

# Managing Wisdom: A Practice-Oriented Leadership Framework

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*Having organizational leaders use practice-oriented frameworks to better understand, apply and manage wisdom in workplace settings contributes to the emerging study of wise leadership. Growing the competence of leaders to effectively execute wisdom enhancing practices will also likely help in turning around the incidence of bad leadership in organizations. After reviewing some relevant literature, a leadership framework for managing wisdom is offered. An action role which helps in operationalizing and executing the management of wisdom is introduced as a key component in the framework. The application value and implications of this framework for practice, policy, research and teaching are considered. Some challenges relating to assisting organizational leaders and policy makers effectively impact wisdom at work are offered, including addressing the areas of leadership development and stakeholder governance.*

*Keywords: wisdom, wise leadership, practitioner framework, action role, impacts, stakeholders*

## INTRODUCTION

Wisdom, whether looking at it as a virtue, a value, a practice, a personal strength or a character trait, is personal knowledge that one has acquired through experience and learning. Wise leaders know how and when to draw upon their knowledge to make valuable contributions to others. Wisdom can be managed within oneself and in others. In managing a leader's own wisdom, a wise leader will be able to find an area, topic, time and place where a value added contribution can be made to another person, group or organization with warmth and assertion so that people will listen. Additionally, leaders are also able to grow and develop their people in such a way to advance their people's experience, learning and knowledge to draw upon to make valuable contributions to others.

The quality of leadership in an organization influences how employees experience work, which in turn impacts their performance and well-being (Kaluza, et al., 2020; Heaphy & Dutton, 2008; Kerns, 2018a; Kilfedder & Litchfield, 2014). Wisdom and wise leadership are receiving increased attention in the managerial leadership literature, including a recent focus on practical wisdom and its implications for practice (McKenna et al., 2009).<sup>1</sup> McKenna and Rooney (2019), for example, while reminding us of the growing concerns over the poor quality of leader performance in organizations, suggest that the study of wisdom and the competent execution of wise leadership may help stem the tide of bad leadership and correct the faults of leadership theory which is often divorced from the realities of practice. Our current understanding of wisdom allows us to formulate approaches that help leaders and other organizational stakeholders manage wisdom in ways that enhance the practice of wise leadership.

In an extensive literature review, Bachmann et al. (2018) connect the application of practical wisdom to leadership as well as to a variety of business disciplines such as strategy and business policy, management and human resource development and information management. Their work also references the extensive leadership failures in practice and questions whether we are realizing the practical utility of esoteric management theories. They further note that the construct of practical intelligence, as an example, has historically focused more on the abstract and philosophical aspects of wisdom. Their observations are aligned with others who see the utility in investigating the application of practical wisdom to contemporary management and organizational issues facing leaders. (Küpers & Pauleen, 2013; Mumford, et al., 2000; Nonaka et al., 2014; Rooney et al., 2010).

Practical wisdom has been defined as an activity involving making judgments and taking action for the common good (Küpers & Statler, 2008). This definition connects with the work being done that applies practical wisdom to describing how strategists and leaders deal ethically and effectively with uncertainty as well as how practical wisdom connects with authentic leadership and virtuous behavior (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Cameron, 2014). Integrative perspectives for better understanding the practicality of wise leadership have been proffered (Küpers & Statler, 2008; McKenna & Rooney, 2019; Yang, 2011). These perspectives underscore the multifaceted nature of wisdom when put into practice as wise leadership.

Grossmann et al. (2019) have helped bring definitional and conceptual clarity to the many definitions and multifaceted elements of wisdom that abound in the literature by summarizing content theories and definitions of wisdom as substantially reflecting pragmatic knowledge relating to making sound judgments and to the reasonableness of these judgments within specific situational contexts. Behavioral scientists have also identified psychological attributes that characterize the making of sound judgments such as perspective, intellectual humility and openness to experience (Bangen et al., 2013; Grossmann et al., 2019). Separating the multifaceted elements of wisdom into state or constructivist versus trait or essentialist perspectives is compatible with the approach offered in this article. The state perspective sees a person's wisdom as being malleable while the trait point of view considers wisdom as stable, distinct and inherited (Grossmann, et al., 2019). The current article aligns with the state or constructivist perspective and with the empirical evidence supporting this point of view. The conceptual, empirical and practice-oriented work flowing from the field of positive psychology relating to wisdom as a character strength and virtue also aligns with the state perspective (Niemic, 2017; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). While wisdom has both state and trait elements, when it comes to managing wisdom at work in the context of wise leadership, the state or constructivist perspective is more relevant, applicable and impactful.

The process of managing wisdom in workplace settings including the integral role that leaders and policy makers play is aligned with the evidence found in the extant literature supporting wisdom as a modifiable state that can be enhanced through deliberate practice and effective facilitation. The literature on expertise and expert performance is also relevant to developing wise leaders (Ericsson et al., 2018).

The extensive presence and costs associated with bad leadership are unsettling. Even though the methods for measuring poor leadership differ, the reported numbers remain unacceptably high (Kaiser, et al., 2015; McCleskey, 2013; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In light of this, more attention is being given to the negative impacts of bad leadership in the extant leadership literature. For example, it has been revealed that there is a significant discrepancy between leader effectiveness and the investment in leader development. In fact, while poor leadership is extensive, billions of dollars are being invested annually around the world on leadership development programs with some estimates reported at \$50 billion (Kellerman, 2018). While there are many offerings in the leadership industry relating to developing leaders, few directly make the connection between practices that are intended to enhance leadership effectiveness while also endeavoring to reduce the negative impacts of bad leadership behavior on stakeholders in the workplace. Further, and more specifically, there is an absence in the extant literature of evidence-based approaches to help practitioners operationalize and execute wisdom based practices in order to become wiser in how they go about achieving mutually agreed upon desired results in their organizations. There are few resources available to practitioners that integrate the key components for managing wisdom into one integrated practice-oriented approach.

