The Extent and Evolution of Phronesis in the Workplace

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Abstract: This study attempts to understand the Aristolian philosophy of Phronesis and relate it to the workplace decision-making and problem-solving processes follows. It navigates through the elements involved in the wisdom itself and tries to charter a specific biased approach on the basis of these elements. Once these elements are established, the study attempts to understand the weight given to these factors in the decision-making process and what contributes to these preferences among the individuals. This study further attempts to understand the impact of Spirituality and Phronesis on each other and whether this contributes to a concrete ideal for problem-solving. On the basis of this study certain characteristics are highlighted which speak about the upcoming trend for problem-solving, decision-making and tackling issues in the workplace. The researcher phased out the work in 3 phases, in the first phase extant literature review was done to identify variables that contributed to the study. In the next stage, a questionnaire was developed as a research tool to study the effect of spirituality on ethics and leadership. In the last phase, the results and discussions were computed. This study attempts to answer the following research questions; 1. What is Phronesis? 2. Is Phronesis connected to Spirituality? 3. Can the practice of Spirituality and Phronesis be amalgamated into creating a more stable work environment and culture on the basis of morally driven work? Subsequently, it attempts to follow the following research objectives; 1. To understand the magnitude of Phronesis in day-to-day workplace environment. 2. To understand the impact of Phronesis of workplace dispute mechanisms. 3. To help forecast future protocols and upcoming trends about problem- solving with regard to the study.

Keywords: Phronesis, Workplace spirituality, Work environment, Work culture, Problem solving, Decision making.

1. Introduction

A. Phronesis

Spirituality's enormous appeal and widespread application in popular media and by ordinary people in a seemingly endless range of circumstances is growing up to be a defining element of modern civilization. The modern argument regarding spirituality and its adoption in order to increase workplace efficiency has opened the avenues for enabling discussions on obscure philosophical judgments. This has seemingly opened up the hunt for more and more direct definitions to fit into and aid the modern perception of spirituality and its effects in workplace productivity. Consequently, this sheds light on the Aristotelian philosophy of Phronesis. The practical wisdom, often known as prudence, refers to the ability to make intelligent judgements about which virtues are required in specific situations and how to best practice those virtues (McGhee, 2012). The exploration of this wisdom raises the question about its ability to fall within the bracket of practical adoption. An overview of the study of Phronesis and its branches lead to two key defining features – a practical understanding of the situation and an emotional awareness of the actions followed. This integration emerges into 'Phronesis,' or the practical wisdom to act in the face of positive or negative things for man (Suneetha Y, 2016).

In other words, a practical strategy - focusing on context circumstances, analyzing felt emotions and the acts they foreshadow, and looking for specific sequences of acts and how they interact – is more likely to harmonize categorically based and perceptually based knowledge, and hence present a deeper picture of the exercise of judgment 'from inside.' (John Shotter, 2014).

B. Research Questions and Objectives

This study attempts to answer the following research questions;
1. What is Phronesis?
2. Is Phronesis connected to Spirituality?
3. Can the practice of Spirituality and Phronesis be amalgamated into creating a more stable work environment and culture on the basis of morally driven work?

Subsequently, it attempts to follow the following research objectives;
4. To understand the magnitude of Phronesis in day-to-day workplace environment.
5. To understand the impact of Phronesis of workplace dispute mechanisms.
6. To help forecast future protocols and upcoming trends about problem- solving with regard to the study.

C. Significance of the Study

This study aims at providing clarity with respect to individual approaches towards decision making among individuals and the significance given by each individual to its consequence in their professional behavior. This study also aims at understanding the factors which would essentially drive individuals into

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incorporating the practice of Phronesis and intertwine it with their own modus operandi. Tapping into this assertion would also shed considerable light on the ties between psychological and abstract theories of Spirituality and Phronesis with the nature of the material and psychical world. The application of this information in relative fields would be resourceful in determining successful ways of increasing productivity while simultaneously guarding the sanity of those involved.

