Towards a grainier understanding of how to encourage morally responsible leadership through the development of *phronesis*: A typology of managerial *phronesis*

Abstract

Aristotle's philosophical insights into ethics, wisdom and practice have drawn the attention of scholars. In the current professional context where ethics are often compromised, this debate assumes a necessary urgency. This subject is highly relevant to business schools, given the general neglect of this quality in executive management development.

Our research involved an analysis of contemporary literature on *phronesis* in the management scholarship, practice and teaching domains. Our definition of *phronesis* identifies themes and paradoxes distilled from this literature. Stories are by nature multi-layered and paradoxical, embracing ambiguity and contradiction, so we incorporate narrative as essential to our enquiry.

While it appears to be easily grasped, *phronesis* is complex, nuanced and paradoxical, seen as an unorganised set of characteristics in the management scholarship domain. We argue that the neglect of *phronesis* in modernity flows from the challenging nature of developing it, itself the consequence of its indistinctness. It calls for Einstein's words "*I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity"*.

This article argues that developing this virtue as a form of practical wisdom, should be an integral part of executive management development if we are to cultivate morally responsible leadership. A typology of managerial *phronesis* will encourage contextually appropriate leadership excellence based on the virtue-attributes of managers-as-scholars. The typology we propose is based on a Grounded Theory synthesis of relevant literature. We adopt a phenomenological stance. Through incorporating Grounded Theory second order themes, we offer a grainier understanding of the qualities of managerial *phronesis*.

Key words: phronesis in executive leadership; executive management development; developing phronesis; case study in phronesis; executive wisdom

1. *Phronesis* as practical wisdom: An Introduction

Aristotle believed that *phronesis,* which he related to wisdom, was essential to the effective management of human affairs (Flyvbjerg, et al. 2012). The central argument of this article is that developing this virtue *phronesis*, as a form of practical wisdom, should be an integral part of executive management development if we are to cultivate morally responsible leadership.

We draw two examples from the recent annals of EMBA dissertations (UCT's Graduate School of Business) that demonstrate *phronesis* in action. We see these stories as touchstones of ethical action in response to crisis. Through them we explore and analyse the business case for developing *phronesis.* We look for commonalties and guidelines as we expand on the underlying problems. These examples exist in sharp contrast to the general neglect of this quality in executive management development.

Phronesis is a part of the troika of intellectual virtues necessary for the effective conduct of human affairs (Higgs, 2012) but remains marginalised in favour of *technê* (the virtue associated with specialised skills) and *episteme*, (related to general knowledge). We adopt the definitions Macklin and Whiteford (2012) propose, with *technê* being the technical wisdom about how best to produce objects whereas *episteme* is defined as theoretical wisdom about objective laws of the universe.

Phronesis is the wisdom underpinning the practical choices of leaders (Erickson, 2012). In the context of management studies, Antonacopoulou (2010b) describes the notion as a relational mode of knowing grounded in virtues and standards of excellence integral in the pursuit of

perfection. To Antonacopoulou, *phronesis* is "*about the knowledge that defines the way we formulate our intentions and the course of action for achieving these intentions*" (pS7).

As evident in the unfolding of our argument, we regard *phronesis* in the context of contemporary management practice, or managerial *phronesis* if you will, as the capacity for values-based sense-making and morally-imbued, relevant behaviour aimed at virtuous outcomes.

We argue that the neglect of *phronesis* in modernity flows from the challenging nature of developing it, itself the consequence of the indistinctness of the concept in the context of management scholarship. A typology of managerial *phronesis* will therefore encourage a more responsible executive leadership. It will empower leaders to develop *praxis*, understood as "*right conduct*" (Kenmis, 2012, p. 147), through which they will be better able to deal with the technical and ethical demands of modernity. A structured understanding of managerial *phronesis* will enable educators to transcend the focus on how we teach general knowledge and develop the technical acumen of students.

We propose a definition and a Gioia-Grounded theory typology in answer to the question, what is managerial *phronesis*? In this we adopt a phenomenological stance, developing an understanding of managerial *phronesis* from the perspective of those who subjectively grapple with the subject (Racher and Robinson, 2016).

2. Two case studies of *phronesis* in action

The two dissertations we consider are Kaare Spange's "Leadership as a driver for Safety" and Nora Thiel's "Exploring Stellenbosch community stories of their first contact experiences of the Stellenbosch wine industry: A phronetic social science investigation."

Spange led a company that operated in an industry with heavy machinery in close proximity to Front Line staff. This posed serious safety risks. While technically safety was addressed through systems and controls, this did not prevent a crisis that shifted Spange's focus to leadership and change in the organizational culture. He begins with a story of the death of a young employee and his response:

> *… eager to show his worth, (he) wanted to assist a truck driver parking his trailer. Standing behind the trailer while it was backing up, (he) was unaware that the rear-view mirrors of the truck were not working and the driver was not able to see him. Given the level of Container Handling Equipment noise, the driver was not able to hear him either. The trailer …squashed (him) between the reversing trailer and a trailer …parked in the facility.* (8)

As the CEO he saw himself as ultimately responsible for the safety of employees:

> *Safety is not a function or a discipline but the generic result of how we operate – how we behave. This was a revelation and both good and bad news. The good news was that if leadership drives safety then it is within my powers to affect and improve it. The bad news is, that if safety indeed is the direct result of leadership, then the death of Mr. Rakubu was the direct result of my Leadership. (9)*

Spange's research question became: "How do I change my Leadership Practice to create a Culture that improves safety?" He concluded that if he did not respond then "the long term (and short term) consequences will be to close down operations and entities." Personal involvement became key to his addressing the safety issue. Spange wished to close the gap "between work-as-imagined (by my Leadership team) and the work-as-done (carried out at the entities)" (84). He writes:

> *I often advocate bringing the leadership closer to the Front Line staff in the ways we communicate and in the actions we take. I refer to this as our "Closer Together" approach. To "Put my money where my mouth is" I participated in a night shift at our Cape Town facility – without the involvement of the management team at the entity. I wanted to demonstrate visible leadership and build trust with the Front Line staff…. One evening I did what in the methodology of PDSA is referred to as a Gemba-walk where*

> *managers are "walking the floor" or following the actual steps of a process. I worked with the Gate staff in our Cape Town depot during an evening shift. As the management team of the entity was not present, I was able to directly engage with the front line staff and see work-as-done.(82/83)*

During the visit, he introduced himself to all staff and made sure they all had the opportunity to share their concerns and views on safety – or discuss other matters they saw as important. One of the front line staff …told the supervisor "Wow – I shook the hand with the CEO". Spange initially felt like a "big shot" but "reflecting while driving back that night, the more important element from that remark became clear: There has been and still is a huge distance between leadership and the front line staff" (98).

Part of his innovation and intervention was to create a bridging role. Together with his supervisor he came up with a new position, The Safety Shifter. "The idea was to put a senior leader (former entity manager) in overalls and have him work full-time with and for the front line staff. Rather than coming with pre-engineered tools and ideas, the Safety Shifter would go to our entities and take part in front line work" (85).

To reinforce this necessary link Spange developed the 1-2-3 approach -

1 Communicate and explain the rules

2 Explain the consequences if rules are not followed

3 Execute in a just manner

During the work performed by the Safety Shifter, the staff would encounter situations where the execution of the 1-2-3 approach was applied – by the Safety Shifter, by management and eventually by the front-line staff. Front line staff participated in the regular safety meetings. This needed much coaxing and reinforcing before it began to serve the purpose the CEO intended.

While Spange shares that this personal involvement was not part of his "DNA", as a leader he was consciously pursuing involvement after seeing the immediate benefits. He introduced the Fatal 5 concept which became encoded in the company etiquette and exchanges. Through the Safety Shifter's involvement, the comments received from Front Line staff changed dramatically:

> *"Fatal 5 is part of our daily work surroundings"*
>
> *"Safety does not start by Management but starts with me"*
>
> *"No more short cuts, I will do my work in the correct manner"*
>
> *"Management does care about us"*
>
> *"I will be accountable for my safety and my colleague" (101).*

In the final chapter Spange reflects on his personal journey:

> *This has been a transformative journey. I was expecting to receive a number of tools during the EMBA to improve my management practice. Little did I know that the main focus would be to improve the most important tool for my practice: me. (125)… This is my main learning from both the EMBA and the dissertation - the importance of the element of trust. Being authentic and genuinely interested in the well-being of my colleagues, friends and family – and showing it – creates the trust. This is how I will change my leadership practice, to create a culture that improves our performance – also when it comes to Safety. (127)*

Norah Thiel grew up on a Stellenbosch Wine farm and after graduating with a B-Econ started working in the family wine business where she is currently involved as a Director. She also serves on the board of Directors of The Stellenbosch Wine Route (SWR) and Stellenbosch 360 Tourism (360).

She saw her EMBA enrolment as a way of developing her own *phronesis* and to bring it to bear on Stellenbosch which she saw as representing a dysfunctional "family" (96). A large part of that family consisted of unemployed despairing youths unaware of or prejudiced against the growing opportunities within wine tourism. Part of the legacy the youth faced came from the negative impact on community health from the abusive consumption of 'cheap' wine.

As a leader, she began to feel she was responsible for what had happened in her town.

> *I was able to see that Stellenbosch had slipped into the "sacrifice syndrome" as described by Boyatzis (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005) One of hopelessness, mindlessness, and little compassion. It is only if we accept, that we are responsible and we can make a difference, that this can change and we can become "Resonant leaders" as a society. We as "leaders create the culture which shapes the behaviour". To change the patterns of behaviour we need renewed courage, hope, compassion, mindfulness and an imaginative approach. (4)*

Thiel's research question evolved to "How can the Wine Tourism Industry within the Stellenbosch community help to establish new patterns of behavior so that we can increase the employment opportunities for our youth?" One of the sub questions asked "How can I make a realistic impact on changed perceptions within our communities through my position within the wine and tourism industries?"

In perusing narrative, Thiel came to an understanding that "Our storied world is an implicate order. It's a world of *movement and becoming*... that when we want to glimpse a particular moment it will be a reflection of the *history of relations.* The ongoing activity of movement shapes these worlds and things do not exist, they occur" (10).

Her literature review took her into this new territory, Heidegger's "Dasein" (being in the moment within one's own world view), being one of them. She observes "Phronesis is a recently accepted social science research approach where it is important to continuously be asking the question 'who is losing?' and 'who is winning?' in the interest of a greater good for society" (33).

She writes of the practical nature of involvement in the project:

> *The essence of the phenomenological approach is for the researcher to reveal a lived experience in such a way that it brings to light new understanding of, until now, unknown narrative so that it can contribute to a positive "social science" endeavor rather than just some philosophical research* (31).

As a leader, Thiel chooses an open vulnerable approach to enquiry:

> *Real social science research needs to listen to how people on the bottom experience their own subordination so that we can help them overcome their subjugation. Good social science includes taking the perspective of the oppressed in the name of helping them achieve social justice. (Flyvbjerg & Schram, n.d.)* (32).

Much of her focus is on self-understanding, drawing from a wide range of sources and disciplines that one would not expect in a conventional MBA. For example, Thiel explores Jungian archetypes. She identifies her archetype as that of the "magician" who "contains, assesses, stays detached and offers advice... The main role of the magician is to contain Fear (my weakness) and deal with it in a constructive way. If I can make fear my ally, I am able to function in a mature space …and cope with difficult situations, able to stay clearheaded, remain detached and hold tension."

She commits to continuous reflection and re-reflection. Using a phronetic social science approach and focusing on narrative leads her to an informed understanding for *"Good social*

science includes taking the perspective of the oppressed in the name of helping them achieve social justice" (Flyvbjerg & Schram, n.d.) (32).

Thiel selected 12 youths under 30 years of age, from different cultural communities "unemployed, employed inside wine industry, employed outside wine industry, still studying." She also interviewed key community leaders "My own interest in shaping our leadership of today towards being in the moment, being present and taking action was partly used to extract themes from leaders I interviewed" (72). A personal development plan which helped to hold tension constructively during authentic difficult interviews and conversations supported Thiels' own *phronesis*.

The themes developed through the narratives reflect a sense of fear and resentment of the wine industry yet an eagerness to help find a bigger overlap suggestion to improve the "real long-term relationship between the wine industry and the communities". The SWR has already used the research input to start new ways of interacting with youth. Development and training became a priority for SWR. The youth interviewed made suggestions ranging from Wine tasting clubs, Winery tours for school children during harvest time, wine ambassador initiatives, wine career guides and many more interactions.

