

# Building Practical Wisdom in Business, Organisation and Management through Transformative Civic Education (‘Bildung’)

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## ABSTRACT

This paper revisits the concept of Bildung as a transformative approach to civic education, aimed at renewing business and management education and organisational practices to foster both human and non-human flourishing and sustainability. It synthesises key insights from the literature on practical wisdom and wisdom learning to develop a conception of spiritually informed, embodied wiser practice in business, organisation, and management.

As a component of transformative civic education, Bildung is demonstrated to have significant potential for cultivating the character traits, identity, and capabilities needed to address the profound ecological, economic, social, and cultural challenges of the Anthropocene. Specifically, the paper establishes a nexus between spirituality and embodied practical wisdom, advocating for more responsible and sustainable business practices and education. By leveraging the tradition of Bildung, both business practices and education can be rejuvenated through the development of the whole person within social praxis.

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*“All our knowledge brings us near to our ignorance,  
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,  
But nearness to death, no nearer to God.  
Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?  
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries  
Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust”*  
T. S. Eliot (1934)

*“We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom.  
The world henceforth will be run by synthesisers, people able to put together  
the right information at the right time, think critically about it  
and make important choices wisely  
And this much about wisdom:  
In the long haul, civilized nations have come to judge one culture against another by a  
moral sense of the needs and aspirations of humanity as a whole...  
What are we, Where do we come from, How shall we decide where to go?”*

Edward Wilson (1998: 294)

## **Introduction**

In the Anthropocene era, human-induced environmental changes and human domination of the Earth’s ecosystems have spawned a poly-crisis that threatens life on Earth (Homer-Dixon, et al., 2015). Human development has ushered in an era of interconnected converging crises: climate change, ecological destruction, disease, pollution, and socioeconomic inequality. Contemporary, hyper-modernist societies are characterised by intensifying instabilities and disparities and globalised, growth-fixated economies, reaching and transgressing planetary boundaries. If humanity continues the current trend to transgress planetary boundaries, the anthropocentric practices could inadvertently destabilise the Earths systems, harming human well-being (Steffen et al., 2015), and threatening all life on the planet and of future generations.

Facing the implications of the Anthropocene (Küpers, 2019), with its blind pursuit of unlimited growth, one-sided focus on efficiency and devastating unsustainable realities (Santos et al., 2017), there is an urgent need for a transformative civic education that aids people to develop a wise and spiritual understanding of an entangled world and enjoin to contribute towards creating a more sustainable world. Such education is important to cultivate practical judgment for dealing with the complex social, political, ethical, and cultural issues that are and will confront us in our everyday lives. Beyond objectivism and relativism, what is called for is being able to mediate between the universal and in particular a type of ethical know-how and practical wisdom in which both are seen as codetermined and needed for wellbeing as concretely embodied in our everyday practices (Bernstein, 1983).

Today’s mainstream business and management education are complicit in perpetuating a state of crisis by squandering natural resources, including so-called human resources, threatening present lives and putting future generations at risk. There is a mounting critique of business schools as institutions of education and their role in economy and society, concerning perpetuating dysfunctional ideologies, rather than enhancing critical and creative thinking by providing required capabilities and a suitable language (Edwards & Küpers, 2024) to discuss systemic and transformative change and/or learning about alternative organisational realities.

Mitroff (2004; Mitroff et al., 2015) and Ghoshal (2005) have already forcefully criticised business schools and their intellectual, emotional, and philosophical foundations and mindset including educational practice. They and others exacerbate them by promulgating a distorted view of human nature (‘humans are motivated solely by greed and are purely

opportunistic'), using a narrow and outdated notion of ethics ('materialistic egoism'), by employing a limited definition of management ('management is merely about making money/profit and can be captured solely in economic terms'). The perpetuation of how models are taught in business education, for example measuring 'success' in purely financial terms, demonstrates foolishness by conflating the means with the end (Baden & Higgs, 2015). As Baden and Higgs (2015) have shown, in cross-cultural comparisons with economies based on different value systems. Business schools need to adjust and update their curriculum to go beyond the superficial consideration of ethical issues and values or by focusing on motivating for responsibility like CSR only as business case marginalising moral and relational motives (Jackson & Lohmeyer, 2024).

