

The Wise Society: Beyond the Knowledge Economy

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to explore beyond the Knowledge Economy and venture into the Wise Society.

Design/ Methodology/Approach – The article is a review of existing publications and original thinking.

Findings – We are at the dawn of the Wise Society. Science and universities have a crucial role to play on the path towards such a society.

Originality/value of paper – The paper contributes to the understanding and the development from knowledge to wisdom.

Key words Wisdom, Wise Society, Knowledge Economy, Corporate Social Responsibility

Paper type Conceptual

Introduction

There seems to be a consensus among scholars and practitioners that we are living in the era that can be described as the Knowledge Economy. But beyond the Knowledge Economy lies the Wise Society (Matthews, 1998). The world is longing for knowledge and wisdom (Zeleny, 2006, p. 751). Despite this craving very little attention has been focused on wisdom (Rowley, 2006), in spite of the plea from Nicholas Maxwell in his 1984 book, 'From knowledge to wisdom, a revolution in the aim and method science', to move from knowledge-inquiry to wisdom-inquiry (Iredale, 2007; Maxwell, 2007). In this paper I argue that the Wise Society is the next development and that the concept is related to concepts like Sustainable Development and Corporate Social Responsibility. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of the United Nations and UNESCO are the expression of wisdom.

Definition of Wisdom

What is 'wisdom'? A wise person weighs the knows and the unknowns, resists overwhelming emotion while maintaining interest, and carefully chooses when and where to take action (Matthew, 1998). Wisdom is "to choose one's behavior based on knowledge and shared values, in order to enhance the well-being of all and awareness that personal action has social consequences" (Blasi, 2006). Rowley (2006) refers to Ostefeld to define wisdom: the ability to make right use of knowledge, or the capacity to judge rightly in matters related to life and conduct. Wisdom is closely related to ethics.

Rowley (2006) and Maxwell (2007) refer to the statement that wisdom is lost in knowledge. Knowledge refers to 'know how' and wisdom refers to 'know why'. In 't Veld (2005) argues that governance codes are a prosthesis for virtues. By implementing codes wisdom is lost; people just comply (know how) and wisdom (know why) is lost. According to de Vrijer, wisdom seems to be the balancing act between 'Me' and 'We' (van Rijn, 2008). De Vrijer refers to Adams Smiths' *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* (Heilbroner, 1986, pp. 57 – 147). De Vrijer also states that wisdom is processed suffered pain. A wise man is a man who has suffered. The late Dr. MacDonald Kibbelaar of Curaçao once said that the rose trimmed at an early age will blossom beautifully later on. A second statement of Kibbelaar on wisdom is the following:

A young and an old bull were on the top of a hill overlooking a valley full of cows. The young bull said: "Let us run down this hill and make a conquest of the first cow we encounter". The old bull answered: "We will descend at ease from this hill and make a conquest of them all".

Hawley states: "The quickest and most effective path to creation of a Wise Society may be via the elderly" (Hawley, 2007). Others state the developing of wisdom is not related to age. Tapscott (2009, p. 282 - 285) believes that the next generation will play an important role in creating the Wise Society. Probably all three statements are right.

The wise organization is a green organization that manages a triple bottom-line: People, Planet and Profit. Broadly speaking, the social responsibility of businesses may cover the following principles:

- Maintaining a high standard of business ethics;
- Working as part of the community;
- Protecting the environment;
- Providing good corporate governance;
- Engaging in fair trade and business practices, as well as fair workplace relations.¹

A Wise Society aims at Sustainable Development, seeking balance between Social (People), Environment (Planet) and Economic (Profit). The MDG are the application of the triple bottom-line at the national and global level.

