Editorial Comment

Management by lighthouses

Constantin Virgil NEGOIŢĂ

Faculty of Cybernetics, Academy of Economic Sciences, Bucharest, Romania

If light is viewed as opposite to darkness, mental illumination, power to explain things, knowledge or information that helps understanding, and so on, then a lighthouse — a permanent structure equipped with light, giving a signal to warn or guide ships at night or in fog — can describe a person who declares to the world.

Constantin Virgil Negoiţă received the PhD in Information Sciences from the Polytechnic Institute of Bucharest in 1969. He is currently professor of system theory at the Faculty of Economic Cybernetics and head of research laboratory at the Institute of Management and Informatics, Bucharest, Romania. He is a member of the Society of General Systems Research, coauthor of "Applications of Fuzzy Sets to System Analysis" (Halsted Press, New York, 1975), author of "Management Applications of System Theory" (Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel, 1979), an editor of the Journal of Fuzzy Sets and Systems, and a member of the editorial board of Kybernetes and Human Systems Management.

The doctrine that speculative prosperity is no answer to spiritual bankruptcy is attractive — judging from the steady inclination of apologists to revive it in one way or another. The proliferation of discussions about teleological, ideological, instinctive and spiritual attributes of a leader shows a deep concern to include the ability of enhancing the society's capability for self-renewal. The function of managing human systems then is the *management of conflict* by avoidance, dissolution, removal or resolution [1].

Even though the concept of renewal is largely alien to the minds of management scientists, they nevertheless recognize that there is a need for methodological intervention. I shall discuss the meaning of the term *renewal* as I see it.

Essentially there are two basic concepts of renewal. One regards human systems as programmed, the other as self-programmed. According to the first point of view, ideology is an instrument of deliberate action. According to the second one, ideology is beyond direct manipulation. Both orientations say that it is through *prophets* that the bounds of societal consciousness can be fixed.

A prophetic process is seen as a counterpart to biological evolution. In 1978, at the Fourth International Congress on Cybernetics and Systems (Amsterdam), Silverman spoke about social order and prophetic practice. He observed that individuals depend, through interaction processes on collectives, which depend through institutional processes on cultures, which depend through prophetic processes on individuals again. Sutherland [3] says that prohets determine the course of societal events and evolution, largely because it is they who provide *the mask*, which, when worn by the subject, makes the patterns visible. My view is that we must regard the prophetic process as exegesis of existence. In order to understand why, we must define the terms.

One has to avoid the classical crime of taking a word whose use is firmly established and purporting to use it as a technical term in some quite new sense. The prophet is a leader, founder or spokesman of a

cause or a party. *Pro* in the Greek term 'Prophetes' does not mean 'before' but 'forth'. Thus the term indicates that the prophet is a preacher, a forthteller rather than a foreteller. A person who has something to proclaim, something to announce publicly. He always refers to another who stands behind him. The prophet does not philosophize, does not speculate. He is a proclaimer. The testimonies of the prophet are not formulations of philosophical doctrine but direct expression of experience. The prophets stand as watchmen and observers. They bear witness to other people, to a community. But how?

It is true that the prophets think emotionally. They use concepts as justice, wisdom and compassion. 'Wisdom' reconciles the conflictual 'justice' and 'mercy'. Since conflicting images cannot be 'killed', they are transcended. Conflictual evaluations are occasions for deliberation out of which new evaluations are formed. These are points of change at which habit fails and awareness is required. It is this striving for awareness that has made the prophet creative. The key to human systems management seems to be the systematic attempt to pull back on higher levels of synthesis where one can attain structural stability. The pullback avoids undecidability generated by conflict. Multiple evaluations generate conflict, and conflict resolution means incorporation of alternate evaluations into a new one which is structurally stable [2].

Striving to evolve unity out of division is matching with the idea of a goal. Purposefulness implies the will to eliminate ambiguity. It seems after all, that dialectical thinking, far from jarring with naive cybernetics, helps to articulate it. In fact, the task of the prophet is to deliver a message which is always the same: avoid the conflict. Since the conflict cannot be killed, we cannot speak about control by feedback. The conflicting evaluations are transcended, and this is control by pullback. If we are offended by the claim that cybernetics neither applies nor does not apply, we might try a familiar dialectical approach and say that human systems management is *above naive cybernetics*.

These are not more than tentative suggestions. What matters to our purpose is that synthesis means movement toward structural stability. In this context, 'error' is seen as a movement which is not oriented towards structural stability. To be in error is to miss the road. When human systems place themselves in a state of error, they transgress the law, they fail to achieve their natural trajectory.

It is a distinct feature of humans that their existence *does* precede their essence. The artifact, on the other hand, is first conceived by its maker and then made. This is what I would reflect by saying that its essence precedes its existence. This is the creed of *structuralism*. Humans are not first envisaged — they exist and what they are depends upon what they do. This is the creed of *existentialism*. People do *not* have functions, as machines do, but there is something common to them. They exist, and what they become depends upon what they know. This is the creed of *classical management*. The prophetic process is different: humans exist and what they become depends upon their awareness. When they are awake, humans do not act on the basis of acquired programs, they program themselves. If the rubric 'prophetic process' sounds offensive, one may substitute for it 'humanism', devotion to human interests.

What I have said of prophets is not what modern management theories attempt to do. But that does not mean that it is incompatible with them. Trying to get a somewhat disciplined view of the leadership process, I shall use the terms Humanist and Nonhumanist. What is the tension between these two concepts? By specifying an 'ought' the Humanist is associated with stimulating awareness, whereas the Nonhumanist is asociated with infused theoretical reasoning.

Habitus of grace seems to be taken for granted by the Nonhumanist. Habitus means a manner of being. Habitus of grace refers to a disposition of the subject to act in a given way, by a gradual reduction of adverse tendencies. The existential habitus are not acquired habitus. They are not generated by the repetition of deliberate acts, but they can be cultivated. We say that humans possess a potential for their realization.

We are obviously facing two radically different types of human systems management, rooted in two different anthropologies and accounting for two ways of conceiving human destiny. The way of the Humanist leads to autopoiesis, self-making, inasmuch as man is called to partake vitally in his natural structure. In contrast with this maxim, it is through the agency of a problematic speculator that human systems find themselves confronted with social consciousness. The speculator professes a created character of behavior and in doing so he is quite consistent with business administration where the attitude of man is characterized by surrender and obedience.

The modern age, prophet-ridden, presents a formid-

able problem of sorting the true prophets from the false ones. I do hope that HSM will tackle this problem in sufficiently clear and responsible ways, while at the same time warning us against and away from hasty explanations which often disguise rather than illuminate problems.

References

[1] R.K. Mueller, Leading-edge-leadership, Human Systems Management 1 (1980) 17–27.
[2] C.V. Negoiţă, Pullback versus feedback, Human Systems Management 1 (1980) 71–76.
[3] J. Sutherland, Societal Systems: Methodology, Modeling and Management (North-Holland, Amsterdam, 1978).