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In Search of Value Rationality and Wise Leadership

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Katalin Illes: In Search of Value Rationality and Wise Leadership

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This paper outlines the life journey of a Holocaust survivor who overcame the traumas of her teenage years and works for peace in the world. The author raises the question of one's individual responsibilities to stand for peace, reconciliation and being a force for good in the world. Using academia as a context it is proposed that in social sciences we need to shift our focus from quantitative measures to reviewing and promote values and purpose in society.

Following Flyvberg's rationale it will be argued that a clear, fundamental distinction needs to be made between instrumental/ scientific rationality and value rationality. Both of these rationalities are valuable and complement each other. However, the current imbalance between the two causes considerable harm and negatively influences our collective decision making both in education and in society at large.
The author believes that classic questions of phronesis (practical wisdom) are valuable not only for research but for all prudent decision making:
1. Where are we going?
2. Is this desirable?
3. What should be done?
4. Who gains and who loses; by which mechanism of power?
These are questions that wise leaders in all contexts tend to ask. It will be argued that introducing such questions in leadership education is timely and necessary.
By redressing the balance between instrumental rationality and value rationality in business education we have the opportunity to consciously start developing wise leaders. Creating space and time for character formation and discussing ethical dilemmas is a powerful way to equip course participants for the challenges of the workplace where high level of ethical awareness and strong virtues are necessary for wise decision-making.

The paper recommends small changes. When these are embedded in the culture they can make a big impact over time. Initiatives need to be specific and realistic to raise awareness about the institution's lived values and potentials. Only when we are clear of our purpose and aspire to give more of our virtuous selves are we fit and able to become and to develop wise leaders.

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Introduction

Recently I attended an event in London with the title: Peace in our Time. It was a public interview and a question and answer session with Eva Schloss, the 88-year-old Holocaust survivor. The interviewer asked questions about Eva's life from early childhood to the current days. Eva was grounded and dignified. She shared her life story with the openness and depth of a woman who has experienced, survived and overcame Hell on Earth.
When she and her mother were separated from her father and brother in Auschwitz her father said to her: "Eva, I cannot protect you any more but God will protect you." And He did.
Eva and her mother miraculously survived the death camp. She came out of the ordeal feeling depressed and sometimes even suicidal. She was very angry with God and with the world. She felt guilty for being alive and carried the trauma of the 6 million dead in her heart for forty years.
She did not talk; she did not want to share the humiliation and her physical and emotional suffering with anyone. Forty years have passed. Eva got married, gave birth to three daughters and on the surface her life started to look and feel fairly normal.
One day at a Holocaust memorial event someone asked her a question and the floodgates of her heart opened. She started to share the horrors she experienced in her teens. That sharing was a turning point in Eva's life. She realized that her authentic sharing could help others to learn, to develop their character and find the courage to stand up for what is right and stop evil in the world.
Sharing also enabled her to release, integrate and let go of the trauma and turn the energy of her anger into a force for good. From that turning point Eva devoted her life to promote peace and justice in the world.

I was deeply moved by Eva's account of her journey in life and I started to ask myself how I could make a contribution to reduce hatred and promote peace and decent human behaviour in the world.

I am an educator. As an academic I am privileged to interact with hundreds of young people every year. These young people come from all over the world seeking an education and an internationally recognized qualification from a UK university. They all have dreams, aspirations and plans when they arrive. What do we do individually and institutionally to help them to bring the best out of themselves and graduate not only with a degree but also with a strong and responsible character able to lead wisely, follow responsibly, stand up for what is right and promote peace in the world?

Over the past twenty years in business education I realized that we teach lots of facts and models to our students but we pay very little attention to shaping characters and developing virtues and morality. In the highly structured curricula there is very little room for identifying and working with individual needs and discussing purpose, meaning and what one means by living a happy and fulfilled life as a contributing member of society.

In this paper I shall outline the difference between instrumental and value rationalities and why we need to review what we appreciate in and expect from social sciences and business and management education. I shall argue with Flyvbjerg (2001) for a more value-driven and wisdom led education where students get opportunities for character development and are regularly exposed to ethical dilemmas.

