



# Strengthening Humanistic Management

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Received: 8 December 2018 / Accepted: 5 May 2019 / Published online: 23 May 2019  
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## Abstract

Humanistic management is emerging as a response to the economic paradigm prevalent in today's business schools, corporations, and society. There are many compelling reasons why the economic paradigm is becoming obsolete, and even dangerous, for business if it is to become an agent of world benefit. The purpose of this article is not to explain these reasons but rather to situate the transition to humanistic management in the context of multiple worldviews. We propose an historical sequence of worldviews each with its own paradigmatic assumptions about what it means to be human and the nature of the world. We draw on converging insights between new science and ancient spiritual traditions to outline an emerging quantum worldview. We further submit that integrating elements of the quantum worldview into humanistic management strengthens it in ways that are essential to humankind's ability to shift to full-spectrum flourishing, defined as a world in which people and all life thrive now and across future generations.

**Keywords** Full-spectrum flourishing · Quantum-science worldview · Consciousness of connectedness · Mindfulness practice

Humanistic management (serving the common good) is emerging as a response to the economic paradigm (focused on profit maximization) prevalent in today's business schools, corporations, and society. There are many compelling reasons why the economic paradigm is becoming obsolete, and even dangerous, for business if it is to become an agent of world benefit. The purpose of this article is not to explain these reasons as many others have done so elsewhere. For example, in *Humanistic Management* (2017), Fordham University professor Michael Pirson explains why dignity and wellbeing— the two core constructs of humanistic management— are urgently needed in the twenty-first century. Harvard scholar Donna Hicks' *Leading with Dignity* (2018) provides a compelling case for going beyond the economic paradigm, as does Princeton economist Marc Fleurbaey's *Manifesto for Social Progress*

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(2018). Additional compelling reasons can be found in articles published in the *Humanistic Management Journal*.<sup>1</sup>

Our purpose is to situate the transition to humanistic management in the larger historical context of multiple worldviews. We propose an historical sequence of worldviews each with its own paradigmatic assumptions about what it means to be human and the nature of the world. Just as earlier worldviews existed prior to the advent of economism and humanistic management, we can begin to outline the emergence of a quantum worldview that draws on the remarkable convergence between new science and perennial spiritual intuitions. We further submit that integrating elements of the quantum worldview into humanistic management strengthens it in ways that are essential to humankind's ability to shift to full-spectrum flourishing, defined as a world in which people and all life thrive now and across future generations.

Our framework builds on the rich history of human development theorizing proposed by Graves (his ECLET research<sup>2</sup> in the 1960s), Maslow (1968), Kegan (1982), Wilber (2000), and Laloux (2014). These thought leaders considered the coming stage in human evolution to herald a profound transformation in consciousness, one which is ontologically more fundamental than previous shifts. According to them, the next stage in human evolution will be “a particularly momentous one in the human journey,” (Laloux 2014: 43) suggesting that humanity is on the cusp of a system bifurcation which will allow it to either mature as a civilization or risk extinction.

Worldviews are similar but not identical to the construct of human development stages. A worldview is commonly defined as “a particular philosophy of life or conception of the world.”<sup>3</sup> We use the term in this sense, as a philosophy or conception of what it means to be human and the nature of the world. By contrast, human development stages are more centered on the psychological and behavioral characteristics of individuals, organizations, and groups.

Worldviews and human development theorizing provide an alternative lens on the role of business agency for addressing complex social, economic, and environmental challenges. Other germane theoretical perspectives include institutional theory, stakeholder theory, and Corporate Social Responsibility & Sustainability. Institutional theory frames business solutions to complex social problems in terms of renegotiating settled institutions among diverse actors with conflicting logics (Helms et al. 2012) or the building of new ones so as to “change the basic routines, resource and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system in which the innovation occurs” (Westley and Antadze 2010: 2). Stakeholder theory focuses on a broad range of actors for whom business creates or destroys value, viewing such value not only in instrumental or transactional terms but rather as having intrinsic worth (E. R. Freeman, 1984). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) & Sustainability typically take a business case approach to addressing environmental, social, and governance issues by seeking to demonstrate the positive return-on-investment of potential solutions (Laszlo and Zhexembayeva 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> Founded in 2016, the *Humanistic Management Journal* focuses on the protection of human dignity and the promotion of human well-being within the context of organizations. It connects disparate fields including business ethics, sustainability and management studies via a humanistic research paradigm. ISSN: 2366-603X (print version); ISSN: 2366-6048 (e-version)