Wisdom may be considered an outcome, or a process that influences other outcomes. For example, wisdom has been connected to increased performance and well-being (Ardelt, 2019; Sonnentag, 2015). (In this article wisdom is viewed as both a process and outcome.) A leader's actions, whether wise or foolish, also impact different organizational levels and key external stakeholders (Kerns, 2015a; Sternberg, 2019). A managerial leader's own wisdom and competence in executing wise leadership practices can be a separate target for assessment and development.

This article offers an operational definition and a practice-oriented framework for managing wisdom. The framework and associated action role are processes by which leaders can individually and collectively influence outcomes that advance the practice of wise leadership. In alignment with calls for theory and conceptualization in behavioral science to include facts and observations gleaned from the real-world of practice, I have developed an approach to enhance the process of managing wisdom (Locke, 2007; Locke & Cooper, 2000).

This framework is intended to help seasoned professionals and emerging leaders enhance their effectiveness in managing wisdom as an organizational resource. The approach may also nudge policymakers, applied researchers and teachers to further contribute in helping leaders execute their roles effectively to achieve desired organizational results through the practice of wise leadership.

## **PRACTICE – ORIENTED FRAMEWORK**

Wisdom is a multifaceted construct which is relevant, applicable and impactful when operationalized and effectively practiced by leaders. In this article, ***wisdom is defined as personalized knowledge acquired through experience and learning during one's life which, when effectively communicated with care in specific situations, provides impactful value-added contributions.*** Wisdom is operationalized through a practice-oriented framework which draws upon a managerial leader action role. This action role is reflective of this definition of wisdom and its multifaceted nature. I call this role, "wise warmly assertive caring teaching" or WWACT.

The process of managing wisdom in the context of managerial leadership is operationally defined as follows:

***Positioning, clarifying and operationalizing wisdom for executing and optimizing while measuring and evaluating its impacts.***

Wise leadership results from the effective management of wisdom as an organizational resource. Many opportunities exist for practitioners, policy makers, researchers and teachers to draw upon knowledge that relates to managing wisdom. The framework presented below applies this knowledge by building upon observations and experiences I have gleaned through working with a broad range of managerial leaders across many different settings.<sup>2</sup>

Drawing upon fieldwork, applied research and consulting, together with relevant literature reviews, over the past three decades I have made the following observations about managing wisdom in the context of wise leadership:

- Wisdom is a multifaceted construct that includes such things as experience-based learning, virtue, personality, a pragmatic knowledge of life and positive efforts (Bangen et al., 2013; Küpers & Statler, 2008; Yang, 2011).
- There is evidence that wisdom can be displayed through leadership in daily functioning and advanced through education and teaching (Ferrari & Kim, 2019; Sternberg & Hagen, 2019; Yang, 2011).
- The topic of wise leadership is emerging as an important area for practitioners and applied researchers to investigate more fully (McKenna & Rooney, 2019).
- Developing a sense of identity and purpose in life are likely important antecedents for the development of wisdom (Bloom, et al., 2020; Ratner & Burrow, 2019).
- Wise individuals including leaders are oriented toward personal growth while maintaining their well-being and resilience during challenging times. (Ardelt, 2019).

- The neurobiology of wisdom along with the learning and cognitive sciences are emerging as fields that hold promise for enhancing the practice of wise leadership (Jeste & Harris, 2010; Lövdén et al., 2020; Vera & Crossan, 2004).
- Self-transcendence or looking beyond one's self-interest for the greater good of others connects with wisdom and correlates with many positive psychological and physical health outcomes (Aldwin, et al., 2019). It also connects with the literature on motivations to lead which is a core leadership dimension (Kerns, 2015b).
- Decisive problem-solving as a key managerial leadership practice helps leaders make wise value-added contributions (Kerns, 2016).
- The work being done in applying ways to positively impact well-being in organizational settings holds promise for applications to developing and enhancing wise leadership (Kerns, 2018a).
- Supportiveness and showing that you care about employee development helps leaders increase their approachability while enhancing performance and well-being (Wagner & Harter, 2006).
- There is a delicate balance between leaders being assertive versus deferring to others. It is important to show empathy and warmth when being either assertive or deferential (Kerns, 2020).
- Growth mindsets and the facilitation of learning are key practices that leaders need to model and encourage (Kerns, 2019a). There are also important differences between the acquisition of competence and its validation. The former supports the development of growth mindsets while the latter can, if overdone, impede learning (Dweck & Molden, 2017).
- Expertise and deliberate practice can be applied to managing wisdom (Ericsson, 2018).
- The application of attachment theory and its dynamic relationship to leadership is important to understanding the role of a leader as a wise warmly assertive caring teacher. (Kerns, 2020; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Popper & Maysel, 2003).
- Evidence based management is an important criteria when applying frameworks and tools to help leaders become more effective (Rousseau, 2012).
- Learning across one's lifespan contributes to leader identity and wisdom. Motivation, affect and cognition along with challenging experiences coupled with interpersonal interactions are also elements in developing wisdom (Glück, 2019; Kerns, 2018b).
- Organizational well-being and human sustainability are topics that need to be investigated further as they relate to leadership, stakeholder governance, and setting organizational policy (Amis et al., 2020).<sup>3</sup>
- Innovative and practical ways need to be further developed for measuring wisdom in organizational settings (Stemler & Sternberg, 2006).
- Significant negative impacts on health, well-being and families are associated with poor leadership (Harms et al., 2017; Kaluza et al., 2020). The significant prevalence of ineffective, incompetent and worse abusive leadership needs to be more fully addressed by policy makers and organizational leaders.

