

The Foolishness of Wisdom: Exploring a post-structural framework for wisdom in organization

Introduction

In contemporary culture wisdom-related archetypes are abundant. Depending on personal inclination or taste they may include King Salomon, Gandhi, Master Yoda, Gandalf and infinite number of other real and fictitious characters. According to Nicholas Maxwell (2008) today wisdom is needed more than ever.

Unsurprisingly, the concept of wisdom draws the attention of organizational theorists and practitioners. Multiple attempts to create organizationally applicable models of wisdom (McKenna and Biloslavo, 2011), perception of possession of wisdom as a desired employee characteristic and therefore important signpost for organizational consultants (www.awakenedwisdom.com/Public/ForOrganizations, accessed 1/09/11) and Business Schools (such as Wisdom Business Academy, www.wisdombusiness.com, at 1/09/11); a distinguishable trend to make wisdom transferable and operational in organizational context (e.g. Leonard and Swap, 2005; (Baltes and Smith, 2008); Kaye et al., talentmgt.com/articles/view); and finally mainstreaming wisdom as a topic of international conferences (<http://www.eiasm.org>, accessed 15\09\2011), reveal the importance of the wisdom concept for the purposes of modern management. The relevance of wisdom for this area is supported by organizational scholars, who include it

in a set of desired managerial attributes and found helpful for managers who struggle with ethical and moral dilemmas (Case and Gosling, 2007).

Research goal

It is a contention of this paper that while relevance of wisdom for organization studies is generally conceivable, essentialist accounts which interpret wisdom in terms of other notions, such as knowledge or intelligence, lead to the incompatibility between different discourses in which wisdom is discussed and consequently make it inapplicable in organizational context. This paper aims to achieve two goals. Firstly, to indicate that the abovementioned accounts of wisdom attempting to universalize its content render the concept of wisdom rather unattractive for modern management and organization studies. Secondly, to demonstrate that a social constructionist, non-universalist and non-essentialist account of wisdom might enable preserving its relevance to organizational problematic, such as leadership, and may occur a viable frame of reference (critical or otherwise) for researchers. To outline the prospect for the latter, a more inclusive and comprehensive framework for organizational research on wisdom will be proposed.