Thiel found great value in a Khoi proverb:

> *//Hapo ge // hapo tama / haohasib dis tamas ka I bo*
>
> *(A dream is not a dream until it is shared by the entire community)* (92).

Subsequently she has been involved in a new business model which incorporates the labour force as shareholders.

3. A crisis of morally responsible executive leadership

These two stories which testify to how *phronesis* can lead to ethical action represent two small islands in a turbulent sea. After the much discussed 2008 financial crises calls for changes in how corporates are managed have grown louder (see for example Brown et al. 2015 and Cairns et al. 2010). In their article on the moral development of worker-researchers, Gibbs et al. (2007) argue that ethical behaviour should be regarded as central to every profession. Kenmis concurs, arguing that "*we not only want good professionals, we want good professional practitioners that will do good*" (Kenmis, 2012, p.148). And more recently, Roos (2017) suggested that ethical governance is vital to the sustainability of society and our planet.

Various means have consequently been developed in an attempt to secure appropriate corporate governance including governance mechanisms internal to the organisation and external governance tools aimed at monitoring and controlling the behaviour of firms' management teams (Misangyi and Acharya, 2014). Examples of these measures that seek to ensure that agents manage their firms appropriately include the various iterations of the King report on corporate governance in South Africa and the similar Cadbury report in the United Kingdom (Rossouw, 2002).

Yet, despite the demand for more morally responsible leadership and the corresponding development and refinement of governance rules evident over the last ten years, moral failures are still evident. For example, the executives of the now disgraced international public relations firm Bell Pottinger sought profit through developing a conflict-inspiring, racially charged campaign in South Africa, a country struggling to overcome racism and racially divisive policies. Similarly, executives at multinational firm, Steinhoff International, stand accused of conspiring to commit accounting fraud (Cronje, 2018) whilst in yet another case, the leading auditing firm KPMG is likely to face inquiries into their role of facilitating

corruption in South Africa and the potential violation of the industry's code of conduct (Haffajee, 2018). Accounting fraud is more common than might be suspected with substantive financial misreporting leading to the suspension of trading in the shares of the multinational firm Tongaat Hulett (Ryan, 2019).

A failure in morally responsible executive leadership is an international problem. In Brazil, the firm Odebrecht is facing ruin following the revelations of institutionalised corruption across its international operations (Alves, 2019). Former executives of the international auto manufacturer Volkswagen face criminal charges for fraud following their attempt to manipulate the results of the diesel emission tests of their vehicles ("Former VW boss charged", 2019). Similarly, executives at international food manufacturer Tiger Brands Limited was criticized for their self-preserving approach in managing the crises ensuing from the world's deadliest listeria outbreak which originated from one of its food processing plants (Johnston, 2018).

3.1 An imbalance in the training of executive leaders

Although some might argue that executive leadership has become more morally responsible over time, the continued ethical failures indicate that something radical has to be done. We do not stand alone in our opinion. For instance, Transparency International (2018) notes that most countries continue to struggle with controlling corruption.

Ethical failures in executive leadership persist despite the tireless efforts of educators and management scholars to develop wiser executives (George et al., 2016). Indeed, these highlighted executive failures occurred against the backdrop of professional training directed by management scholarship. Thus, the discipline is broadly criticised for its inadequate impact (George et al., 2016; Adler and Harzing, 2009; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006). Armstrong

(2005, p. 229) goes so far as to suggest that the current approach to developing managers has a "*corrupting influence on the practice of management*".

The moral failures evident despite heightened focus on ethics and accountability could also be blamed on the mechanistic approach to the application of relevant theories. Prescribed rules and an inappropriate approach to developing managers also contribute to the malaise (Armstrong, 2005). Kinsella and Pitman (2012a) for instance, argue that moral standards should be contextually established relative to the engaged practitioners' situations.

Highlighting research into the mindless application of psychological theory, Glanville (2014) argues that blindly applying theory to practice can bring about unintended consequences. Though Glanville's paper relates to practice in medicine, we argue that this holds true across today's divergent professional practices. According to Ulvik et al. (2017), rules may prevent rather than promote ethical maturity.

William Starbuck argued a decade ago that what has been learned becomes harmful "*because the lessons of experience gradually become inappropriate as technologies change and social trends progress, and organizations are unable to free themselves from obsolete lessons*" (Barnett, 2007, p. 121). Modern executives facing ever quickening changes in an interconnected world of work, can no longer depend on conventional approaches to management (Storey and Salaman, 2010) as this can result in "*dramatically unwise decisions*" (Bachmann et al. 2017, p. 126). A different approach to management development and a different intelligence is required. A radical kind of thinking on your toes not from the comfort of an executive chair. Spange and Thiel literally walked their talk to engage directly with front line staff and community respectively. Stories by their nature involve physical and emotional movement (shifts) to effect change. These encounters brought these leaders new insights into what constitutes engaged ethical leadership as a prelude to action.

4. The Peak of Excellence: The role of phronesis

Hold (2013) proposes an alternative perspective on how moral excellence in professional practice may be achieved. He argues that objectivized ethics and ethics education should be restructured through an increased focus on the development of *phronesis* (Hold, 2013). Kopf et al. (2011) share this view that *Phronesis* should augment the decision to be held accountable. Roos (2017) too grounds his governance case in *phronesis* with Ellet (2012) highlighting the virtue in establishing a more just society. Accountability should not be promoted at the expense of *phronesis* (Pitman, 2012). Ulvik et al. (2017, p. 248) claim that "*when rules do not help, ethics of virtue with phronesis as an ideal is suggested as an alternative*".

Executives cannot rely on theory and science alone (Kinsella, 2012). Neither *technê,* (craft), nor *episteme,* (general knowledge) is sufficient (Kreber, 2015b). Hibbert (2012, p. 65) highlights the potential of *phronesis* to bring about the "*unifying and essential habit of the mind*". Nonaka et al. (2014) argued that Aristotle believed that the wise acknowledged the limits of formal knowledge which stands in contrast to the concept of wisdom.

Some regard *phronesis* as more critical than *technê* and *episteme* (Stewart, 2003; Brown et al., 2015; Sellman, 2012; Shapira, 2013) given its capacity to inform "*wise choices of appropriate actions that actually benefited people in society*" (Erickson, 2012, p. 687). Sasse-Werhahn et al. (2018, p.3) describe phronesis as "*the peak of excellence in leadership and decision making*", with its value to leaders, students and professional practitioners broadly celebrated (Brown et al. 2015; Clegg, et al. 2013; Florian and Graham, 2014; Hartley, 2011; Higgs, 2012; Kenmis, 2012; Kinsella, 2012; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012b; Kopf et al. 2011; Kreber, 2015b; Pickup, 2017; Pitman, 2012; Sage et al. 2010; Salminen-Karlsson and Wallgren, 2008; Sellman, 2012). Tsang (2005, p. 687) goes so far as to state that "*practical wisdom in the*

Aristotelian tradition is deemed more desirable in practice than the technical application of universal truths".

Phronesis enables the identification and accomplishment of worthy actions (Eryaman, 2006). It promotes creativity through supporting the resolution of tensions as a step towards creating new possibilities (Antonacopoulou, 2010b). The Spange and Thiel stories both privilege creative engagement with an identified challenge.

4.1 Teaching and Learning: Phronetically focused curricula?

The need to focus on the teaching of *phronesis* dates back more than a decade. In proposing their 2006–model of engaged scholarship, Van de Ven and Johnson (2006) bemoan the neglect of *phronesis* in business schools. Stewart (2003) wrote about introducing a phronetic orientation in a university degree course. In 2005, McPherson highlighted the potential of *phronesis* in his discussion in Hubert Dreyfus' seven stages of learning (McPherson, 2005).

Yet despite *phronesis* being recognized as an imperative to nurturing more responsible and ethical governance (Roos, 2017), phronetically focused curricula do not represent a typical developmental path as yet. This scarcity in *phronesis*-motivated programmes could explain the lack of progress in achieving the requisite more responsible management.

Management scholarship and professional practice still reflect a preference for *technê* and *episteme* at the expense of *phronesis* (Antonacopoulou, 2010a; Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006; Brown et al. 2015; Gibbs et al. 2007; Hibbert, 2012; Hodgson and Paton, 2016; Lewis, 2013; Pitman, 2012; Roos, 2017; Salminen-Karlsson and Wallgren, 2008).

The dominance of scientific theory might to some extent lie in the challenge of teaching *phronesis.* Vosecky (2017) reminds us that Aristotle argued that *phronesis* cannot be taught directly. In his PhD thesis, Vosecky reviews Aristotle's texts and suggests that our

understanding of *technê* is impoverished and should include intrinsic humanistic goals in the act of making.

In this argument, teaching *phronesis* becomes teaching phronetically in service of a humanistic *technê*. As Vosecky (2017, p. 144) argues *"Thinking of phronesis in this way suggests a way to if not resolve, at least sidestep the Aristotelian dilemma that phronesis cannot be taught*".

The fixation on the unteachability of *phronesis* is in our view unnecessary. As Kinsella and Pitman suggest (2012b, p. 168):

> "*Even if it cannot be taught, it does not imply that the disposition cannot be nurtured and the nascent and practicing professionals cannot be provided with conditions under which phronetic action is both encouraged and rewarded*".

Both Spange and Thiel link their subsequent leadership action to their exposure to the learning involved through an EMBA 'education'. Sellman (2009, p. 85) in his article on teaching for *phronesis* in healthcare suggests too that it is much simpler to approach the development of *phronesis* through the question of "*can phronesis be learned?*" rather than taught. The interrelationship between practitioners, their practice and their *phronesis* that Antonacopoulou, (2010a) highlights suggests that the development of *phronesis* flows from its reinforcing application in transformation of the practitioner and the practitioner's practice. This perspective aligns with the classic understanding that *phronesis* is developed through practicing it (Frank, 2012b; Jamal, 2004).

To facilitate the development of *phronesis*, Vosecky (2017) proposes a *technê* of *phronesis,* for *technê* can more easily be taught.

Recently, the role of mentorship in developing the *phronesis* of pupils has been brought into question too. Moberg (2008) found that mentors are not necessarily more practically-wise than

non-mentors. In this paper our focus on *phronesis* is narrower than that of Moberg (2008) who studied the role of mentorship in developing practical wisdom of prodigies. Athanassoulis (2017) too highlights the limitations of the mentorship by a *phronimos* or virtuous agent as an approach to developing the *phronesis* of pupils. Athanassoulis (2017) argues that the focus in developing Aristotelian virtues should shift to the qualities that the virtuous possess. To develop *phronesis,* requires that we pay attention to its foundational qualities rather than emulating the *phronimos*-in-action.

Focusing on the development of *phronesis* is not enough. It may not translate into the desired evolution of managers from practitioners to *phronimoi* (Kenmis, 2012). Kenmis (2012) makes use of the intentional fallacy argument to suggest that whilst a phronetic disposition is expressed through *praxis*, it is the latter that should be developed first and not *phronesis*. Developing *phronesis*, Kenmis argues, may not necessarily result in desirable behaviour or practice. We side rather with Kristjánsson (2005) who argues that *praxis* represents phronetic activity and that "*we cannot be 'fully good' without phronesis*" (p.469).

4.2 *Phronesis* and *Praxis*?

Kristjánsson (2005) warns against confusing practice with *praxis,* which is always concerned with ethical engagements.

We concede that *praxis* enables the development of *phronesis* given a bounded and mutually reinforcing interrelationship. Actions rather than intentions determine management practice. Yet we still argue for an intentional focus on the development of *phronesis* as a pathway towards morally responsible executive management.

Unlike Kenmis (2012) we believe that *phronesis* represents more than our hopes, intentions, promises and preparedness. It is an action competence (Fricker, 2016; Greeff and Rennie,

2016; Matheson, 2009; Weidenfeld, 2011). *Phronesis,* relates to doing (Salinen-Karlsson and Wallgren, 2008).

Leaving our divergence in opinion aside, we concur with the concern raised by Kenmis (2012) that *phronesis*-pedagogy may not result in the evolution of practitioners to *phronimoi*. To learn *phronesis* is to demonstrate it (Higgs, 2012; Antonacopoulou, 2010a). This requires that characteristics of *phronesis* in the executive management domain be known (Athanassoulis, 2017). *Phronesis* remains elusive (Frank, 2012a; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012a; Kristjánsson, 2015; Lewis, 2013; Lund et al. 2012); an elusiveness that impedes the actualisation of *phronesis*-qualities in management practice. We need a framework of managerial *phronesis* to train managers.

