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Braving the Winds of Change in Policyland

by William C. Howell
HFES President

A change in administrations always hits the nation's Capitol like a hurricane, totally disrupting the policy landscape and throwing everyone connected with it into a state of chaos. It's a time when live issues can get killed, dead ones resurrected, and a lot of others thrown up for grabs. Having witnessed a couple of these upheavals from inside the Beltway, I can assure you it's not a pretty sight, and the present transition is no exception. Among the issues swirling around Capitol Hill these days are several that involve human factors/ergonomics (HF/E), so I'll fill you in on what I've learned about them and what HFES is doing on each. In the process I also want to illustrate why setting and following a course in the face of such policy crises and opportunities is no simple matter for an outfit like ours.

The Bioethics Issue

The first issue centers on a report draft currently in circulation for comment by a National Bioethics Advisory Committee that Clinton appointed back in 1995 to address public concern over potential abuses in genetics research. The report calls for measures to protect human participants that, while perhaps reasonable for *biomedical* research, would constitute a huge and irrelevant burden for the mainly benign *behavioral* kind. If adopted, these measures would greatly exacerbate the current problems that many of our scientists encounter with Institutional Review Boards and would seriously hamper – if not eliminate – some HF/E research.

The reason the measures were written that way is simply because behavioral researchers weren't invited to the drafting party – an oversight, unfortunately, that's all too common in Policyland. Hence our only recourse is to complain as loudly as we can about the omission and point out the potential ramifications. The current "comment period" offers us that opportunity, and HFES is joining the behavioral science community in grabbing it. We feel comfortable in doing so because we're confident that, although probably unaware of the threat, the HFES membership would strongly endorse it.

The Election Reform Issue

The second issue involves a vigorous debate over election reform that is being waged in the aftermath of the 2000 Florida

voting debacle. Speculation runs high over what form it will take, but the consensus is that *something* will happen. Here, unlike the bioethics case, there's an opportunity to be proactive – to reach the station before the train leaves, and to make sure that wherever it's headed, HF/E has a seat. However, seats on policy trains aren't easy to come by, and in the jockeying for position, little guys like HFES usually get trampled – that is, unless they join forces with a brute or two. Therefore, we're working with the 159,000-member American Psychological Association and several other behavioral/social science organizations in pleading our case to the leadership of the Senate and House Rules Committees (where the smart money says this train will wind up). An HFES representative will also be participating in a Capitol Hill briefing that this consortium has scheduled.

Once again, we are confident in making these proactive moves because we can't imagine any HFES members objecting to the inclusion of HF/E considerations and expertise in the reframing of national election policy.

The Ergonomics Standards Issue

Finally, the OSHA Ergonomics Program Standard case illustrates vividly both the impact of the transition in administrations and the dilemma the Society faces in dealing with it. Here we have the rare situation in which HF/E *was* involved from the beginning and continues to be, but finds itself on both sides of a very bitterly fought, very public battle over federal regulations. In case you haven't been following it, the specific issue centers on whether our scientific evidence on work-related musculoskeletal disorders (like carpal tunnel syndrome and lower back injuries)

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Nomination Ballots Mailed

Ballots for nominating candidates for office and the Executive Council have been mailed to all full Members and Fellows. If you have not received your ballot by mid-March, please call Membership Services at 310/394-1811. Nominations are due *April 16, 2001*.



Items Wanted for Daily Newsletter

The HFES 2001 newsletter/on-site information editors are now accepting items for publication in the annual meeting newsletter, *HFES2001News*. Send your submissions to us at HFES2001News@hfes.org.

Topics may include descriptions of demonstrations, previews of panels, TG special session information, invited speakers, "Birds of a Feather" gatherings, recommendations for "Web Site of the Day" (resources to explore after the meeting), upcoming events, and other announcements.

The first issue is being assembled, and e-mail submissions are encouraged. If you would like to submit an article or help with the newsletter, send e-mail to HFES2001News@hfes.org. For other newsletter questions, please contact Newsletter Chair Jeff Lewin at Seagate Technology, 7840 Computer Ave. S., Bloomington, MN 55435; 952/844-8649; fax 952/844-5980; Jeffrey.E.Lewin@Seagate.com. Electronic submissions are preferred. If faxing, please use large sans-serif fonts.

