

LD7-10 Sabiduría y toma de decisiones

16 de mayo de 2007

Estimados suscriptores:

La sabiduría ha sido tema de reflexión filosófica desde hace milenios y es considerada un alto valor humano. La sabiduría como tema de interés científico tuvo sus inicios a mediados del siglo 20 y su estudio empírico tiene sólo 30 años de antigüedad.

En un reciente artículo en el New York Times, "The Older-and-Wiser Hypothesis", Stephen S. Hall reseña la corta pero muy interesante historia de los esfuerzos de varias escuelas científicas por definir, identificar y medir la sabiduría.

Algunas de las principales aportaciones han sido realizadas por la llamada Escuela de Berlín. Estos académicos definen la sabiduría como "un sistema de conocimiento maduro acerca de los aspectos prácticos de la vida" y enfatiza varias cualidades complementarias:

- * Conocimiento maduro tanto de los "hechos" de la naturaleza humana, como de el "como" abordar decisiones y dilemas.
- * Apreciación de las propias circunstancias históricas, culturales y biológicas durante el transcurso de la vida.
- * Entendimiento del "relativismo" de valores y prioridades.
- * Reconocimiento, tanto a nivel de pensamiento como de acción, de la incertidumbre.

Así que de las cuatro cualidades que se piden para la sabiduría, una tiene que ver con la toma de decisiones y otra con la comprensión de la incertidumbre. Buenas noticias para los que se interesan en análisis de decisiones.

Uno de los exponentes de la Escuela de Berlín dice "concluimos a partir de la literatura de filosofía que la sabiduría es como alto rendimiento, es el nivel más alto de potencial o logro que la mente humana es capaz de obtener". De acuerdo a esta escuela, la "sabiduría en acción" se manifiesta como:

- * Buen juicio
- * Consejo sagaz
- * Entendimiento psicológico
- * Regulación emocional
- * Comprensión con empatía

Les anexo el fragmento del artículo que describe con más detalle esa escuela de estudio acerca de la sabiduría.

El planteamiento en el título del artículo, "La hipótesis de más-viejo-más-sabio", es respondido por la Escuela de Berlín diciendo que "no hay evidencia de que la sabiduría aumente con la edad" (pero hay un vínculo), así que parece que hay que trabajarle a volverse más sabio: como muchas cosas buenas, eso no es automático.

Reciban un cordial saludo.

Roberto Ley Borrás

New York Times May 6, 2007

The Older-and-Wiser Hypothesis By STEPHEN S. HALL
(fragmento)

The Berlin Wisdom Paradigm, as it came to be called, was built in part on research using hypothetical vignettes to discern wise and unwise responses to life dilemmas. "A 15-year-old girl wants to get married right away," one vignette suggested. "What should one/she consider and do?"

A wise person, according to the Berlin group, would say something like: "Well, on the surface, this seems like an easy problem. On average, marriage for 15-year-old girls is not a good thing. But there are situations where the average case does not fit. Perhaps in this instance, special life circumstances are involved, such as the girl has a terminal illness. Or the girl has just lost her parents. And also this girl may live in another culture or historical period. Perhaps she was raised with a value system different from ours. In addition, one has to think about adequate ways of talking with the girl and to consider her emotional state."

That reply may seem tentative and relativistic, but it reflects many aspects of wisdom as defined by the Berlin Wisdom Project, which began in 1984 under the leadership of Baltes, who along with Birren had championed the search for late-life potential. Born in 1939 in Germany, Baltes had established a reputation as a leading quantitative psychologist by the time he returned to Germany in 1980 to become director of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin. There, Baltes and many collaborators — including Jacqui Smith (now at the University of Michigan), Ursula M. Staudinger and Ute Kunzmann — embarked on an ambitious, large-scale program to, as they put it, "take wisdom into the laboratory."

Boiled down to its essence, the "Berlin Paradigm" defined wisdom as "an expert knowledge system concerning the fundamental pragmatics of life." Heavily influenced by life-span psychology, the Berlin version of wisdom emphasized several complementary qualities: expert knowledge of both the "facts" of human nature and the "how" of dealing with decisions and dilemmas; an appreciation of one's historical, cultural and biological circumstances during the arc of a life span; an understanding of the "relativism" of values and priorities; and an acknowledgment, at the level of both thought and action, of uncertainty. "We picked up from the philosophical literature that wisdom is like a peak performance," Smith says. "It's the highest level of potential or achievement that a human mind might be able to achieve." And so the Berlin group focused more on expertise and performance than on personality traits, because such an approach lent itself to more rigorous measurement than the typical self-report tests of psychological research.

"Wisdom in action," as the Berlin group put it, might manifest itself as good judgment, shrewd advice, psychological insight, emotional regulation and empathetic understanding; it could be found in familial interactions, in formal writing and in the relationship between a student and mentor or a doctor and patient. Yet by its very nature, the researchers conceded, wisdom was a utopian concept that was virtually unattainable. Baltes and Staudinger pointed out in one paper that "wisdom is a collectively anchored product and that individuals by themselves are only 'weak' carriers of wisdom." They generally did not see wisdom as the function of personality. As Smith puts it: "We went in the other direction and tried to define what a product might be. Not the person as such, but rather some sort of performance that

we could assess.” In evaluating the wisdom of Gandhi, for example, they focused on his speeches and writings.

One instrument the Baltes group developed to measure wisdom was posing open-ended, hypothetical questions like the one about the 15-year-old girl who wanted to marry. (In their view, a reply garnering a low wisdom-related score would be an inflexible, authoritative response like: “No, no way, marrying at age 15 would be utterly wrong. One has to tell the girl that marriage is not possible. . . . No, this is just a crazy idea.”) These vignettes located wisdom firmly in the universe of problem-solving around significant life events — from issues like choosing a career versus child-rearing to facing decisions about early retirement to dealing with a diagnosis of cancer.

The Germans were among the first to reach what is now a widespread conclusion: There’s not a lot of wisdom around. Of the 700 people assessed, “we never found a single person who gained top scores across the board,” Smith wrote in an e-mail message. They also punctured one conceit about growing old when they found no evidence, in four different studies, that wisdom, as they defined it, necessarily increases with age. Rather, they identified a “plateau” of wisdom-related performance through much of middle and old age; a separate study by the group has indicated that wisdom begins, on average, to diminish around age 75, probably hand in hand with cognitive decline. Nonetheless, the Baltes group suggested in one paper that there might be an optimal age and that “the ‘world record’ in wisdom may be held by someone in his or her 60s.”

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