Here come the humaneers

Birth of a new profession skilled in the design of 21st century human work

This is the second in a series of articles investigating how current and future technology is completely altering the way we work across the globe. By Heather Brown, Sophie Edwards, Todd Ackerman, Alex Bonner and James Pepitone.

The first article in this special series in *Management Services Journal* (*MSJ*) on knowledge-work productivity, 'Rethinking Managerial Economics: Accessing the latent value of human capital' (Autumn 2017), makes the case that humaneering adds a new dimension to today's management logic regarding organisation members.

The dominant focus of management continues to be on the standardised tasks, or Type 1 work people can perform (see Figures 1 and 2), which is now a smaller and shrinking part of their economic potential. Furthermore, we continue to see most organisations applying management methods conceived for Type 1 standardised tasks to Type 2 knowledge work. As a result, the new and more substantial economic opportunities in the form of knowledge work remain largely undeveloped.

HR decision science

Stanford University professors Jeffrey Pfeffer (organisation behaviour) and Robert I Sutton (management science and engineering), in their book *Hard Facts Dangerous Half-Truths & Total Nonsense: Profiting from evidence-based management* (2006), make the point that management's organisational decisions are too often based on an outdated model, familiar method, personality preference, entertaining speaker, persuasive book, or other source that lacks factual validation for the situation at hand. Nowhere else in corporations is such disregard for science more evident than in the making of management decisions regarding people.

As USC professor John W Boudreau and Toro Vice President Peter M Ramstad discuss at length in their book, *Beyond HR: The new science of human capital* (2007), the human resources (HR)

function is rarely any help in this regard. They call on HR to 'build a new decision science' to reveal the 'hidden opportunities' in decisions about talent and how its managed. They liken HR's opportunity to the emergence of finance and marketing years ago as decision sciences for accounting and sales respectively.

It is not our place to argue here that humaneering provides HR with the essential capability to increase workforce productivity and resolve the people issues that have dogged it for so many years. However, we do suggest that humaneering might be a framework or initial step toward an HR decision science.

Non-zero-sum technology

Have you noticed that new technology frequently divides people?

One group – typically the people creating or otherwise likely to benefit from the new technology – see it as inevitable progress they are bringing to life. Some in this group even find pleasure in taunting the nonbelievers and proving them wrong.

Another group – people who recognise that inevitably their lives will be disrupted or forever victimised by the new technology – don't see it as progress at all. Some even feel threatened or deeply challenged to respond, and beyond hoping for its failure, even consider what can be done to derail it.

If there's another group, it's made up of bystanders who either won't be noticeably affected or don't yet realise how or to what end. These people frequently dismiss or poke fun at the marketplace machinations around the new technology, perhaps siding with the winners or the losers, or simply ignoring all of it.

This 'winners and losers' or zero-sum effect is not limited to the evolution of new technology. It's widespread throughout society, the result of competing rather than cooperating our way to the future.

How often is it that everybody wins or, at a minimum, gets enough benefit to accept the changes brought forth by new technology? Seemingly not often enough. But when the benefits are widespread among stakeholders, we can expect less resistance to change, quicker adoption and lower costs.

From its inception, the nonprofit Humaneering Technology Initiative (HTI) set out to create a new technology that would be an exception to the 'winners and losers' pattern. It has strived since its inception to create a regenerative technology that yields a virtuous cycle of economic growth and shared prosperity:

- Conceived to apply human science to 21st century human work
- Established as a nonprofit initiative for public good
- Funded by providing value-based services
- Represented all stakeholders throughout its development
- Organised as a scalable platform for open-source support
- Synthesised empirical knowledge from over 200 science disciplines
- Designed at the whole-system level for non-zero-sum outcomes
- Field-tested all principles and methods within operations
- Achieved outcomes far exceeding expectations
- Provided early-access for testing whenever requested

In addition to these factors, the January 2018 open beta release of v4.0 means many more organisations will require an introduction to humaneering, application experiments, adoption planning, practice development, plus leadership and implementation support. Estimates from advisors suggest the