In studying the different factors affecting Phronesis, this study aims at finding a middle ground between the various approaches to decision making, essentially unifying individuals under one agreed course of action. It aims at building a fundamental structure of standard approach which individuals would apply to their equals, superiors and subordinates. In addition to this, it also aims at building such a structure with respect to the varying treatments which the individuals are subjected to receiving.

In addition to this, this study finally attempts to explore the emphasis placed on the need to conjure a universally applicable set of values and how effective such values will be in maintaining a unified code of action in organizations among individuals. This study thus clarifies the role of the human tendency to channel aggression towards social scenarios instead of the work assigned in aiding further turbulence in such settings.

In doing so, this study aims at covering fair ground at the individual level, group level and organizational level pertaining to degrees of application of Phronesis, incorporation and importance placed upon approaches to problem solving, in defining productivity as well as effectiveness, and, the evolution of the moral nature of individuals into establishing quality leadership respectively.

2. Literature Review

A. What is Phronesis?

As studied in literature and media, the term 'Phronesis' has its roots in Greek wisdom and philosophy, and roughly translates to a kind of intelligence nestled within the brackets of practical knowledge emotional thinking, creativity and good judgement. The importance of Aristotle and his teachings play an instrumental role in understanding the wake of Phronesis and thus its interpretations. There are many ways to interpret the onset and scope of this wisdom in practical life. Its boundaries extend in countless branches towards all ethical pursuits of life. In a workplace setting, Phronesis is viewed as a means to shift individual perspectives and thus aid improvement through introspection.

As argued by researchers Patricia Grant and Peter McGhee, Phronesis is viewed as a regulative ideal where individuals are guided by an internal conception of certain ideas. (McGhee, 2012). These ideas further give birth to their perceptions and motivations which are consistent to their internalised sense of correctness. In this way, the people who bear the practice of Phronesis think that it is worthwhile to live ethically and follow righteous behaviour.

Researchers Darnell, Gulliford, Kristjánsson, and Paris

approach Phronesis as an integrative ideal which creates a bridge between the gap between knowing what the right thing to do is and actually doing the right thing. The researchers further present a four-dimensional model of Phronesis as follows: 1. Constitutive – The ability to form observations and recognitions on the grounds of ethical relevance thus putting into practice the virtues that one holds, 2. Integrative – The act of prioritizing and adjusting the nature of these virtues based on the complexity of the situations, 3. Practice – Practicing these virtues and thus forming a concrete moral identity, 4. Reasoning - Solidifying these virtues by backing them up with reason thus aiding a cycle of continuation away from the subjectivity that comes with complex situations. (Lapsley, 2019)

As defined by Richard Halverson, individuals use phronesis, or experiential experience embedded in character, to assess and pursue courses of deliberate action. Phronesis is a morally grounded type of knowledge that is driven by the values that form character. In this way, the circumstances we recognize as noteworthy and the agendas we follow in our lives reveal our moral commitments and hence play a role in understanding our character. (Halverson, 2004)

B. Phronesis and Spirituality

The ties between Spirituality and Phronesis are more apparent than they are argued for. Spiritual people have internalized a certain vision of true excellence. This suggests that they are not only committed to intellectually adhering to those principles, but also to putting them into practice. Patricia Grant and Peter McGhee explain this as Spiritual people are more likely to be good and exhibit those virtues (McGhee, 2012). It's unclear why or how a spiritual person is required to be ethical at work. Aristotelian virtue ethics is the theory that describes how this process could occur. A virtuous individual assumes that living according to moral standards is worthwhile. The mentality of a spiritual person is close to that of a virtuous person. Spiritual values, as previously discussed, are moral values in the sense that they are inherent, objective, and contribute to human flourishing. Spiritual people practice these ideals on a regular basis because they have internalized them as part of their regulative ideal. As a result, they develop stable behaviours aimed at the benefit of themselves and others as a result of this, entering the period of virtue acquisition and practical wisdom. Organizations which have manifested into a spiritual culture regularly engage in the recognition of their employees and clients as able individuals of mind, body and spirit replete with capabilities and attitudes aiding to the development of the organization as a whole. This approach sets the organization on a path towards a visionary future, capable of bringing about drastic shifts in the mentalities of individuals both inside and outside the organization. When individuals begin to view their work as a path of personal growth which brings about opportunities of inducing harmony with oneself and one's surrounding, they invariably begin to treat it as a measure of their own sense of rectitude. (Golestanipour, 2016) concluded that organizational spirituality mediatised the relationship between the respect for ethical climate and civic virtue in the organization. Workplace spirituality is not about

