

This paper was downloaded from



Charles Sturt
University

<https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au>

Paper Title: Wisdom as it exists in a professional's life

Author/s: Qayyum, A., Khan, A., and Redshaw, S.

Conference Title: 16th International conference on knowledge management.

Theme: Knowledge commons in the city of medicine

Dates held: 03/12/20 – 05/12/20 **Place:** Durham, NC, USA

Pages: 12

Abstract:

Goal/Purpose: Various studies have attempted to measure the complex concept of wisdom and this study extends those efforts by developing and putting into practice a qualitative measure of wisdom. Thus, the purpose of this research was to investigate the key characteristics of wisdom for professionals working in the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) sector.

Methodology: Qualitative approach was used to conduct this research using the Wise Action Model (WAM) to measure the complex and elusive nature of wisdom. Data was collected from information professionals working in managerial positions in the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) sector using the in-depth interviewing technique. Thematic analysis technique was used to analyse the data.

Results: The findings indicate that while most participants exhibit some elements of wisdom, there are gaps that need to be addressed before wise functioning is deemed applicable in their roles. So, while knowledgeable information acquisition and community engagement was very visible, more emphasis on values and stakeholder wellbeing will lead to wiser considerations.

Originality/value: Study of wisdom certainly deserves more attention in knowledge management research as previous studies have indicated. With increasing stresses in the lives of professionals, it is now more important than ever to gain an understanding of how much wisdom prevails in organisational settings to improve the lives of individuals, and consequently the wellbeing of impacted communities.

Wisdom as it exists in a professional's life

Asim Qayyum, Arif Khan and Sarah Redshaw

1 INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen the development of quite a few measures of wisdom (e.g. Ardel (2003); Glück (2017); Staudinger and Pasupathi (2003); Sternberg (1998); Webster (2003)). With a focus on information professionals working in the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) sector, this study is unique in the way it translated the quantitative measures used in previous study into a qualitative instrument that can allow wisdom aspects to be explored through interviews. Thus the purpose of this research was to investigate the key characteristics of wisdom for professionals working in the GLAM sector.

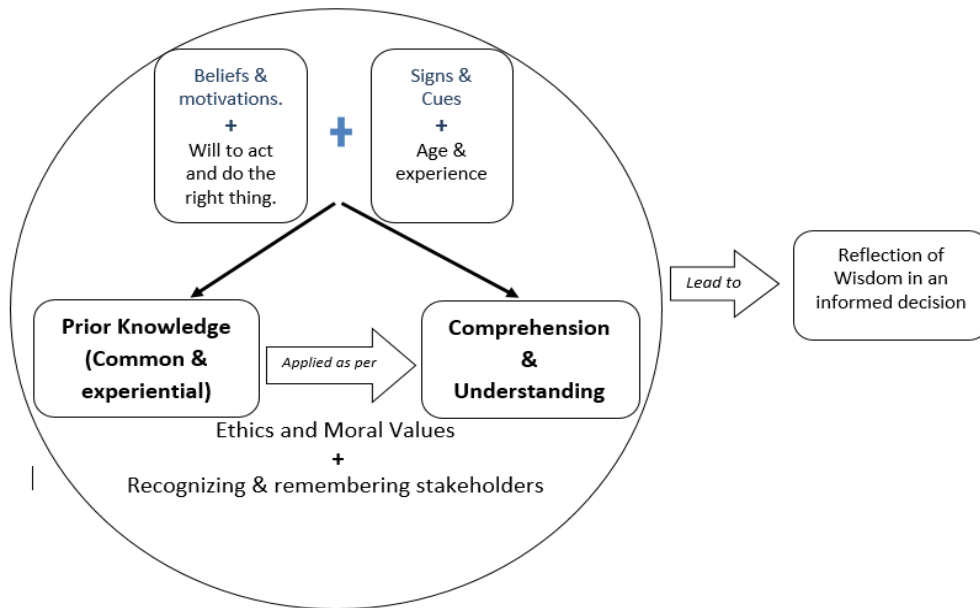
Wisdom has been defined as a noun (possessed) or verb (action) in several previous studies, and in dictionaries, for example, the Collins online dictionary defines wisdom as “knowledge of what is true or right coupled with just judgment as to action; sagacity, discernment, or insight”. So the capability of an individual to judge the right from the wrong, or their insights and experiences are the possessed form of wisdom, which Baltes and Staudinger (2000) describe as the rich factual and procedural knowledge about pragmatics of life. The second component of wisdom is the capability of an individual to put that personal knowledge and its understanding into action, and this is the final building block of wisdom which must be accompanied by good ethical and behavioural values (Rowley, 2006).