<sup>2</sup> ECLET is an acronym for the Emergent Cyclical Levels of Existence Theory researched and developed by Clare Graves in the 1950s and 1960s. His work gave rise to Spiral Dynamics and many other human development frameworks. The Graves model describes distinct worldviews that humans operate from and that dictate the goals we set, the things we care about, and the behaviors we exhibit as we evolve throughout our lives.

<sup>3</sup> A common definition of worldview is given here: <https://www.google.com/search?q=Dictionary#dobs=worldview>

Systems scientist Donella Meadows, in a widely cited article (1997), argues that shifting “the mindset or paradigm out of which the system arises” is the highest leverage point at which to intervene in a complex system. It is in this perspective that worldviews are put forward as an effective theoretical framing for researchers interested in the changing role of business in society.

## Key Features of the Transition from Economism to Humanistic Management

Economism can be compared and contrasted with humanistic management through the lens of operating logics and objectives. Whereas economism is driven by *maximization*, humanistic management seeks *balance* through the promotion of dignity and practical wisdom. While the ultimate objective of economism is wealth, power, and status, the goal of humanistic management is to preserve dignity, which here means more than self-respect and worthiness. Dignity is a category for all that is intrinsically valuable, such as freedom, love, and care, which cannot be priced. Beyond the dignity threshold, the goal of humanistic management is the promotion of wellbeing.

Within economism, Pirson distinguishes between the *homo economicus* of neo-classical economics and the Resourceful, Evaluative, Maximizing Model (REMM) proposed by Jensen and Meckling (1994). The former sees consumers through the lens of utility functions and the firm as a black box entity defined by its production and demand functions, with both consumers and firms driven by the insatiable desire for money. REMM offers a more sophisticated model in which goods can be both material and non-material, and where constraints, for example of time and wealth, bestow individuals with opportunity sets within which to maximize outcomes.

Humanistic management finds these models of economism to be insufficient or misleading. It introduces the notion of human dignity as a universal baseline for the accordance of human rights for everyone (Pirson 2017: 61). In addition, the baseline model evolves from two to four primary drives of human nature.<sup>4</sup> Whereas economism depends only on the primary drives to acquire and to defend, humanistic management adds the *independent* drives to bond and to comprehend. “The [humanistic] model also acknowledges that the *balance*, and not the *maximization* of these four drives, or any subset of them, is the goal” (Pirson 2017: 79).

The transition from economism to humanistic management is further characterized by a focus on solutions rather than problems, systems instead of component parts, and ethics in addition to economic performance.

Thoughtful observers of today’s economic scene will be compelled to agree that the proposed transition to a humanistic model of management is much needed. Unfettered materialism and the rise of the neoliberal paradigm have led to, among other things, the enrichment of the top 1% at the expense of the 99%; the rise in drug abuse and suicide rates; the non-acceptance of refugees fleeing violent conflicts; a lack of civility in public discourse; and the wholesale destruction of the natural environment. A greater emphasis on protecting dignity and promoting wellbeing can only be seen as a welcome development to address such negative realities.

<sup>4</sup> Harvard professor Paul Lawrence (2002, 2010) has written extensively about the four drives of human nature and how they relate to leadership.