In contrast to reproducing conventional utilitarian forms of business as usual, educators are called to develop and teach more pro-social management orientations and reprioritise the goal of social wellbeing over individualist business profit-maximisation. For example, Hühn (2014) has questioned the primacy of profit over goodness, and self-interest over care for communities, future generations and the natural environment. He argues that these misplaced priorities undermine ethics. Seeing and treating the natural environment not as a living being, but as a financial asset and a physical system that provides matter-energy sources for production and carbon sinks for the emissions of the production process. Business school programs do not consider the actual and potential impact this has on all stakeholders (Nonet, Kassel & Meijs, 2016).

Correspondingly, many current sustainable business practices and business education are limited by being rooted in a materialist, reductionist and anthropocentric paradigm and having an instrumentalist purpose of securing competitive or other economic advantages (Schuler et al., 2017) and merely 'sustain the economy' (Kurucz et al., 2014, p. 439). With such orientation, mainstream business, including education with their mainstream practical and pedagogic strategies, reinforce a narrow, short-term, and self-interested mentality and normalised moral disengagements (Küpers, 2024) or miscommunications that are complicit in the mainstreaming of unsustainable practices, causing our current ecosystems crises.

Considering these dire realities, the central research question of the paper is how *Bildung* can contribute to developing practical wisdom in business, organisation and management. The paper advances a position that *Bildung* is a promising way to build practical wisdom in business, management practice, education and spirituality and can support this process as a coherent background and strong motivational force (see Figure 1).

Integrating 'Bildung', wisdom and spirituality, in business, organisations and management alternative perspectives with practical implications for achieving a balanced integral wellbeing of humans and other species, nature, and planetary ecosystems (Shrivastava & Zsolnai, 2023), and spiritual-based business ethics (Zsolnai, 2022; Zsolnai, et al., 2022). Correspondingly, embodied wisdom related to organisation and leadership (Küpers, 2013; Küpers & Statler, 2019) can and has been connected to educating managers (Küpers & Pauleen, 2015; Rooney et al. 2020) and wisdom learning in organisations (Küpers, 2017).

Specifically, spirituality offers an awareness of the integrative interconnectedness of all life and the sense of meaning, purpose and responsibility as well as transformative orientations and practices that arise out of such understanding.

Bringing together a transformative education approach ('Bildung') with practical wisdom and spirituality, we seek to create conversations and forms of social innovations and cultural practices in which new and vital possibilities for sustainable and ethical business practices might be discovered. Moreover, integrating wisdom and sustainability (Intezari, 2015; Küpers et al. 2024) help catalyse and reinterpret the very status of what "being sustainable" means in business and its education. It can provide further rationales and contributes to a transformative agenda in education (see e.g. Dehler, 2009) and complements a care-based ethical approach to teaching and learning (Heath et al., 2015).

In relation to practical wisdom and spirituality, what is called for is a critical interrogation of taken-for-granted assumptions, ideologies, organisational and managerial(ist) discourses and practices. This implies considering the contexts, role and dynamics of interests and powerful forces that underlie economic and managerial perception, thought and action while exploring alternative ways of educational practices.

Methodologically, the approach of this conceptual paper is synthesising relevant literature and developing our arguments systematically. Specifically, the given examples provided within the paper serve only illustrative purposes and are not derived from a formal data analysis process and are aiming to contextualise our arguments rather than function as empirical evidence. Furthermore, the used descriptive vignette helps to explore and illustrate specific characteristics and experiences in a situational education context related to the discussed topic.

The paper is structured as follows. It begins with a historical reconstruction and description of 'Bildung' as transformative civic education and inter-relational practice, linked to personal, interpersonal, communal, and societal dimensions, concerns, and contexts. Subsequently, we discuss the relevance of embodied, transformative wisdom, related to organisation and specifically to management education. We offer perspectives on the role of spirituality as embodied interconnectedness, which is related to and exemplified by some business organisation and management. Furthermore, we provide an outline of a Bildung-centered business and management education and discuss theoretical and practical implications. In conclusion, we provide various overarching perspectives on transformative education, wisdom, and spirituality concerning sustainability.