The philosophical perspective of Buber is discussed and it will be suggested that wise leaders intuitively appreciate the crucial difference between 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' relationships and they know how to see the 'divine' in the Other. Unless we develop a mindset of respect towards others we shall not be able to move beyond the divisive mentality of 'them and us', of moral disengagement and keep objectifying those who are different from us.

I shall offer a brief overview of the latest developments in leadership research and highlight the concepts that consider leadership as a continuously evolving co-created social phenomenon. I shall argue that it is our responsibility to put the emphasis on wisdom and character development in business and management education. In my view changing the emphasis in business and management education is a vital first step in preparing responsible young leaders for facing the huge challenges in the world with wisdom and open mindedness.

Instrumental Rationality and Value Rationality

In his seminal work "Making Social Science Matter" Flyvberg (2001) argues that social sciences should not copy the methodologies and measurements of natural sciences. We need to appreciate the valuable differences between the two and make full use of the advancements in both fields in our educational processes.

Flyvbjerg (2001) developed a strong argument for basing social science on the foundation of the Aristotelian concept of phronesis. For Aristotle *phronesis* is a "true state, reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad for man." (Aristotle, 1976. 1140a24 - 1140b12). "*Phronesis* goes beyond both analytical, scientific knowledge (*episteme)* and technical knowledge or know-how (*techne)* and involves judgements and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor" (Flyvbjerg, 2001. p. 2). As *phronesis* is commonly involved in social science, the attempts to reduce social science and theory either to *episteme* or *techne,* or comprehend them in those terms, are misguided.

Phronesis or practical wisdom is particularly important because it balances instrumental-rationality with value-rationality. Such balancing is necessary for sustained happiness in society. Current society and organisational life put far too much emphasis on instrumental-rationality, measurements for the sake of measurements and short-term solutions without considering the long-term, often negative consequences.

"Just as social science has not been able to contribute with Kuhnian normal science and predictive theory to scientific development, so natural science has had little to offer to the reflexive goals, values, and interests that is a precondition for an enlightened development in any society" (Flyvberg, 2001. p. 53.).

Where natural science is weak social science is strong and vice versa and they can complement each other in meaningful ways. Unfortunately over the centuries the emphasis was fully on scientific and instrumental rationality and value-rationality was gradually pushed to the margins or was totally ignored even within social sciences. It is high time to start redressing the balance and give more prominence to value-rationality at least in business education and start building bridges between scientific knowledge (episteme; know why), technical skills or craftsmanship (techne; know how) and 'prudence' or practical wisdom (phronesis).

"Phronesis is that intellectual activity most relevant to praxis. It focuses on what is variable, on that which cannot be encapsulated by universal rules, on specific cases. Phronesis requires an

interaction between the general and the concrete; it requires consideration, judgement and choice. More than anything else, phronesis requires experience." (Flyvberg, 2001. p. 57.)

Flyvberg takes us back to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle and clearly demonstrates how universal rationality started to be valued more and more as the oral traditions were gradually replaced by writing. Although Socrates originally placed himself on the side of logic and universal rationality, he ended up questioning the value of this rationality. Plato, who was his student could not accept his teacher's conclusion that nobody knew anything. He continued to search for universals and became the founder of Western philosophy and theoretical science. Aristotle, who was Plato's student disagreed with his teacher and argued that when studying human activities we cannot be satisfied with focusing only on the universals. When studying human activity one needs to practice phronesis and focus on values as a starting point in practice. Aristotle felt strongly that human behaviour could be best understood through specific cases and by studying specific examples.

Flyvberg argues further that "Social scientists do not have a theory (rules and laws) for how the people they study determine what counts as an action, because the determination derives from situationally defined (context-dependent) skills, which the objects of study are proficient and experts in exercising, and because theory –by definition- presupposes context-independence." (Flyvberg, 2001. p.42)

Personal experience is vital to learning particularly when one wants to move from the rule-governed analytical rationality to the intuitive, holistic and synchronous performance of tacit skills. The Dreyfus model of learning (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986) offers the following five levels of progression:
1. Novice
2. Advanced beginner
3. Competent performer
4. Proficient performer
5. Expert

At the first three levels of learning analytical rationality is used. Facts, figures and rules are important at the initial stages of learning. But the highest level of learning can only be achieved by the learner's own experience as practitioner of specific skills. At this level the learner applies his/her judgement and assesses the most appropriate action intuitively. At proficiency level one understands and organises the task intuitively and when necessary reflects analytically over what will happen. At an expert level one's performance is effortless. It is a level of virtuosity where one just intuitively knows what to do or how best to complete a task in a given situation.

