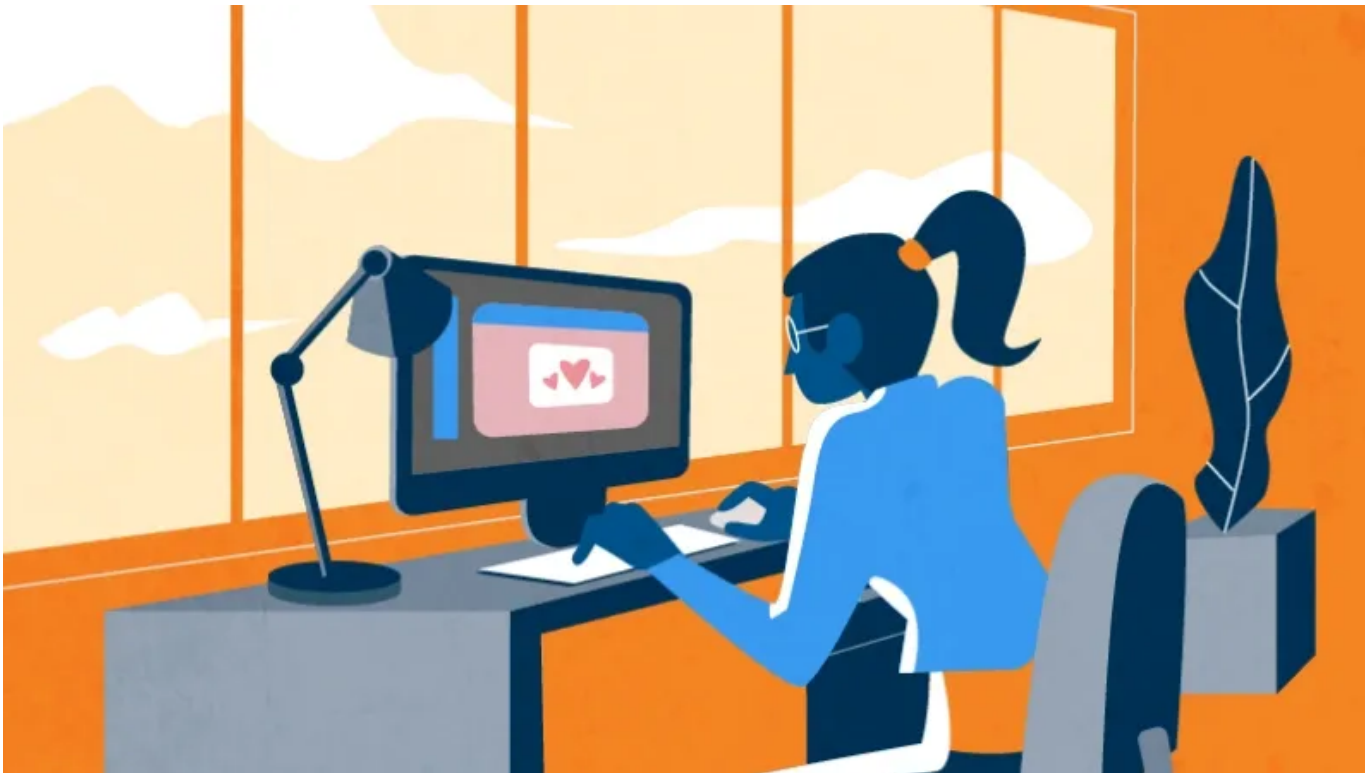




# HumanOps: In Dire Need Of Intellectual Humility

AVIMANYU BANDYOPADHYAY - 16 SEP 2021



In this [Rethinking DevOps](#) series, I have revisited the core idea of [DevOps](#) and relooked at its components with a new perspective. I talked about the [significance of documentation with equal priority as given to software itself](#) in the previous article.

In the sixth article of this series, I'm focusing on a very essential component not quite seen as a technical metric - us humans.

These humans can be developers, system administrators, engineers, salespersons, managers, directors, CEOs and basically anyone associated with a role in keeping a company's infrastructure smooth & operational.

# What is HumanOps?

[HumanOps](#) is an initiative by [StackPath](#) that focuses on the human side of running infrastructure.