If you are interested in advertising in the newsletter, please contact HFES Communications Director Lois Smith at 310/394-1811, lois@hfes.org.

Calling All Exhibitors

HFES invites companies providing publications, products, and services to exhibit at the 45th Annual Meeting in Minneapolis. The rate for a 10' x 10' booth is \$2000; \$750 for a tabletop. Coffee break and other sponsorships are available. Corporate sponsorships are welcome for any aspect of annual meeting support. For more details, contact Lois Smith in the HFES central office (310/394-1811, lois@hfes.org). ☒

Bulletin

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On-Line Consultants Directory

The HFES On-Line Directory of Human Factors/Ergonomics Consultants is now available at the Web site, <http://hfes.org>. Any visitor may search for a consultant or expert witness using a number of criteria, including name, specialty area, and location. There is no charge to search the directory.

HFES Members and Fellows are invited to place a listing; the cost is \$150 for 12 months for individuals and \$250 for companies. (A company must have two full HFES Members on staff full-time.) Listings include name and contact information, with links to e-mail addresses and Web sites, and specialty areas; they may also contain details about consultants' educational background and partial client list.

To place a listing, simply use the member log-in at the home page and follow the links. Once the listing is submitted, an invoice appears, which can be printed and sent with payment by mail or fax. Listings are activated within five business days of receipt of payment. Activated listings may be updated anytime. ☒

Call for Special Section Papers

By Michael Byrne and Wayne D. Gray
Special Section Editors

Manuscript submissions are invited for a special section of *Human Factors* entitled, "Quantitative Formal Models of Human Performance."

One of the goals of research in human factors is the prediction of human performance. Although verbal theories and empirical results clearly add to the science, they are not especially useful for quantitative performance prediction. Formal models, on the other hand, can be used to make specific quantitative predictions about human performance.

This special section will examine the use of quantitative formal models in understanding and predicting human performance in a human factors context. *Formal models* include both computational and mathematical models, and *human performance* is construed widely to encompass the full range of human performance including cognition, perception, motor control, and physical aspects of performance, such as biomechanics and anthropometrics. We are especially interested in models that span a broad range of performance; for example, those including vision, cognition, and manual control.

In addition, we explicitly acknowledge that human performance does not exist in a vacuum – it is a function of the tasks undertaken, artifacts used to perform the task, and environments in which it occurs. Thus we invite submissions that include formal models of the task, artifact, or environment. Models or modeling frameworks that jointly consider the human element, the

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task, and the artifacts/environment should be of special interest to the human factors community.

Please submit five copies of your manuscript by *October 1, 2001*, to Editor, *Human Factors*, "Models of Human Performance," P.O. Box 1369, Santa Monica, CA 90406-1369 USA. Please contact the special section editors at byrne@acm.org (Mike Byrne) or gray@gmu.edu (Wayne Gray) if you have any questions.

Human Factors Seeks Reviewers

HFES is seeking occasional reviewers for *Human Factors*. Reviewers provide invaluable service to the journal and the Society by evaluating new and revised manuscripts and offering thoughtful and constructive comments to authors. Consistently excellent performance will be rewarded with consideration for the Editorial Board. We invite any interested members and non-members, regardless of expertise area(s), to apply.

Reviewers can expect to review two to six manuscripts per year, depending on the number of submissions received in their topic areas. Generally, reviews are expected within four weeks. To apply, or for more information, please send a letter and curriculum vitae to Ellen Murphy, Communications Associate, HFES, P.O. Box 1369, Santa Monica, CA 90406-1369; fax 310/394-2410; e-mail ellen@hfes.org.

CHAPTER NEWS

Europe Chapter Exchange Program

By *K.-Peter Holzhausen*
HFES Europe Chapter President

The Europe Chapter has established a program designed to stimulate exchange between its members and human factors professionals in the United States. The program will enable chapter members to visit the United States for a limited time to attend conferences or other related events. The program will also help fund research and support student thesis projects and internships.

To achieve these goals, corporate sponsorship is of vital importance, and the chapter is proud to announce that Donald Vreuls and his VRC Corporation have donated \$10,000 to the program.

The chapter is still defining the first year of the exchange; however, it is expected that several students and chapter members will be able to visit participating organizations or conferences in the United States during 2001. Half the grant will be allocated for exchange between the United States and Europe, and students can expect a financial contribution of \$1,000. Other projects will be funded on an individual basis.