CLASSIFICATION	TYPE 1 WORK	TYPE 2 WORK
Terminology	Standardised task *Standard work* *Required work* *Tasks* *Physical work* *Using one's hands* *Doing*	Adaptive response *Knowledge work* *Discretionary work* *Responsibilities* *Mental work* *Using one's head* *Deciding*
Goal and Solution	Clear *Predetermined and prescribed to workers*	Not clear *Contingent on situation and determined by worker*
Objective	Assignment compliance *Complete assignment as directed*	Opportunity capitalisation *Maximise economic value derived from assigned opportunity*
Sources of Economic Value	Efficiency Standardisation Simplicity Large scale Variation control	Effectiveness Differentiation Sophistication Yield management Variation potential
Complexity	Low *Closed work system with identifiable root cause and direct effects*	High *Open work system with diffused contributing causes and emergent effects*
Work System Design Priority Order	1. Work 2. Work environment 3. Worker *Work environment should support work*	1. Work 2. Worker 3. Work environment *Work environment should support worker*
Essential Work Attributes	Specific objective Practical workload Told what to do Told how to do it Minimal distraction	Specific opportunity Meaningful job-role Autonomy Response-ability Resources support
Human Reasoning and Communication	*Level 1* – Concrete/ physical *Level 2* – Rational/ statistical	*Level 3* – symbolic/ verbal *Level 4* – abstract/ conceptual
Desirable Worker Attributes	Endurance Obedience Diligence Intelligence	Expertise Commitment Initiative-taking Creativity

Figure 1.

need to develop at least 2000 professionals to support the 2018-2020 open beta release.

To create a clearer perspective of what this role involves, we present a lightly edited transcript of a discussion by four practitioners from various backgrounds who were involved in earlier testing of humaneering and its DesignedWork protocol for 21st century human work.

Humaneers emerge from opportunity

Humaneering has been discussed in *Management Services Journal* articles since 2014. The article, 'New Frontier for Increasing Workforce Productivity' (Winter 2016), included the
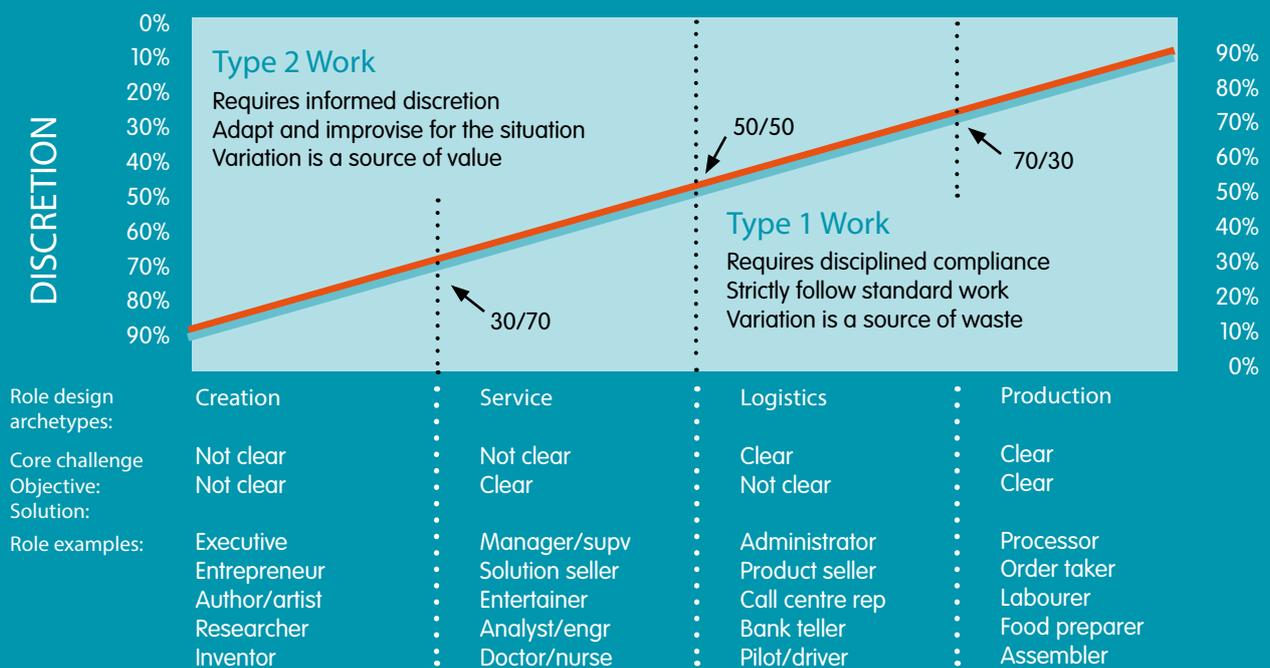
Figure 2.

The figure shows a diagram with DISCRETION on the left vertical axis (0% to 90%) and percentages on the right vertical axis (90% down to 0%). An orange diagonal line crosses from lower-left to upper-right with markers at 30/70, 50/50, and 70/30.

- **Type 2 Work** — Requires informed discretion. Adapt and improvise for the situation. Variation is a source of value.
- **Type 1 Work** — Requires disciplined compliance. Strictly follow standard work. Variation is a source of waste.