Greeff and Rennie (2006) propose a concept map of *phronesis* in the community health research-context, developed from data collected during a guided focus group. Greeff and Rennie (2006, p.175) conclude that the eight focus group participants are all *phronimoi* and therefore possess *phronesis "as a crucial decision-making skill"*.

This does not represent a compelling argument that the focus group participants are indeed *phronimoi*. The only clues the authors provide relate to selection criteria. The focus group had to have a master's degree with two years' experience as action researchers who face ethical dilemmas. They were not to be subordinate to the researchers conducting the research and be willing to participate and express themselves freely (Greeff and Rennie, 2016). These criteria indicate a focus on technical competence rather than phronetic prowess.

We empathise with the authors since it is difficult to describe a *phronimos*. The vagueness is not only an obstacle to the development of *phronesis* in a cohort of professional managers, but also hinders the ability to describe a *phronimos* and ultimately to monitor the development of a manager in developing her or his *phronesis*. To know whether our judgements are sound, to

borrow from Higgs (2012), involves realising *phronesis* through understanding and performance.

5. Managerial phronesis as reflected in the literature

How does the contemporary management scholarship community frame this intellectual virtue?

To explore this phenomenon our research involved an analysis of contemporary literature on *phronesis* in the management scholarship, practice and teaching domains. The aim was to ground the theory of *phronesis* in the reviewed authors' perspectives and conceptualisation. So the passages in the literature that relate to the concept were more important in developing a typology than the nature of the literature sources.

We limited our search of sources published over the past ten years in the *Ebsco Host*, *Science Direct* and *Emerald*, which we deemed most relevant. We augmented this initial search via a broader use of Google Scholar. The literature review remained purposeful rather than exhaustive (Thomas and Harden, 2008). (Many of the sources we consulted appear in the bibliography only so as to streamline our article so it does not get bogged down in a mass of references).

From the review, it is evident that the concept's definition as far as it relates to management practice domain has not yet been settled. We encountered a multitude of definitions within the boundaries and characteristics of *phronesis* yet to be clarified.

Despite the indistinctness and seeming incompleteness of any description (Frank, 2012a), a definition and conceptualisation of *phronesis* emerges based on common themes that can be isolated. Our proposed definition may guide more focused programmes.

5.1 Definition of managerial *phronesis*

Privileging a definition of *phronesis* assumes the existence of an ideal benchmark. Judging the merit of the divergent modern interpretations in management scholarship, we believe, is incongruent with the phenomenological approach to our study. We seek to give practical meaning to the subjectively understood phenomenon through exploring the perspectives of reviewed authors on the subject (Racher and Robinson, 2016). Even Aristotle, who coined the concept *phronesis*, is not systematic when describing it (Kristjánsson, 2015).

As an alternative, we propose a thematic synthesis of the different conceptualisations of the virtue evident in the literature. Managerial *phronesis* can be understood as a moral thinking and doing competence. As such it supports good management, with good management being managerial behaviour that stimulates appropriate organisational activities and outcomes. Here is our definition:

> 'the capacity for values-based sense-making and morally-imbued, relevant behaviour aimed at virtuous outcomes.'

Our definition incorporates five themes distilled from the literature. (1) Managerial *phronesis* is an intellectual virtue. (2) It is a judging quality where judgement is grounded in virtuous ethics. (3) It holds virtuous aims in focus. (4) It incorporates contextually relevant behaviour. (5) Managerial *phronesis* is an action-competence.

We now consider how each of these themes manifests in the reviewed literature.

5.1.1 Managerial *phronesis* as an intellectual virtue

The first theme to emerge is that *phronesis* is an intellectual virtue (Athanassoulis, 2017; Florian and Graham, 2014; Holmgren et al. 2011; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012a; Kristjánsson, 2015; Regelski, 2012; Sellman, 2009). Though it is described as a knowledge, (Cooper and Morgan, 2008; Glanville, 2014; Rief et al. 2013) or practical knowledge (Back, 2012; Pickup, 2017), *phronesis* is not an intellectual *knowing* and should be distinguished from other forms of knowledge (Ellett, 2012). It is a state of grasping the truth (Kristjánsson, 2015), an intuition connected to *doing* (Brands, 2014; Kreber, 2015a). *Phronesis* seems to be regarded more as a way of being or reasoning (Florian and Graham, 2014; Hibbert, 2012; Pope-Ruark, 2014; Rief et al. 2013), an intelligence that draws on knowledge (Athanassoulis, 2017; Brown et al. 2015; Roos, 2017). Therefore, *phronesis* is more about knowledge (Antonacopoulou, 2010a) than being a knowledge-type itself and is often contrasted with *technê* (Florian and Graham, 2014). It acts as a verb rather than a noun.

5.1.2 Managerial *phronesis* is a judging quality grounded in virtuous ethics

Authors such as Cooper and Morgan (2008) and Engle (2018) suggest that wisdom as a conceptualisation of *phronesis* is intended to mean practical knowledge. This seems to denote knowledge of appropriate goals and the means to those goals (Cooper and Morgan, 2008; Ekmekçi et al. 2014; Ellett, 2012). Others refer to *phronesis*-as-knowledge as a "*knowledge of ethics*" (Hold, 2013, p. 47) or "*faculty of the soul*" (Pope-Ruark, 2014, p. 324).

The conceptual distinction between *phronesis* as practical knowledge or practical wisdom is not clear. Perhaps the description of *phronesis* as a capacity (Hold, 2013; Macklin and Whiteford, 2012) or rather a reasoned capacity (Kristjánsson, 2015; Tierney, 2014; Vosecky, 2017) is more appropriate. This reasoned virtue is deliberative (Brands, 2014; Cairns et al. 2010; Ekmekçi et al. 2014; Fitzgerald, 2007; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012a) and judges complex

knowledge in relation to the relevant context and goals (Athanassoulis, 2017; Kreber, 2015a). Coulter and Weins via Mary Holmes (2010, p. 2) refer to *phronesis* as "*embodied judgement*".

Thus, *phronesis* is the ability to "*calculate well to promote some good end*" (Pope-Ruark, 2014, p. 324). In addition to being a judging quality, this rational capacity is grounded in a virtuousness or ethics. *Phronesis* is therefore a moral thought too (Chishtie, 2012; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012a; Lund et al. 2012; Pope-Ruark, 2014; Roos, 2017) with authors such as Pickup (2017); Vosecky (2017); Tierney (2014) and Fitzgerald (2007), often quoting Aristotle's argument that *phronesis* is "*concerned with what is good and bad for a human being*" (Pickup, 2017, p. 2129).

5.1.3 Managerial *phronesis* holds virtuous aims

The literature indicates a consensus that *phronesis* involves formulating virtuous aims as well as discerning the appropriate and effective courses of action. Whilst Antonacopoulou (2010a, p. 7) states that it "*defines the way we formulate our intentions and the course of action for achieving these intentions*", which suggests a more general genre of planning, she does make the point that *phronesis* is grounded in ethics (Antonacopoulou, 2010b). Other authors argue that the goals engendered through *phronesis* and the plans hatched to attain the goals are morally imbued. Athanassoulis (2017, p. 348) states that "*phronesis manifests itself in the ability to see what virtue requires*". Back (2012) reminds us that for Aristotle, *phronesis'* attractiveness lies in the ability to deliberate about the consequences of concrete action. This in turn influences the action's desirability to the *phronetically* wise person or *phronimos*. *Phronesis* would predispose one to "*feel and do 'the right things at the right time, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way'*" (Back, 2012, p. 126. Sellman, 2009). Spange and Thiel act in terms of this congruence.

Many authors share this understanding: Fitzgerald (2007); Bands (2014), Kinsella and Pitman (2012b) Ekmekçi et al. (2014); Brown et al. (2015) Ellet (2012) among others. Kopf et al. (2011, p. 293) articulate this phronetic characteristic as "*the capability, developed over time, to consider what modes of action are necessary to deliver change and to enhance the quality of life*".

5.1.4 Managerial *phronesis* incorporates contextually appropriate behaviour

This alignment suggests that *phronesis* is also contextually and situationally sensitive (Falk, et al. 2012. P916). The generally held view is that *phronesis* is variable to the practitioner's particular occurrence and context (Back, 2012; Brands, 2014; Falk et al. 2012 among others).

Brown et al. (2015) and Hold (2013) note that *phronesis* involves making the appropriate decisions in context. Virtue involves applying theory and science in a particular context (Cooper and Morgan (2008), what Salminen-Karlsson and Wallgren (2008, p. 80) refer to as *"the dynamics of practical situations*". *Phronesis* cannot be generalised and is always linked to particular experiences (Clegg et al. 2013). This privileges narrative which articulates the particular through a specific context.

5.1.5 Managerial *phronesis* is an action competence

The golden thread running through the reviewed literature is that *phronesis* is a practical or action-orientated virtue (Back, 2012; Engle, 2018), i.e. "*the practical knowledge of ethics*" (Hold, 2013, p.470). Often translated as practical wisdom (Barkathunnisha et al. 2016; Brands, 2014; Clegg et al. 2013; Dredge et al. 2012; Ekmekçi et al. 2014; Engle, 2018 among others) and referred to as "*practical common-sense"* (Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 73); "*practical reasoning*" (Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 113); "*knowledge for acting*" (Glanville 2014, p. 1294) and "*experiential*

knowledge" (Rief et al. 2013, p. 312) and a knowledge orientated towards daily practices and deliberations (Rief et al. 2013)

6. A Call for a Typology of managerial phronesis in executive management practice

Phronesis is understood then as a situationally embedded developmental and practical skill. We argue that despite the opinion that *phronesis* cannot be codified into writing (Salminen-Karlsson and Wallgren, 2008), we need a typology of managerial *phronesis* to support its development in our target audience. We analysed the identified literature using the Gioia Grounded Theory methodology (Gioia, et al., 2013).

As a systematic approach to inductive research (Gehman et al., 2017), the Gioia methodology was appropriate to the thematic analysis. The emergent data structure forms the Grounded Theory foundation. The data structure, as the ultimate product of the Gioia-analysis, enabled the presentation of the theory underpinning the typology. The structure also demonstrates the progression from the literature as raw data to meaning units to conceptual themes (Gioia, et al., 2013). We represent the aggregate dimensions that emerged from the analysis as four distinctive modes : engaging, knowing and thinking, being and acting, as conceptualised in Figure 1. This conceptualisation concurs with Kenmis's (2012, p.156) "*quality of mind and character and action*".

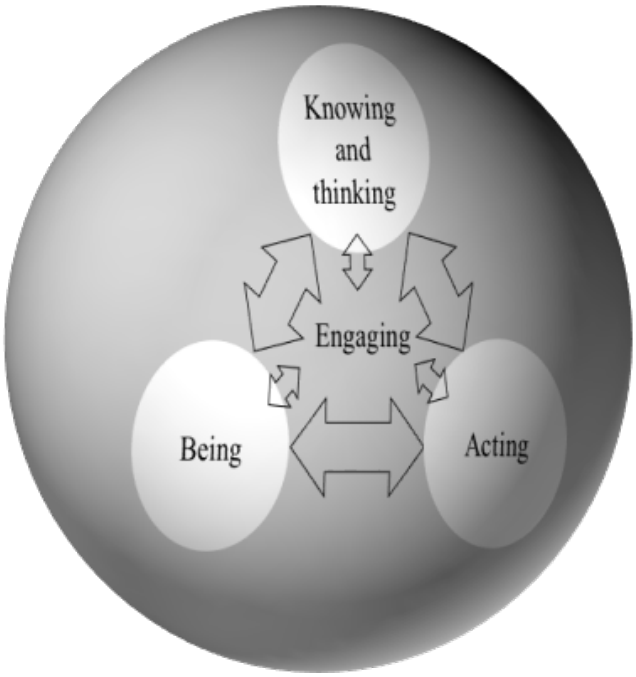

Figure 1: Modes of managerial *phronesis*

This congruence between management action and character should reflect one's virtues (Antonacopoulou, 2010a, 2018; Higgs, 2012). It lies at the heart of professional knowledge (Kinsella and Pitman, 2012a) beating in the professional manager's context and community.

We describe each of the four phronetic modes, with the second order themes identified during the Grounded Theory analysis representing the characteristics of each of the higher order modes. The analysed literature represents exemplar-meaning units. The first order codes were extracted to form the basis of the Grounded Theory.