If you are interested in participating in the program or in making a donation, contact Dick de Waard, secretary of the HFES

Europe Chapter, at d.de.waard@ision.nl. For more information about the HFES Europe Chapter, visit <http://www.ision.nl/users/hfesec/>.

IN THE NEWS

HFES members **John W. Gosbee** (Veteran's Health Administration National Center for Patient Safety), **Ronald G. Shapiro** (IBM Corp.), and **Corinna E. Lathan** (AnthroTronix, Inc.) gave presentations at a late-October 2000 meeting held in Phoenix, Arizona, convened by the Latiolais Leadership Program, College of Pharmacy, Ohio State University. According to the article in *Ohio Script News* (Ohio State University College of Pharmacy Alumni Society), the purpose of the meeting was to bring together medical practitioners to learn about the limits of human performance, human factors engineering, and the application of this knowledge to improving medical use safety. Audience members included physicians, nurses, and pharmacists, as well as professionals from the pharmaceutical industry. Proceedings are being prepared; for information, contact Philip J. Schneider at 614/292-1514, fax 614/292-1335, schneider.5@osu.edu; <http://latiolais.org>.

NEWS

NIOSH Grant Applications

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health is accepting applications for grants supporting research on the health and safety implications of long hours of work, overtime shiftwork, or demanding work schedules. Studies of the impact of work schedule redesign on the occurrence of traumatic injuries, musculoskeletal and cardiovascular diseases, and workplace stress are also appropriate. Applications are due *April 18, 2001*. For more information, contact Roger Rosa, NIOSH, Office of the Director, Room 715H, Hubert H. Humphrey Bldg., 200 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, D.C. 20201; 202/205-7856, fax 202/260-4464; rrosa@cdc.gov, or visit the NIOSH Web site at <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-OH-01-006.html>.

FundSource Web Site

The American Psychological Association's Decade of Behavior has launched a unique, searchable Web site – the first of its kind exclusively devoted to funding opportunities for behavioral and social science disciplines. Known as FundSource, the site allows two kinds of searches. The first can be conducted using the FundSource database, which includes names, contact information, Web site URLs, and a short description of funding areas and programs for each entry (foundation, agency). A search of this database by name of organization, research discipline(s), or research topic(s) will provide a list of those database entries for foundations or agencies relevant to the search terms.

The second type of search, WebSearch, is of the actual Web

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sites of relevant funders, focused on their information about programs and opportunities. For this search, you may enter terms, phrases, or names, and you will be provided with links to the relevant funding information.

At present, the site concentrates on funding for research activities. As it expands, it will include information on training opportunities at all levels (graduate students, post docs, and early career fellowships, among others), on resources for improving grant-writing skills, and on funding for sabbatical opportunities. Visit FundSource at <http://www.decadeofbehavior.org>.

Source: Science Directorate of the American Psychological Association, Psychological Science Agenda, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2001, p. 4.

Patient Safety Program

The Department of Defense Patient Safety Center at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology was established to develop a nonpunitive Patient Safety Program within the Military Health System. One of its most important tasks is to collect and analyze patient safety information from all of the military medical treatment facilities. For certain serious adverse events, a root cause analysis will be performed by an interdisciplinary team of investigators who will focus primarily on systems and processes rather than on individual performance.

The investigation team will ask "What?" and "Why?" until all aspects of the process are reviewed and all contributing factors are identified. They will identify what changes need to be made in systems and processes through education, redesign, or development to improve performance and reduce the risk of future injuries to patients.

For more information, visit the Department of Defense Web site at <http://www.afip.org/Departments/PSC/index.html>.

International Journal

Universal Access, an interdisciplinary refereed journal, is seeking submissions addressing the accessibility, usability, and acceptability of information technology. The journal publishes research concerning the design, development, evaluation, use, and impact of information technology, as well as articles on standardization, policy, and other nontechnological issues that facilitate and promote universal access. For more information, contact Alfred Hofmann, Executive Editor, Springer-Verlag, Tiergartenstrasse 17, D-69121 Heidelberg, Germany; +49 6221 487 599, fax +49 6221 487 588; hofmann@springer.de, <http://www.springer.de/comp/lncs/index.html>.