Flyvberg believes that in social sciences reality is continuously changing and co-created so each phenomenon is context dependant and need to be considered individually. This is in line with the phenomenologist views of Husserl (1960). Husserl identified the concept of 'life-world'. A life-world is intersubjective and it comes out of our directly lived experiences, prior to all our thoughts about it. This is the reality that we experience with all of our senses before we reflect upon these experiences and analyse them.

"All of our concepts and representations, scientific and otherwise, necessarily draw nourishment from the indeterminate realms, as the physicist analysing data is still nourished by the air she is breathing, by the feeling of the chair that supports her and the light flooding the window, without her being particularly conscious of these participations. The life-world is

thus peripherally present in any thought or activity we undertake. Yet whenever we attempt to explain this world conceptually, we seem to forget our active participation within it." (Abram, 2017. p.40.)

Husserl realized that the assumption of objectivity had led to an almost total eclipse of the life-world in the modern era, to a nearly complete forgetting of this living dimension in which all of our endeavours are rooted. In striving to attain a finished blueprint of the world, the sciences had become frightfully estranged from our direct human experience. The specialized and technical discourses had lost any obvious relevance to the sensuous world of our ordinary engagements. "The consequent impoverishment of language, the loss of a common discourse tuned to the qualitative nuances of living experience, was leading, Husserl felt, to a clear crisis in European civilization. Oblivious to the quality-laden life-world upon which they themselves depend for their own meaning and existence, the Western sciences, and the technologies that accompany them, were beginning to blindly overrun the experiential world – even, in their errancy, threatening to obliterate the world-of-life entirely." Abram, p. 41)

This objectification of the world and everything in it is painfully noticeable in the fragmented and often exploitative nature of human relationships. When we look at an other human being as an object that we can gain benefit from then the relationship is seriously out of balance even before it started and there is no hope to develop respectful, interconnected human connections.

Seeing the Human Essence and the Divine in the Other

Martin Buber (1878-1965) the German-Jewish philosopher, argues that "deep responsibility is a human response in everyday life to the signs of eternal Thou, although it is difficult for us as modern human beings to hear them" (Margolin, 2013 p. 77).

In the beginning of his seminal work "I and Thou" Buber states that:
 "The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude.
The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he speaks.
The basic words are not single words but word pairs.
One basic word is the word pair I-You.
The other basic word is the word pair I-It; but this basic word is not changed when He or She takes the place of It.
Thus the I of man is also two fold.
For the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It." (Buber, 1970 p. 53).

Buber believes that these two kinds of relationships hold true for any relationship of the self and the world including relationships with other people, with nature and the spiritual world. There is a major difference between these two attitudes. In the I-You relationship the I and the Other are both fully there as equals and whole. "The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being. The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being." (Buber 1970 p.54.) The I-It relationship is based on the differentiation in the world and related to the usefulness of the relationship to the individual. The I-It relationship is what Kant described between the subject and the object. However, the I-You relationship is something rather different because through this relationship man is able to step out of himself. For Buber the "I-You" is a bridge to modern man's concept of God.

Margolin (2013 p. 80.) offers the following quote: "When one of his students asked Buber: "What does an atheist like me do if he can't find the Thou? If I gaze in wonder at the universe

but still can't find a Thou there?" Buber replied: "The fact that you don't hear the Thou doesn't mean there isn't broadcasting. Simply that your receiver is not yet turned on."
This means that for Buber the eternal Thou is always present, though not everyone can hear the Thou."

In his essay "Dialogue" Buber explains his views on responsibility. For him responsibility is how one responds to the signs coming into one's life via human beings, nature or the spiritual world. When one is too absorbed in oneself and the receiver in not turned on it is easy to miss the calls and the signs trying to enter into one's life.