6.1 Mode of Engaging

Managerial *phronesis* includes a Mode of Engaging. As illustrated in Figure 2, *phronimoi* engage with their community and situation in a dialogical, participative, context-based and discursive manner.

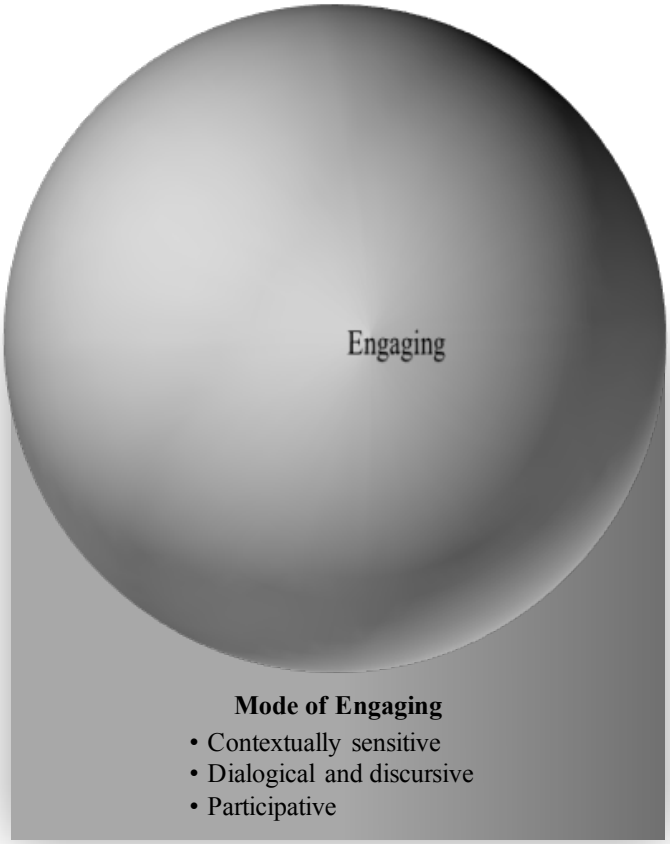

Figure 2: Phronetic Mode of Engaging

6.1.1 Dialogical and discursive

While dialogue is central to *phronesis* (Back, 2012; Pickup, 2017; Rief et al. 2013), managerial *phronesis* transcends dialogue, being both dialogical and discursive. It involves the transformation of understanding (Castelli and Trevathan, 2008). It is dialogical in testing (Clegg et al. 2013) and extending knowledge (Antonacopoulou, 2018) and is critical and creative in negotiating and promoting shared meaning (Higgs, 2012). Phronetic engagement is interpersonal (Antonacopoulou, 2018) communication with others (Rief et al. 2013) and involves concession and compromises (Clegg et al. 2013).

6.1.2 Participative

A wise practitioner adopts a participative approach to engaging (Antonacopoulou, 2018; Castelli and Trevathan, 2008). Higgs (2012) claims that the moral and ethical approach to professional practice demands that the practitioner works with stakeholders, critically

examining different worldviews. According to Florian and Graham (2014), *phronesis* as a relational enterprise, is about perceiving more and implies an inclusive approach to teaching. Kopf et al. (2011) sees the unveiling of reality through engaging others in storytelling. This beats at the heart of Spange and Thiel's approaches. Their stories are all about how relationship, and connection insist that we engage with the worldview of other characters in the drama of the moment.

6.1.3 Contextually sensitive

The centrality of stories in *phronesis* suggest that lived experiences relate to distinct contexts. A *phronimos* considers the context carefully (Cooper and Morgan, 2008; Hold, 2013), respecting the particularities of each case (Kreber, 2015b). This is the substance of story. Both Aristotelian *phronesis* and its modern incarnation, emphasise a contextual perspective (Chishtie, 2012). In describing *phronesis* as the eye of moral experience, Kristjánsson (2005) claims that the virtue is an experiential situating process.

6.2 Mode of Knowing and Thinking

In proposing reflexive critique as a pathway to establishing more critical business schools, Antonacopoulou (2010, p.S7) refers to *phronesis* as a "*mode of knowing*". Since this virtue includes cognitive processing (Falk et al. 2012), the constellation of phronetic characteristics relating to the intellect of a *phronimos* is referred to as a mode of knowing and thinking (Figure 3). The literature indicates that a phronetic practice is discerning, interrogative, analytical, orientated towards experiential learning, deliberative and problem focused. We elaborate briefly on these six aspects of this mode.

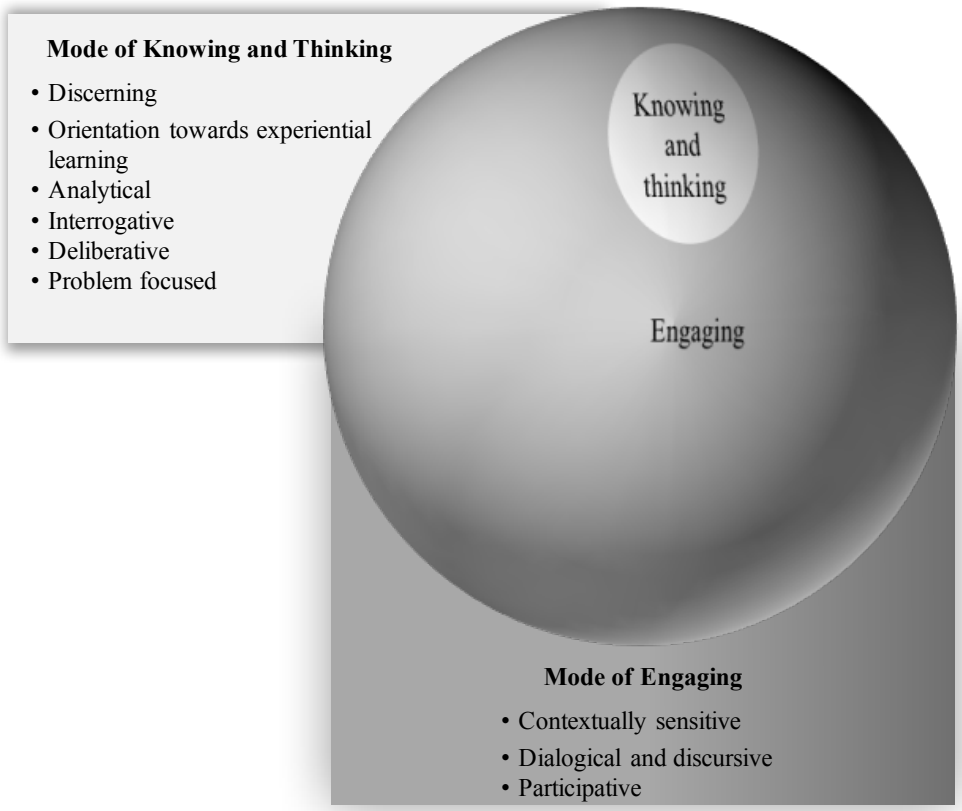

Figure 3: Characteristics of a phronetic knowing and thinking

6.2.1 Discerning

Phronesis involves discernment (Antonacopoulou, 2018; Ellett, 2012; Hibbert, 2012; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012b; to name a few) and making moment-to-moment judgements (Hold, 2013). Discernment and deliberation are at the centre of a phronetic practice, a view shared by Pickup (2017) Antonacopoulou (2010) and Brands (2014).

Discernment relates to the ability to judge within a particular situation (Brown et al. 2015; Kreber, 2015a; Pickup, 2017; Sage et al. 2010; Salminen-Karlsson and Wallgren, 2008; Sellman, 2012), which involves determining the contextual appropriateness of knowledge (Cooper and Morgan, 2008) and reason (Sellman, 2012); different virtues (Kristjánsson, 2015; Rief et al. 2013); the appropriateness of action (Cairns et al. 2010; Dredge et al. 2012; Hold, 2013); behaviour (Back, 2012; Ellett, 2012) and desirability of outcomes (Cooper and Morgan,

2008; Regelski, 2012). This includes the experiences practitioners choose to expose herself or himself to (Kenmis, 2012).

Phronetic discernment weighs up pros and cons (Ellett, 2012). According to Weidenfeld (2011) *phronesis* comes to be through the deliberation that results in authentic resolve.

6.2.2 Interrogative

Frieda Brands (2014) regards wisdom as more interrogative than declarative. Roos (2017) suggests that if students are to become *phronimoi*, they must learn to ask questions - beyond what seems immediately relevant (Cairns et al. 2010), inquiring into what we take for granted (Chishtie, 2012; Florian and Graham, 2014) and questioning what options are available (Cairns et al. 2010). Thiel's questions for example reach out into seemingly unrelated disciplines such as Jungian psychology.

6.2.3 Analytical

Phronesis requires the analysis of all relevant information (Cooper and Morgan, 2008). Regelski (2012) refers to *sunēsis* or understanding context and detail as an Aristotelian virtue underpinning *phronesis*. The person who desires *phronesis* seeks to understand divergent ways of being in the world (Kenmis (2012). Phronetic analysis includes the careful consideration of contextual data (Hold, 2013). It is critical and practical thought (Cairns et al. 2010; Kenmis, 2012), invention and inference (Cooper and Morgan, 2008) which Antonacopoulou (2018) and Casteli and Treyatham (2008) refer to as practical syllogism.

6.2.4 Orientation towards experiential learning

The focus on analysing contextual information implies orientation towards lived experiences (Brands, 2014). The traditional scientific (read less phronetic) approach that tends to ignore practitioners' lived experience in the study of phenomena and the importance that they attach to objects in their practical engagements, is unnatural (Sewchurran, 2008).

It is not surprising that Athanassoulis (2017) regards *phronesis* as a practical enterprise, often described as a "*practical rationality*" (see Chishtie, 2012, p. 101; Fitzgerald, 2007, p.78; Cicmil et al. 2006, p.679 and Kreber, 2015a, p.108) *Phronesis* is closely associated with experiential knowledge (Brands, 2014; Pitman, 2012) and experiential learning through participation (Castelli and Trevathan, 2008; Cicmil et al. 2006; Kenmis, 2012; Rief et al. 2013).

6.2.5 Deliberative

A *phronimos* is deliberative in nature (Chishtie, 2012; Ellett, 2012; Hold, 2013; Kinsella, 2012; Kristjánsson, 2015; Regelski, 2012; Weidenfeld, 2011). For Ellett (2012) deliberation is the foundation of sound professional judgement and practical rationality, whereas Roos (2017, p.120) refers to *phronesis* as "*thoughtful action*". Pickup (2014) argues that the *phronimos* deliberates about appropriate outcomes. He more recently went so far as to suggest that it is deliberation that sets *phronesis* apart from scientific knowledge because universally applicable knowledge does not require deliberation (Pickup, 2017).

6.2.6 Problem focused

The phronetic practitioner engages with and investigates a range of problems and questions in the moment (Back, 2012; Barkathunnisha et al. 2016; Brands, 2014; Kopf et al. 2011; Pickup, 2014).

Pope-Ruark (2014) argues for a return to professional writing as a community situated social practice rather than a mere art of technically and clear communication. She quotes Miller who argues that ignoring the role of social *praxis* and the interrelationship between *inter alia* professional ideals and problems reduces practitioners to mere technicians. Pope-Ruark (2014) suggests that *metis*, as a form of intelligence that enables a practitioner to be deliberative and adaptive in unexpected ways when problems arise, is a necessary supplement to *phronesis,* even though it is described by others as a counterpart. Identifying and solving problems is a part of daily, practical life, as it was for ancient active, civic Greek citizens. Kopf et al. (2011) agree, suggesting too that an active problem-posing approach is tied to phronetic practice.

6.2.7 Phronesis and Paradox

Phronesis is greater than the sum of all these six knowing and thinking attributes. It embraces at least seven paradoxes that we can identify. (Figure 4). Stories are by nature paradoxical as they embrace ambiguity and contradiction.