	Creation	Service	Logistics	Production
Role design archetypes:				
Core challenge	Not clear	Not clear	Clear	Clear
Objective:	Not clear	Clear	Not clear	Clear
Solution:				
Role examples:	Executive	Manager/supv	Administrator	Processor
	Entrepreneur	Solution seller	Product seller	Order taker
	Author/artist	Entertainer	Call centre rep	Labourer
	Researcher	Analyst/engr	Bank teller	Food preparer
	Inventor	Doctor/nurse	Pilot/driver	Assembler

firsthand account of a CFO who led his organisation's program of humaneering applications. This narrative approach was well received by people sharing their feedback

Another *MSJ* article, 'Business Process Humaneering' (Spring 2017) discussed the question of which organisation function is best able to lead and support humaneering's application during the much-anticipated technology driven transformation of human work. We ask this question among others to these humaneering practitioners.

While not supporting any one function, insight gained from the personal experiences of these individuals can be valuable to organisation leaders. Each of the four individuals – one from the UK, two from Canada, and one from the US – developed their humaneering capability earlier in its development and have gone on to practice what they learned. While each was involved with different projects, all were exposed to the same principles and methods from the v3.0 private beta release of humaneering-based DesignedWork.

After tracking down these individuals and discussing the purpose of this article, all agreed to a two-hour online discussion, from which a transcript would be created, with just minor editing for concise expression. Our goal was to capture the unique 'voice of experience' shared by everyone, rather than strive for agreement.

Personal Introductions

Sophie Edwards – I am British and joined a large consulting firm right after university but now have my own consulting practice tending to people issues for organisations in several sectors. I have two large and one smaller client and, because there is just one of me, this keeps me busy and makes it difficult to look for new clients. One of my clients will be moving because of Brexit, and they have offered me a position.

Heather Brown – I'm Canadian, but live in the US with my American husband and three children, and work in corporate HR for a major health services company that provides insurance, pharmacy and other services. My job is similar to an internal consultant. We are a small department in HR, and we work wherever we are sent by the executives or requested by the managers to resolve systemic people issues.

Alex Bonner – I too am Canadian and work from my home in Vancouver, though I do spend half my time somewhere else in the world. I tried a real office, but it just reduced the time I had with my family. I too work as a consultant, almost exclusively for private equity firms, and specialise in due diligence and post-acquisition operations improvement. Essentially, I look at acquisition targets for undervalued or underdeveloped people and people-dependent operations. Post-acquisition, I support the improvement strategies. Unlike the private equity firms that rely primarily on financial engineering, my clients build the companies they acquire.

Todd Ackerman – I am based in Silicon Valley, and work on start-ups with founders and venture capital. I first learned about humaneering during a presentation at an operations management conference. I then did some digging around, found HTI and arranged to work on a few of their beta projects. I have been using humaneering since.

What does humaneering enable you to do that you couldn't do before?
(Alex) I see economic value where others don't and, even more important, I can help people create more economic value when management sees them only as a cost to be eliminated.

(Todd) Me too. I'm an operations guy, but I never understood

the logic that eliminating people increased productivity. That's a path to nowhere. So much for agility.

(Heather) When I show up to help executives or managers improve an operation's performance, they are like the sky is falling. To be fair, we can empathise with their frustration, because we know so many have a perspective that only sees inanimate materials, not talented, capable and creative people. I should add that my organisation development (OD) education way underemphasised work and job design, and spent way too much time on novel theories that, while good and potentially helpful, can't touch all the negative effects of poorly designed work. Work and job design is where human performance is achieved or squandered for most organisations. Start with design. Don't you agree?

(Sophie) Yes, I do. It's what makes the difference for my clients too. Most haven't given much thought to the informal . . . can I say sloppy . . . way they pull work and jobs together. Sometimes I'm amazed at how well people have got on with their work. These employees put up with so much that is unnecessary. It's no wonder people can't stay engaged in a job they were at one time excited to get. I like knowing I can help them at the same time I am solving the manager's problem.

How does management respond to your use of humaneering?

(Sophie) I don't tell my clients I'm using humaneering. Maybe I will if the term becomes more popular. And management's response is gratefulness. They think I'm a miracle worker, but of course I'm not really. But until they learn humaneering, I think I'll enjoy their appreciation.

(Alex) I don't think most managers realise that the old industrial approach they use for managing people doesn't work like it once did. It will be interesting to see how they respond to humaneering as it becomes more well known. It's not easy to change the way you've done something for so long. But then again, they'll be telling their people they need to change, so maybe managers will change too. For now, it's a great living, and like Sophie, I enjoy being appreciated.