Given that a measure of wisdom needs to be multidimensional (Webster, 2003), this paper used a wisdom model and the qualitative measures derived for that model as described in the methods section below. This method allowed for investigating the presence/absence of wisdom related characteristics in the workings of information professionals or knowledge workers, who responded to a series of questions while reflecting on the works they did in some recent projects.

2 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to investigate the key characteristics of wisdom existing within the workings of information professionals in the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) sector. The instrument used in this study was based on the Wise Action Model (WAM), Figure 1, as has been proposed by Qayyum (2018) to measure the complex and elusive nature of wisdom.

Figure 1 - The Wisdom Action Model (WAM)



The various concepts captured in this model are summarized as follows:

Workers should gather required information about the task at hand using prior knowledge as per their experiences, and then apply it as per personal comprehension and understanding of the task at hand. Signs and cues existing in the environment should be used as a guiding force to strengthen the resulting comprehension. The application of knowledge will also be influenced by some motivations and beliefs that the resulting product will lead to good outcomes. The right outcome, or the wise decision will also depend on how much of the social, ethical, and moral norms and values are recognised, reflected and acted upon, and requires that the internal and external stakeholders be recognised, remembered and honoured during the course of the action.

Research questions for this study were derived from the qualitative instrument on measuring wisdom developed by Qayyum (2020). Those research questions were translated into an instrument in a qualitative form suitable for use in an interview. This translation was necessary because a study of human experiences and their situations requires that the researcher understand their complexity, subtlety, and the dynamic nature, and a qualitative human focused instrument is useful in that case (Pickard, 2013, pp. 14-18).

Using the research questions, an interview guide (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) was prepared by considering the key components of Wise Action Model. Required ethics clearance was sought and obtained from the university's human research ethics committee. Data collection took place using in-depth qualitative interviews with 12 participants (5 male and 7 female) purposefully identified from the GLAM sector managers who had an experience of working and/or executing developmental projects in their workplaces. Verbatim quotations from the participants are referred to in the finding section as participant (P), number (X), and then the gender indicator (male/female), e.g., (P1M). Each interview lasted from 45 minutes to one hour where the discussion took place around aspects knowledge and wisdom. Interviews were audio recorded with prior permission and transcribed verbatim by the researchers. Thematic analysis technique was used to analyse the data.

3 FINDINGS

Provided in this section are the research questions that inspired this study, and the interviews were conducted bearing these questions in mind. The findings related to each research question follows the question itself.

Research Question #1: Where the information was acquired from, and what was the personal contribution (knowledge, experience, intuition) of participants to that information?

Two participants [P1M, P2M] referred to their qualifications when describing where the information was acquired, and their personal contribution to that information. A history degree gave P1M knowledge of lists, databases, online sources and publications and periodicals to refer to for information. For P2M degrees in library information and management gave him 'fairly refined ways of trying to keep up to date, both in terms of professionally what's happening and technologically' as well as seeing what peers and colleagues are doing by talking to them, attending conferences, reading and writing papers.