### **Bildung as trans-formative civic education**

*Bildung* is a German term with English and Greek roots and Nordic and American fruits. The word does not sit comfortably in English, but it can be interpreted as "transformative and civic" in relation to education. The original meaning includes the German for 'image' (*Bild*) and the verb meaning 'to form, shape, construct' (*bilden*), and suggests, when applied to a human being, a kind of quasi-aesthetic formation of one's character. It implies that education in its original sense as '*educare*', literally meaning 'bringing forth' *thus* enculturation, and realisation. With these orientation and connotations, *Bildung* refers to a sense of fulfilling

the learners' nature or purpose, besides personal, interpersonal and transpersonal needs in relation to the challenges of a particular historical and societal context (Andersen, 2020).

For Herder (1744-1803) *Bildung* implied the cultural formation realised via social interaction, and always in relation to history and the life-worldly context as well as related to art (Herder, 1990; 2002). While *Bildung* involves a quest to advance the whole of humanity, this quest originates in the specific culture and specific circumstances of individuals, with their own unique conditions and potentialities. For Herder, *Bildung* is a process that plays out through natural and cultural evolution and is taken up into reflective human agency insofar as humans grasp and align themselves and their societies with spiritual creative purposes at work and in the world. Herder argued that the quest for wisdom, can never be completed and only be advanced through developing diverse perspectives and by challenging each other's views while learning from each other. He exerted a major influence on Wilhelm von Humboldt's views on education when the latter established the University of Berlin in 1810, privileging the humanities while supporting and aligning it with development of the sciences.

While Herder's political vision is communitarian and 'consociationist', nonracist and anti-imperialist envisioning a harmonious web of diverse nations and peoples, Humboldt's is more liberal and individualistic: social and political life should maximise individual freedom and thereby foster individual self-realisation. The starting point for all enquiry, Humboldt argued, is the quest for self-understanding, which ultimately leads to the quest to understand the whole cosmos. Education should be an active, dialectical process, and it should involve and respect the perspectives of students. Humboldt argued that university education must combine teaching and research, and students should participate in research, working with their lecturers rather than simply learning from them.

Historically, it was Humboldt's understanding of *Bildung*, rather than Herder's concept that became institutionalised within the pedagogical and cultural institutions of late 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois culture equated with a classical liberal education, regarded as a badge of bourgeois nobility, integrating art as a medium for *Bildung* and source of a thorough social and political transformation.

The German *Bildung* was an aesthetic education that was seen as a way of generating harmony between the opposing forces of the embodied human spirit. This aesthetic education was seen as effectively resisting the instrumentalising reduction of human persons while serving as an ethical formation fit for them to self-sensing and stable self-government (Herdt, 2019), as well as social 'sensus communis' as the capacity to cultivate and inhabit a shared world. This communal sense is mediated via sensory aesthesis-based intermodality to social attunement and 'common sense' - even more relevant in the Era of Globalisation, considering a post-colonialist orientation (Spivak, 2012). For Herder and Humboldt as well as other philosophers of education (including Schiller, Goethe, and Hegel) as well as more contemporary ones in the 'Bildung tradition' related to the liberal arts (Herdt, 2021). *Bildung* is a holistic concept and is difficult to break down its composite meaning into isolated aspects without losing its permeating reference. Grasping the comprehensive concept of *Bildung* requires a particular way of seeing the relationship between the individual and society, and its interrelated view of learning and becoming. *Bildung* entails a dynamic worldview that

values independence and critical thinking, whilst it considers and is related to the ecological, social, cultural, and other interdependencies of human learning and life including the harmonious development of all natural and human capacities.

Being part of an ongoing hermeneutic process of understanding, that includes reflecting on one’s past, biases, and particularities, and moving between familiarity and strangeness, Bildung is not a particular ‘goal’ or objective to be achieved, but an unfolding state of continual quest (Gadamer 1981/1982, pp. 8-16). As such, it is an intrinsic disposition of free spirit(s), who as educated ones have a special sensitivity to hermeneutic situations and how to think about and behave in them.

In contrast to a reified superficial education or degenerated commodified forms, the higher purpose of education in the sense of Bildung is the development of human civic maturity and the cultivation of practical wisdom, enacted for sustainable futures. Specifically, Bildung refers to a moral and emotional maturity that has been part of Nordic culture and orientation for a long time (Anderson, 2020). Both, maturity and wisdom are understood as qualities, not only as ‘qualifications’. ‘Be(com)ing’ educated is an open process and a lived experience. In addition to being a trained, qualified professional, an educated person is able to *profess*. This implies to assess, deliberate and judge in a holistic way, specific situations relating to general interests and the common good. The ability and capacity to ‘profess’ defines the “*professional*”, including professional managers.