(Heather) This might be a good place to mention that I have been trying to encourage my HR department to become more informed about humaneering. I respect our Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) for creating a separate department, so we could offer this service without getting bogged down in internal issues. And I have been able to attract a few previous HR partners to work with me on assignments. The rest . . . and we have a big department . . . don't seem to be very interested. Candidly, I don't think they recognise that the old approach to HR hasn't been working . . . or at least isn't enough to meet the needs of today's organisations. I have discussed what I see as an opportunity for HR with our CHRO, yet she has insisted for a couple of years that the timing is not right. I'm worried they might run out of time. The operations I've worked with see what's happening, and two have offered to hire me if I wanted to leave HR.

(Todd) You are making me grateful that I work for myself. I don't get exposed to much drama in my work, and decisions are made quickly. You are either in or you're out. The person's working out or they aren't. Period. Right now, humaneering is my competitive advantage, and by the time it becomes mainstream, I have plenty of experience to stay ahead of the pack.

How do employees respond to your use of humaneering?

(Heather) I suppose I'm feared like most consultants initially. Consultants have earned a bad reputation with many employees, and any apprehension is understandable. However, in no more than a few hours to a few days, our transparent approach, involvement of the organisation, and other interpersonal considerations result in a very good working relationship and lots of cooperation. Employees don't attribute any of this to humaneering, though, because it is rare that anybody would even hear the word. Since we didn't use it during the beta projects, I'm comfortable with speaking about what I'm doing in terms the organisation already understands. As for the after effects of our work in a department, most employees are pleased to have had our assistance, and they hope we'll come back and do more of the same.

(Todd) Same for me. People quickly recognise I'm there to help them, they cooperate, and they appreciate the results. I can't imagine most give it much thought. They probably just assume other start-ups are getting the same kind of help.

(Alex) I naturally expect to be well received for the help I bring, and if not at the start, this quickly becomes the case. Furthermore, this is likely a reason why the humaneering approach is so effective. Management's gains don't require employees to sacrifice. Nobody's getting beaten-up, so management can achieve its targets. Humaneering is different

Participant Summary Table

Name	Nationality	Employee/Independent	Clients
Sophie Edwards	British	Independent	Firms in the UK
Heather Brown	Canadian	Employee	Corporate HR within diversified health services organisation
Alex Bonner	Canadian	Independent	Private equity firms
Todd Ackerman	American	Independent	Silicon Valley start-up founders and venture capital firms

than the typical zero-sum approach management takes to solve problems. By taking a systems design approach, reducing unintended constraints on productivity, exploiting untapped opportunities to create economic value, and deeply involving employees in the design process, we can generally find a way for everyone to win.

(Sophie) I get the impression that the managers and employees I work with are a bit more apprehensive to speak up than the people with whom you work; more accustomed to or accepting of being told what do to. I find that employees are reluctant to consider anything different until it has a manager's okay. This adds to the challenge of involving employees in redesigning their work. Many see it as risky behaviour. Only when a change is clearly approved are many employees ready to consider how it will be good for them. This means I go easy on encouraging employees to be creative, and I directly involve managers in the process just to show their support.

Where should humaneering capability reside within organisations?
(Heather) Naturally, I think it belongs in HR, but like I said, my CHRO seems reluctant to lead us through some needed changes. If this is typical of HR leaders, they may hesitate and lose the opportunity to lead other productivity enhancement initiatives.

(Sophie) HR may be changing already here. There is an ex-BBC HR director who is holding seminars and rallies to encourage HR people to think outside the box they're in. I think it's called DisruptHR. She's holding these events all around the world, but I've not actually attended or talked with anyone who has (https://disrupthr.co).

((Todd) Interesting question. I don't see many HR types. Typically, the organisations I work with aren't big enough to need one. But to answer your question, I think every manager needs to understand the basic principles and methods of humaneering, and then there needs to be some corporate function focused on workforce development, knowledge work productivity, human capital exploitation, maximising intangible economic value, and other underdeveloped value-creation opportunities. I don't think most HR types have the spurs for it, but I could be wrong, or maybe it's time to up their game.

What does it take to learn humaneering and the DesignedWork protocol?
(Alex) I thought the way they (HTI) managed the beta projects was very helpful. Everybody developed by graduating through stages of capability, plus we learned something new each evening that we could practice on the project the next day.