An integrated framework to help leaders enhance their effectiveness at managing wisdom is depicted below in Figure 1. This framework has been applied in diverse settings including work organizations, executive education classrooms and field studies. The model is practitioner friendly and conceptually tied to relevant literature relating to leadership, learning, expertise, and competence as well as attachment theory. The framework addresses the need for an integrated, practical approach to managing wisdom while also helping to diminish the negative impacts of poor leadership practices on people and organizations. Enhanced well-being, performance and wisdom are outcomes that are also intended to result from the effective application of the framework.

**FIGURE 1**  
**MANAGING WISDOM AT WORK: A PRACTICE-ORIENTED LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK**

<p align="center"><b>Phase I: Positioning and Clarifying</b></p>	<p align="center">➔</p>	<p align="center"><b>Phase II: Operationalizing and Committing</b></p>	<p align="center">➔</p>	<p align="center"><b>Phase III Executing and Optimizing</b></p>	<p align="center">➔</p>	<p align="center"><b>Phase IV Measuring and Evaluating Impacts</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wisdom is an organizational resource to be managed</li> <li>• Wisdom – Leadership Multi-Faceted Factors:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Values (Kerns, 2017a)</li> <li>➔ Character Strength and Virtue (Peterson &amp; Seligman, 2004)</li> <li>➔ Life-Span Experience (Kerns, 2018b)</li> <li>➔ Personality (Kerns, 2017b)</li> <li>➔ Practical Intelligence/ Personalized Knowledge, (Chia, 2009; Cianciolo &amp; Sternberg, 2018; Zacher, et al., 2014)</li> <li>➔ Well-Being (Ardelt, 2019; Kerns, 2018a; Kaluza, et al., 2020)</li> <li>➔ Situational Context (Kerns, 2015a)</li> <li>➔ Outcomes/Results Management (Kerns, 2015c)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Wisdom: State vs. Trait (Grossmann et al., 2019)</li> <li>• Attachment Theory and Leadership Dynamics (Mikulincer &amp; Shaver, 2016)</li> <li>• Lifelong Learning, Knowledge and Wisdom Contributions:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Thought Leadership (Kerns, 2019b)</li> <li>➔ Competence and Motivation (Elliot, et al., 2017)</li> <li>➔ Mindsets and Growth (Dweck &amp; Molden, 2017)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Bad Leadership (Harms, et al., 2017; Kellerman, 2018)</li> <li>• Principles for Wise Leadership (Kerns, 2020)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wise Warmly Assertive Caring Teaching (WWACT) Action Role (Kerns, 2020)</li> <li>• Understanding the practical utility in applying the Principles for Wise Leadership to managing wisdom</li> <li>• Integrating relevant, applicable and impactful aspects of wisdom to managing wisdom for enhanced wise leadership</li> <li>• Gaining organizational commitments with key stakeholders</li> <li>• Establishing organizational alignments</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and Document Performance Profile (Kerns, 2001)</li> <li>• Balance Competence Acquisition with Validation (Dweck &amp; Molden, 2017)</li> <li>• Apply Well-Being Enhancing Practices (Kerns, 2018a)</li> <li>• WWACT Role Execution (Kerns, 2020)</li> <li>• Gain experience and engage in deliberate practice to enhance expertise (Ericsson, 2018)</li> <li>• Effectively inquire and acquire wisdom</li> <li>• Obtain ongoing performance feedback</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measure/index value-added contributions</li> <li>• Measure/index personal wisdom acquisition (Webster, 2019)</li> <li>• Assess impacts on key organizational results/outcomes</li> <li>• Assess well-being levels</li> <li>• Develop and use situational judgement tests (SJT) to assess the impacts of selected wisdom enhancing practices on specific situations (Stemler &amp; Sternberg, 2006)</li> <li>• Make feedback based adaptations and changes</li> </ul>

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In the framework the four phases are offered in chronological order of the most basic provisions for managing wisdom; however, the phases are inter-related and in practice are dynamically interactive. The discussion that follows reviews the phases and the interplay among them.

### **Phase I: Positioning and Clarifying**

Understanding and clarifying key elements of wisdom is an important part of positioning this topic with leaders as an organizational resource to be managed. Wisdom is a multifaceted construct involving the dynamic interaction of various components. While there is no universally agreed upon definition of wisdom, there is agreement concerning its multifaceted nature. The study of wisdom finds concepts such as personality, experience-based knowledge, virtue and practical intelligence receiving attention in the extant literature (Cameron, 2014; Kerns, 2018b; Staudinger & Glück, 2011; Sternberg & Glück, 2019).

Several areas become important for leaders to understand in the context of managing wisdom. Personality as it relates to openness, assertiveness, and supportiveness is important. Experience, learning and knowledge are key aspects. Motivations to lead, especially as it relates to transcendent reasons for leading, are prominent in the current model. Further, situational context and seeking the common good by displaying virtuous behavior also influence this framework for managing wisdom.

Attachment theory as it relates to leadership is also important. An attachment perspective on leader-follower relationships helps us to better understand the effects of a leader on followers' development and functioning (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). As with effective parenting, leaders can play the role of a wise caregiver and can provide a safe and secure base for others (Popper & Mayseless, 2003). In the case of managerial leaders, they can be seen as strong and wise caregivers when interacting with their followers. Effective leaders help their followers develop trust in them by being appropriately supportive and caring while also displaying warm assertiveness. They are able to develop trust by displaying security enhancing behaviors that include offering wise value-added guidance and being warmly assertive as an expression of caring for their reports' learning and development. Attachment theory and related leadership dynamics can be used to help leaders understand their effects on followers' development and functioning as an element in positively impacting wisdom at work.<sup>4</sup>

Linking wisdom to learning and competence is also important. Specifically, the work being done relating to mindsets and how they impact achievement motivation and competence acquisition and validation bears directly on a leader's efforts to effectively execute practices to enhance organizational wisdom. It seems that a growth mindset as opposed to a fixed mindset is important for leaders to facilitate in enhancing learning and wisdom (Dweck & Molden, 2017). The process of leading thought leadership is closely associated with this work and provides leaders with a systematic approach for managing the acquisition of knowledge which in turn can be used to make wise value-added decisions (Kerns, 2019a).

