

Business Ethics: A European Review

Special Issue Call for Papers

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Practical Wisdom and Management

Background

Practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is an approach to human decision-making developed by Aristotle, and that was favoured until the Enlightenment replaced it with a rule-based logic. *Phronesis* is tied to the individual and his or her character, and takes a long-term view of decision-making, while the Enlightenment project tries to replace character with rules or algorithms that apply to all individuals in specific situations. In the 19th century, economics and later management followed the Enlightenment logic, with the result that depersonalised theory largely has replaced character in management thinking. Management theory has been criticised for this by some of its most important contributors. For example, Warren Bennis and James O'Toole (2005) criticised business schools for having abandoned practice for the sake of journal article production as an end in itself; Sumantra Ghoshal (2005) called management theories evil; the then dean of the Rotman School, Roger Martin (with Moldoveanu 2008), said that MBA students are trained not to have questions but to unthinkingly apply tools they do not understand; while the current dean of the Harvard Business School wants to establish management as a profession, i.e., as having a moral code. Meanwhile, theorists like Henry Mintzberg and the late Peter Drucker have been saying similar things for over 50 years. Virtue ethics is able to address a number of issues in management, among them the depersonalisation and de-individualisation of the subject of research, short-termism, positivism, excessive theorising to the detriment of practice and the role of values in management research and practice.

Virtue ethics has experienced a comeback in moral philosophy since G.E.M. Anscombe's (1958) criticised modern moral philosophy for having a conversation about values without actually any notion of

what values are. It took a while for this increased interest in virtue ethics to reach management, but a number of special issues and many books have made the topic a vibrant research stream in business ethics. Business ethicists now sometimes argue that ethics is primarily about the individual—his or her character, and the virtues and vices that are part of it—and only secondarily about the acts that person performs (Alzola, 2015). Since Solomon (1992) began to argue for understanding management in terms of virtues, others have taken up the challenge. Although virtue ethics now has a role in some theorising about leadership and organisational behavior (Hartman, Koehn, Melé, Ferrero & Sison, Schwartz, Grint, Crossan & Mazutis), it has not yet expanded its presence into other areas of management research and is, through the advent of Big Data, threatened to be further marginalised. The purpose of this special issue is to show how the virtue ethics concept and particularly practical wisdom, can contribute to make the teaching, theorising, and the practice of management richer, thicker and more useful. We particularly encourage scholars that address these issues from a philosophical perspective, but also welcome contributions from other traditions.

Research questions and themes explored by potential contributions to this Special Issue could include, but are not limited to, the following aspects:

1. Which important questions in management theory could be better addressed by using virtue ethics?
2. How can virtue ethics contribute to management education and to the development of management as a profession?
3. Can new virtues emerge? Are there virtues specific to management?
4. Can older virtue theories, such as Aristotelian or Thomist theories, be applied in modern management practice?
5. How can practical wisdom counteract any problematic effects of rule-following?
6. What is the relationship between organisational culture and practical wisdom?
7. Can practical wisdom enhance our understanding of rationality and its role in management?

8. How does practical wisdom transfer or function across cultural boundaries in a world of increasing interconnections and globalization?
9. How important is practical wisdom for our understanding what a "good" manager is?
10. What is the role of practical wisdom in management education?

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15th January 2019

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Authors are strongly encouraged to refer to the BE:ER website and check the instructions on submitting a paper: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14678608/homepage/forauthors.html>. Questions about expectations, requirements, the appropriateness of a topic, etc., can be directed to the guest editors of the Special Issue.

Submission to the special issue is required through Manuscript Central by **15th January 2019**.

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