OBSSR Web Site

The National Institutes of Health's Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research has launched a new Web site that provides information for scientists interested in learning more about

specific funding opportunities in the behavioral and social sciences. The site also provides information about policies regulating research and training supported by the NIH. Visit <http://obssr.od.nih.gov>.

Source: Science Directorate of the American Psychological Association, Psychological Science Agenda, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2001, p. 17.

California Workplace Injuries Down

The number of job-related nonfatal injuries and illnesses reported in California during 1999 decreased from 6.7 per 100 workers in 1998 to 6.3 in 1999. This rate marks a record low since such statistics were first collected in the 1970s.

A similar downward trend was also reported in the national figures. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the total number of injuries and illnesses reported in U.S. workplaces for 1999 was 5.7 million, resulting in a rate of 6.3 cases per 100 workers, down from 6.7 in 1998.

Only one California sector (finance, insurance, and real estate) recorded a slight increase in injuries and illnesses, up from 2.7 per 100 workers to 3.1. More than half of the nonfatal occupational illnesses reported were disorders associated with repeated trauma. For more information, visit <http://www.bls.gov>. ☒

SHORT COURSES

Occupational Health and Safety at the Margins: Exploring Reasonable Accommodation in the Workplace (April 17, 2001). Center for Public Health Education and Outreach, University of Minnesota, School of Public Health, Box 197 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455; 612/626-4515; <http://www1.umn.edu/mcohs/>.

Ergonomics in the Workplace: Application to Work-Related Musculoskeletal and Nerve Disorders (May 1, 2001). Department of Environmental Health, University of Washington, Box 357234, Seattle, WA 98195-7234; 206/543-3199, fax 206/543-9616; ehadmin@u.washington.edu, <http://depts.washington.edu/envhlth/>.

Introductory Ergonomics (May 14-16, 2001) and **Ergonomics Job Analysis and Design Workshop** (May 16-18, 2001). Department of Engineering Professional Development, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 432 N. Lake St., Madison, WI 53706; 608/263-2061, fax 608/263-3160; custserv@epd.engr.wisc.edu; <http://epdweb.engr.wisc.edu>.

Applied Ergonomics, Part I – Low Back and Part II – Upper Extremity (June 4-8, 2001). Arun Garg, College of Engineering and Applied Science, P.O. Box 784, Milwaukee, WI 53201-0784; 414/229-6240, fax 414/229-6958; arun@uwm.edu, http://ergonomics.uwm.edu/Applied_Ergonomics.html. ☒

Color Imaging Conference

Abstracts are invited for the Ninth Color Imaging Conference, to be held November 6–9, 2001, in Scottsdale, Arizona. Topical areas include color science, human color vision and psychophysics, color in computer graphics, and virtual reality. Abstracts are due *April 1, 2001*, and electronic submissions are strongly encouraged. Contact the Society for Imaging Science and Technology, 7003 Kilworth Ln., Springfield, VA 22151; 703/642-9090, fax 703/642-9094; info@imaging.org, http://www.imaging.org/conferences/cic9/.

HWWE 2001

The international congress on Humanizing Work and Work Environment will be held December 11–14, 2001, in Powai, India. Abstracts are invited for topics such as consumer ergonomics, accident and injury prevention, ergonomics for the disabled and elderly, cognitive ergonomics, and industrial ergonomics. Abstracts are due *April 30, 2001*. Contact G. G. Ray, Conference Secretary, HWWE-2001, Industrial Design Center, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Powai, Mumbai 400 076, India; ergoasia@idc.iitb.ernet.in, ggray@idc.iitb.ernet.in; http://ergoasia.virtualave.net. ☒