abiding to the theologies and practices of a spiritually enlightened leader, but rather about encouraging a sense of community and channelling respect for self and in turn the community as a whole. Such organizations are equipped with the ability to tackle the work-life balance of employees in a fruitful manner leading to self-imposed discipline and commitment by employees in their work. According to (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003), the need to introduce the employees to a spiritual sanctity towards the job is more than ever now due to the growing structure of modern workfare leading to insecurity among employees towards one's job. Cable and (DeRue, 2002) talk about the 'person-organization fit' module which essentially talks about conformity between the values of an individual and those of an organization. This finding concludes that when individuals adhere to the work ethic and atmosphere through self-imposed regulations, then the productivity of the work order ascends into higher multitudes.

C. Phronesis and Psychological Pursuits

Phronesis as a concept borders on the edges of virtues, ethics and practicality, which makes it a multi-dimensional prospect for psychological exploration. Phronesis has been termed by various authors as identity defining, morally regulating, and emotionally and practically integrating. These traits help us foray with Phronesis as a psychological pursuit embedded within the blanket of practicality and experientialism.

As explained by Darnell, Gulliford, Kristjánsson, and Paris on considering the different aspects of phronesis. It's an analytical quality, a deliberative excellence that screams wisdom. It gives the bearer the ability to see clearly, understand circumstances, recognize key features, and generate important explanations. (Lapsley, 2019). It entails emotion control as well as making context-dependent decisions. Phronesis is often referred to as a metavirtue since it relies on subordinates. The researchers argue that such scope is beyond the integrative and constitutive aspects of Phronesis. In doing so, they present a componential phronesis model which undertakes a few more traits into account and branches it into study.

The spiritual seeker's search is not confined to an external focus; it also involves a desire to incorporate one's own self. This internal emphasis produces a range of results that favor the company indirectly. It equips people with the resources they need to pursue true spirituality, realize their virtuous goals, and deal with and solve life's problems (Pargament, 1997; Silberman, 2003).

3. Research Methodology

The sample questioning focused on conducting studies across student groups in order to evaluate how students choose the approach for decision-making; and further, how they choose to apply it. It aims to evaluate the responses by studying the dependency across the different variables. The study evaluates all responses and groups them based on the answers to form pie-charts and bar-graphs. These charts assess the percentage of the sample according to the responses in order to give a simplified reading. The sampling technique followed in this study is convenience sampling since ease in accessibility was facilitated through digital circulation of the questionnaire. The sample was chosen based only on the parameter of age and all other parameters such gender, geographical location, field of study pursued, religious affiliation, etc. were ignored.

The sample consisted of 106 individuals engaged across the various fields of management, commerce, medical management and architecture. The mean age group of the sample was 19.74 (=20). The data was collected through a primary source by means of a questionnaire circulated digitally among the participants of the study.

4. Data Analysis

With regard to the elements involved in the concept undertaken for study, it is important to note the factors which encompass the topic of Phronesis as a whole. These factors, though vast in number can be functionally categorized into two components – Emotional Awareness/Consciousness and Practicality/Intelligence.

To understand the degree of importance being given to these two factors in day-to-day working decisions, individuals were asked about the factors they regard the most when taking decisions about their workplace under normal circumstances. While 2.8% participants admitted to taking only emotional consciousness as a relevant factor in their decision making, 7.5% participants said a practical understanding of the situation was more important. A combination of these factors was the popular choice among the participants, with over 94 of them supporting this course of action for their decision making. This translated to a majority of 89.6% for an approach characterized by a middle ground between the two.