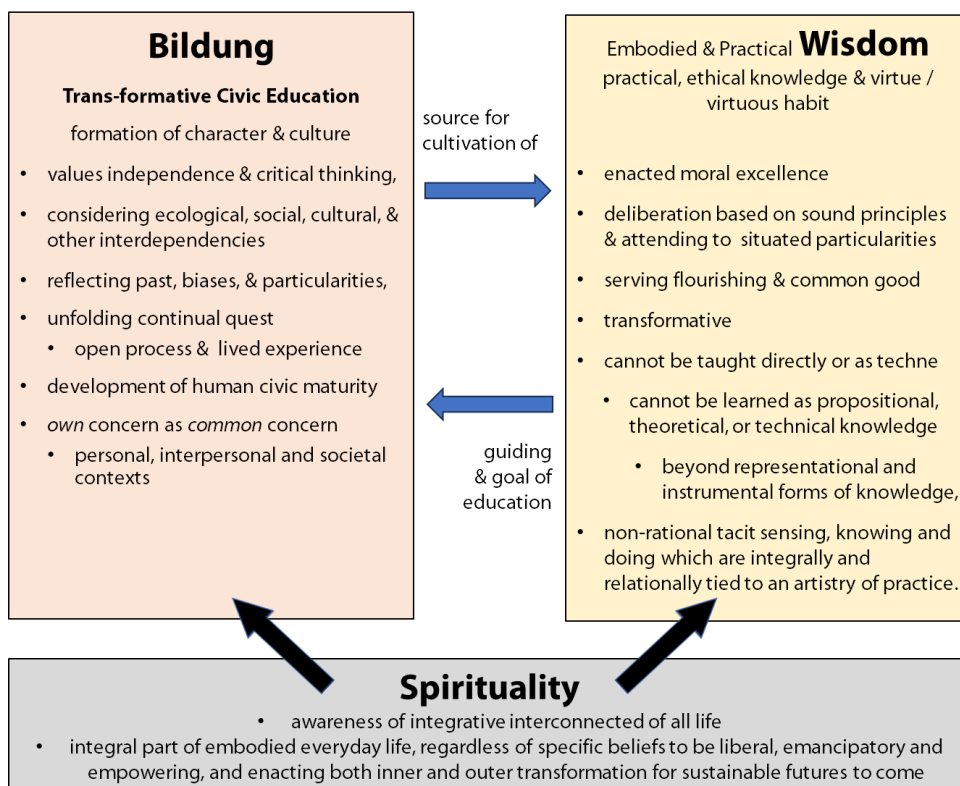


Figure 1. The nexus and relations between Bildung, Wisdom and Spirituality.

Accordingly, *Bildung* means inviting learners to make the subject matter (contents) their *own* concern in relation to a common concern. Through the possibilities of *Bildung*, learners become capable to identify with chosen and given questions, issues, and contents in critical independent ways, while seeing these in complexified inter-dependencies.

*Bildung* allows developing a relationship to contents and concerns by which the learner can incorporate them into personal, interpersonal and societal contexts and meaningful perspectives. With reference to a reasonable value judgement, a person who is educated in the sense of *Bildung* is ready and able to take responsibility, with a concern for a different more sustainable and just economy and society. *Bildung* is not only different from extrinsic-oriented training, but it also allows an integration of fulfilling learning and education with happiness (Noddings, 2003) and flourishing (see Figure 1).

### **Embodied and practical wisdom**

Having examined *Bildung* as a cultivating medium for wisdom, we now turn to the relevance of embodied, practical wisdom, especially in organisation and leadership (Küpers, 2013, Küpers & Statler, 2019). We connect wisdom to business and management education and learning (Küpers, 2017) and envision 'wise' companies (Ikujiro & Takeuchi, 2019). The classical concept of practical wisdom, known as *phrónêsis*, refers to disposition, practical knowledge, and intellectual virtue, a kind of virtuous habit that refers to an act of moral excellence which creates *eudaimonia*, translated as happiness, by serving the common good individually and collectively or enhancing the well-being of society, which is the quality of a communal and responsible life in community (Aristotle, 1998, 1144a4–5).