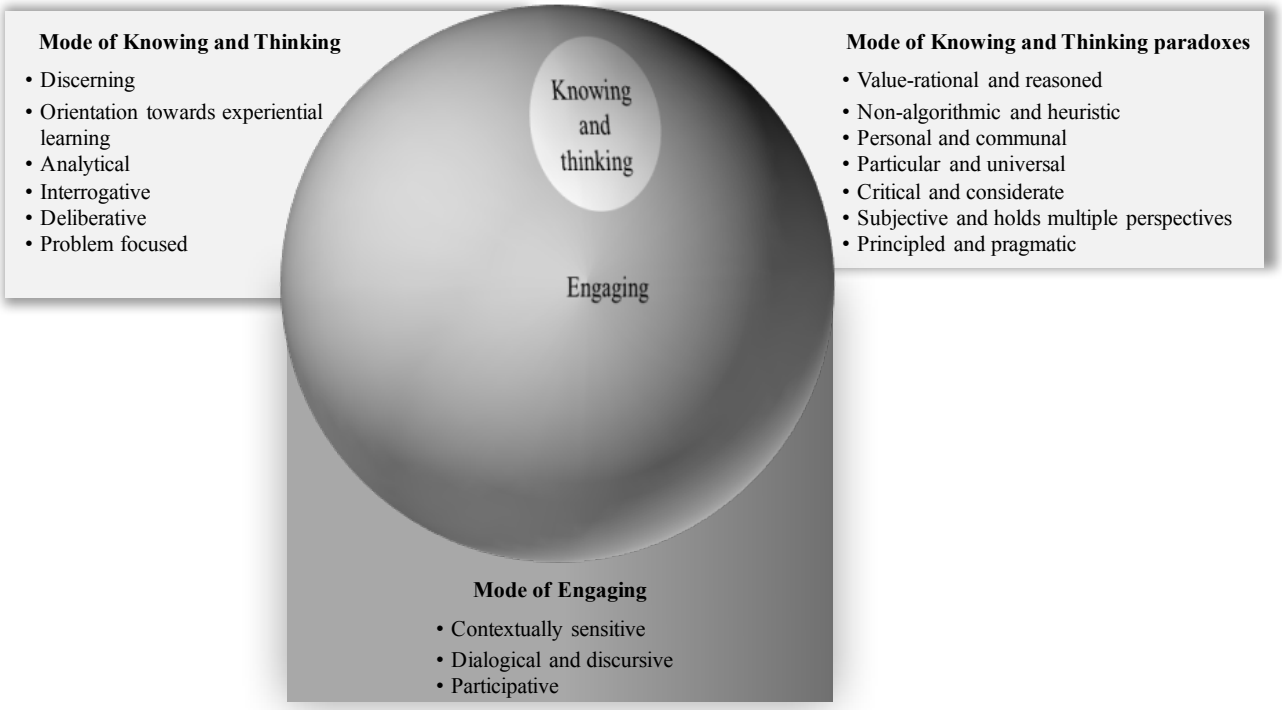

Figure 4: The paradoxes of a phronetic mode of knowing and thinking

6.2.7.1 Value-rational and reasoned

Phronetic knowing and thinking is both value rational and reasoned. Whilst some may argue that this is not a paradoxical concept and that value rationality describes the properties of phronetic cognition, we disagree. We believe that managerial *phronesis* incorporates a cunning cognition focused on being in the world, but also simultaneously a measured values-driven thinking.

Back (2012) describes the *phronimos* as an equilibrated human who can balance reason and irrational faculties and who can harmonise head, heart and hand. Back (2012, p.125) continues that Aristotle regarded humans as "*compound organisms. They have physiological, emotional and reasoning faculties*", whilst Clegg et al. (2013, p1253) suggest that contemporary approach to *phronesis* "*meld inquiry with value reflection*".

In proposing a contemporary rediscovery and re-evaluation of Aristotelian *phronesis,* Ellett (2012) considers Jeffrey Stout's examination of *phronesis* and suggests that he implicitly rejected both motivational hedonism and rational egoism in his understanding of love for the intrinsic virtues of phronetic social practice. Ellett (2012, p.17) expects that a rediscovery of *phronesis* will see professionals "*as having not only the (cognitive) capacity to deliberate (judge) well but also the appropriate (affective) attitudes and dispositions (i.e. the virtues)*" (brackets in original text).

6.2.7.2 Non-algorithmic and heuristic

Phronesis is non-algorithmic and heuristic at the same time. The phronetic practitioner is aware of the limitations of protocols and is therefore not a slave to algorithms (Sellman, 2012).

The non-instrumentality of *phronesis* notwithstanding, a practitioner's *phronesis* does translate into a coherent strategy-in-*praxis* through the process of personal development (Clegg et al.

2013). *Phronesis* becomes evident in the performance of activities embodied in phronetic habits (Kristjánsson (2015). The *phronesis*-informing activities such as reflection, eventually becomes routine, though the phronetic-heuristics cannot be said to be the unreflective application of techniques or repetitive actions, but rather a habit of not succumbing to routine and habit (Macklin and Whiteford, 2012).

6.2.7.3 Personal and communal

The third paradox identified is that *phronesis* is both personal or individual as well as a communal or collective knowledge (Florian and Graham, 2014; Pickup, 2017). It is a personal knowledge in the sense that it is used in guiding the actions of a *phronimos* and in that it expresses who the *phronimos* is (Macklin and Whiteford, 2012). *Phronesis* is about self-improvement and living one's own life (Back, 2012) and according to Clegg et al. (2013) the virtue, with its interrelated *praxis,* is inseparable from the character of the *phronimos*.

Phronesis is also a communal or collective knowledge in that a practitioner's beliefs point back to her or his culture and traditions (Florian and Graham, 2014) and blossoms through purposeful engagements with others (Tierney, 2014). The *phronimos* understands her or his interrelationship with others' lived experiences and with her or his community (Kopf et al. 2011). To Frederick Ellett (2012, p.14), *phronesis* is "*an embodied social practice*".

6.2.7.4 Particular and universal

Phronesis mediates between the particular and universal, general and practical (Ellett, 2012; Hibbert, 2012; Kristjánsson, 2015; Lund et al. 2012; Pickup, 2017). Even Krisjánsson (2005) as an Aristotelian phronetic generalist, believes that since *phronesis* is about action, which is concerned with particulars, it cannot only be about the general or universal. Gibbs et al. (2007) too highlight a student's realisation that abstractions of knowledge have limited value.

Macklin and Whiteford (2012) and Cooper and Morgan (2008) argue that *phronesis* is not focused on developing universal rules and techniques but rather on marrying the universal with the particular. Dunne as quoted by Towers (2013, p.121) states that *phronesis* is about bringing general and particular, conceptualized as a theory-practice dichotomy, "*into illuminating connection with each other*". Krisjtánsson (2015. P.312) expands on Aristotle's claim in saying that "*to be sure, phronesis is not 'about universals only' [17, 1141b15], but it nevertheless takes its cue from a generalist theory about the good life"*.

6.2.7.5 Critical and considerate

The next paradox identified is that *phronesis* is both critical and considerate in knowing and thinking. Antonacopoulou (2010b) reminds us that being critical is a fundamental part of phronetic knowledge, *phronesis* involves critical inquiry into worldviews and opinions as well as one's own practice (Higgs, 2012), character traits (Kristjánsson, 2015), traditions (Castelli and Trevathan, 2008) and wisdom (Glanville, 2014).

Phronimos in humility is considerate to others' lived experiences. The considerate care, flows from the idea that engaging with other viewpoints requires an appreciation of existent differing perspectives (Holmgren et al. 2011). *Phronesis* involves a willingness to explore others' worldviews (Kenmis, 2012) and uses this to re-evaluate existing positions (Brands, 2014).

6.2.7.6 Subjective and holds the multiple perspectives of others

Phronetic knowing and thinking seems to be beholden to a subjective position as well as multiple perspectives. *Phronesis* involves being purposeful in pursuit of a particular moral objective, which is linked to the moral compass of the particular practitioner (Antonacopoulou, 2010b; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012b; Pitman, 2012). Having an appreciation for the utility of

incorporating different perspectives and interests, the wise maintain several perspectives simultaneously (Cooper and Morgan, 2008).

6.2.7.7 Principled and pragmatic

Praxis, or the practice of *phronesis* (Falk et al. 2012), is purposeful in pursuit of moral objectives. Ellett (2012) reminds us that those engaged in social practice can be principled even if doing so is prejudicial to their personal self-interest. In describing nurses gifted with what he refers to as professional *phronesis*, Sellman (2009) too argues that the *phronimos* is committed to doing the right thing and in taking whatever steps are necessary in pursuit of this outcome. At the same time, *phronesis* settles on what is practical and favours pragmatic approaches (Cooper and Morgan, 2008; Antonacopoulou, 2018).

Spange and Thiel can be seen as juggling these seven paradoxes in the narratives they explore.

6.3 Mode of Being

Given that Back (2012), Macklin and Whiteford (2012) and Michelsen et al. (2008) all argue that *phronesis* is a reflection of the person who possesses it, we propose that *phronesis* includes a mode of being as depicted in Figure 5. This phronetic mode of being is sevenfold - intuitive; cautious; adaptable; mindful; reflective; action orientated, virtuous and ethically sensitive.

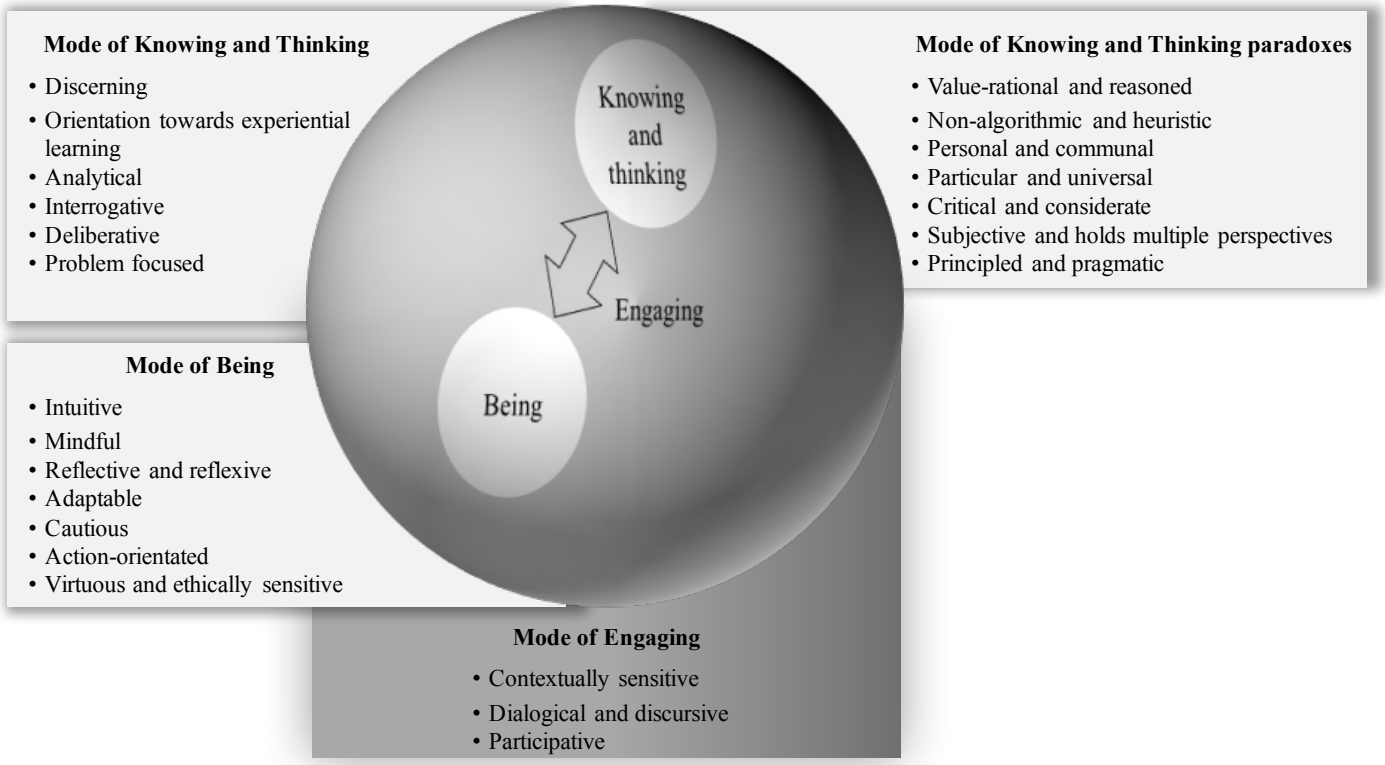

Figure 5: Phronetic mode of being

6.3.1 Intuitive

A phronetically wise practitioner uses amongst other attributes, intuition to settle on the appropriate action in a given situation (Cicmil et al. 2006; Hold, 2013; Macklin and Whiteford, 2012; Pickup, 2014; Sellman, 2012). Frieda Brands (2014) associates *phronesis* with Schon's artistic and intuitive processes for *phronesis* integrates intuition.