I just mentioned that we humans are not quite seen as a technical metric, rather, humans should be seen as a biotechnical metric. To learn why, you must keep in mind the following mantras of HumanOps as laid down by StackPath's movement:

1. Humans build and fix systems.
2. Humans need downtime. Humans get tired and stressed, they feel happy and sad.
3. Systems don't have feelings yet. They only have [SLAs](#).
4. Humans need to switch off and on again.
5. The wellbeing of human operators impacts the reliability of systems.
6. Alert Fatigue == Human Fatigue
7. Automate as much as possible, escalate to a human as a last resort.
8. [Document everything](#). Train everyone. Save time.
9. Kill the blame/shame game.
10. Human issues are system issues.
11. Human health impacts business health.
12. Humans > systems; humans should control the systems, not the other way around

## Recognizing SysAdmins and DevOps Engineers as the human "component" of DevOps

A quick glance of the 12 mantras above make it clear about how HumanOps can be a contributing factor in the well-being of any industry. Recognizing them allows letting go of the [superhero culture](#) and help realize the ill effects of [burnouts](#) at work.

It is quite imperative that as long as the engineer's health is topnotch, so is the server uptime. At the best of our health, production error rate tends to be the lowest.

### HumanOps/mantra.rst at master · HumanOps/HumanOps

HumanOps deliberately highlights the importance of the teams running systems, not just the systems themselves...

 GitHub • HumanOps

## What is Intellectual Humility?

Intellectual humility should NOT be mistaken as general humility. Both are very different.

General humility or simply humility is the trait that we commonly know of that is defined by sincerity, honesty and selflessness. General humility, is also not a less important characteristic, but intellectual humility is something else.

Intellectual humility is the recognition of the fact that what, why, how, when, and where we believe a particular fact might be wrong. In other words, it is actually realizing that our systemic process of thinking might be incorrect.

Intellectual humility is possible only with people with an open mind, who are ready to change their beliefs provided the available evidence that contradicts their belief is relative, logical, and verifiable.

*Intellectual humility is simply “the recognition that the things you believe in might in fact be wrong,” as [Mark Leary](#), a social and personality psychologist at Duke University, tells me.*

### Intellectual humility: the importance of knowing you might be wrong

Why it's so hard to see our own ignorance, and what to do about it.

 Vox • Brian Resnick

Intellectual Humility or simply IH, is severely dependent on our capacity to learn and unlearn, through a continuous validation process - the willingness to accept that you might be wrong, however strong our belief system may be with respect to any topic of concern.

IH scores are also defined via a lack of intellectual overconfidence. If you want to learn more about your score with all metrics in detail, you can take an [Intellectual Humility Quiz](#) on your own.

## The Intellectual Spectrum

Intellectual Humility is in fact, part of an intellectual spectrum, where the other traits lie on the two sides of IH: On the left lies **intellectual servility** while on the right, lies **intellectual arrogance**.

The difference between general servility and intellectual servility is how you just saw the difference between general humility and intellectual humility. Similarly, general arrogance and intellectual arrogance also differ in the same manner.

## How Intellectual Humility can empower HumanOps

In the earlier days of technical, personality, and soft skill assessment, [Intellectual Quotient](#), more popularly known as IQ, used to be the deciding factor. Through the passage of time, the metric lost much of its esteemed significance when the importance of [Emotional Quotient](#) or EQ, gained traction.

### Links between intellectual humility and acquiring knowledge

(2020). Links between intellectual humility and acquiring knowledge. The Journal of Positive Psychology: Vol. 15, ...

Taylor & Francis • Elizabeth J. Krumrei-Mancuso

In today's time, Intellectual Humility or IH, is now the best soft skill assessment system, and can revolutionize the way Human Resources or HR functions in any industry! If potential employees with better IH scores get more preference, workplace health will automatically thrive and boom. This, ultimately leads to a positive end result on company profits.

## A new outlook towards work

I just mentioned profits. What is profit? Is it in terms of only money? Or are there other ways to look at it? A good way to start is just a simple observation of nature:

Take for example, [labor management at an ant colony](#). It is one of the best case studies you can have if you want to study how members in a group can efficiently organize themselves.