¹ <http://www.goodcorporatecitizen.com/meaning.html>, accessed on 23 December 2009

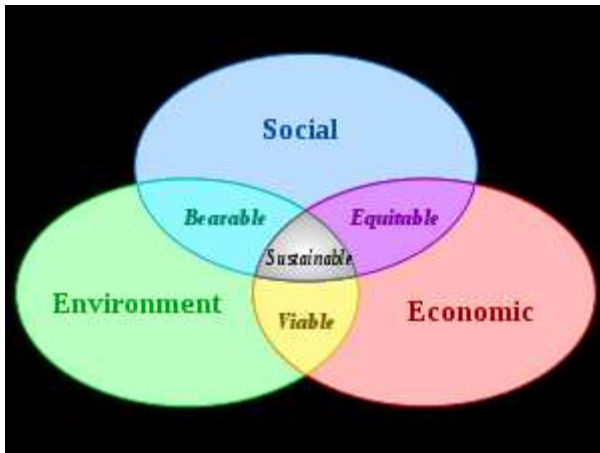


Figure 1: Sustainable Development²

In the Knowledge Economy, on its way towards a Wise Society, universities play a key role. More than 50 percent of young people attend university, the so called Lisbon norm. The trend has been from elite education to mass education (Blasi, 2006, pp. 404 - 407).

Therefore we conclude that wisdom is the application of knowledge balancing self-interest and the interest of others. Wisdom can be found on three levels of analysis: the individual, the organization, and society. Wise individuals are required to create wise organizations, and wise individuals and organizations are needed to create a Wise Society.

Literature review/ Conceptual framework

The word ‘philosophy’ means ‘love for wisdom’ (Ross, 2004). In the literature on wisdom, reference is made to Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.), Plato (429–347 B.C.E.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.), Augustine (354-430 A.D.), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 A.D.), Descartes (1596-1650 A.D.), Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), and John Henry Newman (1801-1890 A.D.). Also reference is made to ancient insights from China’s ‘I Ching’ (450-350 B.C.E) and Islam’s Avicenna (980-1037 A.D.). ‘I Ching’ refers to perspicacity, leadership and wise decision-making. Avicenna developed a view of knowledge that is centered on wisdom. There is a no fundamental difference in how the West and East perceive wisdom. Confucius states that there are three paths to wisdom: experience, imitation and reflection. Love of learning is similar to wisdom. Buddhism states that a wise man distinguishes carefully between right and wrong (Rooney, 2005). The future of global business will mix Eastern and Western wisdom, says Matthew (1998), referring to Nonaka and Takeuchi.

Wisdom can not reside in human insight alone; wisdom is a gift from God. This is also stated by Deanne-Drummond (2007) referring to Newman: “God is the fount of wisdom”. Case and Gosling (2007) state that management is a spiritual practice. Management is constantly frustrated by causes and effects beyond one’s control. Aristotle

² UCN. 2006. The Future of Sustainability: Re-thinking Environment and Development in the Twenty-first Century. Report of the IUCN Renowned Thinkers Meeting, 29-31 January, 2006
http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/iucn_future_of_sustainability.pdf

agrees with there godly wisdom. Aristotle distinguishes between the wisdom of God and practical wisdom. He focuses his study of wisdom on practical wisdom. This distinction was adapted and adopted into the monotheistic religions (Ross, 2004). Aristotle states that one should live according to moral virtues. A fully developed person also requires intellectual virtues such as wisdom, intelligence and prudence. Aquinas continues this development of thought with the distinction between wisdom and practical wisdom (*prudencia*). Practical wisdom is oriented toward the good. “Our view of wisdom is secular because worldly wisdom must be based on sound knowledge, must be reasonable and balanced, must be ethical, and must result from humane experience and understanding” (Rooney et al, 2005, p. 208). In Cartesian rationalism the deeper meaning of the practical wisdom of Aristotle was lost.

Vico, inspired by Aristotle, distinguishes four intellectual types: savant, fool, ignoramus, wise person (*sage*). The savant approaches ethics as if it is manual. The fool approaches ethics mindlessly. The ignoramus approaches ethical matters from a position of ignorance. A wise person aims for eternal truth. The wise person has practical theoretical knowledge. Vico reacted to the ‘New Science’, Cartesian rationalism, with its disregards of Aristotle, and total faith in experiment and demonstration. In the Knowledge Economy the savant and the ignoramus rule. But the time has come for a humanism that avoids the extremes of positivist pseudo-science (Rooney et al, 2005).