Brown et al. (2015) associate managerial intuition with *phronesis*. Sewchurran (2008) too draws attention to *phronesis* in arguing for a renewed focus on developing intuition in information systems project practitioners. Back (2012, p118) refers to intuition as "*practical nus*" or "*the ability to perceive the uniqueness of the concrete situation while at the same time being able to see it as a "case of" a certain practical domain*" (quotation marks in original text). Although Back (2012) discusses intuition as a characteristic of *technê* which too is

intuitive in application, he later links the same sense of the concept *nus* or intuition with *phronesis*.

6.3.2 Mindful

Florian and Graham (2014, p.469) refer to *phronesis* as "*a form of situated awareness*" suggesting that mindfulness is inherent in a phronetic practice. Choosing the appropriate values and actions, according to Kristjánsson's (2005) reading of Aristotle, requires considerable attention to situated details. Kenmis (2012) argues that *phronesis* consists in openness to experience, a preparedness to see what the situation is. *Phronesis* is about perceiving more deeply (Florian and Graham, 2014; Holmes, 2010).

Pearce (2016, p. 87) describes a second element as the "*cognitive state where individuals actively process new information and make thoughtful judgements about their actions*". Antonacopoulou (2010b) simply refers to mindfulness as alertness or *egrigorsi*. Phronetic mindfulness includes an alertness to different settings (Falk et al. 2012); relevant power relations (Chishtie, 2012; Cooper and Morgan, 2008; Hold, 2013); competing values at play (Cooper and Morgan, 2008); situated particulars (Hibbert, 2012; Holmes, 2010; Kristjánsson, 2015) as well as the emergent changes in the situation (Kopf et al. 2011).

6.3.3 Reflective and reflexive

The *phronimos* is both a reflective (Brands, 2014; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012b; Rief et al. 2013; Roos, 2017) and a reflexive (Falk et al. 2012; Lewis, 2013; Sellman, 2012) being. Antonacopoulou (2018) and Cairns, et al. (2010) argue that actionable knowledge is a catalyst for reflexivity, It involves reflexive critique (Antonacopoulou, 2018; and 2010b). *Phronesis* re-evaluates personal character traits of the developing practitioner after it has come into being (Kristjánsson, 2015). Reflexivity seems to be an antecedent, attribute as well as a consequence

of *phronesis*, which in our view is not necessarily incongruent since *phronesis* is developed through practicing it (Frank, 2012a; Jamal, 2004). Sage et al. (2010) believe that the wise practitioner enjoys an overarching capacity for critical reflection of self and the group. Back (2012, p.111) speaks of a "*reflective rationality*".

6.3.4 Cautious

The conceptual understanding of the phronetic mode of being (Figure 5) highlights our view that *phronimos* is cautious. Kenmis (2012) believes that the *phronimos* does not immediately accept what the situation appears to be whereas Athanassoulis (2017) suggests that developing phronetic acumen in turn develops the capacity to be cautious in making pronouncements. In claiming that he would imprint *phronesis* in the heart and mind of students, Johan Roos (2017) concludes his article by arguing that as a result the student would be cautious over commerce.

Florian and Graham (2014) describes *phronesis* as a process that involves circumspection or observation before deciding on appropriate action. The authors also refer to Weidenfeld's call for a "*sharpening of circumspection*" (Florian and Graham. 2014, p.470). Weidenfeld (2011) describes circumspection as "*a phenomenological account of phronesis"* (p.257): it enables reflection on being-in-the world, identifying opportunities to contribute as well as the means to do so. Finally it provides insight into the appropriate way to act. To Regelski (2012), *phronesis* involves an ethic of care that includes choosing with care.

6.3.5 Adaptable

A phronetic mode of being includes adaptability as a characteristic. *Phronesis,* or the ethical disposition underpinning *praxis*, depends on Aristotle's four second order virtues, one of which is *dēinotes*, that is versatility or cleverness. This is the ability to cope with changing challenges (Regelski (2012). Cooper and Morgan (2008) make the point that a virtuoso can adapt

technologies to the current circumstances. According to Brands (2014), *phronesis* gained from exposure to different experiences and problems will enable practitioners to adapt rules and principles. Fricker (2016) believes that expertise, which incorporates *phronesis*, enables the dental practitioner to adapt to rapidly changing circumstance and individual needs. The *metis*-intelligence that Rebecca Pope-Ruark (2014) suggests, refers to this adaptability.

6.3.6 Action-orientated

To Aristotle, *phronesis* is experiential knowledge (Brands, 2014). It is an action-competence (Fricker, 2016). It is through practicing it that *phronesis* comes into being (Antonacopoulou, 2010b) in the here and now (Matheson, 2011). Weidenfeld quotes Heidegger to argue that *phronesis* is not abstract cognition but that it is "*the bursting forth of the acting person as such*" (Weidenfeld, 2011, p. 261). Lewis (2013) asserts that action is the purpose of moral thought.

6.3.7 Virtuous and ethically sensitive

We identify the qualities virtue and ethical sensitivity as fundamental aspects of a phronetic mode of being. *Phronesis* is enlightened action (Clegg et al. 2013), a virtuous expression of the practitioner's values (Athanassoulis, 2017). A *phronimos* lives ethically (Falk et al. 2012; Lund et al. 2012; Macklin and Whiteford, 2012).

We all need orientation to guide our decisions. For the *phronimos*, the orientation is *phronesis* which is about ethics (Chishtie, 2012; Ulvik et al. 2017). Athanassoulis (2017, p.348) states that the "*the goal of phronesis is the noble and the good*", making sense of the moral demands of practical contexts.

6.4 Characteristics of a phronetic mode of acting

Many researchers accept that *phronesis* incorporates a mode of acting (Hold, 2013; Fricker, 2016; Macklin and Whiteford, 2012; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012b; Higgs, 2012; Sage et al. 2010; Sellman, 2009; Pickup, 2017 and Weidenfeld, 2011). Figure 6 illustrates the four characteristics of this phronetic action that we identified from the literature review (bottom right quadrant).

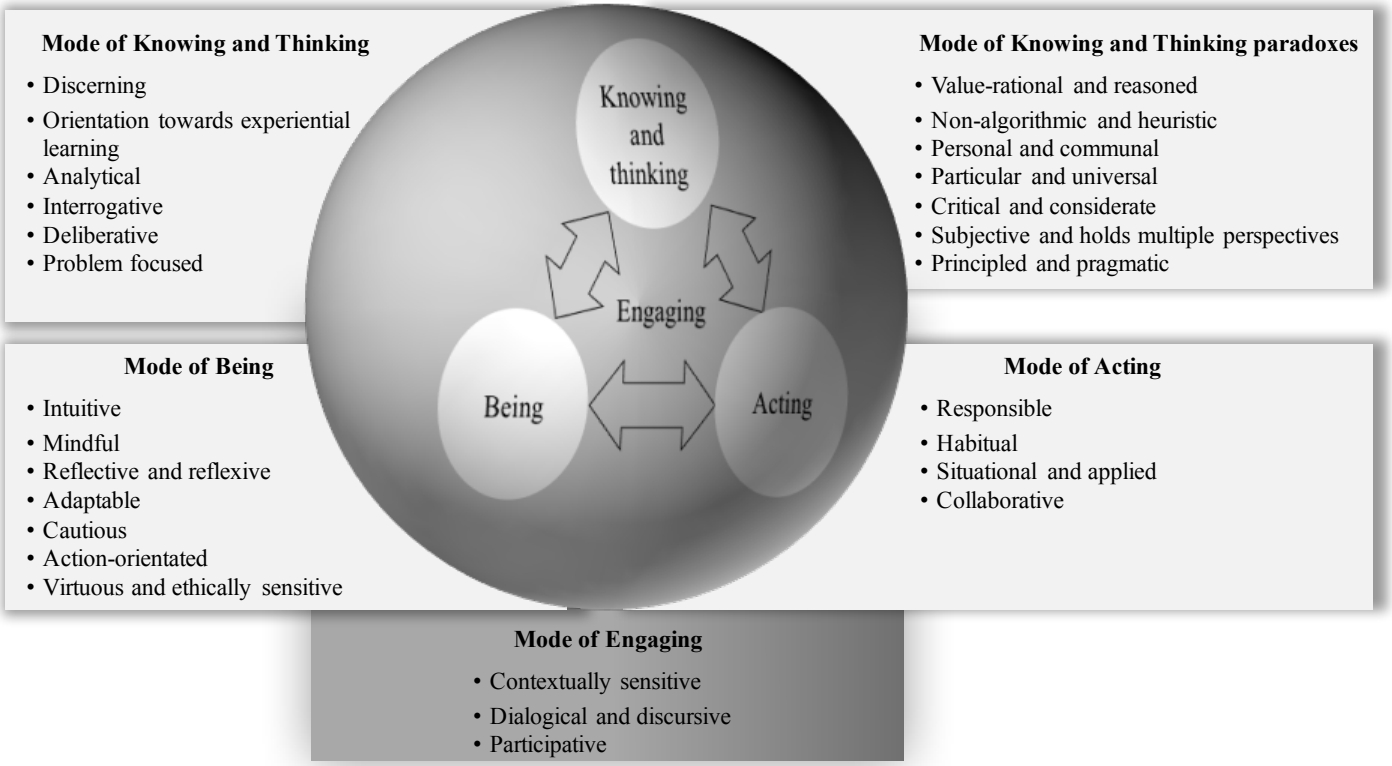

Figure 6: Characteristics of phronetic action

6.4.1 Responsible

A *phronimos* acts responsibly (Brands, 2014; Ellett, 2012; Florian and Graham, 2014; Kinsella and Pitman, 2012b; Pope-Ruark, 2014). Phronetic action is "*doing good, not only in public, but for the public, as well as for one's own good*" (Vosecky, 2017, p.57; see also Clegg, et al., 2013, p.1253). Athanassoulis (2017) as well as Macklin and Whiteford (2012) remind us that a *phronimos* is informed by an intuitive response to people's needs and interests (Holmes,

2010). To Aristotle, *phronesis* shapes human behaviour in the field of human good (Boyce, 2014). Kristjánsson (2015, p303) states that to become virtuous, "*one must learn to choose the right actions and emotions through phronesis-guided reflection*", until this becomes routine. There is integrity in the practice of a *phronimos* (Brands, 2014; Sellman, 2012).

6.4.2 Habitual

In Kristján's earlier work, he argued that *phronesis* is a habit that develops from the routine performance of its constituting activities (Kristjánsson, 2005). In discussing the paradoxical nature of phronetic knowing and thinking, we also noted the heuristic nature of phronetic thinking. To Rief et al. (2013, p.311) *phronesis* however transcends deliberative thinking skills and include "*the "embodiment" and enactment of habits"* (quotation marks in original text).

Phronesis can therefore be regarded as a practice, given its orientation towards daily *phronesis*-informing activities (Rief et al. 2013). This phronetic practice is not programmed repetition of actions and techniques, but, as Macklin and Whiteford (2012) argue, *phronesis* involves "*a habit of not acting in accord with a routine or habit*" (Macklin and Whiteford, 2012, p. 93). This equates with conscious choices.

6.4.3 Situational and applied

Phronesis involves the application and adaptation of knowledge and theories to a particular situation (Cooper and Morgan, 2008; Macklin and Whiteford, 2012) and is therefore both contextual and applied (Hold, 2013). Phronetic action calls for the transformation of past traditions into new meanings, establishing relevant values in current situations (Castelli and Trevathan, 2008). Rief et al. (2013, p.311) speak of *phronesis* as "*situated performance*". Donald Matheson (2009, p.713) notes that phronetic understanding "*involves the individual engaging with the whole of his or her being with the whole of the object, in the present context*".

Gibbs et al. (2007, p.367) also quote Gadamer who claimed in this instance that a "*phronimos is always in the situation of having to act in exigent circumstances*".

6.4.4 Collaborative

Learning collaborative decision making is part of developing practical wisdom (McClellan and Sanders (2013). Macklin and Whiteford (2012) remind us of Dunne's view that *phronesis* is used in acting with one's cohort. Working collaboratively is also an inherent characteristic of Phronetic social science, which is an applied *phronesis* in the social sciences (Engle, 2018).