For this classical approach, flourishing (*eudaimonia*,) is a matter of having and acting on virtuous desires – those appropriate to human beings for a good life – a life characteristic of a rational and sociable creature. In this perspective, that is what a human being ought to be and typically is. Wisdom serves as means to safeguard human relations. Such serving and transformative wisdom aims at and strongly correlates with flourishing and eudaimonic well-being (Dong et al., 2023), spirituality based pro-social behaviours (Jeste et al., 2021) and localised nature conservation (Abas et al., 2022).

Practical wisdom focuses on making the 'right' use of knowledge, means and preferential choices or judgements for prudent actions to serve the right ends. It brings together deliberation and reflection based on sound principles with an ability to attend to the relevant particularities of a concrete situation. Accordingly, practical wisdom, in the Aristotelian tradition, is a knowledge-bound, intellectual virtue for guiding decisions and actions that normatively serve to enhance the flourishing of all societal well-be(com)ing, and thus a responsible life in the community.

Beyond providing ethical knowledge and being a virtue, practical wisdom and its learning is related to sensual dimensions that are tactile, visual, olfactory and/or auditory and multisensorial ways of responsive practices (Küpers, 2024), often situated spontaneously and pre-reflectively by bodies and within 'social' embodiment. It can function as a medium for the integration of ecological, societal, and political spheres in which today's economies and businesses play such powerful, far-reaching, and often problematic roles (Küpers, 2013). It brings together embodied, affective, and critically reflective dimensions for a (more) virtuous

practice of organisations and leadership in relation to their contexts and developments (Küpers, 2007; 2013; 2024).

Furthermore, it can serve for the transformation of individuals, groups, and communities as well as organisations and institutions. Transformative wisdom considers the complex nexus of humans, organisations, and their natural and socio-cultural environments to understand and enact holistic, integral and self-transcendent approaches that make a difference in terms of ethical praxis. The latter for instance is exemplified in ‘Common Good-Oriented Organisations’ (Freneau et al., 2023) or ‘wellbeing-oriented organisations’ (Shrivastava & Zsolnai, 2022).

Practical wisdom cannot be taught directly, but conditions for facilitating wisdom learning can be created in management education as well as in business and other organisations. Thus, practical wisdom involves experiential learning that enables one to act and cope with real-world complexity. It cannot be learned as propositional, theoretical, or technical knowledge. Wisdom and its learning require learners to go beyond representational and instrumental forms of knowledge, and move towards becoming wise as embodied and situational action in praxis (Küpers & Pauleen, 2013; Küpers 2024). Such orientation serves as an antidote or counterweight to thinking of wisdom as something purely intellectual or cognitive or even appropriating it and instrumentalising it as a faddish technique.

Several frameworks show how wisdom can be inculcated or ‘learnt’, notably as a subject of pedagogy and education (McKenna, Rooney, & Kenworthy, 2013; Intezari & Pauleen, 2013) as well as in relation to education governance (Bohlin, 2022; Eckel & Trower, 2023; Sison & Redín, 2023).

Accordingly, embodied wisdom can be cultivated as a specific enacted capability and competent practice (Küpers, 2013) but needs to be processed as a movement *in-between* as an inquiring journey in *Metaxas* (Linds, & Trull, 2012) and requires a community of joint research, mutual assistance, and spiritual support (Hadot, 1995, p. 274). This inquiry and context as well as a corresponding sustainability learning is realised through in-between spaces that “emerge from the differences of various knowledge fields and fields of action [and] provide opportunities to link knowledge production and societal transformation” (Vilsmaier & Lang, 2015, p. 51).

Approaches towards embodied creative learning and the playful artistry of wisdom (Küpers & Pauleen, 2015) show the role of objectives, and concepts as well as concretising classroom strategies and practices for ‘wisdom learning’ in management education (ibid. p. 497). Furthermore, recent neo-Aristotelian attempts to retrieve practical wisdom in education and ways of educating phronesis (Kristjánsson & Fowers, 2023), are reclaiming societal and planetary flourishing, as the aim of education to realising collective wisdom (Kristjánsson, 2020; 2020a).