After studying the more recent literature, the following framework emerges. Civilization moves from dealing with data (Knowing-Noting) towards wisdom and beyond (Know-Why) in a spiral movement, starting again at data on the next level.

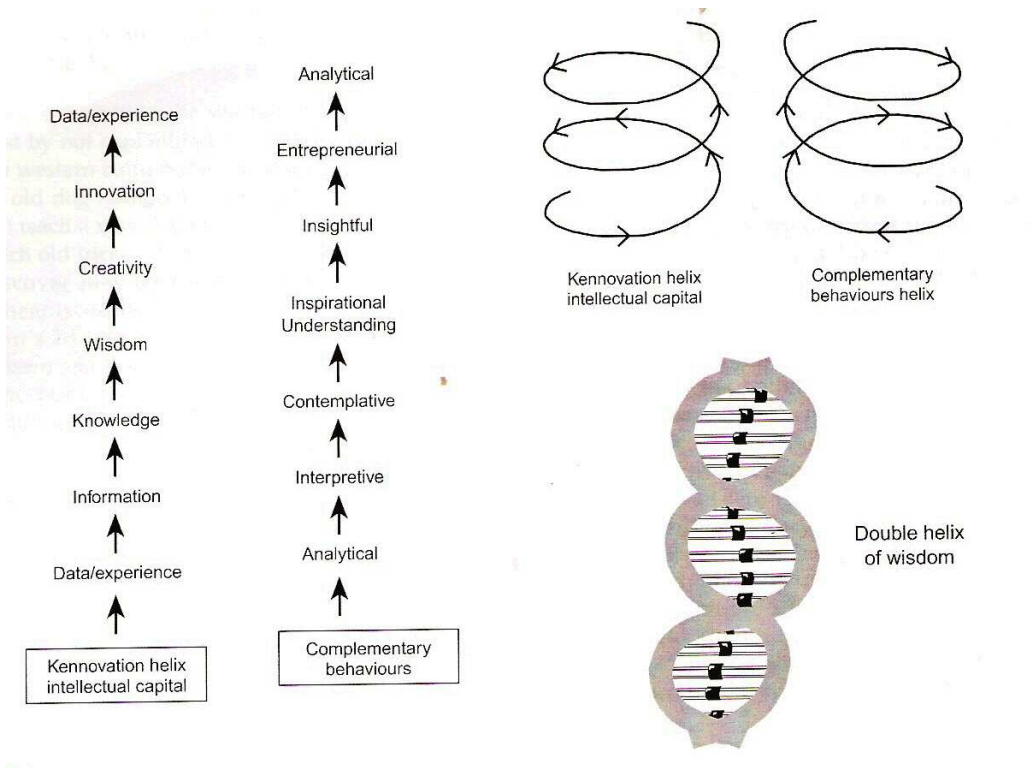


Figure 2: Kennovation and complementary behaviour leading to double helix wisdom (Matthews, 1998)

An alternative model is a journey from data to enlightenment, as a final stage.

	Effect	Propose
Data	Muddling through	Know-Nothing
Information	Efficiency	Know-What
Knowledge	Effectiveness	Know-How
Wisdom	Explicability	Know-Why
Enlightenment		

Table 3: Taxonomy of knowledge (Zeleny, 2006).

Wisdom (practical wisdom) does not only reside within an individual. Different authors discuss wisdom on different levels: individual, organizational and society.

Society	Sustainable Development
Organization	Social Corporate Responsibility
Individual	Wisdom

Table 4: Three levels of wisdom

Wisdom is action that not only benefits the individual himself or herself, but the common good in they long run (Yang, 2008). Organisations can be informed and knowledgeable, but in the global era they must become wise. It is about efficiency, effectiveness, explicability and ethics (Zeleny, 2006, p. 752).