### Decoding the Remarkable Algorithms of Ants | Quanta Magazine

The biologist Deborah Gordon has uncovered how ant colonies search efficiently without central organization, ...

Quanta Magazine • Emily Singer

Now, what is profit to them? It is the surplus resources (food) they gather all year round. At some point of time, we humans too, used to consider the same thing as our sole profitable entity, but as time progressed, we started looking at profit with varied perspectives.

Before there was any money, there used to be a [barter system](#), with which someone could exchange one commodity for another with a fellow human being. So, these commodities, mostly food, used to be an earlier form of currency and probably the first form of local or foreign exchange!

Fast forward to today, we now have multiple forms of currency as money. But we as humans have lost our true purpose as to where our profit lies in the first place. Unlike ants, that continue to deliver exceptional organizational skills within their colony

since way longer than us, we humans collectively have lost those skills in an endless race against time.

Instead of focusing on quality of living, we humans have started focusing on quantity which is why we tend to have an endless urge to generate more and more money, sacrificing our work-force health (knowingly or unknowingly) while glorifying burnout and superhero culture. Corporate giants tend to get happier by looking at ever-increasing money flow graphs. But is that happiness ever going to be everlasting? Where does true happiness lie?

Let us take a moment and go back to our ant colony example. It turns out ants have feelings too!

*Ants don't have complex emotions such as love, anger, or empathy, but they do approach things they find pleasant and avoid the unpleasant. They can smell with their antennae, and so follow trails, find food and recognise their own colony.*

#### **Do ants have feelings?**

Ants brains are smaller and simpler than our own, but the collective hive mind of the colony could have feelings.

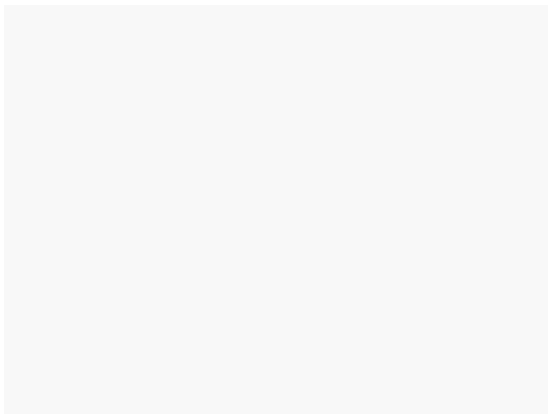
 BBC Science Focus Magazine • Susan Blackmore

A single ant only has around 250,000 neurons in its brain, compared to billions of them in a human's. So, where does real happiness lie? As it is very apparent, it is the act of generating profits that seems to deliver the happiness rather than the profits themselves. Why? Because once the profits are generated, the happiness gradually ceases to exist, and there is desire for more, bringing us back to the same profit generation activity.

*If all the humans in the world started working as a giant "ant" colony, how "profitable" would it be?*

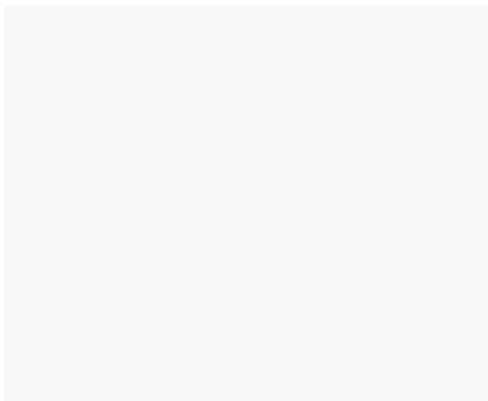
Therefore, it is our love for work that generates happiness.

If you try to represent it statistically, the following is how the general trend is:



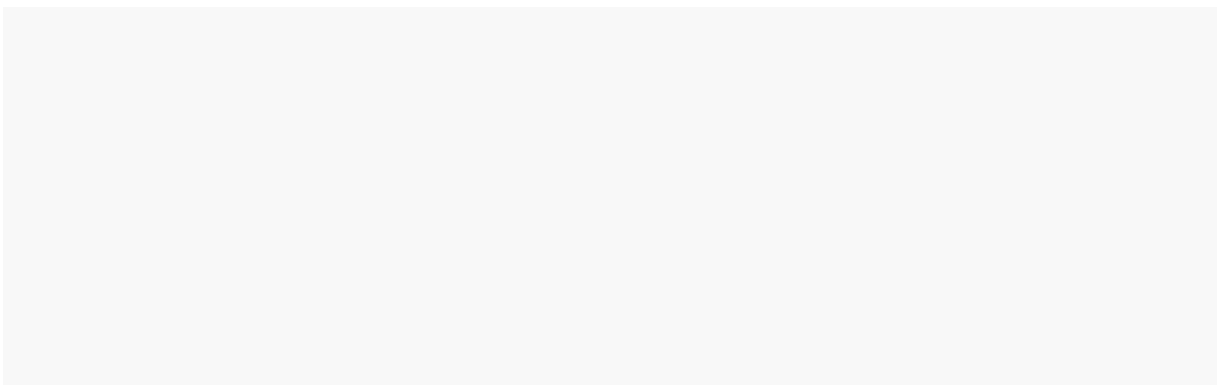
As we can see here, at some point in time, happiness will no longer tend to increase and will become constant.

On the other hand, if you follow the below statistic, life takes a different turn:



When you love your work and follow it out of pure passion, happiness becomes everlasting. Money, ambition or fame in this case, become the byproducts of work.

But wait, life isn't 2D, life is 3D. Therefore, happiness is our 3rd co-ordinate(or the Z axis):



Now if you consider any point within this "dimension", it is nothing but our watchful conscience!

It is upto us to decide on which point should we exist and strike a gentle balance among the three according to our preference. If I may cite again, Intellectual Humility can play a significant role in bringing this to realization.

### **Intellectual Humility - A Prerequisite For Great Leadership In Modern Workplaces - India Employer Forum**

Intellectual humility promotes a healthy work culture where there is no fear of displeasing the boss. It...

India Employer Forum • India Employer Forum

IH alone, can make our collective humanity bring in this gentle balance and realize the best version of ourselves at work.

### **Need for more initiatives that encourage kindness at work**

Did you know there is a movement online (not sysadmin day) that supports sysadmins? It is inspired from the DevOps idea and known as [HugOps](#), highly encouraged by HumanOps champion, [Hannah Foxwell](#).

Another initiative, called [Humans TXT](#), encourages knowing the people behind a website. It's a TXT file that contains information about the different people who have contributed to building a website.



At a time when [stress tends to increase with salary](#), apps such as [Ginger](#) can be a remarkable digital companion. But even then, there is nothing like [proper employee counselling](#). Thankfully companies have started to realize [the importance of counselling their employees](#).

*When the going gets tough, show empathy and appreciation for your SysAdmins.*

It is really good to know that a big company as [IBM now takes HugOps so seriously in workplace culture](#). This leaves a very noticeable and positive impact on employees in the long run.

## Concluding thoughts

As some final notes, I would like to reiterate that giant corporations should learn from smaller companies like [Zapier](#), [Ghost](#) and [Rocket.Chat](#), that scale rather high on the kindness factor! So, let's start to [be kind to sysadmins during downtime](#).

In addition to HumanOps, perhaps we humans also need DevHuman, which would develop us all into better humans at work, particularly through a regular assessment of our own selves through our IH scores from time to time.

On a personal note, I've been working **with** (honestly it's not a **for**) Chmod777 Media Tech (the home of [It's FOSS](#) and [Linux Handbook](#)) for almost two years now, and while at work, whenever [Abhishek](#) wishes to contact me on a day-to-day basis, at first, he always begins his conversation with, "Hi, How are you?".

That simple sentence, is the first step towards practicing kindness at work. It brings in a sense of belonging within the workplace among employees and a reminder...that before being an employee, you are first a human being. So, inquiring about how the human is at first, is definitely quite an agreeable HumanOps approach at work.

Because evolution is a continuous process, and since we are also part of the food chain and ecosystem, how would we operate as humans without our own personal development? When kindness and our ability to learn garners more importance rather than just current technical knowledge, better workplaces will continue to emerge throughout the entire industrial spectrum.

So, let me leave here a fundamental question:

*Should HumanOps be a subset of DevOps or should it be the other way round?*

If you please, do share your thoughts on this new outlook in the comments below.

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