Buber claims that the meeting with God depends on the human mind. For him God is not the creation of the human mind and one's meeting with the divine depends on the quality of one's inner intentions, quality of thoughts and overall life in the world.
"To Buber's mind, God is present where there is an I-Thou relationship as free as possible from the absolute control of the I-It relationship that analyzes and divides reality into its components." (Margolin, 2013 p.83.)

In the more and more fragmented and alienated world Martin Buber's thoughts and profound statements are a rich source for reflection and discussion. When one's attitude is 'I-It' the other is objectified. When the attitude is 'I-You' we stand in relation to the other. This clear distinction sheds some light on one's moral agency, self-regulation or disengagement of moral agency. These are the concepts that we explore in the next part of the paper by discussing Albert Bandura's research on social cognitive theory and moral disengagement.

Moral Disengagement – Why do we disregard the Other?

Albert Bandura (2016) challenges the theories suggesting that human behaviour resides with the individual or with the environment. He rejects all unidirectional causation and proposes a three-way interactive and dynamic connection. He argues that moral agency is either inhibitive or proactive. The inhibitive form stops one from behaving inhumanely and "the proactive form, grounded in a humanitarian ethic, is manifested in compassion for the plight of others (Bandura, 2016 p. 1-2.). In his seminal work, the 'social cognitive theory' he argues for a triadic codetermination and suggests that human functioning is a product of interplay of personal influences, the behaviours individuals engage in and the environmental forces that impact on them (Bandura, 1986).

The personal determinants include biological factors, competencies, belief systems, values, goals, attitudes, emotional states and self-conceptions. These factors influence how one perceives the environment and how one acts in it. (Bandura, 2016).

The second contributor is the actual behaviour that can take physical, social or emotional forms. Behaviour can alter the environmental conditions and individuals can trigger stereotypical reactions from the social environment regardless of what they do or say based on their gender, race, age, ethnicity and physical characteristics.

The third contributor is the environmental influences. Social cognitive theory makes a distinction between imposed, selected and created environments. The imposed environment impinges on individuals whether they like it or not. Although one cannot control such an environment one can decide how to respond or react to it. In Bandura's view the environment is mainly a potentiality and "does not come into being until it is selected and actualized by the

actions that people take" (Bandura, 2016 p.7.). Different people interact with the same environment in different ways. Some take advantage of the enabling and positive aspects of the environment others get entangled in the aversive and debilitating aspects of the same environment. People also select and create their environments. It is particularly true in the age of technological advancements when social networks and virtual, online environments become more and more part of one's daily life and reality.

Bandura argues that efficacy beliefs also shape people's expectations. Efficacy beliefs determine how people view opportunities and challenges. Individuals with low self-efficacy beliefs are easily convinced of possible negative outcomes and they quite quickly give up trying. Resilient belief on the other hand is a highly adaptive resource both in change and self-development. Bandura warns that agentic capabilities do not come with a built in moral awareness or value system and wrongdoers can have high efficacy and cause a lot of harm.

Theories of human agency focus primarily on the individual, however, Bandura distinguishes between individual, proxy and collective agencies. Moral disengagement operates on all three levels of agency. Individuals tend to "sanitize or sanctify detrimental activities that are within their sphere of control and shift the responsibility for the activities elsewhere in the chain of command." (Bandura, 2016. p. 13.) Proxy agency is often used by organisations to shield themselves from controversial agencies they promote. These proxy agencies are often pretend to be a grass-root voice of the public.

There is no universally accepted moral law or code of conduct. Most moral theories focus on the cognitive aspects of moral behaviour. However, very little research had been done to understand how moral standards are converted to moral conduct. Bandura's research offers many illustrations and rich examples of the irregularities between one's proclaimed moral standards and actions. Moral mandates are often overridden by emotions, social pressure or different kinds of incentives.

Individuals self-construct their moral standards, they draw from a variety of sources, influenced by many factors and do not always practice what they preach. The same individual can follow different moral standards in different settings or in different activities not necessarily even being aware of these inconsistencies.