Wisdom and society remind us of Plato. “In *The Republic* Plato ponders the likelihood of persuading philosophers to become kings or of developing kings into philosophers. Neither is likely, yet the possibility of such a happy coincidence remains a powerful aspiration of management development and education” (Case and Gosling, 2007).

From the Knowledge Economy to the Wise Society

There has been a lot of discussion about how to label the post-industrial age. The post-industrial society is associated with many concepts: Globalization, the New Economy, the Information Economy, the Knowledge Economy, the Weightless Economy (Coy, 2000; Dean and Kretschmer, 2007, p. 573; Greenspan 2007, p.493), the Creative Economy (Florida, 2002, 2007; Howkins, 2001), and the Experience Economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

The Information Economy (1970 to 1995) is characterized by high levels of investment in analytical power to process data and information more quickly. In the information age, jobs require more brain power than muscle power (Bolkin, 1999).

The Knowledge Economy (1995 to date) is characterized by connecting power to share data and information faster and further. Technology enables us to tap into each other’s creativity. The Knowledge Economy is the result of bringing together powerful computers and well-educated minds to create wealth. Technology enables people to work 24/7. Work and personal lives merge. Work without being personally present is possible (Kamberg, 2007). Kamberg states that we are moving to the Conceptual Age where employees are the source of creativity that will make the difference competing in the marketplace. This makes employees a major asset (Bolkin, 1999; Handy, 1996, p. 201).

In the Creative Economy the creative class will bring their country to great economic growth. Countries and cities compete to attract this creative class. Cities that attract this class are characterized by Talent, Technology and Tolerance (Florida, 2002, 2007; Hospers and van Dalm, 2006; Carrol del, 2005). “At the heart of such an effort is recognition of the vital roles that art and culture play in enhancing economic development and, ultimately, divining a ‘creative community’ – a community that exploits the vital linkages among art, culture and commerce. Communities that consciously invest in these broader human and financial resources are at the very forefront in preparing their citizens to meet the challenges of rapidly evolving, and now global, knowledge-based economy and society” (Eger, 2006, p. 18).

Society has evolved from the pre-agriculture society, to the agriculture society, industrial society, information society, and now the knowledge society - hunter, agriculturalist, industrialist, information/knowledge worker, sage. In this article it is argued that the next development stage will be the Wise Society (Covey, 2004, p. 13; Blasi, 2006, p. 403). Rooney et al. (2005) state that wisdom is a necessary component of knowledge-based economies and that it should not be subordinated to the narrow imperatives of technological development within the socio-economic context of technocratic capitalism.

Year	Society	Characteristic	Author
2.5m years ago - 6000 years ago	Pre-agriculture Age/ Hunter		
6000 years ago - 1763 A.D.	Agricultural Age		
1763 - 1970	Industrial Age		
1970 - 1995	Information Society	Data crunching	Bolkin (1999)
1995 - today	Knowledge Economy	Connectivity	Bolkin (1999)
	Creative Economy	Creativity	Florida (2002), Eger, 2006
	Wise Society	Holism	Covey (2004), Rooney et. al. (2005)

Table 5: Towards the Wisdom Society.

Not all societies are the same. As Max Weber already stated, there is not one type of society. He distinguishes the charismatic, the traditional and the rational-legal society (Meuleman, 2008).

Spiral Dynamics distinguishes six types of society. These six are presented in Figure 6.

Colour	Description
Beige	Archaic, instinctive, survivalistic, automatic, reflexological “Express instinctively and automatically for biological survival”
Purple	Animistic, tribalistic, magical, animistic tribal order “Sacrifice self to the wishes of the elders and the ways of the ancestors to placate the spirits”
Red	Egocentric, exploitive power gods, dominionist “Express self impulsively and without guilt lest one suffers unbearable shame”
Blue	Absolutistic, obedience, mythic order, purposeful, authoritarian “Sacrifice self now to the one true way and obey rightful authority so as to deserve rewards later”
Orange	Multiplistic, achievist, scientific, strategic “Express self calculatedly to achieve what self desires, but so as not arouse the ire of others”
Green	Relativistic, personalistic, communitarian, egalitarian “Sacrifice self now, to obtain now, for self and others”

Figure 6: Spiral Dynamics (Cowan & Todorovic, 2000; Dinan, 1999)

Green is the Wise Society in which there is a balance between ‘Me’ and ‘We’.