## Limitations of Humanistic Management

Humanistic management is thus an enormous step forward in restoring a sense of intrinsic value to human affairs. Applying its core principles to management research, practice, pedagogy, and policies can contribute powerfully to policies aimed at shared prosperity and flourishing. Nevertheless more limited forms or interpretations of humanistic management have potential drawbacks which, left unaddressed, may prevent it from achieving the very goals it seeks to achieve.

Humanism, as the word implies, is concerned above all with humanity. It draws on thinkers from Aristotle to the twentieth century Swiss ethicist Hans Kueng who sought to understand human nature and the fulfillment of human needs. It emphasizes the protection of human dignity and the promotion of human wellbeing.

The first potential limitation of a humanity-centric model is the risk of species exceptionalism. Instead of seeing ourselves as an integral part of nature and of the cosmos, humanism continues a long intellectual tradition of seeing humankind as somehow separate and above other forms of life. More recently, scholars such as Otto Scharmer are attempting to apply humanistic management processes and principles to a wider set of challenges by relating them, for example, to the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. Are such efforts sufficient given today's social and global challenges? MIT's John Ehrenfeld was one of the first modern-day management thinkers to emphasize the growing need for managers to raise their awareness that we cannot flourish as a species without the flourishing of all life on earth (Ehrenfeld and Hoffman 2013). While some might argue that our dependence on nature is fully implied in humanistic notions of wellbeing (or *eudemonia*), by putting humans at the center of humanistic management, scholars and practitioners incur the risk, even if unintentional, of anthropomorphizing the purpose of management.

A second potential limitation of humanistic management concerns its dualist lens on economic performance and ethical behavior, whereby teaching the tenets of free-market capitalism need only be complemented by courses in business ethics. At times humanistic management decries such dualism yet does not seem to offer any real alternative for management research, education, and pedagogy.<sup>5</sup> On the positive side, it proposes to go beyond economism's emphasis on technical financial skills, to encompass moral and emotional learning as well as "active experience" in field labs. This is an important step toward a more integrated Whole Person approach to learning and practice. However, it fails to fully acknowledge the role of direct-intuitive learning—through a process that modern scholars (Senge et al. 2008; Jaworski, J., 2012; Scharmer, O., 2016) sometimes refer to as *presencing*—based on reflective and spiritual practices. In this view, it is only by complementing technical, moral, emotional, and social skills with direct-intuitive (mindful and spiritual) practices can we hope to fully integrate performative and normative behavior.

A third potential limitation of humanistic management is that it appears grounded in a still largely reductionist view of science, especially the neuroscience of empathetic behavior. For example, altruism and the drive to bond are presented as hard-wired into the brain, as demonstrated by various areas, such as the nucleus accumbens, which light up when such behavior is present. The underlying scientific paradigm is physicalist and

<sup>5</sup> Dean Jenny Darroch and Professor Katherina Pick at the Drucker School of Management provide one example of efforts to radically redesign management curricula in ways that re-imagine education in the twenty-first century.

reductionist rather than integral. It does not acknowledge or attempt to incorporate the ontological implications of quantum science, with its properties of entanglement and nonlocality, or of a cosmology that sees the universe as composed of vibrational fields of energy rather than particles and forces. It fails to recognize that evolution itself is increasingly seen as an organically interwoven process that exhibits a high degree of scale-invariant coherence (from quantum vibrations to atoms and molecules and up to the cell, organ, individual, group, society, ecology, biosphere, and universe). One wonders, what do humanistic management scholars make of startling new hypotheses such as the idea that our beliefs can heal our bodies or affect our well-being? (Lipton 2007).

Recent developments in scientific thought have huge and immediate consequences for how we see the world around us: instead of thinking of ourselves as separate and discreet from one another and from nature, quantum science suggests that we are all part of one interconnected fabric of existence. In the language of quantum physics, we are instantly and everywhere connected to each other and the world. At the macro level of bionomics, epigenetics, and environmental science, living systems are dynamically connected to each other and their environment. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, elaborated later in quantum field theory, implies that uncertainty and indeterminism are fundamental features of our world. Particles and waves, mind and matter, spirit and physic, humanity and all life on earth, are now best seen as irreducible wholes.