Which of the following is most important to you in taking decisions regarding workplace issues?
106 responses

- ● Emotional consciousness
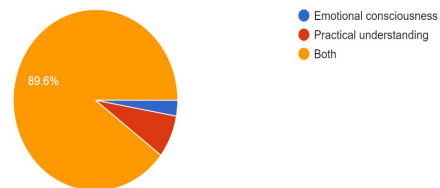- ● Practical understanding
- ● Both

89.6%

Fig. 1. Factors affecting decision making

To understand the idea of the participants behind tackling issues, I tried to rate the importance of certain courses of action generally employed by management in tackling decision making regarding certain issues. These issues are also vaguely categorized into and Emotional approach and a Practical approach for the purpose of this study according to the text and literature analysis. This study categorized the work culture and inclusiveness for inputs approach as emotional approaches, and, setting up of ground rules and independent handling of issues as practical approaches. The responses generated by the participants in decreasing order of popularity were as follows; 1) Having a work culture that ensures that all perspectives are heard and accounted for (85.8%), 2) Taking inputs from all parties involved (53.8%), 3) Helping the parties by putting up ground rules regarding similar issues happened in the past

(42.2%), 4) Letting the parties handle issues by themselves (14.2%).

Which of the following, if shown by your workplace, exhibits a sound method of tackling issues to you?
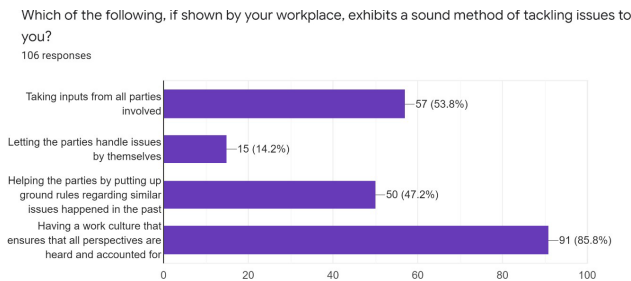106 responses

Fig. 2. Factors concerning approach of decision making

To further understand the nuances of the weight these factors carry in the efficiency of decision-making according to the participants, the approaches were further classified into three factors for each approach. Participants were asked to rate the importance of these factors to understand whether there stands a subconscious biasness in the approaches. The division was as follows;

Emotional Approach – 1) Emotional Intelligence, 2) Strong sense of justice, 3) Knowing what to do with the knowledge presented (wisdom).

Practical Approach – 1) Practical knowledge about the field of the issue, 2) Optimal use of resources available, 3) Knowledge of all the facts involved.

The popularity among the participants for the factors is listed in decreasing order below;

1) Practical knowledge about the field of the issue (78.3%)
2) Knowledge of all facts involved (67%)
3) Emotional Intelligence (66%)
4) Knowing what to do with the knowledge presented (63.2%)
5) Strong sense of justice (53.8%)
6) Optimal use of resources available (52.8%)

What are some qualities that make up for efficient problem solving according to you?
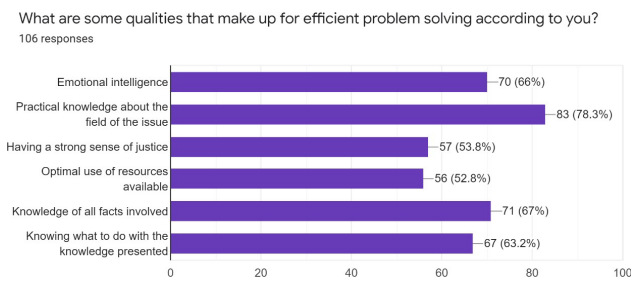106 responses

Fig. 3. Elements involved in factors of decision making

To understand whether individuals were aware of the effect such an integrated method of problem solving would have on them they were asked if they found such an approach beneficial. 80.2% of the participants voted Yes for an answer while 19.8% voted Maybe. This indicated that all participants are aware however slightly that inclusive problem solving is the better way for maintaining an ideal work environment.