CALENDAR

- ★ **AOTA's Annual Conference & Exposition**, April 19–22, 2001, Philadelphia, PA. American Occupational Therapy Association, P.O. Box 31220, Bethesda, MD 20824-1220; 301/652-2682, fax 301/652-7711; confmeet@aota.org, http://www.aota.org.
- ★ **Safety in Action 2001**, May 1–3, 2001, Melbourne, Australia. Australian Exhibitions and Conferences Pty. Ltd., Level 2, 267 Collins St., Melbourne, VIC 3000 Australia; +03 9654 7773, fax +03 9654 5596; safety@aec.net.au, http://www.aec.net.au.
- ★ **IIE Annual Conference 2001**, May 20–23, 2001, Dallas, TX. Institute of Industrial Engineers, 25 Technology Park, Norcross, GA 30092; 800/494-0460, 770/449-0460, fax 770/441-3295; http://www.iienet.org/annual2001.htm.
- ★ **American Industrial Hygiene Conference and Exposition (AIHce) 2001**, June 2–7, 2001, New Orleans, LA. American Industrial Hygiene Association, 2700 Prosperity Ave., Suite 250, Fairfax, VA 22031; 703/849-8888, fax 703/207-3561; http://www.aiha.org/conf.html.
- ★ **ISOES 2001 Conference**, June 4–7, 2001, Fairfax, VA. International Society for Occupational Ergonomics and Safety, 1503 Inlet Ct., Reston, VA 20190; 703/689-9619, fax 703/689-9637; isoess@biz-comm.com, http://isoess.org.
- ★ **ASSE Annual Conference and Exposition**, June 8–16, 2001, Anaheim, CA. American Society of Safety Engineers, 1800 E. Oakton St., Des Plaines, IL 60018; 847/699-2929, fax 847/768-3434; customerservice@asse.org, http://www.asse.org/annual.htm.

45th Annual Meeting of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society, October 8–12, 2001, Minneapolis, MN. Hosted by the Upper Midwest Chapter. HFES, P.O. Box 1369, Santa Monica, CA 90406-1369; 310/394-1811, fax 310/394-2410; lois@hfes.org, http://hfes.org. ☒

Braving the Winds of Change in Policyland

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is strong enough to justify ergonomics regulations, and whether the benefit of such rules to workers would outweigh the cost to employers.

To resolve the former question, Congress commissioned an in-depth review of the scientific literature by a distinguished National Research Council panel, but the Clinton folks didn't wait for the answer. Fearing how the election might turn out, they pushed through the OSHA ergonomics rule just before leaving town. The Bush people now want to rescind it before it goes into effect in October. The problem is, the NRC report appeared in the interim, and to the dismay of the attack forces, it generally supports the scientific basis on which the rule rests. So the Republicans are dismissing the message by trashing the messenger – as appropriate and objective a panel of experts as one could possibly find. I know that, because I chaired the NRC Committee on Human Factors, which, along with the Institute of Medicine, oversaw their selection, and we made sure all relevant disciplines and perspectives were well represented.

Begging to differ, a senior member of the House committee that has jurisdiction over OSHA was quoted in the *Wall Street Journal* referring to the NRC panel as “a bunch of left-leaning eggheads,” adding that we should have chosen “businesspeople and real workers” for the job instead. Somehow the thought of “Harvey Hodcarrier” and “J. P. Megabucks” judging the merit of our scientific literature leaves me a bit cold, but temperature aside, this controversy illustrates a common “no-win” situation that the Society faces in dealing with public policy issues. For one thing, the term “ergonomics” has acquired such strong negative connotations inside the Beltway that our staunchest allies avoid it like the plague when pushing a “human factors” position on other issues. For another, the field looks bad because our members are taking strong public stances on *both* sides of this high-profile issue. And for still another, HFES can't take the strong position that both factions of our membership are demanding because there is clearly no consensus. Unfortunately, on issue after issue, the Society's split personality leaves us no other choice, and we are roundly criticized on all sides for our wimpy ways.

The HFES Policy Dilemma

Like many of you, I believe strongly that HFES must take advantage of policy opportunities when it can, and the bioethics and election reform issues that surfaced in the wake of the most recent storm have enabled us to do that. However, we will always be limited in our policy efforts by our size and the growing heterogeneity of our membership. We can deal with the problem by locking arms with compatible “big guys” and forging ahead – and we're doing so whenever possible. But the heterogeneity problem forces us to remain silent on policy issues that are often the most visible and important to our members and to society, like the OSHA ergonomics rule. All we can do is sit tight and try to ride out the storm. Like it or not, my friends, that's the down side of diversity. ☒

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FLASH!

Please help the Society save money by contacting the central office with change of address information or by updating your On-line Directory listing at <http://hfes.org>. Thank you!

ANNUAL MEETING DATES TO REMEMBER:

June 8

Author Kits Mailed

July 20

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