## Historical Worldviews

To put humanistic management in a broader context (i.e. beyond a dualistic comparison with economism), it is helpful to consider earlier worldviews each with their own paradigmatic assumptions about what it means to be human and the nature of the world. We need to be reminded that many "philosophies of life or conceptions of the world" existed before economism or humanistic management, while new ones will emerge in the future. Table 1 provides an overview of five historical worldviews and imagines a sixth worldview, extending humanistic management, which we label "quantum". The five are mostly western<sup>6</sup> while the proposed sixth is inherently global. The choice of worldviews and their elements is not intended to be comprehensive. Rather, they are illustrative of distinct conceptions of what it means to be human and the nature of the world. Additionally, many elements are cyclical in nature. For example, the pre-agricultural nomadic worldview saw humans as embedded and inseparable from nature, a conception which is re-enlivened in the quantum worldview in which humans are once again seen as embedded and inseparable from nature.

In keeping with the human development phases of Graves, Maslow, Wilber, and Laloux, the shift to the quantum worldview is represented as a transformation from 'first-tier' to 'second-tier', meaning that it represents an ontological leap to an entirely new way of being. Writes Laloux, "All 'first-tier' stages consider that their worldview is the only valid one, and that all other people are dangerously mistaken. People transitioning to what Laloux calls the Teal phase [his color-coded designation for the next stage in

<sup>6</sup> Some would say that economism, humanism, and even Biblical Christianity have become global in the twenty-first century. But their architecture and cultural orientations remain largely western, even when they have taken root in new continents.

**Table 1** Historical worldviews and their elements

<b>WORLDVIEWS</b>	<b>Pre-agricultural nomadic</b>	<b>Post-Bronze Age (Greek)</b>	<b>Biblical Christianity</b>	<b>economism</b>	<b>humanistic management</b>	<b>quantum</b>
<i>Ultimate objective</i>	Survival	Eudamonia	Heaven	Money	Wellbeing	Flourishing
<i>Conception of being human</i>	Embedded and inseparable from nature	Self, others, & nature form split identities	Man is in service to God	Humans seek to maximize	Humans seek to balance	Humans evolve in a coherent & interconnected universe
<i>Epistemological elements</i>	Magical, instinctual	Critical reasoning	Contemplation and surrender	Analytic, positivist, reductionist, determinist	+Experiential, +Ethical	Direct-intuitive, Holistic, indeterminist
<i>Primary method for grasping truth</i>	Mythological	Philosophical	Faith-based	Physicalist science	+Humanities	Emerging science and spirituality
<i>Form of consciousness</i>	Paradoxical consciousness	Consciousness of self, society, and cosmos	Consciousness of God	Consciousness of individuality	Consciousness of humanity	Consciousness of Oneness
<i>Guiding source of behavior</i>	Spirits, shamans	Philosophers, sages	Laws of God	Performative criteria	Performative & normative criteria	Integral being criteria



**Note:** The use of a plus (+) sign indicates that the element is *added* to those elements in the cell to its immediate left. The use of a plus (+) sign indicates that the element is *added* to those elements in the cell to its immediate left

human evolution] “can accept, for the first time, that there is an evolution in consciousness, that there is a momentum in evolution towards ever more complex and refined ways of dealing with the world.” (Laloux 2014: 43).

## Strengthening Humanistic Management and What it Means for Scholars and Practitioners

The goal of strengthening humanistic management is anchored in the notion of full-spectrum flourishing. The intransitive verb *flourish* is more dynamic than the noun *wellbeing*. It implies a continuing process of living life to its fullest rather than a condition of existence. It recognizes evolution as a primary attribute of all living systems. “Full-spectrum” refers to a scale-invariant property that encompasses all life, not only humanity, and all levels of existence from quanta to the cosmos. Secondly, it recognizes that humans are physical, emotional, and spiritual beings who *co-evolve in a dynamically interconnected universe*. When we say that we are deeply connected with the world around us, we mean it not just metaphorically but in science-based terms of the energy and information fields—the quantum vibrations—that quantum science irrefutably proves connect and unite us.

