

April 2006

## Managerial and Administrative Accidents

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### Recommended Citation

Maruyama, Magoroh (2006) "Managerial and Administrative Accidents," *Management Dynamics*: Vol. 6: No. 1, Article 7.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57198/2583-4932.1219>

Available at: <https://managementdynamics.researchcommons.org/journal/vol6/iss1/7>

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## MANAGERIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ACCIDENTS

**Magoroh Maruyama\***

With good intentions, managers and administrators may cause professional accidents by overloading, overcrowding, overriding or over-trusting. (1) They may overload themselves and their subordinates; (2) They may overcrowd their time table; (3) They may shortcut and override some necessary details which their subordinates or business partners have painstakingly made; (4) In communist or post-communist countries, they may over-trust “official” specialists without any system of quality control.

If you overload a truck, you cause accidents. Likewise, if you do any of the four “overs” listed above, you cause professional accidents which you only retrospectively repent after it is too late. Here are actual examples.

A newly elected editor of an established management journal wanted to create and implement several new feature serials consisting of invited articles. Each serial will appear at fixed intervals, and several serials will be timewise rotated in such a way that each issue of the journal will carry an article of only one serial. The editor invited me to write the inaugural article of one of the serials. At first, both he and I thought we had enough time: three months. But we ran into several complications. Initially he suggested that I write about the relationship between my several theories in 8000 words. I put a high priority on this article and finished my manuscript in two weeks. His reply was that it was too “terse” and I needed to add more explanations. It was terse because I had to compress several theories within the length limit: theory of heterogeneity and

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transculturality of individual cognitive types (HTICT); theory of growth of non-redundant complexity (NRC) in social and biological systems due to morphogenetic interaction among heterogeneous elements (MIHE). I re-wrote the manuscript entirely, by adding the required explanations but by shortening the summary of the theories and by relegating the details to the references. The editor thought this was worse. Therefore, I changed the topic and wrote a meta-level paper on sub-understanding due to dimension reduction into the cognitive space of the interpreter. My time was limited because I had to proof-read a multi-author monograph in a sociology journal. One of the authors died meanwhile and I had to proofread his chapter. Incidentally, the copy editor of the sociology monograph did a very accurate and speedy job in the error corrections, and the time between the end of my corrections and the actual publication date was less than one month, but I had to be in daily fax contact with the copy editor of the sociology journal during that time. After that was done, I worked on my manuscript on sub-understanding and sent it to the editor of the management journal.

By that time, it was three weeks before the manuscript deadline of the journal for the typesetter. I assumed that I made it in time. Then an incredible fiasco happened. The editor forwarded my manuscript to the typesetter, but did not include my figures. The typesetter had to improvise the figures from my text, and it went wrong: the figures were disfigured. The editor is apparently a non-graphic thinker, and completely ignored my figures. When the proofs came, already far behind the schedule, I was shocked. A 45 degree angle looked more like 30 degree angle, and a parabolic curve was shriveled, ugly and very unprofessional. The copy editor and I made desperate efforts in vain, by daily telephone calls and fax exchanges between California and England, across the time zone difference of eight hours. If the copy editor and I had one more week, I could have sent my original figures to her. But that possibility was precluded due to the time limit. My article was printed on time, but with disfigures,

which the editor dismisses as unimportant, because his cognitive type excludes graphic thinking.

The second example occurred in Hungary. A good friend of mine, a very solid ethologist, had become the Editor-in-Chief of a very scholarly journal in 2002. In the spring of 2002 he asked me to write an article for his journal. I wrote and sent to him a manuscript "Time lag differences between disciplines". In June 2002, after my manuscript reached his office, I received the following letter from the managing editor of the journal together with a Hungarian translation :

(The Editor-in-Chief) kérésére jelenkezem Önnél, a cikkének a budapesti (name of the journal) című folyóiratba szánt, magyar nyelvű fordításával. Kérem, ellenőrizze a szöveget, és küldje vissza hozzám, Tisztelettel.

**[At the request of our Editor-in-Chief, I enclose a translation intended for our (name of the journal). Please check it for errors and return it to me. Respectfully,]**

This put the responsibility of error corrections squarely on my shoulders. I could read Hungarian very slowly with a dictionary, but was not fluent in it. But I accepted this request gladly, because it would give me an opportunity to improve my knowledge of the Hungarian language. But even with my rudimentary knowledge of the language, I could immediately notice not only translation errors but also arbitrary change of words which changed the meaning completely. For example, "inbreeding" was translated as "inborn"; "private (nongovernmental) foundations" became "Uncle Sam" (governmental); "territorial boundary shifts" (such as happened several times in Alsace between France and Germany, or in Transylvania between Romania and Hungary) was translated as "migration of population" (across unchanged boundaries). If the translator could think logically, he would not have made such gross mistakes. I made a total of 218 corrections, all in Hungarian, and many of them with my detailed comments which I wrote

also in Hungarian to make sure the translator would understand. My corrections were not in elegant Hungarian, but I expected the copy editor to use more elegant words as long as I got the correct meaning across. One serious error, for which the translator was not completely to blame because he simply perpetuated a major error which his predecessors kept repeating since the 1940s, was to translate “causal loops” (which should be translated as “okozati karikak”) as “random cycles” (véletlen ciklusok). Causal loops are exactly the opposite of random cycles. How this obvious error was perpetuated over 60 years is a mystery. Perhaps communists were not supposed to question previous “official” errors. I inquired about this to Edward Teller, the famous nuclear physicist, who was then still alive in Standord, and Andrew Grove, one of the originators of Intel, but they found no satisfactory answer. Both Teller and Grove were born and grew up in Hungary (Their names in Hungarian were Teller Ede, and Gróf András, respectively). Teller was born in Budapest in 1908, became USA citizen in 1941, and died in 2003. Grove was born in Budapest in 1938, moved to USA in 1956 in the year of the Hungarian Revolution against Russians, and is still active). I sent back my 218 corrections to the Hungarian journal, and inquired about the qualification of the translator. The Chief Editor wrote me back that the translator was an “official” translator, and made a derogatory remark that that my corrections were archaic and inelegant. I reminded him that the managing editor's letter put the responsibility of proof corrections on my shoulders. He said that it was simply a formal letter which was sent to all (Hungarian) authors. He implied that I did something unnecessary, undesirable and presumptuous. I pointed out that he should have a different form letter, which did not require proofreading in Hungarian. He was an excellent scholar but an inexperienced administrator. Nevertheless, he promised that he would have a third party look at the translation. The third party turned out to be a social scientist. But he did not check the translation against my original. All he did was to read my corrections and confirm that they were inelegant. I was shocked by the lack of the sense of quality check in accuracy. Obviously it was a

habit from the communist system. The chief editor wrote to me a sarcastic letter saying that his idea of requesting my article was crazy. I wrote back and said that it would not have been crazy if the translator did it right. He suggested that I could withdraw my manuscript. I replied that he should keep my manuscript on the file of the journal until, perhaps in 50 years, Hungary produces decent translators, because my manuscript would not be obsolete in 50 or 100 years, and it would provide a good documentation not only on the time lag differences between disciplines in the second half of the 20th century but also on the hang-over of the communist system in Hungary at the beginning of the 21st century. He is a nice guy and an excellent researcher, but is caught in the transition between systems.