Dynamics

Why must we move from knowledge to wisdom?

According to Deane-Drummond (1999) technology will continually increase possibilities. The world is becoming too complex: “...democracy seems to have been, up to now, the best way to drive a country forward, but democracy is based on a ‘conscious consensus’ of people, and the growing complexity of the problem to be faced (such as energy, pollution, waste water, and social problems) sometimes need unpopular answers.

Therefore in a democratic country, good solutions can be obtained only with increasingly educated and responsible people. Finally, well-educated people are also needed in order to properly manage diversity and intercultural dialogue and to strengthen identity” (Blasi, 2006, p. 403). Deane-Drummond (2007) refers to issues like genetic modification of food, environmental concerns and new reproductive technologies.

How are we moving from knowledge to wisdom?

“There is no easy path to wisdom. There never was, and there probably never will be” (Sternberg, 2001). According to Sternberg we will need to teach learners to balance ‘Me’ and ‘We’. Reflexivity is the essence of wise practice. It requires knowledge of ethics and values, historical knowledge, cultural knowledge, social knowledge, self-knowledge and communication know-how. All can be related to Aristotle (Rooney et al., 2005).

A wise company is a green company. The wise company practices Corporate Social Responsibility (Rowley, 2006). A wise organization determines the right behaviour and the right behavior determines wisdom in the organization (Matthews, 1998). Some talk about the social business. A social business is a profit-making company driven by a larger mission. The profit-maximization principle is replaced by the social-benefit principle. Several models are possible: Stakeholder-Owned Companies, Mission-Controlled Companies, Public-Private Hybrids (Kelly, 2009). Organizations must increasingly use products and solutions to increase wisdom (Chartered Management Institute, 2006).

According to Ikujiro Nonaka (2006), leadership in Wise Companies is a dynamic process of synthesizing the vision, *ba* (shared sense), dialogue, practice, knowledge assets, and the ecosystem of knowledge to create knowledge. At the basis of such leadership is phronesis (Practical Wisdom). Phronesis (Prudence, Practical Wisdom) is defined as the virtuous habit of making decisions and taking actions that serve the common good - an ability to find a ‘right answer’ in a particular context, deliberate reasoning and improvisation, which synthesizes particulars and universals. It can be acquired only through high quality direct experience. Six abilities that constitute phronesis are:

- making judgments on goodness,
- sharing contexts with others to create *ba* or shared sense,
- grasping the essence of particular situations/things,
- reconstructing the particulars into universals using language/concepts/narratives,
- using any necessary means well to realize concepts for common goodness, and
- fostering phronesis in others to build a resilient organization.

It all comes down to the triple-bottom line.

Higher education has a critical role to play in the transition towards a Knowledge Society (Elder, 2009). In Europe 50% of each age cohort attend higher education and this number is expected to rise. Europe has moved from elite education to mass education. Universities play a vital role. To fulfill this role autonomy and academic freedom are essential. A critical distance from societal demands must be kept in order to allow for a renewed capacity to ‘invent’ the societies of tomorrow. The structures must be created to make the university a place for free and fundamental research. The challenge is to go

beyond the Knowledge Society. Knowledge is the conscious use of information. In a Wise Society there is a balance between the scientific and economic dimensions and the creative and spiritual dimensions. Universities must become agoras where interaction between students and professors becomes more consistent and effective. Students should be at the centre of the university's engagements. Students must become good managers of themselves. These conditions are threatened by mass media and research funding (Blasi, 2006, pp. 404 - 407). Deane-Drummond (2007) refers to John Henry Newman's writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, to argue that education is not passive reception of knowledge, but a way of life. Universities should not inspire learners to knowledge as a goal but to wisdom.