Leaders need to recognize and better understand the negative impacts that bad leadership is having on organizations. This is especially important for key organizational decision makers who are members of boards of directors, executive committees, and/or top management teams.<sup>5</sup>

As part of positioning wisdom with organizational leaders and policy makers regarding how to strategically manage it as an organizational resource, a set of principles for wise leadership was developed. These principles are displayed in Table 1 below:

**TABLE 1**  
**PRINCIPLES FOR WISE LEADERSHIP**

1. <b>Engage</b> in thinking strategically and innovatively about managing wisdom.
2. <b>Encourage</b> modeling and facilitating the effective execution of the wise warmly assertive caring teaching (WWACT) leader action role.
3. <b>Embrace</b> wisdom as a dynamic process and key outcome for enhancing and sustaining performance, well-being, and doing the right thing.
4. <b>Appreciate</b> and savor that acting wisely contributes meaningfully to the world.
5. <b>Approach</b> leadership development as a dynamic holistic integrated process for developing wise leaders.
6. <b>Grow</b> and help facilitate the development of wise leaders who make value-added contributions to organizational stakeholders.
7. <b>Recognize</b> that the teaching and facilitation of wisdom needs to be relevant, applicable, and impactful.
8. <b>Illuminate</b> evidence-based competencies using action and experiential learning that strengthen growth mindsets.
9. <b>Develop</b> practical ways to assess wise leadership.
10. <b>Translate</b> the multifaceted components of wisdom into frameworks and tools that have practical utility.

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**Phase II: Operationalizing and Committing**

With the positioning and clarifying of some key topics surrounding wisdom and leadership addressed, attention can be drawn to operationalizing and gaining commitments, adding further practical utility to the management of wisdom.

The WWACT leader action role is integral to operationalizing wisdom and subsequently helping to execute and optimize the practice of wise leadership. The Principles for Wise Leadership provide context for this action role. The principle that encourages the modeling and facilitating of the effective execution of the WWACT leader action role is especially relevant. Since leaders have an enormous impact on people and organizational culture it is important that they become competent positive role models and facilitators of wise leadership.

The WWACT leader action role contains the following key practices:

1. Making value-added contributions
2. Displaying warm assertiveness
3. Communicating caring and support
4. Facilitating learning and growth mindsets
5. Showing self-control

These key practices are drawn from the multifaceted set of frameworks and concepts that are connected to the study of wisdom. My work in developing this action role connects with leadership, wisdom, attachment theory and learning science along with some other relevant behavioral science concepts such as assertiveness, caring and perceived support. In addition, Cameron’s (2014) and Wrzesniewski’s (2012) work relating to virtue and virtuous behavior or “doing the right thing” have contributed to the development of this role for leaders to positively impact wisdom for the benefit of others and the world at large.

This work has included field study and consultations with C-Level leaders and executive committees. Through these efforts I view competent leadership to include a *wise warmly assertive caring teaching (WWACT)* leader action role. This role requires the capacity to be strong (warmly assertive) while making wise decisions and offering helpful value-added perspectives (wisdom) in ways that show you care and that you are supportive of others especially as a relates to facilitating their learning and development. In the WWACT role, leaders are also teaching and are motivated for transcendent reasons that help their followers

become more trusting and secure in their relationships at work. They help others optimize their value-added contributions.

Making value added contributions, as previously noted, is one of the key practices associated with executing the WWACT leader action role. Key action areas with broad application for managerial leaders to make value-added contributions at work include the following actions:

1. Leading thought leadership (Kerns, 2019b)
2. Fairly and reasonably weighing evidence and alternatives
3. Decisive problem-solving (Kerns, 2016)
4. Offering perspective
5. Leveraging competencies and expertise

Effectively making value-added contributions impacts key results across functional work areas and all organizational levels including enhancing well-being and performance. Executives who have applied the actions noted above in workplace settings have observed enhanced well-being and performance for themselves and others. This is especially apparent when executive committees have developed innovative ways to measure the value of contributions e.g. indexing the number of new products that have contributed to increasing customer satisfaction, employee well-being and profitability. In these situations, the common good and mutual interests of stakeholders are met in ways that boost performance, well-being and business growth. The execution of the action role in the context of wise leadership needs to be sufficiently committed to by all levels of management starting with the strategic leadership group. Gaining these commitments is especially important since commitment levels impact organizational performance and well-being (Chris, et al., 2016; Stanley & Meyer, 2016). The execution of the action role needs to be effectively communicated and aligned throughout the organization. Vertical and horizontal alignment will help integrate the action role into the organizational culture (Labovitz and Rosansky, 2012). This will likely contribute to establishing WWACT as a resource for developing wise leadership and enhancing organizational wisdom.

### **Phase III: Executing and Optimizing**

Having addressed operationalizing commitments and alignments, a number of useful things can be done to help leaders execute and optimize their performance of the wise warmly assertive caring teaching (WWACT) leader role. The development and documentation of a performance profile supports the execution of the five practices and accompanying actions associated with the WWACT role (Kerns, 2001). Also, the ongoing receipt of useful constructive feedback on how effectively one is practicing the action role is important in optimizing the execution of this role. It is helpful to have each leader develop a program of deliberate practice which focuses on the five practices and related action areas contained in the WWACT role. These efforts should include being mindful of exercising a growth mindset as it relates to striving to become a wiser leader. I have also found it helpful to apply specific well-being evidenced based practices to the leaders' efforts in working to execute and optimize managing wisdom (Kerns, 2018). Utilizing one's strengths, such as being innovative and persistent, have proven to be helpful in deliberately practicing wisdom enhancing skills. Additionally, the action learning skills relating to cognition, execution, relationships and self-management supports the acquisition of competence, knowledge and wisdom (Marquardt, 2019).