Bandura's overarching question is: How people do harm and live with themselves? His answer is that it happens through moral, social and economic justification by cognitively reconstructing morality and creating a "just cause" where the end justifies the means (Bandura, 2016).

Language is a powerful tool and systematically used for reconstructing morality. Detrimental activities are often expressed in euphemistic terms. There is a rich literature on the language of non-responsibility and sanitized language (e.g. Gambino, 1973). Professor Gerald Grow (2012) offers the following tips for good euphemistic writing: "put it in the passive voice and delete the agent of the actions; inflate the terminology that does not add meaning; build in noun strings; add a qualifier of uncertain relation to the original statement; add noun strings and terminology to the qualifier; separate related words; equivocate and obfuscate; cover your tracts and make yourself look good." (quoted in Bandura, 2016 p.54).

Advantageous comparison is another technique that is used to inflate wrong doing. Skillful framing can make the lesser evil look almost righteous. Displacement of responsibility is also

a frequent practice when one is obscuring or minimizing one's role in the wrong doing. 'I only followed orders' is a classic response in that context.

One can deny, distort or disregard the harmful effects of one's acts and victims can be dehumanized to justify wrong doing. This latter approach is particularly powerful since hurting or disregarding the needs of another human being with the same basic needs as one's own is rather difficult. Recognizing similarities between ourselves and the other triggers compassion and empathy.

Psychological research emphasizes that the worst can be brought out of good people when other individuals are dehumanized. Research also suggests that when conflicts and 'enemies' are humanized then one tends to develop compassion and empathy towards them.
A powerful way of humanising the other is to move away from abstract generalised concepts and focus on individual cases and start looking at the images and journeys of other human beings.

Emerging Concepts in Leadership

Scandals and the misbehaviour of leaders are regularly on the news so it is not surprising that leadership in general has not got a very good reputation. There is no shortage of definitions, lists of qualities leaders need or memoirs of leaders who are keen to share their perspectives with readers. These in themselves do not improve the quality of leadership around us.

There is a growing consensus among researchers that the dynamics of 'leading' people is a relational, continuously evolving and co-created social phenomenon. The outcome is influenced not only by the actions and behaviour of the leader but also by the input of the followers, the influence of the purpose and the overall environment.

Leadership-as-Practice captures the fact that leadership can only be meaningfully studied in practice, in real time as it happens, even if the outcome is not producing universally applicable results. Raelin (2016: 27) argues: "The foundation of the leadership-as-practice approach is its underlying belief that leadership occurs as a practice rather than reside in the traits or behaviors of individuals. A practice is a coordinative effort among participants who choose through their own rules to achieve a distinctive outcome". Accordingly, leadership-as-practice is less about what one person thinks or does and more about what people may accomplish together. It is thus concerned with how leadership emerges and unfolds through day-to-day experience.

The expectations from leaders are high and there are calls for 'good leaders' (Ciulla, 2011) mindful leaders (Sinclair, 2007; 2012), 'wise leaders' (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2011), 'authentic leaders' (Cucher and Menaldo, 2018; Fernando, 2016), 'humble leaders' (Morris et al., 2005; Owen & Hekman, 2012; Argandona, 2015), 'servant leaders' (Greenleaf,2002; Grint, 2005; Spears & Lawrence, 2002), 'moral leaders' (Gerard, 2017),'ethical leaders' (Ladkin, 2017; 2015) 'responsible leaders' (Maak and Pless 2006) and 'spiritual leaders' (Bouckaert, and Zsolnai, 2012).

There is also a call for taking a broad view of leadership and include not only high profile roles but also every day cases where people "lead quietly" (Badaracco 2002. 2.) at different levels of responsibility. They face dilemmas, ambiguity and need to take action. When one 'leads quietly', one needs to consider conflicting values and priorities, there are no pre-established patterns to follow, the context is given and one has to work with continuously evolving events.