7. Conclusion: Honing the virtue-attributes of managers-as-scholars

Till recently *phronesis* has been seen as an unorganised set of characteristics, at least in the management scholarship domain. We advocate structure to focus the efforts of those tasked with developing executive leaders. Managing appropriately within a framework of divergent and often veiled normative values and contextual nuances requires moving from an immediate concern with theories and skills to cultivating an appropriate practice. In such a practice, theory and skills play but a part. Managers need to develop *phronesis* as an evolving story if they are to develop contextually appropriate managerial excellence.

The typology we articulate in this article offers the potential to focus development efforts on honing the virtue-attributes of managers-as-scholars. The hypothesized framework illustrates the modes of engaging, knowing and thinking, being and acting inherent in the management practice of a *phronimos*. It also illustrates how *phronesis* unearths and integrates traditional principles, philosophies and knowledge as well as general theories, technologies and skills. This prepares a leader to engage with a management practice appropriate to existent situational nuances and moral demands.

The typology we propose represents an empirical description of managerial *phronesis*. It reveals its characteristics from a Grounded Theory synthesis of the many contemporary abstractions in the management practice, scholarship and teaching literature. At the same time, by incorporating the Grounded Theory second order themes, we hope to offer a grainier understanding of the qualities of managerial phronesis.

We understand managerial *phronesis,* this intellectual virtue, to include an interrelatedness between character, a virtuous mode of being and action (Antonacopoulou, 2010a; 2018) and Higgs (2012). This understanding has an important consequence for studying and developing the *phronesis* of executive managers: It is an applied competence. No understanding of the concept can be complete unless its manifests in practice.

The typology we present here remains a theory. Applying it as a dogmatic *technê* of practical wisdom should be avoided. The typology is however borne from literature on the development of *phronesis* in management practice and is therefore intended to be a framework that should be debated, tested, validated and refined in divergent contexts. As evidenced in Spange and Thiel's contributions, each story brings its unique possibilities rich in paradox and meaning.

8. Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants and no humans are involved in this article.

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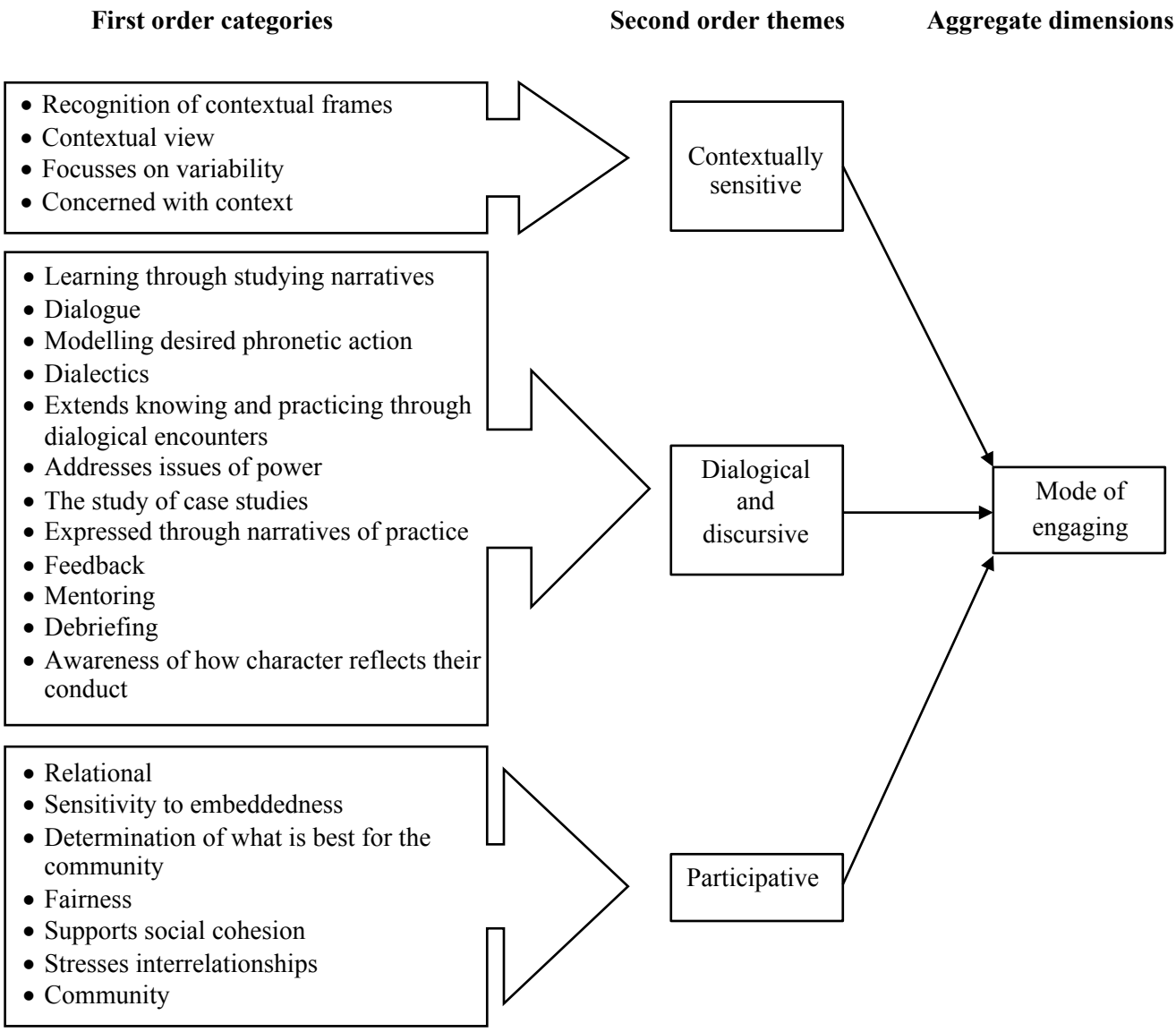
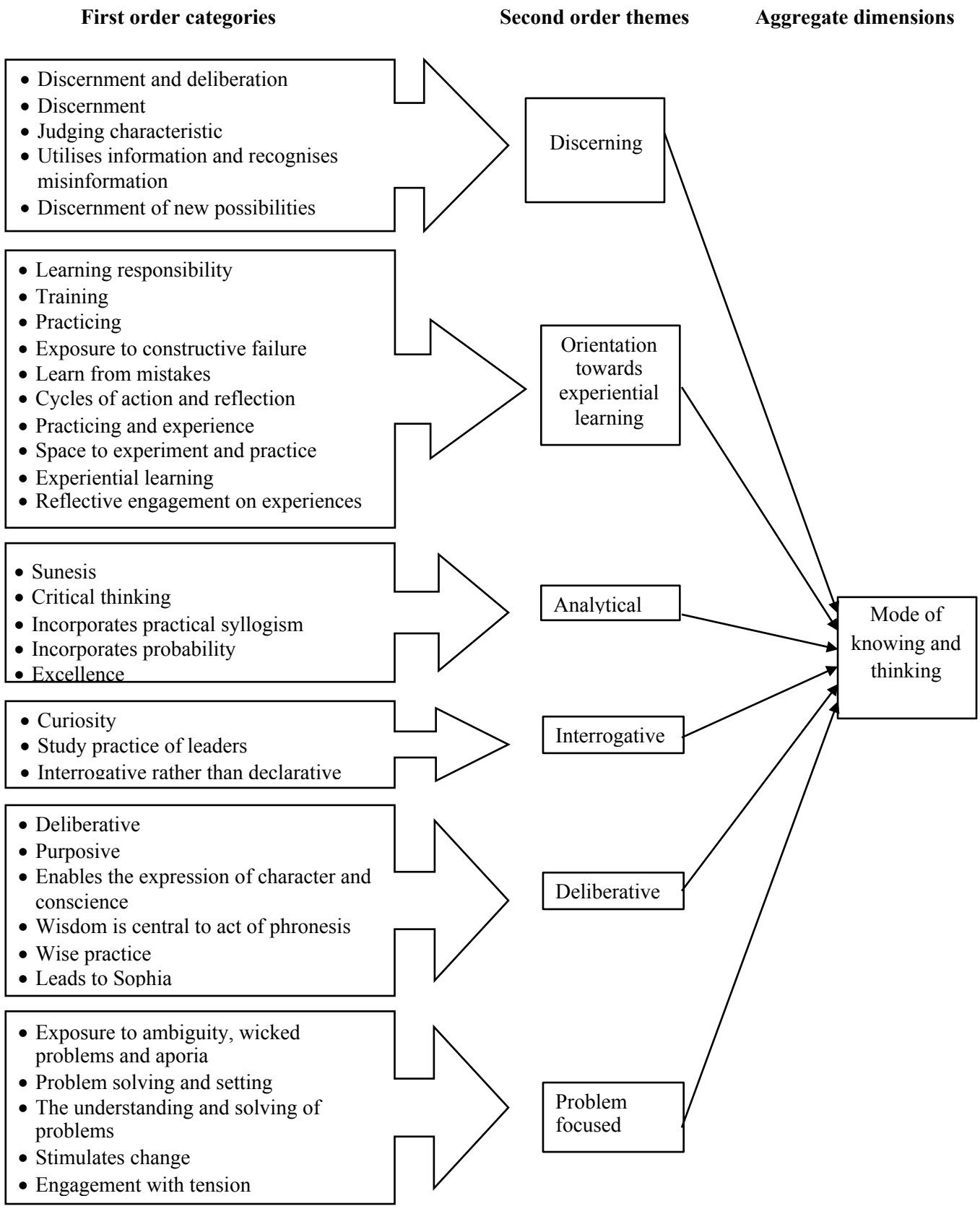
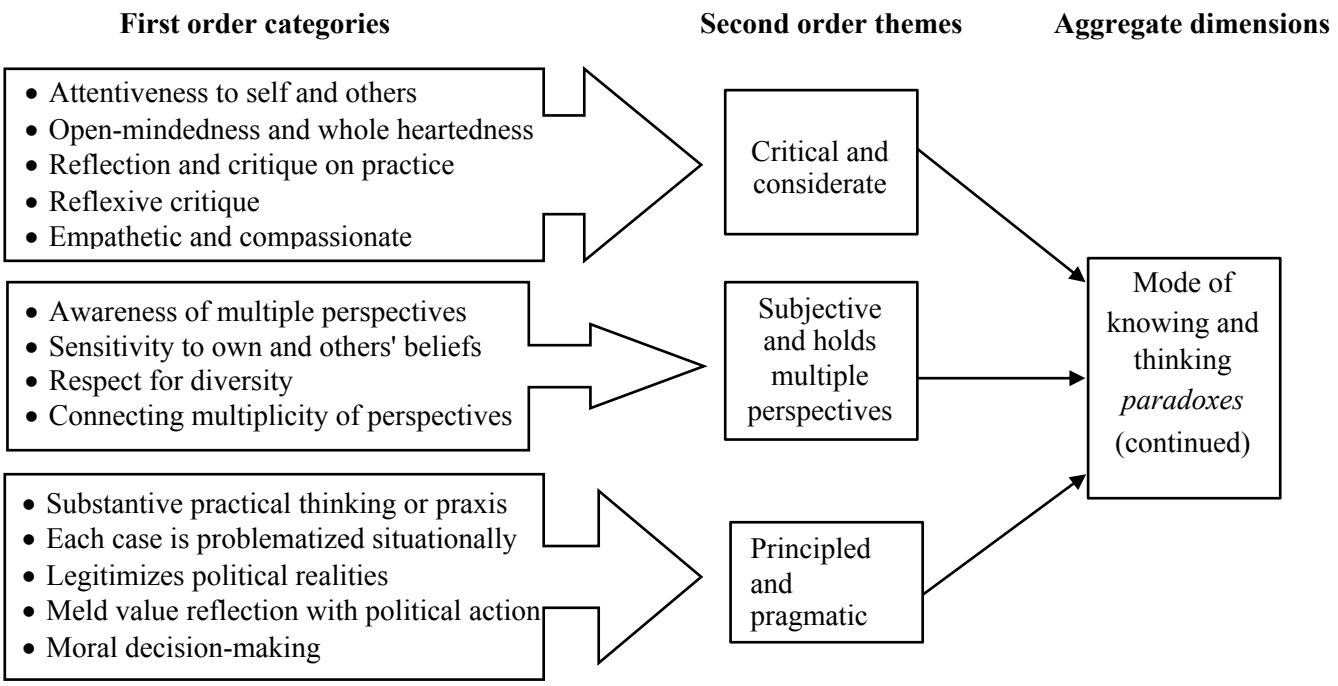
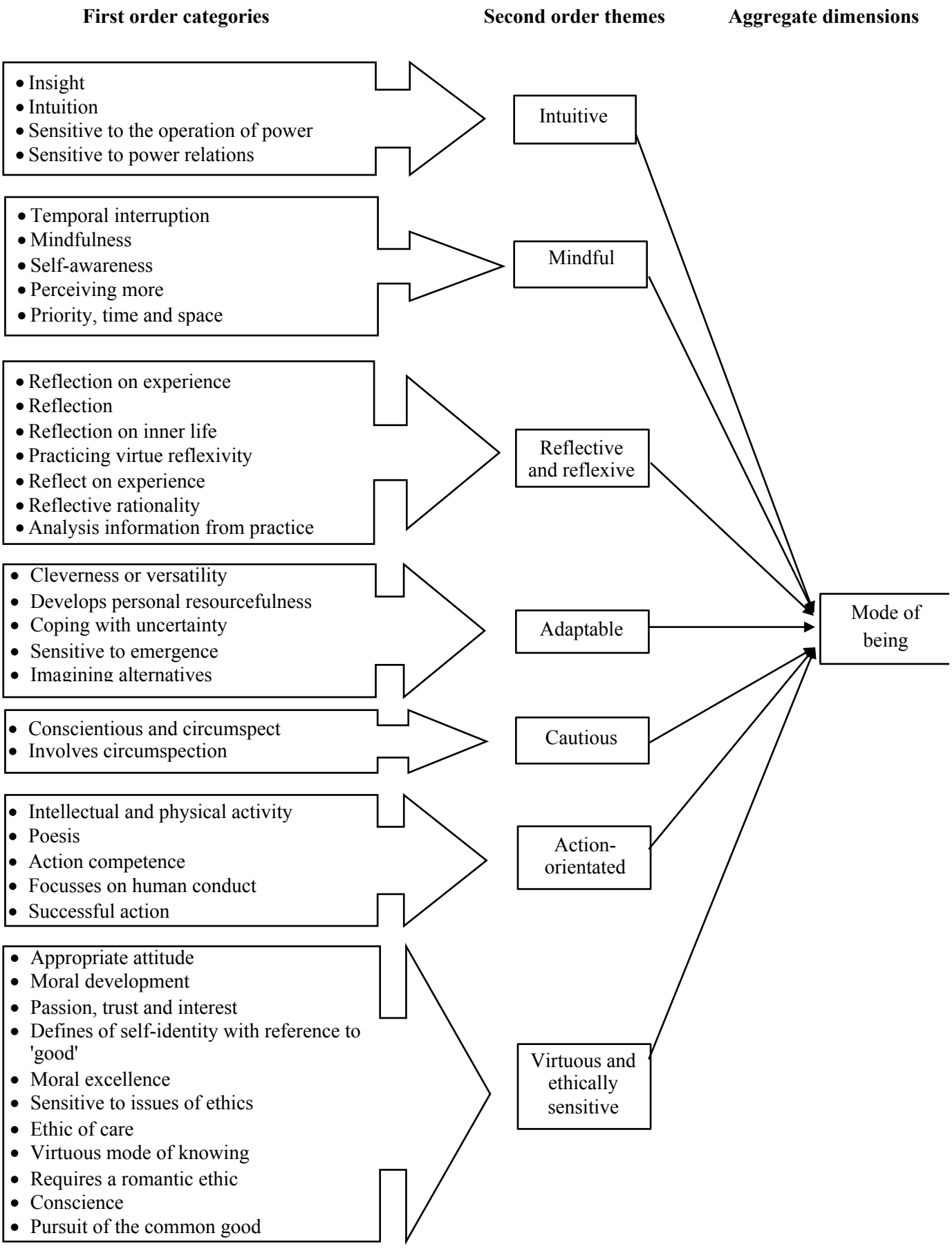
Appendix A: Gioia Grounded Theory data structure