### **Phase IV: Measuring and Evaluating Impacts**

Measuring and evaluating the impacts of leaders' efforts in managing wisdom is a key component in the framework. Measuring and evaluating performance and well-being along with indexing value-added contributions are especially important in determining if leaders are committing to and acting in alignment with the action role. Measuring and indexing the acquisition of personalized individual, team, and collective organizational wisdom is also valuable. While it is difficult to find ways to measure the impacts of actions designed to enhance wisdom, it remains important to pursue these efforts. In this regard, situational judgement testing (SJT) is an encouraging tool that helps capture the situational nature of wisdom and practical intelligence that standard testing procedures do not validly assess (Stemler & Sternberg, 2006). Feedback gleaned from the measurement and evaluation process also becomes a basis for behavioral



changes and/or adaptations to optimize and further advance executing and optimizing managing wisdom as indicated in Phase III.

## **APPLICATION VALUE AND IMPLICATIONS**

The management of wisdom has application value and implications for practitioners, policy makers, researchers as well as teachers. All four groups contribute to the growth and development of emerging and seasoned leaders. Practitioners and policy makers, in particular, can benefit from having practical frameworks and tools to help enhance their efforts at being a part of managing wisdom as an organizational resource. A discussion of the application value and implications of the proffered framework across practice, policy, research and teaching domains follow.

### **Practice Domain**

Using the practice-oriented framework and the action role embedded in this model has proven useful in helping practitioners better understand and positively impact wisdom. In particular, the practices contained in the action-oriented role have helped managerial leaders execute and optimize their efforts in enhancing wisdom as an organizational resource. This work has been advanced by converting the five practices found in the action role into a behavioral rating scale for managerial leaders to use in self-assessment. For example, the practice of facilitating learning and growth is further broken down into five actions to take when executing this practice as part of the action role (Phase III). The five actions associated with facilitating learning and a growth mindset are:

1. Self assessing of mindsets.
2. Asking open ended questions.
3. Assessing competence levels.
4. Modeling growth-oriented mindset behaviors.
5. Setting learning and performance goals.

These actions along with those associated with the other four practices become items in a survey that is used for self-assessment and/or 360 feedback as needed and appropriate.

Another useful application in working with leaders is to have them regularly assess their execution of five well-being enhancing practices (Kerns, 2018a). In particular, the well-being enhancing practice of showing interest in others' development has proven to be a useful behavioral area for leaders to assess. This specific well-being enhancing practice correlates with the caregiving element found in the WWACT leader action role. This well-being related practice tracks with the findings from the Gallup organization concerning what followers look for in their leaders (Wagner and Harter, 2006). Focusing on this specific practice area has generated a number of innovative ways that leaders have used to let their people know that they are committed to their development and to helping them achieve their learning goals which is an important outcome resulting from implementing this process of managing wisdom. It has proven to be especially effective for leaders to challenge their people with realistic yet stretching learning goals.

The use of the principles for wise leadership have also been effective in helping organizational leaders connect these beliefs to wisdom enhancing practices. An outgrowth of this application has been the development of principles for wise leadership practices matrix. Managerial leaders have developed customized matrices to index their beliefs and practices that they have found useful in helping their reports make value added contributions. This particular process has helped generate additional innovative practices for leaders to use in encouraging wisdom enhancing behaviors in others. It has also been valuable in helping to reinforce the importance of connecting beliefs about wise leadership to concrete actions in a coherent and aligned manner. This has helped practitioners further understand the practical utility in managing wisdom and to see how it can be operationalized beyond an abstract concept.

To offer further practical utility, the components in the practice-oriented framework have been integrated into a performance profile for individual managerial leaders (Kerns, 2001). These profiles help link key practices found in the WWACT leader action role with desired outcomes for effectively managing wisdom such as increasing the number of value-added contributions and enhancing one's personal wisdom.

The performance profiles have also been used to help select leaders for their potential in executing and optimizing the WWACT leader role.

To further enhance managerial leaders' competence and confidence in executing and optimizing the WWACT action role, the work being done in business settings relating to developing expertise especially as it relates to deliberate practice is currently being applied to helping leaders manage wisdom (DiBello, 2019). The practices associated with the WWACT leader action role have also been facilitative in helping to set learning goals. This evolving work should prove to be valuable in helping leaders help themselves and others increase their competence and confidence in managing wisdom.

### **Policy Domain**

There are policy implications for why leaders and policy makers should strive to manage wisdom at work. Because of the enormous cost that bad leadership is exerting on organizations, boards of directors and top management teams could benefit from focusing more attention on enhancing wise leadership while reducing the number of bad leaders in their organizations. It seems that the practice-oriented framework offered in this article can provide needed guidance in helping these bodies reduce the number of bad leaders. Managing wisdom both as a process and outcome when aligned with the topic of optimizing leader effectiveness while reducing ineffectiveness makes good business sense.

I have found my work with executive committees in organizations to be both rewarding and value added when introducing the idea of managing wisdom as a way to enhance leadership effectiveness. The set of principles for wise leadership, as previously reviewed, has been especially valuable in positioning the importance of managing wisdom to top management teams and executive committees. In particular, the following four principles have been particularly impactful in helping these bodies more fully understand and explore the value in managing wisdom as a strategic organizational resource:

1. **Engage** in thinking strategically and innovatively about managing wisdom.
2. **Encourage** modeling and facilitating the effective execution of the wise warmly assertive caring teaching (WWACT) leader action role.
3. **Grow** and help facilitate the development of wise leaders who make value added contributions to organizational stakeholders.
4. **Recognize** that the teaching and facilitation of wise leadership needs to be relevant, applicable and impactful.