Seeing what others are doing in the field was mentioned:

Look and see what other people are doing within, and particularly outside of the sector, challenge those assumptions, paradigms. [P7F]

Looking at what comparative institutions are doing [P8F]

Other means included looking at relevant databases as well as their own archives, online sources including ABS, and publications and periodicals. Talking to peers and colleagues was mentioned by the majority as a key means of acquiring information. Talking to different stakeholders and partners as well as consulting with their communities were other sources of important information.

One participant referred to an 'environmental scan' which included looking and seeing 'what other people are doing within, and particularly outside of the sector challenge those assumptions paradigms', reading a lot of literature reviews, making use of the peer network, putting out items for discussion, bringing other people some experiences;

Try and get different perspectives, so people can share their, their knowledge and experiences, trying to avoid doing too much homogenous thinking around certain issues, those are sort of the broad steps that would be taken and then using that to then look at how to distill that against particular objectives and outcomes that are being sought. [P7F]

Research Question #2: How much did the participants rely on colleagues, external stakeholders, and community for acquiring the information?

All but one participant referred to community consultation, with some participants giving frequent references to community input. While one talked to others 'who are working in the space so that they get on side with some of the ideas and thoughts about the exhibition, so that they can also promote it in a way and that adds to what I did and gives me some feedback from the community' [P1M] others said it was 'knowing the community and their expectations'.

Drawing on diverse staff skills and experience was mentioned by P8F, P11F and P12F. Teamwork was seen as fundamental by P10F who said she will 'still have that goal in mind about how I'm going to do it what the outcome is but talk to the team about how it's all going to happen', 'take it to the team, flesh it out, make the team have ownership of that and then start implementing it'. P3F referred to 'convincing my staff that this was a good thing' and getting them to 'do some social research across Australia, New South Wales and in their local community'.

Another referred to learning how to provide leadership and relying on 'a lot of intuitive knowledge' [P5F] and P9M stated 'all leaders draw on their knowledge and experience to inform decision making on a daily basis and I certainly do so, however this does not eliminate

the need to do proper research or bring in other people and expertise for some critical or key decisions’

Getting more specialised information from the community was important for P12F: ‘relying a lot more on specific data from the community about what they want me to work on, what areas they want me to focus on’.

Research Question #3: How did participants evaluate and reflect on the information (work and personal) to understand it?

Participants mentioned experience, policy, goals, strategic plans, quality of information and existing collections as well as team involvement as providing structures for evaluation and reflection. Anecdotal feedback from the community could also be a source of evaluation. Reliance on how he was taught to do things and how he has done things subsequently, work experience while an intern and learning from ‘just doing’ and teaching were structures that enabled reflection and evaluation for P1M. Reading could also be a way of moving things forward. Policy related to a collection and what works are in it determine the opportunities that are possible. P2M looks for further qualification and references to the kind of things that are happening, and using relevant literature:

There's a lot of literature out there that concerns what the people's opinions are. If I'm particularly interested in what somebody is talking about I might want to look into it further and see where they lead to [P2M].

Applying ‘some tests around the quality and the credibility of the data or information’ from literature reviews, looking at work coming out of organizations or records or conferences and so forth ‘and also looking for alignment with the project objectives, what are the terms of reference, what is it that we were trying to achieve’ gave structure to evaluating for P7F.

A leadership team with monthly meetings of about two hours where updated policies and procedures, and new ideas about how the budget will be spent’ and then quarterly, also talking about ‘new ideas of what do we want our projects to be in the next financial year, and so people do a lot of thinking and talking outside of those meetings and then bring in the ideas and thoughts and plans’ [P3F].

Considering the knowledge in the materials at hand and how that is organised is an ongoing process for P4M who acknowledges people communicating with him who are his predecessors:

I've got the assistance of people who are dead and hopefully I'm doing that for my successors, so I'm communicating what I know in the cataloguing that we do for future generations. [P4M]

Having open conversations about what the facility actually has and what it can offer, what the team has and what they can do and 'negotiating any flexibility that's needed in terms of the exhibition delivery' was also important for P8F.