Shotter and Tsoukas call for Phronetic leaders who in an Aristotelian spirit demonstrate practical wisdom and prudence. Phronetic leaders developed a "refined capacity to come to an intuitive grasp of the most salient features of an ambiguous situation and, in their search for a way out of their difficulties, to craft a particular path of response in moving through them, while driven by the pursuit of the common good." (Shotter, and Tsoukas, 2014. p.225)

Aristotelian approaches have long promoted the responsibility of practical wisdom and an inherent capacity to judge as the fundamental conditions for 'good' leadership. Nonaka & Takeuchi (2010) define wise leadership as the ability to handle situations, share knowledge and stimulate values, rather than just achieving performance results. However, this wisdom, founded on such values, does not have the same effect within many contemporary contexts as cleverness – that is the demonstration of specific technical knowledge. As Revans astutely remarked: "The Clever man will tell you what he knows; he may even try to explain it to you. The wise man encourages you to discover it for yourself even although he knows it inside out himself. But since he seems to give you nothing, we have no need to reward him. Thus, the wise have disappeared and we are left in the desolation of the clever." (Revans, 1980. p.9).

Discussion

The paper started with an example of an individual transformation of a Holocaust survivor who managed to overcome her trauma and transformed her negative emotions into a force for good. In my experience human beings can relate to meaningful stories, get inspired and learn meaningfully from the experiences and examples of others.
Reflecting on Eva Schloss' life journey I recognised that following the life force and the desire to do good and act courageously is a choice that one can make. To recognise this choice and to develop the values to support the virtuous choices in life can be developed through education and by being surrounded my wise individuals who do not shy away from standing by what is right even when it is not the popular opinion in a given environment.

Educational institutions and particularly universities and business schools could offer a lot more to future generations of decision makers by introducing values, purpose and ethical dilemmas into the main stream of the curriculum.

The question of how to transform business education in a way that graduates could get sufficient experience to make decisions based on value rationality as well as instrumental rationality is not an easy one. The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness about the importance and the urgency of the matter and invite colleagues all over the world to consider incorporating value rationality into the subjects that they teach.

I am aware that changing mindsets is a considerable challenge. There are many highly regarded subject specialists currently teaching in business schools (including mine) who are products of an education system based on scientific and instrumental rationality. Some might be deeply convinced that passing on their views and methods are the best and only way of preparing students for their careers. Imposing a different paradigm on anyone is counterproductive, however, there is no harm in reviewing our own practices and putting more emphasis on values and giving more practical opportunities to students to battle with ethical dilemmas and become more aware of the interconnected nature of the world.

Multi-cultural, diverse settings are ideal environments to experience the difference between the I-It and I-Thou relationships and honestly face our prejudices and judgemental views of the

"Other." The first step of change is the realisation that there is something one actually needs to change. The classroom is also an ideal and safe setting to discuss moral disengagement and how one could improve one's own behaviour.

My experience over the past twenty years proved without the shadow of a doubt that the more I work on trying to become the best possible version of myself, the more I am able to keep my own ego at bay and the more I am prepared to live by my values and treat others with respect the more impact I am able to make in the classroom and inspire others.

Conclusion

Most people would agree that the world needs wise leaders. There are numerous examples of corruption, greed, self-centredness, short-sightedness and foolish actions. These demonstrate the lack of wisdom and the lack of responsible leadership. Wisdom similar to trust is an elusive concept, difficult to define and we often start thinking about it when it is missing. Wisdom is not boastful, it is not self-serving, it is unassuming and when it is present it has a calming and uplifting influence on people and events.

The rhetoric is changing in business education but that does not necessarily mean the change of the dominating mindset and behaviour. Business education has yet to embrace the responsibility of preparing students for life by giving them opportunities for self-discovery, and for development of personal mastery, integrity and wisdom. For this to happen institutions seriously need to consider redressing the balance between instrumental rationality and value rationality and design programmes that will enable the development of the whole person.

Inviting students to formulate their own definitions of success is one of the first basic steps that business school professors could do. Allowing time and creating opportunities to explore questions about meaning, purpose and the idea of a 'good life' can give students a chance to explore their own beliefs about life in line with their conscience.

By including philosophy, ethics, and lessons from the wisdom traditions into the curriculum of business education and allowing time and free space for honest dialogue educators can enable students to make the shift from competition to collaboration, from knowledge hoarding to knowledge sharing, from exploiting private opportunities to contributing to the overall well-being of society.

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