Focusing on the above four principles has opened the door to broader conversations and debate about the elements of bad leadership as well as bringing attention to what constitutes wise leadership. These conversations have also provided a bridge to more detailed and focused discussion about how their organizations can strategically implement the managing wisdom practice-oriented framework presented in this article. In particular, the elements used to position and clarify wisdom (Phase I) from a leadership perspective and as an organizational resource has been especially useful in enriching these exchanges. For example, connecting the topic of attachment with leadership dynamics along with the idea of the differences between growth and fixed mindset has been especially helpful and impactful.

Further, top management teams could likely benefit from exploring and developing key ways to measure and evaluate the impacts of wisdom within their organizations. It is challenging for executive committees to identify practical ways to index value added contributions as well as to measure personal wisdom acquisition. The work in helping organizations index the ideas and actions that contribute to increasing the revenues for new products on an annual basis has proven to be useful. This work also points to the importance of including teams as targets for managing wisdom and is aligned with evidence showing that teams can be an important source of wisdom creation and a resource to be strategically managed to enhance wisdom (Nielsen et al., 2007).

Given that wisdom may be most effective when viewed strategically across organizational levels, it seems important for governing bodies to manage and track the impacts of wisdom at the individual, team and organizational level. This process helps in establishing organizational alignments, operationalizing, and gaining commitments from key stakeholders across the organization. In turn, this will support wisdom and wise leadership as valued organizational resources to be fostered and managed.

It also seems wise for policymakers to integrate the management of wisdom into their talent management processes and performance management programs. Organizations who can recruit and select talented leaders who have a predisposition and/or experience with managing wisdom related practices will likely be at a competitive advantage. Also, the ability for organizations to design and develop performance management infrastructures that address wisdom as an important process and outcome metric may offer additional opportunities to gain a competitive edge.

### **Research Domain**

While this article is focused on practitioners with the intent of helping them better understand and execute actions associated with positively impacting wisdom, several areas seem to be attractive targets for additional research. It would be of interest to further explore the attributes and behavioral characteristics of individuals who best fit the competencies required to effectively manage wisdom (McKenna & Rooney, 2019). Closely associated with this area is the need for additional practice-oriented frameworks to assist leaders in managing wisdom as an organizational resource. In particular, it would be valuable to see more practitioner friendly frameworks that integrate additional factors from the multifaceted dimensions found in the extant literature relating to wisdom and leadership (Bachmann et al., 2018; Yang, 2011).

The work in applying evidence-based roles and related practices to positively impact wisdom at work could benefit from researchers studying additional roles and practices beyond the WWACT leader action role offered in this article. It would be especially useful to learn about other roles and practices that relate to the multi-dimensional facets associated with wisdom and leadership. In particular, methodologies that help identify and illuminate lifespan experiences that contribute to the acquisition of wisdom would be beneficial. This along with a better understanding of how well-being is impacted by practices designed and executed to enhance wisdom would be valuable.

The research that is emerging on education and cognitive functioning across one's lifespan holds promise in looking at wisdom and wise leadership developmentally (Glück, 2019; Lövdén, et al., 2020). While in its infancy, this work may have some useful implications for engaging emerging leaders in wise leadership development programs early in their careers. It may be that these more formative developmental years help early career leaders formulate implicit leadership theories and guideposts that help them create and sustain wise leadership as they grow and develop into more seasoned leaders (Kerns, 2018b; Zaar, et al., 2020). It may also be that early career exposure to wisdom and leadership topics along with other developmental experiences exert influences on later career success relating to embracing, delivering, and executing wise leadership.

It would also be especially valuable and stimulating to further explore how the dynamics of adult attachment help or hinder leaders in executing wisdom enhancing roles. For example, knowing the respective attachment styles of leaders and followers and how their styles impact trust levels, growth and learning would be useful. I am currently exploring field studies that involve considering and assessing the nature of leader attachment profiles and how a leader's profile impacts followers and their propensity to engage with the leader to make innovative and value-added contributions. This work also connects with the study of leader approachability and how being approachable impacts follower's receptivity to a leader's efforts to engage with them. Further, it would be valuable to have the WWACT leader role more fully investigated to determine the magnitude and nature of its impact on positively influencing learning and the acquisition of personal knowledge in organizations (Kerns, 2020).

There is also a need for additional ways to measure and evaluate the impact that efforts to enhance wisdom have on process and outcome metrics. The metrics needing further study include investigating outcomes such as well-being, individual and team value added contributions, and other traditional and nontraditional measurements of leadership and organizational effectiveness. The development of situational judgment tests (SJT) to assess the impacts of selected wisdom enhancing practices in specific situations would also be valuable (Grossmann, et al., 2019; Stemler & Sternberg, 2006). These efforts would further contribute to discovering the value of wisdom as an organizational resource to be managed at all organizational levels.

## Teaching Domain

The teaching of wisdom in the context of managerial leadership could benefit from having practical frameworks and tools to offer emerging and experienced leaders looking to enhance their effectiveness in managing this process. I have imported some of the applications used in workplace settings into executive leadership classrooms when teaching frameworks, tools and evidence-based practices associated with positively impacting wisdom at work.

Experiential exercises have proven to be valuable and have been employed to help business students better understand and apply the practice-oriented framework as well as the WWACT leader role. This process includes having learners apply selected elements from the array of multifaceted factors relating to leadership and wisdom and discuss how the chosen factors have influenced their work in striving to become wiser. For example, the factor of lifespan experience is used to have learners identify key moments in their development when they were favorably impacted by a person or situation that positively contributed to their personal wisdom. Also, personality as an influential factor in shaping the acquisition of wisdom is often explored. For example, learners are asked to complete a personality profile assessment to specifically identify facets of their personality that they believe helped them in acquiring knowledge which, in turn, contributed to them becoming wiser by applying this knowledge in value-added ways.