As explained in a new book on this topic (Tsao and Laszlo 2019), such a strengthened humanistic paradigm, labelled quantum leadership, is presented as a learning journey to elevate a person’s consciousness with creativity and resilience. It is a timeless path to developing his or her leadership potential. Mindfulness practices—defined as “practices of connectedness” to encompass both eastern and western forms—quiet the mind and expand our consciousness so that we are more aware of the truth about our experiences.<sup>7</sup> They include mindfulness meditation, walking in Nature, art & aesthetics, physical exercise, and journaling, among countless others. Through such practices, we connect to the origin of consciousness itself, slowly awakening to holism. From that “We” space, we grow in personal power, we clean up our traumas and trapped emotions from the past, and we discover our gifts and purpose in life.

Experiencing our lives as deeply interconnected physically, emotionally, and spiritually, changes how we think and act. We become more empathetic and compassionate. We begin to see ourselves as one with the world. We become more coherent in ourselves and in our interactions with others and with all forms of life.

The quantum paradigm has significant implications for management. The purpose of management becomes to be a force for good, as leaders experience their lives and the lives of their organizations as relational rather than as ego-centered. The goal becomes to create prosperity for all and to contribute to a healthy environment and improved wellbeing. This is very different from current management goals in organizational strategies which, in practice, are often limited to reducing ecological footprints and minimizing social harm.

To the four human drives of humanistic management, the quantum paradigm recognizes a fifth independent drive: to care for the environment (dCfE) including all life on Earth. There is

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<sup>7</sup> Such practices have three characteristics in common. First, they are part of a well-documented upward spiral in positive emotions which increase our sense of wellbeing and build consequential resources to handle life’s challenges (Frederickson et al., 2008). Second, they expand our awareness of being one with the world, helping us to get in a state of “flow” where creativity and productivity emerge effortlessly (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Third, they engage the whole person rather than only the analytic rational self (Boyatzis, et al., 2014). They offer an action-oriented pathway to entrepreneurial creativity and to effective collaboration in today’s complex and turbulent environments. See Tsao and Laszlo, Chapter 6.



compelling evidence for such a drive which too often has been ignored by anthropocentric attitudes.<sup>8</sup> To mental, emotional, and social intelligence—central topics in humanistic management education—it adds somatic (Blake 2018) and spiritual intelligence (Wigglesworth 2014).<sup>9</sup> In this paradigm shift, the conception of what it means to be human becomes much more multi-dimensional and relational.

In the quantum paradigm, wealth is defined broadly to include not only financial capital but also physical, relational, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Leaders who operate in it are more likely to flourish with significant benefits to both business and society (Zollo et al. 2017). Benefits include greater creativity and collaboration along with an increased capability to inspire people and to produce lasting change in turbulent environments. Along the journey, people learn how to cultivate personal wellbeing and a deep connection to others for shared prosperity and genuine flourishing.

## Future Directions for Management Research and Practice

The thesis of this paper has been that management theory and practice need to build on humanistic management as it exists today. The outline of such a strengthened humanistic management model was briefly outlined above. A few important caveats are in order. First, this paper is intended only as an early exploration into a new and emerging worldview and what its contours might look like. The goal is to invite further inquiry into the topic. Second, the core elements of humanistic management remain essential and much needed for all the reasons described by Pirson, Hicks, and others. Anyone seeking to revise or extend humanistic management should be cautious not to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

With these caveats in mind, the following topics may be of interest to management researchers. Emerging discoveries in the sciences have significant implications for our “philosophy of life or conception of the world” which, in turn, have still unexplored consequences for management theory. Examples of natural science fields that are revolutionizing our understanding of the world are quantum physics, quantum biology, consciousness research (where a serious scientific debate rages between physicalism led by Daniel Dennett and, in the opposing camp, panpsychism led by David Chalmers), epigenetics, and evolutionary biology. What images of the world do findings in these fields, taken as a whole, portray? How do they alter fundamental assumptions taken for granted in the contemporary field of management?