Deane-Drummond (2007) concludes that the religious dimension has been forgotten in public debate and at the universities, that theological wisdom is important and that it is often omitted from university educational agendas. "Universities need to be places that instill in those who study there the love of learning that goes far deeper than simple success at examinations. For the kind of wisdom that is instilled offers skills that are not just 'transferable', but help to foster *citizen virtues*, those who are able to take active and full responsibility not just in their family life, but in the public sphere as well." (Deane-Drummond, 2007, p. 182).

Science should move from Knowledge-inquiry to Wisdom-inquiry. There are four elementary rules of reason:

"(1) Articulate and seek to improve the articulation of the basic problem(s) to be solved.
(2) Propose and critically assess alternative possible solutions.
(3) When necessary, break up the basic problem to be solved into a number of preliminary, simpler, analogous, subordinate, more specialized problems (to be tackled in accordance with rules (1) and (2)), in an attempt to work gradually toward a solution to the basic problem to be solved.
(4) Inter-connect attempts to solve the basic problem and specialized problems, so that basic problem-solving may guide, and be guided by, specialized problem-solving"
(Maxwell, 2007). Science has neglected (1) and (4). Wisdom requires all four criteria. Iredale states that, "In contrast to knowledge-inquiry, wisdom-inquiry would give intellectual priority to the personal, and social, problems we encounter in our lives as we strive to realize what is of value, problems of knowledge and technology being intellectually subordinate. In this way, says Maxwell, wisdom-inquiry is better able to help us resolve the global problems described above" (Iredale, 2007, p. 121). This should be achieved in interdisciplinary ways, involving research groups from different institutes and in dialogue with society. Ethics should be central to all disciplines of science (Iredale, 2007).

Analysis and concluding remarks

We are moving from a Knowledge Economy towards a Wise Society. Is wisdom a linear development that follows after knowledge? Is the old wise Indian in a primitive culture not wise, despite his lack of scientific knowledge? In 't Veld (2005) refers to the moral sense of the Indian, living sustainably in harmony with nature, and at the other extreme the Master of the Universe dominating nature. He advocates that we should be more

Indian and less Master. Is this a linear development or a circular one? Ironically, in 't Veld states that Aristotle was the first to separate men from nature. Rowley (2006) states that wisdom is related to action based on knowledge and moral values and norms. Wisdom is not just *being* good, but *acting* good (Zeleny, 2006). But is wisdom *action* or is it sometimes the courage not to act? I challenge this notion of wisdom as action. Sometimes it is wise not to act. For example it is wise not to develop the South Pole.

The philosopher king of Plato reminds me of Singapore. According to Lee Kuan Yew, the founding father of Singapore, the basic principle for the progress of Singapore is: "Social cohesion through sharing the benefits of progress, equal opportunities for all, and meritocracy, with the best man or woman for the job, especially as leaders in government" (Kuan Yew, 2000, p. 691). On the other hand, Rooney et al. (2005) believe that the incorporation of wisdom by government enhances democracy and diminishes technocratic control. Van Gunsteren (2007) agrees with them, when he states that democracy is a self-organizing system, based on the principles of the 'Wisdom of the Crowds' (James Surowiecki, 2004), and it is superior to autocratic governments. He states, however, that several conditions must be present for self-organization to work: diversity of opinion, independence, decentralization, and aggregation - a system to arrive at collective decisions. But van Gunsteren makes a few additional remarks. Independence should not result in isolation of people and groups, and the self-organization of democracy requires leadership for indirect steering to maintain the conditions for self-organization. This argument is shared by Frissen (2009) who states that democracy requires a political elite, to protect a the democratic system from populism. This means that the philosopher king can rule democratically, if his role is to preserve the self-organization of the country.

The above illustrates that the Wise Society is all about personal governance, good corporate governance and good public governance.

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