinder the integration of responsibility into models of economic rationality whereas qualitative conceptions advance it.” He suggests that efforts to promote a humanistic paradigm of economics and management fare better when oriented at a qualitative idea of freedom. Allowing for a qualitative deliberation of choices, this idea of freedom permits more aspects of our humanity as valid in our quest for a better life for all.

The idea of qualitative freedom and the notion of responsibility require a different approach to organizing practice, one that is normatively guided yet pragmatically human rather than technocratic and algorithmic. Practical wisdom uses general insights about human behavior and enables its application in a particular situation in real life. The notion of practical wisdom is often invoked as a key to wise management and better leadership. In their article Claudius Bachmann et al. (2018) suggest that rather than technical and algorithmic decision making, practical wisdom is increasingly perceived as a necessary resource for excellence in judgment. They also point out that so far, little effort has been devoted to provide substantive guidance on how to apply practical wisdom into day-to-day managerial decision-making processes. In order to close this gap, they propose an item-based guideline for self-guided decision-making, which explores the specific aspects a practically wise decision-making process inherently entails.

Such practical wisdom is often challenged by the human experience. Reclaiming our humanity does not mean we should be ideological and naïve. Practical wisdom means in many ways that we need to be more fully aware of our limitations and what it means to be human, including our frailties and weaknesses. Rather than proclaiming fundamentalist, ethicalist norms that serve as Sunday proclamations, humanistic management is utterly practical.

One central approach to better management that allows us to reclaim and restore our humanity is compassion. In many ways compassion has become a central topic within the positive organizational scholarship community. It is in much need, yet it is important to ensure that we understand the boundaries of such approaches in order to apply compassion wisely and with practical wisdom.

Spiritual figures such as the Dalai Lama and Popes Benedict XVI and Francis have repeatedly highlighted the central role of compassion to alleviate the pain caused by existential crises. So far, however, compassion related concepts have played a marginal role within management research. Dutton et al.’s *Administrative Science Quarterly* 51(1):59–96 (2006) seminal paper offers a much needed perspective as it allows to conceptualize compassion as an organizational focal point. In a paper that was separately reviewed, I set out to examine boundaries to the general applicability of compassion organizing theory (Pirson 2018). I start by examining the assumptions regarding the human capacity for compassion presented by Dutton et al. (2006). I further develop a set

of boundary conditions of individual level compassion capability, a precondition for compassion organizing. I then develop a typology of compassion capability proposing four archetypes of individual level compassion capability, and transpose the insights generated onto a typology of organizing modes. This typology allows distinguishing the various modes of compassion organizing, and helps identifying the structures and mechanisms that undermine compassion organizing. As such, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the potential for compassion organizing in theory and practice.

When we extend ourselves in terms of our compassion we often need to reclaim our humanity and restore ourselves. When compassion fatigue has set in Erica Steckler and Sandra Waddock write that we need a structured support system (Steckler and Waddock 2018). They propose a retreat system for healing and self-compassion.

They advance a framework of three types of “retreats” – reflective, relational, and inspirational – that social change agents can use to sustain themselves through challenges inherent in their work. They define retreats as intentionally crafted spaces that provide opportunities for reflective practices, relational presence, and inspirational resources. The retreats framework is based on the experiences of a set of successful social entrepreneurs who have played a prominent role in establishing new organizations at the intersection of business in society.

As such the authors bridge ideas of humanistic management, integral practice, and positive organizational scholarship to identify and detail the personal practices that enable social change agents to fortify themselves as they work toward establishing new institutions and successfully implementing impactful work over time. Findings from their study suggest that the ability for social change agents to sustain themselves is facilitated through the cultivation of retreats that enable these individuals to persevere through adversity in organizational settings, build resilience, advance personal well-being, contribute to humanity’s welfare, and achieve success in their transformational endeavors.

Finally, we are very honored to publish a speech delivered by Cardinal Peter Turkson which highlights the relevance of humanistic management ideas in the broader societal context of human development.

In his speech he presents “*Pope Francis’s teaching on Integral Human Development as an Agenda/Proposal for an Inclusive Growth.*” He outlines his notion of “*inclusive growth,*” and then explores the sense of “*integral human development.*” He develops and applies integral human development as a notion within *the Social Magisterium* of the Church from Pope Paul VI to Pope Francis through John Paul II and Pope Benedict. He observes how this teaching in the Social Doctrine of the Church helps realize *inclusive growth*. Indeed, he argues, *Integral human development* has been the Church’s way of pursuing, for ages already, *dignity for all* in “*inclusive growth*” and now in the United Nations sustainable development Agenda (Cardinal Turkson 2018).

We appreciate the possibility to publish Cardinal Turkson’s speech yet want to qualify that its publication does not endorse a particular catholic belief system as humanistic. In fact, we subscribe to a notion that humanistic management traditions develop from all religious and spiritual traditions.

Along those lines, we wish to highlight the work of Hans Kueng on the Global Ethos as a shared notion of the global religious traditions and ancient wisdoms that can inform a globalized enactment of humanistic management. Jonathan Keir and Christopher Gohl are organizing a special issue of the Humanistic Management Journal focused on the Global Ethos and how it can support further conceptual, practical and pedagogical approaches within humanistic management.

Humanistic management thinkers and doers are many, probably a silent majority. We have powerful allies and many potential forms of collaboration await. However, we need to step forward and reclaim our shared humanity together. As researchers, teachers, practitioners, and policy makers, we need to rethink our foundational theories of organizing that prevent us to be human much more thoroughly. We therefore kindly invite your thoughts and research at the Humanistic Management Journal, so we can advance at a quicker pace.

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