Do you think you would benefit if your workplace employed the use of practical and emotional approach to problem solving when handling your issues?
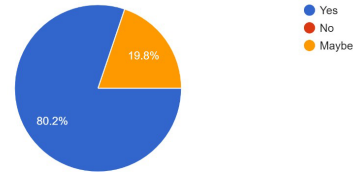106 responses

Fig. 4. Data on individual benefits of Phronesis

To understand whether such approach would help in the satisfaction of individuals towards their work, participants were asked if such an approach would help them be more satisfied at work. 80.2% of the participants voted Yes, 16% of the participants voted Maybe, while 3.8% of the participants voted No.

Do you think you would be more satisfied with your work if your workplace employed practical and emotional approach to problem solving?
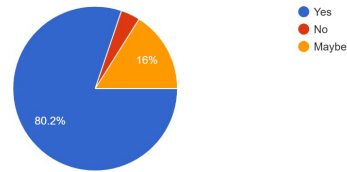106 responses

Fig. 5. Work satisfaction with regard to Phronesis

To understand whether the benefit received in the employment of such a method would be on the basis of only satisfaction or efficiency as well, the participants were asked if such an approach would help increase their efficiency towards their work. 76.4% of the participants voted Yes, 20.8% voted Maybe while 2.8% voted No.

Do you think the use of such dual approach to problem solving would increase your efficiency towards your work?
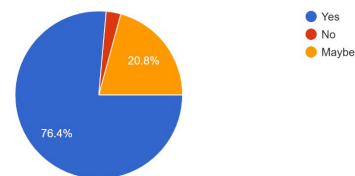106 responses

Fig. 6. Work efficiency with regard to Phronesis

To understand the kind of problems solved by employing a practical approach to problem solving, individuals were asked to recall instances where their workplace demonstrated a practical approach to problem solving. The responses received were mainly concerned with the following issues; discussing project requirements, conflicts in schedules, promotions and remunerations, holding workshops, problems regarding achieving certain organizational goals, using past methods to predict performance, finding out facts about a problem and using a person with specific knowledge to solve such problems, deadlines and slack.

To understand the kind of problems solved by employing an emotional approach to problem solving, individuals were asked to recall instances where their workplace demonstrated an

emotional approach to problem solving. The responses received were mainly concerned with the following issues; disagreement between members, motivating employees to work, negotiation situations, workload, personal stress, mental health, faltered performance, personal grudges and judgements towards team members, communication and rapport, friendly environment to ensure communication, COVID-19 scares, empathy during fights and emergency situations.

To understand the importance given to moral beliefs when employing either one or both approaches to problem solving, individuals were asked whether their moral beliefs affect their approach to problem solving. Over 66% of the participants voted Yes, 24.5% of the participants voted Maybe, while 9.4% of the participants voted No.

Do you think your moral beliefs affect your personal approach to problem solving?
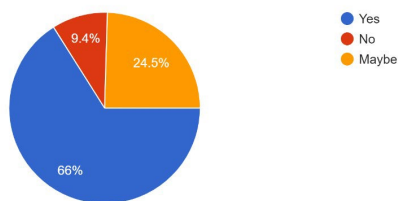106 responses

Fig. 7. Dependence of morality/spirituality on Phronesis

To understand whether the recent pandemic has made individuals more sensitive to workplace issues and their handling, individuals were asked if employing such a dual approach to problem solving would the beneficial for the employees. 84.9% of the employees voted Yes, 12.3% of the employees voted Maybe, while 2.8% of the employees voted N

In the wake of the recent pandemic, do you think you would benefit if your workplace showed an emotional approach to problem solving along with practicality?
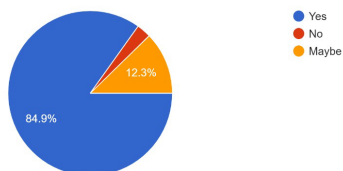106 responses