(Heather) Experience is most important, if not critical. I've learned so much just by applying the humaneering principles across a wide range of operations and situations. Another thing I've learned is that people who want to learn these principles can be helpful quickly. The HR partners that volunteered to work with me are learning fast, and probably ready for their own assignments. Motivation is important to all learning, but maybe more so for humaneering because it requires people to unlearn some old and ineffective thinking about people and how to have them working up to their potential.

(Sophie) Has anyone else seen the new HTI website? There is a brief description of a new remote development program for the open beta release in January. Let's pause for 10 minutes

so you can read about it. Go to https://HumaneeringTech.com/community/ and scroll half way down.

(Alex) I like it. Because it's remote, we can easily get up to speed on what's new. And I can put acquisition managers in it to reinforce my work with them.

(Sophie) That was my thought. It gives me another way to engage and support my clients.

(Todd) Did anyone read the other pages on the site. The site provides a good explanation of why humaneering works so well. I hope this doesn't cost us our market advantage!

(Heather) Humaneering is just another new technology. Executives will eventually find out about it, and the innovators will waste no time in getting it for their company. And we can help them.

What's your advice to executives wanting to assess humaneering's potential?

(Todd) Don't waste time before you try it. As we tell founders, run, don't walk. Get to the front of the line and quickly apply it to a few people problems. I'd also try it in a section of some large operation with lots of people. This way they will see the difference for themselves. There's no other way when managers have grown up on industrial management.

(Heather) In general, I agree with you, but I have seen some young managers get it on their own. I don't think most of Gen Y and Z like industrial management. They still should see it though, because the numbers will make their decision easier to make.

(Sophie) The management I work with like to see new things demonstrated first, and even with strong evidence will want the buy-in of others before seeking approval.

(Heather) Now that HTI has remote training, another approach executives could take would be to get a few of their people enrolled to learn more. Because humaneering crosses functions, they might want to encourage their staff functions . . . HR, IT, engineering, facilities, operations improvement, and so on . . . to enrol people too. The training was originally for practitioners, maybe HTI will have a course for people only evaluating it. The site said the first course was free and self-paced . . . maybe that's enough for some of these people.

(Alex) This will be interesting. Humaneering has been kept somewhat of a secret during development. The release in January will be the first that isn't private. Even the innovators in business probably don't know that it's coming.

Any final advice to anyone else reading this article?

(Heather) I hope we haven't made humaneering sound like a gimmick, or just another quick fix for people problems. We should tell them that humaneering draws knowledge from more than 200 human science disciplines, and then weaves that knowledge into a quick and easy-to-use approach for designing and managing human work. Today's still dominant industrial approach to management is based on engineering, or the physical sciences of chemistry and physics, and focused on managing people so they can operate, keep up with, and don't interrupt machine work. Industrial management does utilise some human science, for example in human factors, ergonomics, user interface, and others. But only elementary behavioural concepts from biology and psychology, essentially to regulate or control people to minimise their negative impact on machine systems. People respond much better to the more-human humaneering approach, and this quickly, predictably, and sustainably translates into a smoother operation and greater productivity (economic value created/labour cost) for the enterprise, and high levels of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and stability for employees/workers. What do we need to add to this?

(Alex) I can add that we comfortably project a 30-50% increase in knowledge work productivity for each of years one and two, post-acquisition. We get this with a primary emphasis on creating new economic value, but also dismantle or redesign management systems that cost more than they contribute to business results. Most of this is from replacing traditional industrial management with a humaneering-based approach. Humaneering energises people and lets them do their best work. Management is focused more on support than control, and work is focused more on maximising economic value than on hitting preset targets.

(Sophie) I guess I'm a bit more conservative than the rest of you. You might say I'm more cautious about management's support, and the employee's support as well.

(Todd) My people make Alex sound conservative. The goals start at 10X and go up from there.

A sixth discipline

On numerous occasions, evidently well-read executives have suggested that humaneering may be a 'sixth discipline' to which Peter Senge refers as a possibility in his book, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization* (1990). They suggest this because of the additional human potential that humaneering reveals and makes accessible.

As Senge requires, this new potential remains outside the grasp of industrial era management thinking, which continues to dominate and now constrains most organisations. Some in management succeed based on this new potential, yet do not readily perceive it accurately in their own human nature, which makes it even less likely they will recognise it in others.

Humaneering and humaneering-based DesignedWork are continually updated sets of principles and methods that require learning and mastery for effective application. Thus far, it appears that potentially anyone could develop proficiency through disciplined practice.

To this end, HTI is conceiving a new kind of professional – the humaneer – who is professionally developed to provide this needed support, either as an employed internal humaneer or an independent external humaneer. While the technology applied is the same for these two roles, the leadership required of each differs substantially (ie internal staff-role leadership versus market and client leadership).