Relying on team members to evaluate information was significant for P6M which meant a lot of 'back and forth and that sort of referral opportunity', going to the project managers and saying 'Okay, here's a quote, I think this is a good option to go with, allowed me to actually bounce ideas off them'. [P6M]. Contemplating and arriving at a position and then running it past other people to get their perspectives may reinforce or contradict his own thinking requiring evaluation of what he thought as well as evaluating the project 'against set goals to see if the information and knowledge used to inform the project was adequate or where it could have been improved' for P9M.

One participant who had a very difficult team and needed to 'massage' them to progress said this could mean compromise in parts and she tended to 'reflect constantly about what could be and what we've ended up with' [P10F]. While the strategic plan might provide some guidance it is important to understand where people are coming from for P11F, even though 'there's no kind of formalized process that you go through I think that's largely something that comes from experience'.

Keeping a record of feedback in spreadsheets including anecdotal and formal and statistical information and considering a number of different factors such as who has given the information, what their potential biases might be and their own biases and if they are hearing 'from a certain group of people who want a certain style or a certain type of show because that benefits their interest area, we have to kind of weigh that information against well, how is the rest of the community going to respond'. [P12F]

Only one person talked about interpersonal reflection, thinking about 'how various interactions have gone with colleagues, whether I have conducted myself in a positive way, have I exercised appropriate I'm going to say humility' [P2M].

Research Question #4: What are participants' personal motivations?

Several participants mentioned that deriving personal satisfaction was the key motivation in their professional work. Satisfaction was also accompanied by that sense of achieving something for the community. For example, P10F summed this up very nicely by

stating, “[Motivation was achieving a] personal satisfaction and a good outcome for the community. So the person, the community comes first as that is personal satisfaction for me that I'm doing an okay job”.

Research Question #5: How do the participants deal with criticism, transition and obstacles, or things not working out (negative circumstances)?

When faced with criticism from colleagues or community, most participants were of the view that listening to the concerns with an open mind, and then addressing those concerns with facts was the best way to resolve the situation. For example, a couple of comments were: “providing information [to community] in a simple and honest manner has been the best recourse in these situations.....defensiveness particularly if there is some validity to the criticism is counterproductive” [P9M], and, “this person that's always complaining I'm going to go and talk to her. And the message, we're looking at here, you're not happy, can you tell me what it is. And I could explain my perspective and I took her inside and I showed her the work in progress” [P1M].

Such interactive actions are stated to result in better decisions, and even better professional learning for future actions.

Research Question #6: How do the participants deal with moral and ethical values (work and personal)?

Most participants did not feel strongly about differentiating between ethical and moral values in their work or personal lives. They also felt quite comfortable with the work they were doing in libraries, art galleries, city councils, or archives as being morally and ethically compliant. For example P8F mentioned that,

“I've done [things] in my working life, but you know there's things that I haven't enjoyed doing, I haven't sort of felt that it's 100% right but I think for myself, personally, I've never crossed a line.”

Most talked about following ethical work guidelines at work. A couple of interesting observations were that the sense of what is right or what is wrong can change with age [P2M], and P9M nicely termed morals as being about principles, while ethics is about the exhibited behaviour.

When prompted on moral values, people talked about climate change or lack of empathy towards senior citizens [P10F], handling controversy around items in library/arts collections [P1M, P3F], making sure that fairness and equity is maintained [P7F], or even

viewing moral values as sometimes bordering on self-interests rather than community interests [P12F].

Participants asserted that moral values relate to commonly held perceptions or accepted ideas about what is right and wrong while ethical values are more about how someone conducts themselves when confronted with situations where there are questions of right and wrong. So, one is about principles and the other about behaviour. In terms of dealing with moral and ethical values in personal and professional lives, majority of participants were of the viewpoints that one needs to deploy specific strategies to deal with such issues. Similarly, few participants recommended that specific tangible approaches such as looking at guiding principles, sustainable development goals, and transparency measures can be a good way to deal with moral and ethical values in personal and professional lives. However, from the discussion, it can be concluded that it is more about one's decision around how to deal with moral and ethical values in personal and professional life. For example, in terms of dealing with ethical and moral values, one participant reached out that

“I've worked with a lot of difficult people whose way and style of working, I don't agree with but ... I haven't sort of felt that it's 100% right but I think for myself, personally, I've never crossed a line ... I do have more sort of control over how things happen” [P8F].