Further, it has been valuable having learners meet in small groups to develop a list of characteristics and attributes of wise leaders and subsequently discuss in a larger group their respective lists and then in the larger group collaboratively develop one integrated profile. This activity has also been extended beyond developing the integrated list. In this instance, after the integrated list is finalized, learners are given the assignment of comparing their current bosses' profile with the integrated list and then develop specific wisdom enhancing practices that they would recommend to their bosses to enhance their practice of wise leadership. When it is wise to do so and their bosses are receptive to feedback, students are encouraged to talk to their bosses about their work in formulating a wise leadership profile and how it relates to them as their leader. A variation of this activity is for learners to apply the profile to themselves and subsequently develop an action plan to enhance their own practice of wise leadership. This experiential activity has proven to be very useful in helping learners more fully understand the value in practicing wise leadership and applying it in the workplace.

Another effective experiential exercise is for students to be presented with scenarios calling for them to make situational judgments. In this activity learners are given real world business situations and asked to provide brief statements regarding what they would do as a wise leader to make value-added contributions to positively impact the situation. This specific experiential learning activity is especially effective in helping learners understand and obtain practice in experiencing the situational element that is a key factor in managing wisdom. They come to see that one's competence and confidence in managing wisdom is influenced by situational context (Kerns, 2015a).

An especially useful and impactful tool for helping learners better understand the relationship between wise leadership and bad leadership is to have them compare the two. This is accomplished by having them profile the top five characteristics that they believe reflect bad leadership and then brainstorming key actions that they can take to apply wisdom in helping convert these bad leaders into more effective and productive leaders. Typically, this exercise is preceded by having learners read about incompetent, ineffective and abusive leadership as well as about effective leadership practices. The exercise is concluded by having students indicate to what extent their boss is behaving effectively and/or ineffectively. This concluding activity helps bring additional relevance, applicability and impact to the classroom.

Currently I am extending the work that is being done in the area of teaching leaders to teach (Betof, 2009; Finkelstein, 2019) through my engagement with CEOs and their executive teams. This work addresses the need for leaders to execute their role as a WWACT leader by focusing on the "T" or teaching component in the action role. These efforts are proving fruitful in helping these leaders have impact on helping their people learn, grow and develop. An advantage in having organizational leaders do the teaching is that they are closer to the work of their people and can provide credible real-time practical examples and wise insights to their people. This is in contrast to outsourcing leadership development to outside vendors and/or educational institutions. An outgrowth of this work is that leaders receive praise and positive

feedback from their people in appreciation for their investment in helping them grow and develop. These people are recognizing that their leaders are interested in their growth and development. This program of helping leaders become more effective teachers is part of a larger leadership development program that is targeting leaders to become more effective in executing the WFACT leader action role. This work is intended to help leaders deliver personal wisdom in ways that add value to their people as well as enhance their own well-being. Making their unique contributions to their organizations and their people's growth and development is proving to be gratifying and a source of meaningfulness for the leaders who are serving as teachers. I am also considering and preparing to extend these efforts with boards of directors and other organizational governing bodies.

## **SOME CHALLENGES**

Having leaders and organizational policy makers engage in managing wisdom as an organizational resource offers a number of challenges. Although there are instruments available for measuring wisdom, additional practitioner-oriented assessment tools are needed (Webster, 2019). The available instruments, for the most part, are not as applicable and useful in assessing the impacts of selected wisdom enhancing practices in specific situations. In fact, because of the interactions of the trait and state components of wisdom, practitioners are challenged to use multi-situational judgment testing since single snapshot measurements of individual differences and wisdom make it difficult to determine the impacts of situational circumstances versus trait level factors on wisdom (Grossmann et al., 2019).

The sparse number of assessment tools available for measuring wisdom and the impacts it has on an organization is complicated by the reality that there is a lack of definitional clarity and practitioner-oriented frameworks to address managing wisdom at work. The practitioner is unfortunately offered a broad spectrum of definitions with few practitioner-oriented frameworks to help them better understand and practice managing wisdom in workplace settings.

Closely associated with the assessment challenge is the reality that wisdom is difficult for some leaders and organizations to understand. They often do not see the practical utility in the key elements relating to wisdom and how they relate to leadership and organizational effectiveness. It seems that many practitioners equate the idea of wisdom with philosophical discussions and abstract concepts. This situation and challenge is first addressed in Phase I of the practitioner-oriented framework by positioning and clarifying wisdom and through reviewing the management of the processes relating to operationalizing, executing and measuring wisdom as an organizational resource. Without a practical operational definition of managing wisdom along with a framework with associated evidence-based practices managerial leaders and other stakeholders are less likely to engage in applying this otherwise seemingly abstract concept. This is unfortunate because there is increasing evidence and resources to draw from to support organizational leaders in their efforts to better understand and manage wisdom as an organizational resource (Kessler & Bailey, 2007; Sternberg & Glück, 2019; Yang, 2011).

What is also especially challenging is for top management teams and boards of directors to view wisdom as something other than a soft abstract concept that offers little practical utility for positively impacting their organizations. Given this circumstance, it is and will continue to be challenging for those interested in developing leaders to help these high-level bodies understand and practice managing wisdom as an organizational resource. Helping managerial leaders to recognize the value in striving to become wise leaders by effectively managing wisdom will continue to be challenging. Given this, it is important for practitioner-oriented scholars to develop additional frameworks and tools that help credibly persuade leaders and their organizations to engage in actions that help apply wisdom in relevant, applicable and impactful ways at work.

