

Invitation to join the
TASK FORCE ON MANAGEMENT OF COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS

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Invitation

We invite you to discuss and to develop with us answers to the problem of managing complex organizations in complex environments, a key issue of our contemporary world. It is indispensable to go beyond the Weberian model of management, which bears little relationship to much of what actually happens in complex organizations like international business companies, schools and universities, hospitals, government agencies, etc., etc., etc. It is necessary to develop alternative concepts and models of management.

The Problem

The contemporary world is characterized by growing ecological problems, a growing population, and technical and organizational innovations at an ever increasing rate. These often produce a host of new problems while making the coping with old ones more difficult instead of solving them. At the same time globalization produces an increasingly complex world society confronted with new kinds of problems. It is divided by three fundamental conflict lines affecting also individual organizations: (1) Nature vs. culture and technology – the ecological issue, (2) north vs. south – unequal distribution of wealth, poverty, and power, and (3) a new kind of east-west conflict in the guise of Western vs. radical Islamic world.

Thus we and our organizations - business and others - are confronted with socio-technical innovations in a highly dynamic environment with fundamental conflicts that risk to escalate and to threaten the viability of our organizations and of society at large.

Nevertheless, we have to act and try to manage and sustain, at least for some time, our societies, our organizations, and also our personal lives. The contemporary environment is complex because of the high number and variety of relations involved. They make it apparently impossible to grasp the issues intellectually and even more impossible to manage and control them (in the sense of cybernetics).

Moreover, there are social forces and processes operating behind the backs of the social actors, i.e. individuals, enterprises, governments, etc. These are emergent processes resulting from the aggregated unintended consequences of a multitude of intentional individual actions. As, in addition, such processes operate in the contemporary global world through more and more complex networks and feedbacks of causes and effects, the social actors creating them and being their victims at the same time usually are not even aware of those undisclosed social forces and processes.

Management implies both sustaining and adjusting daily routine operations within given structures, and the (strategic) adaptation, i.e. structural change and transformation, of this

very framework, in order to adapt the framework to a changing environment along with the routine operations it supports.

The Requirements

In the face of the rapidly increasing difficulty of action and decision in such a situation on the one hand and the evident insufficiency of much public, non-public, political, and economic (organizational) decision-making on the other hand, a novel approach is required going beyond established theories (and practice) and implying possibly a novel view of management, new concepts, and alternative models under the constraints of complexity. The latter is not an entity but a property of systems, here the social and socio-technical systems which are of primary interest to us.

The Task

To meet this challenge, the purpose of an Internet Task Force on the management of complex social systems is to analyze the conditions of complexity, under which organizations have to operate, to design theories and strategies for operating, planning, deciding, and developing organizations under such conditions and constraints, and, as far as possible, to develop a new understanding of what management, planning, steering, and control might mean under conditions of complexity.

For this purpose it is necessary to collect ideas and materials, to discuss and develop them, and to make them available to the members of the task force as well as other interested colleagues. All of this is to be done by using the Internet in the most efficient and effective way possible, while keeping Internet use at the same time as simple as possible.

The Internet Task Force

To ensure effective and goal-oriented communication and discussion, the group is to be run as a closed group to which new colleagues are to be accepted by personal invitation or recommendation. Membership depends on active participation and will expire by inactivity. Papers and results considered ready for wider distribution and discussion will be made available to the public through appropriate means of publication, including the communication channels, public meetings and conferences of SCiO and RC51.

Fields of application and examples are at present education, health care, international business organizations, and drug abuse management. As the key focus, however, is on the systemic respectively sociocybernetic issue of management of organizations and their coping with complexity, irrespective of the particular business sector, these specific fields of application can be extended to other areas, according to the interests of the participants.

Institutional Relations and Background

The Internet group is affiliated both with ISA [RC51](#) and [SCiO](#). RC51 is the Research Committee 51 of the International Sociological Association (ISA). It is one of the largest of the more than fifty Research Committees that, along with a large number of national sociological associations, constitute the ISA. SCiO - Systems and Cybernetics in

Organisations - is a UK-based society promoting in particular practical applications of sociocybernetics in the different kinds of organizations.

SCiO members are encouraged and supported by outreach activities to participate in this valuable and ambitious project. It offers a possibility to explore the sociocybernetics of complex organisations; to gain insights into how cybernetics and closely related disciplines can be used together; to further the understanding of the nature of organisations and of how they can function more effectively.

While maintaining close exchanges with both organizations and using the meetings and conferences both of SCiO and RC51 for face-to-face discussions and presentations of papers, the Internet Task Force will act independently from both. The focus will be on Internet communication to avoid time and resource constraints which usually go along with conferences.

To initiate this group, Bernd Hornung and John Raven will act as a preliminary founding committee to get activities started. It is expected, however, to establish at the forthcoming 12th International Conference of Sociocybernetics, Mérida, México, June 24-28, 2013, a more permanent coordinating group of three or four colleagues, as John Raven and Bernd Hornung will not be available for organizational tasks at long term.

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