Research question # 7: How do participants recall the characteristics of wise people in their lives?

Participants in this study shared their understanding of how they perceive about wise people and how they may be distinguished as a knowledgeable person. To address their perspectives, participants have identified some key characteristics of wise people. Majority of participants identified a male as the wise person they remembered, and were unanimous in stating the people that have qualities such as creativity, sense of equality, and inspiration may be regarded as wise people. Some participants pointed out other qualities such as sense of humour, enthusiasm, and mentoring capabilities are perceived to be wise people. Other traits that participants have commonly identified were ethics and morality, harmless to others, honesty and trustworthiness, willing to share knowledge, and “really encouraging the growth of people” [P7F]. Few participants asserted particularly that those who have broad network of friends and colleagues and have active social and cultural interests are considered to be wise people.

“So for me, that will be people that may have a sense of equality, where you can speak with them... [when your] every voice is going to be heard and given value...people that are

creative they're people that are inspiring. Okay. And at the same time, they are people that get things done.” [P5F]

It can be subsumed from the participants’ perceptions and understanding that wise people have personal, social, and cultural characteristics in common.

Research question # 8: Do participants make an effort to understand the views of people different from them in upbringing and culture?

Participants have shared their stories around how they perceive themselves in understanding the views of other people around them. However, there were contrasting views based on participants’ beliefs and cultural diversity that they experienced at the workplace. For example, participants who have been working in a culturally diverse environment had no difficulty listening and understanding opposing views of people from different cultural background. Other participants have stated that listening and absorbing opinions of people different from them culturally was frustrating and annoying.

“I often purposely listen to opinions which are diametrically opposed to mine, this can be frustrating and at times difficult to deal with particularly where it challenges my values. However, I think it’s appropriate to gain insight into other opinions which while I might not agree with does allow for broader understanding of an idea and way of thinking” [P9M].

Similarly, few participants have declared that they always look for the common ground when confronted with such situation. One participant particularly stated that “What annoys me is when I’m sitting in a group of my so-called friends and they tell some really racist jokes” [P10F].

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A newly derived qualitative measure was used in this study to investigate the presence/absence of wisdom related characteristics as were conceptualised and postulated in wisdom Action Model (WAM). The target audience was information professionals or knowledge workers working in the GLAM sector, who reflected on the happenings in their recent projects in an interview. As per the definition of wisdom presented earlier on in this paper, the key considerations are the possession of required insights and experiences that are supplemented by adequate knowledge and its understanding, and most importantly a focus on

the wellbeing and good of the community. The second part of wisdom focused on actions being taken to implement the project, with the community considerations and adherence to values.

The findings indicate that most people in GLAM sector work on projects that involve the community in one way or another. Community consultations were regularly held in most cases, and there was regular contact between the project executors and stakeholders. However, noticeable was the aspect that community was mentioned in many cases when prompted by the interviewer, leaving some lingering doubt in the mind of the researcher that wellbeing of the community was dwarfed by business considerations as the key driver. Though most participants mentioned the personal satisfaction they felt by serving the community, and that gratification seemed to be the primary motivation.

Team members contributed significantly in most cases to provide the required knowledge to drive the project, and most participants relied on team members for evaluation and reflection. Individual reflections were mostly done while the work was in progress, and hardly anyone kept aside some distinct reserve time for personal or work related reflections. Participants mentioned exercise, gardening, or cooking as downtime activities with only two people being involved with community outside work. This lack of causal contact could potentially lead to the participants missing out on some of the community needs that are not voiced in work environments.