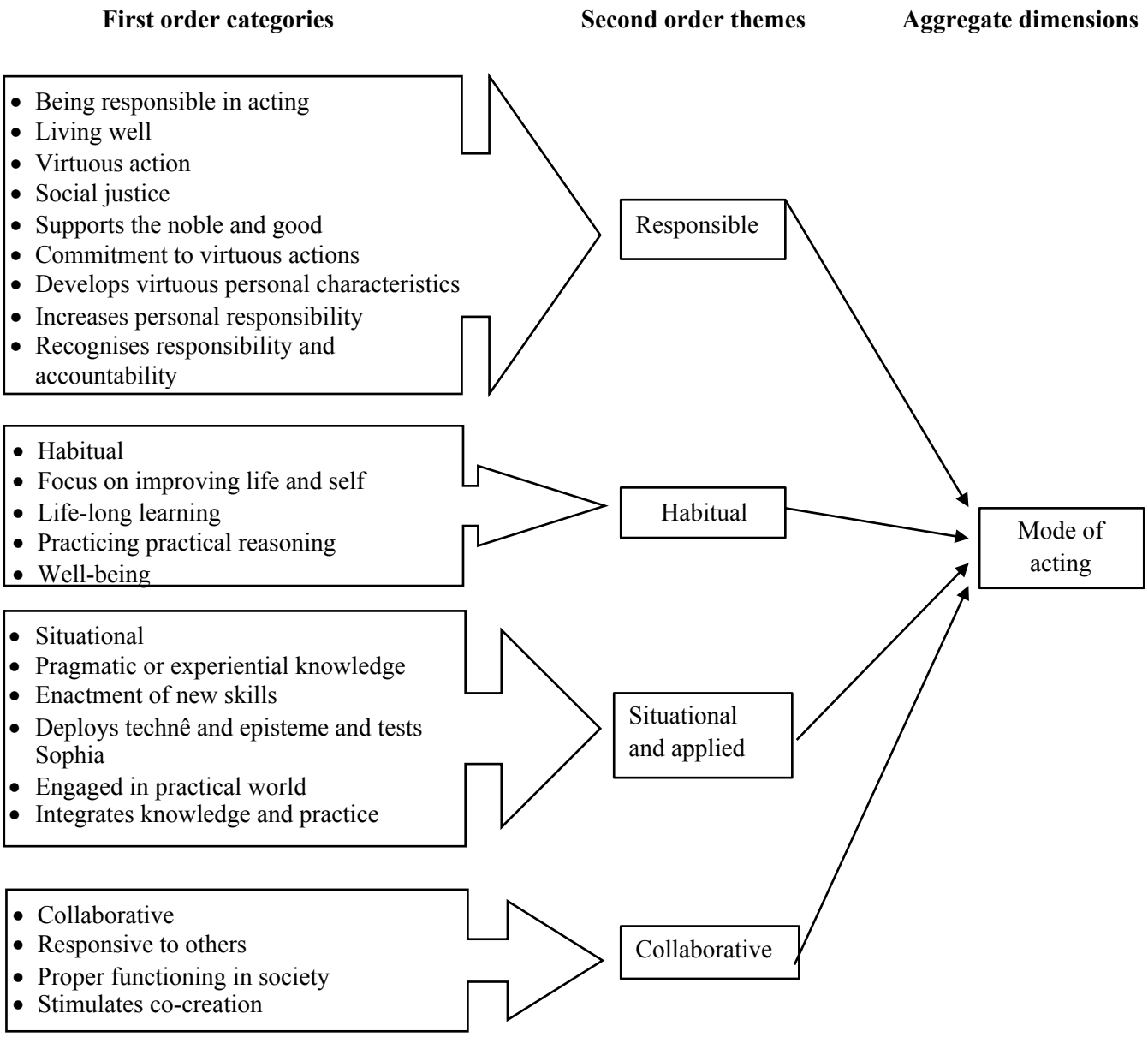



First order categories
Second order themes
Aggregate dimensions
• Discernment and deliberation
• Discernment
• Judging characteristic
• Utilises information and recognises misinformation
• Discernment of new possibilities
Discerning
• Learning responsibility
• Training
• Practicing
• Exposure to constructive failure
• Learn from mistakes
• Cycles of action and reflection
• Practicing and experience
• Space to experiment and practice
• Experiential learning
• Reflective engagement on experiences
Orientation towards experiential learning
• Sunesis
• Critical thinking
• Incorporates practical syllogism
• Incorporates probability
• Excellence
Analytical
• Curiosity
• Study practice of leaders
• Interrogative rather than declarative
Interrogative
• Deliberative
• Purposive
• Enables the expression of character and conscience
• Wisdom is central to act of phronesis
• Wise practice
• Leads to Sophia
Deliberative
• Exposure to ambiguity, wicked problems and aporia
• Problem solving and setting
• The understanding and solving of problems
• Stimulates change
• Engagement with tension
Problem focused
Mode of knowing and thinking

First order categories
Second order themes
Aggregate dimensions
• Combination of knowledge to perform job and consideration of the right thing to do
• Explication of principles or values-in-use
• Balance between rational and irrational faculties
• Focus on exploring meaning and value
• Congruence between practice, virtues and character
• Ability to see what virtue requires
• Integrity and savvy
• Make sense of moral demands
• Phronesis is a virtue
• Character-guided decision making
• Empirical praxis
Value-rational and reasoned
• Non-algorithmic
• Informs the utilisation of scientific and technical knowledge
• Outcome of phronesis is the process itself
• Knowing how to bend the rule
• Challenges to one's existence
• Knowledge to make planned decisions
Non-algorithmic and heuristic
• Focus on the nature of the individual
• Personal competence
• Reflection on social world reference
• Communal
• Shapes a person's character
• Phronesis remains in the realm of the individual
• Reflection on self and position in society
• New conception of self
Personal and communal
• Epistemological grounding
• Philosophical grounding
• Concerned with particulars and universals
• Integrates theory and practice
• Interaction between general and practical
• Mediates between universal and the particular case
• Technical proficiency and theoretical knowledge
Particular and universal
Mode of knowing and thinking *paradoxes*


First order categories
Second order themes
Aggregate dimensions
• Attentiveness to self and others
• Open-mindedness and whole heartedness
• Reflection and critique on practice
• Reflexive critique
• Empathetic and compassionate
Critical and considerate
• Awareness of multiple perspectives
• Sensitivity to own and others' beliefs
• Respect for diversity
• Connecting multiplicity of perspectives
Subjective and holds multiple perspectives
• Substantive practical thinking or praxis
• Each case is problematized situationally
• Legitimizes political realities
• Meld value reflection with political action
• Moral decision-making
Principled and pragmatic
Mode of knowing and thinking *paradoxes* (continued)


First order categories
Second order themes
Aggregate dimensions
• Insight
• Intuition
• Sensitive to the operation of power
• Sensitive to power relations
Intuitive
• Temporal interruption
• Mindfulness
• Self-awareness
• Perceiving more
• Priority, time and space
Mindful
• Reflection on experience
• Reflection
• Reflection on inner life
• Practicing virtue reflexivity
• Reflect on experience
• Reflective rationality
• Analysis information from practice
Reflective and reflexive
• Cleverness or versatility
• Develops personal resourcefulness
• Coping with uncertainty
• Sensitive to emergence
• Imagining alternatives
Adaptable
• Conscientious and circumspect
• Involves circumspection
Cautious
• Intellectual and physical activity
• Poesis
• Action competence
• Focusses on human conduct
• Successful action
Action-orientated
• Appropriate attitude
• Moral development
• Passion, trust and interest
• Defines of self-identity with reference to 'good'
• Moral excellence
• Sensitive to issues of ethics
• Ethic of care
• Virtuous mode of knowing
• Requires a romantic ethic
• Conscience
• Pursuit of the common good
Virtuous and ethically sensitive
Mode of being


First order categories
Second order themes
Aggregate dimensions
Being responsible in acting
Living well
Virtuous action
Social justice
Supports the noble and good
Commitment to virtuous actions
Develops virtuous personal characteristics
Increases personal responsibility
Recognises responsibility and accountability
Responsible
Habitual
Focus on improving life and self
Life-long learning
Practicing practical reasoning
Well-being
Habitual
Situational
Pragmatic or experiential knowledge
Enactment of new skills
Deploys technê and episteme and tests Sophia
Engaged in practical world
Integrates knowledge and practice
Situational and applied
Collaborative
Responsive to others
Proper functioning in society
Stimulates co-creation
Collaborative
Mode of acting