### **Spirituality and the wisdom of in-between**

Spirituality to us is awareness of the interconnectedness of all life and the sense of meaning, purpose, and responsibility as well as transformative orientations and wisdom-oriented self-transcending and social caring practices that arise out of such understanding. From a spiritual perspective being and human consciousness is evolving beyond materialistic,



instrumentalist rationality to embrace more complex, creative and integral, ways of sensing, feeling, thinking, knowing and doing.

According to John Heron (2006), a participatory spirituality can be interpreted as an orientation that integrates situational engagement, immanent enlivenment and transcendent enlightenment. As a nexus, these modes serve to opening and co-creatively enacting and expressing the spiritual as indwelling (life) potential of a 'living-in-connectedness' thus embodied conviviality or 'commonviviality' (Küpers, 2022) of a transformative integral being (Merleau-Ponty, 1995, p. 84; 2003) as a web of "self-other-things" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 57). A corresponding embodied spirituality, participatory spiritual culture and practical 'sacred science' (Heron, 1998) are processing the 'divine immanence' as mutual co-creation between actual 'presences' (Heron, 2006, p. 10). Accordingly, spirituality can be interpreted as an integral part of embodied everyday life, regardless of specific beliefs to be liberal, emancipatory, empowering and enacting both inner and outer transformation.

In the contemporary context of 'post-secular society', the topic of spirituality and ways of its integration in the workplace generate momentum and find resonance in organisational and leadership studies and practices (e.g. Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2019; Fry & Sadler Nisiewicz, 2013). The role of spirituality in organisations, its various definitions, and embedded assumptions and contested meanings have been investigated for quite some time (e.g. Bell and Taylor, 2016). Dangers, problems, and limitations of (cultic) spirituality at work in organisation and leadership have been discussed (e.g. Tourish & Tourish, 2010), calling for a critically informed analysis (Cunha et al., 2006).

What is needed is a pluralistic and integrative vision of spirituality in organisations (Edwards, 2004) that considers spirituality critically and bodily. Therefore, what is called for is to move towards an embodied and critically interpreted and enacted spirituality of organisation (Bell, 2008). Part of such orientation is seeking possibilities to situate and reflect on possibilities for integrating spirituality in concrete relationships of business, education, and society in our contemporary world. For such an undertaking a post-phenomenological understanding and post-dualistic ontology that emphasises an inter-being and 'inter-between' can be helpful (Küpers, 2017). The very embodied 'in-between(ing)' can be interpreted as a spiritual sphere where an enacted spirituality is an enflashed realisation of relational processes of being and becoming that which could be called '*inter-be(com)ing*' (Küpers, 2017) that emerges out of organisations and can make them practically wise.

With Buber (2000/1923, p. 66) what qualifies the genuine relationships between I and Thou is love and a mature love a caring and loving sensibility can serve as principles for a refined, inclusive education (Buber, 2002/1947, p. 123) and humanistic management (Lee, 2024) as a precondition to ethical reflection and responsible action necessary to foster flourishing and a healthy spiritual growth. Building on such in-between as a sphere that is spiritually potent, the capacity for learning developing a relational ethical orientation or 'inter-ethics' (Abma et al., 2010) and transformative, epistemic, and political flourishing (Heron, 2006) depends on the ability to nurture 'between-times' and 'between-places' as spatiotemporal realms for the co-creation of value in different constellations.

Putting into practice an enflashed understanding of embodied spirituality and wisdom in business and management education opens possibilities for studies and practices about

bodily ‘how’s’ of organising, teaching and learning. Such an approach helps to critique disembodied orientations that neglect embodiments or merely seeing them as instrumentalised resources or objects for utilitarian ‘practicalism’ within the context of neo-liberal corporate life, bounded by the power relations within capitalist socio-economic relations.

### ***Examples of proto-spiritual’ and ‘proto-wise’ practices in business and leadership***

There are many examples of cases in which ‘proto-spiritual’ and ‘proto-wise’ practices have been enacted with considerable success both economically and socially. What Intezari et al. (2024) call ‘Executive Wisdom’ refers to wise decision-making in dealing with socially complex problems that is characterized by comprehensiveness, foresight, effectiveness, timeliness, selflessness, and ethics. For example, it is balancing rationality with emotional regulation or short-term financial impacts with long-term integrity and ethical responsibility, as well as enacts an inclusive leadership and team decision-making (ibid., see also Intezari, & Pauleen, 2018).