Fig. 8. Pandemic and Phronesis

5. Findings and Conclusion

While attempting to understand how Phronesis affects individuals on a day-to-day basis, the elements of this concept were split up and targeted as individual elements. Even when these elements were targeted individually, participants drew a middle ground approach between the two factors and established. The concept of Phronesis was not explained to the participants of the study to ensure that there would be no biasness based on the awareness or unawareness of a certain kind of wisdom. The participants responded on the basis on their own understanding about the application of these questions in their lives.

To understand whether the approach of Phronesis has relevance to the individuals, the individuals were asked to choose their preferred method of problem solving in workplace

issues. A vast majority of individuals reported to having a preference for the dual approach to problem solving, indicating that the wisdom of Phronesis was preferred as a common underlying necessity.

To understand the weightage given to each approach in spite of their much-wanted inclusivity, the approaches were divided into two courses of actions namely; Emotional approach - having a work culture that ensures that all perspectives are heard and accounted for, taking inputs from all parties involved, and, Practical approach - helping the parties by putting up ground rules regarding similar issues happened in the past, Letting the parties handle issues by themselves. Here there was seen to be a higher regard for the emotional approach, since the courses of action employees under the emotional approach were given a higher preference as compared to those under the practical approach.

To understand the subtleties that led to individuals forming this preference, three factors employed under each approach were listed and their weightage was analysed. These six factors were categorized as follows; Emotional Approach – 1) Emotional Intelligence, 2) Strong sense of justice, 3) Knowing what to do with the knowledge presented (wisdom). Practical Approach – 1) Practical knowledge about the field of the issue, 2) Optimal use of resources available, 3) Knowledge of all the facts involved. The respondents rated these factors and their implications were drawn. According to the data shown, it was understood that individual initially given importance factors such as practical, relevant knowledge and facts when dealing with issues. Once these facts and information is available, individuals turn more towards emotional characteristic like emotional intelligence and wisdom when tackling the issue of how to progress with the information presented.

To understand why individuals chose these preferences and what could be the underlying influencers of choosing when to employ which approach, individuals were asked about the effect such a dual approach to problem solving would have on their satisfaction and their efficiency towards their work. A majority of the respondents claimed that such a dual approach, or in other words, the approach of Phronesis would have a positive effect on their satisfaction levels towards their work and their work efficiency as well. In addition to this, almost all the individuals think that employing Phronesis would be more beneficial to them.

To understand whether Spirituality and Phronesis can be linked to find an established pattern in the workplace decision making, individuals were asked about the impact of their moral beliefs on their chosen approach. The responses for this question were not promising enough to establish a concrete co-dependence of the two factors as there were mixed responses regarding the same. This suggests that while emotional approaches may be subject to the impact of Spirituality, practical approaches are not. This pattern cannot establish a relationship between Phronesis and Spirituality.

Moving on to a scenario more relevant to the current state, individuals were asked whether Phronesis would be a good approach post the impact of the pandemic in the workplace. A majority of respondents claimed that Phronesis would be

beneficial in these times.

It was understood that the reason Phronesis is celebrated among the participants of the study as a beneficial approach is because it handles different types of workplace issues all under one label or philosophy. Phronesis would tackle the issues of discussing project needs, scheduling system tensions, promotional offers and compensations, holding workshops, issues with achieving certain organizational goals, using past patterns to estimate performance, gathering facts about a problem and enlisting the help of someone with specific ability to resolve such issues, deadlines, and slack which commonly come under the banner of practical approach. It would also tackle issues like workload, personal stress, mental health, faltering performance, personal prejudice and judgments towards members of the team, interaction and camaraderie, friendly workplace to ensure communication, COVID-19 scares, empathy during conflicts and critical circumstances. In this manner, it is much easier to draw a necessary policy on the basis of an all-inclusive philosophy.

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