Related to such developments in the natural sciences is the consilience of different types of knowledge, and its implications for management. The science of an interconnected reality is converging on perennial insights from the world’s major religions and spiritual traditions. A unifying source of “all that is” can be found in the Chinese Tao, the Vedantic Brahma, the Buddhist Sunyata, the Zoroastrian Aša, and the mystical realm of Sufism, just as it appeared in many Judeo-Christian traditions. While spiritual wisdom has been largely rejected as a basis for management practice, confirming evidence from the realm of science is giving fresh relevance to historical intuitions of Oneness.

In the social sciences, exciting new theories are revolutionizing entire disciplines. New economic models are being proposed such as Kate Raworth’s *Doughnut Economics* (2017), Richard Thaler’s

<sup>8</sup> See Tsao, F. and C. Laszlo. *Ibid.*, Chapters 5 and 6

<sup>9</sup> Somatic intelligence refers to enhanced abilities that become available through heightened awareness of sensory information about our well-being. Spiritual intelligence has been described as a higher dimension of intelligence that activates the qualities and capabilities of the authentic self in the form of wisdom, compassion, integrity, joy, love, creativity, and peace.



predictably-irrational *Nudging* (2009), and Amit Goswami's beyond-materialist *Quantum Economics* (2015). In the Doughnut model, economic activity is constrained by planetary boundaries (the outer ring of the doughnut) while being required to operate at minimum social standards (the inner ring of the doughnut). Instead of economies that need to grow, whether or not they make us thrive, it conceives of economies that “make us thrive, whether or not they grow” (Monbiot 2017). In psychology and organizational behavior, the emerging field of positive organizational scholarship (POS) is putting greater emphasis on strengths and on positive deviance, rather than studying social phenomena as problems to be fixed. POS gives greater weight to the dynamics of whole systems and cooperative relationships. “[O]rganizational research [is] shifting from an emphasis on competition and reductionism to partnerships, networks, high quality relationships, community, and stakeholder negotiation. This movement indicates a paradigm shift from the individual to the collective” (Pavlovich and Krahnke 2012).

What do these developments in the natural and social sciences mean for theories of management? In addition, how might Management, Spirituality, and Religion (MSR) scholarship<sup>10</sup> contribute more centrally to enriching the field?

For management practice, future directions could start with the growing body of scientific evidence that a broad range of mindfulness and spiritual practices have a transformative effect on our consciousness, sense of purpose, health, and wellbeing. (Tackney et al. 2017). Specifically, such practices are shown to help cultivate broader perception and greater awareness of our connection to self, family, community, and the natural environment (Sheldrake 2017). They transform our mindsets and assumptions about the world through a direct-intuitive experience of connectedness. Introducing such practices into the workplace can help managers see themselves as deeply connected, not just metaphorically, but in the sense of a physical and conscious whole.

With many leading integral philosophers hypothesizing that humanity is on the brink of a fundamental shift in consciousness from ‘first-tier’ to ‘second-tier’ stages of human development,<sup>11</sup> such a shift would coincide fortuitously with the urgent need for radically more effective solutions to global challenges. From tackling climate change and social inequality, from remedying toxic pollution and toxic workplaces, management theory and practice require a paradigmatically new approach if business as an institution is to stay relevant and serve the common good.

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<sup>10</sup> For scholarly examples of management, spirituality, and religion research, see the selected works of Judith Neal, Margaret Benefiel, Andre Delbecq, L. W. Fry, Douglas A. Hicks, David Miller, and Susan Case, among others.

<sup>11</sup> Such as David Bohm, Fritjof Capra, Clare Graves, Willis Harman, Ervin Laszlo, Abraham Maslow, Donella Meadows, and Ken Wilber.

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