The values being followed in the GLAM sector are heavily ethically derived as per the general feedback received from the participants. The issue of moral considerations was mostly thought to be individual-dependent, and most participants failed to make a distinction between moral and ethical values in work or personal lives. Clients who raised moral issues were usually dealt with on a case by case basis, and those issues were not thought to be community wide. Lack of such a holistic view may well prove to be an impediment to exhibiting wisdom within the managerial cadre as the society's decline in morality continues in general.

While the traits of wise personalities were mentioned, it was also good to hear people say that they try and imitate the good qualities of those wise people. Some participants also identified the darker personality traits of the wise people in their lives, showing the usual fallible nature of a human being, and hopefully guiding the people not to blindly follow any one's habits.

Interacting positively with people from other cultures or upbringing was embraced by most participants as they had worked or lived in multicultural environments. Interactions in personal lives were however limited for most, and there were frustrations voiced at times for

people who held a different point of view. However the work considerations were always at the forefront and therefore cultural differences were stated to have been resolved amicably most times.

Summing up all the conversations, it seems that most people in managerial roles understood the information and knowledge they needed for their works, and their works were executed in an ethical manner bearing in mind the community needs. A little more emphasis on reflections, moral values, stakeholder wellbeing, and thinking good for the community should lead to wiser considerations.

5 REFERENCES

Ardelt, M. (2003). Empirical assessment of a three-dimensional wisdom scale. *Research on aging*, 25(3), 275-324.

Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). Preparing for Interview Research: The Interview Protocol Refinement Framework. *Qualitative Report*, 21(5).

Glück, J. (2017). Measuring Wisdom: Existing Approaches, Continuing Challenges, and New Developments. *Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, 73(8), 1393-1403. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbx140

Pickard, A. J. (2013). *Research Methods in Information*. London, UK: Facet Publishing.

Qayyum, M. A. (2018). Modelling wisdom in learning and decision making. *International Journal Knowledge and Learning*, 12(2), 146-166.

Qayyum, M. A. (2020). Developing a qualitative measure of key characteristics of wisdom, Presented at the *15th International Conference on Knowledge Management*, Dec 4-6, Florianópolis, Brazil.

Rowley, J. (2006). Where is the wisdom that we have lost in knowledge? *Journal of Documentation*, 62(2), 251-270.

Rowley, J. (2007). The wisdom hierarchy: representations of the DIKW hierarchy. *Journal of information science*, 33(2), 163-180. doi:10.1177/0165551506070706

Schwartz, B., & Sharpe, K. E. (2006). Practical wisdom: Aristotle meets positive psychology. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 7(3), 377-395.

Staudinger, U. M., & Pasupathi, M. (2003). Correlates of Wisdom-Related Performance in Adolescence and Adulthood: Age-Graded Differences in “Paths” Toward Desirable Development. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 13(3), 239-268.

Sternberg, R. J. (1998). A balance theory of wisdom. *Review of general psychology*, 2(4), 347.

Webster, J. D. (2003). An Exploratory Analysis of a Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale. *Journal of Adult Development*, 10(1), 13-22. doi:10.1023/a:1020782619051

Webster, J. D. (2007). Measuring the character strength of wisdom. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 65(2), 163-183.

Webster, J. D., Westerhof, G. J., & Bohlmeijer, E. T. (2014). Wisdom and mental health across the lifespan. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 69(2), 209-218.

Williams, P. B., Mangelsdorf, H. H., Kontra, C., Nusbaum, H. C., & Hoekner, B. (2016). The Relationship between Mental and Somatic Practices and Wisdom. *PloS one*, 11(2), e0149369.

Wink, P., & Helson, R. (1997). Practical and transcendent wisdom: Their nature and some longitudinal findings. *Journal of Adult Development*, 4(1), 1-15.

Zeleny, M. (1987). Management support systems: towards integrated knowledge management. *Human Systems Management*, 7(1), 59-70.