Another challenge relates to leadership development. While billions of dollars are being spent annually on leadership development, the effectiveness of leadership development efforts on organizational performance is alarmingly deficient. This situation presents a challenge to policymakers and those responsible for leadership development in organizations. It highlights the need for practical ways to ensure that the dollars invested in these programs are wisely spent. Organizational decision makers are challenged

to increase the number of wise leaders in their ranks while reducing the number of ineffective, incompetent, and/or abusive leaders. This challenge can be addressed, in part, by having policymakers more fully understand the merits in supporting and encouraging their leaders to recognize the value in viewing wisdom as an important process which can be managed and as an outcome for them to pay attention to as they measure leadership and organizational effectiveness. The framework and related action role offered in this article may help boards of directors, top management teams and their leaders address this challenge in a systematic way. Treating wisdom as an organizational resource to be managed to enhance the practice of wise leadership seems to both operationally and strategically make good business sense. The challenge is for policy makers and organizational leaders to become more knowledgeable and wiser about wisdom and wise leadership.

A final challenge connects to the field of strategic business policy and relates to extending the current focus on shareholder return to a broader view of organizational value creation by more fully considering stakeholder governance (Barney, 2018; McGahan, 2020). Organizations have diverse and multiple stakeholders such as employees, customers and suppliers. Enterprises also have spheres of influence which extend to communities outside of their internal operations, for example, their employees' significant others who are often overlooked as influential stakeholders (Kerns, 2015a). Historically, organizational governance has focused on the relationship between shareholders and top management regarding how they create and distribute economic value. Amis et al. (2020) observed that maximizing shareholder value may not address the diverse and perhaps conflicting interests between shareholders and stakeholders which in turn may reduce rather than maximize the value of the enterprise. This view is shared by others (Campbell, et al., 2012; Carney, 2020; Klein, et al., 2012). For example, employee well-being and customer loyalty levels influence organizational value creation and other key outcomes which can be more broadly addressed by organizations that adopt a stakeholder perspective. Policymakers and top management teams, in particular, are challenged to consider adopting a stakeholder governance approach to move beyond a primary focus on shareholder return. Some suggest that making this shift could be one of the most important contributions to the field of management in the 21st-century (Amis et al., 2020). The considerations and deliberations relating to resolving this challenge could likely benefit from wise leadership.

Addressing these challenges relating to the measurement and assessment of the impacts of wisdom enhancing efforts on organizations along with the need for additional practitioner-oriented frameworks to help leaders and policy makers see the practical utility in managing wisdom at work seems beneficial. Also, addressing the disconnect between investments in leadership development and actual leader effectiveness will likely pay dividends to policymakers and leaders. Finally, the challenge for organizational policy makers and top management teams to consider adopting a stakeholder governance perspective may contribute to enterprises realizing greater value than if they focused mainly on creating wealth for shareholders. These efforts can be advanced by the application of frameworks and action roles such as those offered in this article to workplace settings. Organizations that pay attention to wisdom and the enhancement of wise leadership have the opportunity to develop these areas as resources for a competitive advantage.

As more attention is focused on the practice-oriented aspects of managing wisdom at work, additional challenges for practitioners, policy makers, researchers and teachers will be presented. The practice-oriented framework and associated WWACT leader action role, offered as an organizational resource for managerial leaders, contributes to enhancing wise leadership and organizational effectiveness in organizational settings.

## **SUMMARY STATEMENT**

The development and application of practices to help organizational leaders more effectively understand and impact wisdom in organizational settings will be important to advancing the practice and study of wise leadership. As this work moves forward there will be a need for additional definitional clarity, practice-oriented assessment tools and leadership development efforts to help leaders better understand and manage wisdom as an organizational resource. Policy makers and top management teams, in particular,

who take on the challenge of adopting a stakeholder perspective to governance would likely benefit from displaying wisdom when implementing this approach. These and related efforts will likely advance our knowledge and understanding of how to best impact wisdom levels at work. Managerial leader actions will be an integral part of these efforts. Policy makers as well as practitioners play key roles in impacting wisdom at work. The effective management of wisdom as a valued resource holds promise for positively impacting organizational functioning, stakeholders and societal well-being.

## ENDNOTES

1. A debate comparing and contrasting management and leadership has occurred over more than thirty years. In this article the terms managerial leadership, management, leadership, leader and manager are used synonymously.
2. In developing leader performance enhancing frameworks and tools for leaders, my colleagues and I utilize the following set of criteria. The frameworks and tools need to:
  - Add value in an organization
  - Have face validity for practitioners
  - Be relevant to practitioner's daily work
  - Be evidence based in practice and/or research
  - Be practical to implement in an organizational operating environment
  - Be coachable/teachable
3. See Pfeffer, J. (2018). *Dying for a paycheck: How modern management harms employee health and company performance*. New York, NY: Harper Business, for additional observations regarding human sustainability. Also, see Rath, T. (2020). *Life's great question: Discover how you contribute to the world*. Alexandria, VA: Silicon Guild Books, on how to make meaningful contributions to the world which is related to human sustainability.
4. While it is beyond the scope of the current article to further explore attachment theory's application to leadership the interested reader is encouraged to explore this topic further by reviewing Haslam, S.A., Reicher, S.D., & Platow, M.J. (2015). Leadership: Theory and practice. In M. Mikulincer, P.R. Shaver, J.F. Dovidio, & J.A. Simpson (Eds.), *APA handbook of personality and social psychology: Group processes* (pp. 67-94). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Also see Keller, T. (2003). Parental images as a guide to leadership sense making: An attachment perspective on implicit leadership theories. *Leadership Quarterly*, 14, 141-160.
5. Part of the motivation for encouraging wise leadership is the hope that it can help turn around the epidemic of bad leadership. I have been endeavoring to do this with CEOs, executive teams and boards of directors. In short, top management and leaders throughout an organization making wise decisions that improve organizational effectiveness on both traditional and nontraditional metrics seems to be good business and is an area meriting additional attention from organizational stakeholders.

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