To illustrate how embodied and practical wisdom manifest in business decision-making and leadership, the following presents some specific examples that highlight wise practices in action. These examples showcase leaders who have effectively applied wisdom to navigate complex situations, balancing short-term demands with long-term organisational health and ethical considerations. In general urging students and managers to prioritise in their decision-making renewable energy sources and carbon reduction strategies and helping navigate the complexities and trade-offs involved in such transitions, balancing economic viability with environmental sustainability.

For concrete examples, there are innovative and committed business leaders such as Paul Polman of Unilever, who while questioning the primacy orientation towards shareholders calls for governments, business and NGOs and multi-stakeholder groups to work together to tackle the world’s most pressing challenges and has developed the Unilever (Murphy & Murphy, 2018). It calls for companies to be restorative, reparative and regenerative (Polman & Winston, 2021).

Polman’s decision to focus on sustainability as a core tenet of Unilever’s business strategy showcases practical wisdom in balancing economic performance with societal impact. His leadership practices involved reshaping corporate goals, encouraging innovation aimed at sustainability, and engaging stakeholders in meaningful dialogues about shared value creation. By embedding sustainability into the company’s operations and culture, Polman demonstrated how wise leadership can drive both purpose and profit, setting a benchmark for responsible corporate citizenship.

Another example is Yvon Chouinard of Patagonia, who built a global outdoor clothing and gear company a brand dedicated to environmental stewardship *as a main tenet of the company’s mission statement*. This implies putting the earth first, by making products that last, telling customers to buy less and by sharing earnings with grassroots environmental groups, spreading the gospel of sustainability far and wide, and, yes, by telling employees that, so long as their jobs get done, they can surf when the waves are up, ski when the powder’s fresh, and climb mountains when the urge strikes. Evidence on how the company

integrates environmental concerns into its core business strategies can be seen for instance, in Patagonia's decision to allocate 1% of its total sales to environmental causes and its commitment to using eco-friendly materials reflect a long-term vision that transcends mere profit maximisation. Chouinard's leadership practices also emphasise transparency and accountability, fostering a corporate culture where values and actions are aligned, which strengthens stakeholder trust and loyalty.

The environmentalist and entrepreneur David Yeung of Green Monday, with his multi-faceted social venture of a plant-based retail, dining and distribution network in 'Green Common' is changing the way we eat, and thus live and think (Ocsai, 2023).

Like these, there are other examples of family firms which integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations, providing not only improved working conditions; but also supporting stakeholders including non-profit organisations, or being involved in local community projects etc. (Stock et al., 2024) and small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) as most common form of business organisation, like a caring-oriented, relational HR practices in Malaysian SMEs (Au et al., 2024).

These examples underline the essence of embodied and practical wisdom in business contexts—where leaders make decisions that are not only strategically sound but also ethically grounded and socially responsible. Through these practices, such leaders cultivate sustainable and resilient organisations that thrive in the face of complex, dynamic challenges.

### **Bildung-centered business and management education**

The Bildung concept implies some directions for reforming business and management education to respond to the grand challenges of the Anthropocene. These challenges include articulating and implementing a role for business enterprises in resolving climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, global inequality, welfare deficiency, and social unrest. Business schools and other institutions of business and management education should become places of transformative learning to create new things with a positive impact on nature society, and future generations.

In light of Bildung some important functions of business and management education can be redefined as follows:

- (i) generating universal orientation across cultures and disciplines,
- (ii) assisting the whole-person development of students and faculty,
- (iii) creating new forms of knowledge,
- (iv) bringing forth responsible practitioners,
- (v) enhancing the problem-solving capabilities of society, and
- (vi) catalysing progressive social change in human-earth systems (Shrivastava & Zsolnai, 2024).

Today's business and management education is almost exclusively based on Western theories and models, including agency theory and shareholder primacy, and disregards non-Western approaches and conceptions of management, including aboriginal/ indigenous ones

which might be vital for the sustainability transition of humanity. A dialogue with non-Western cultures<sup>1</sup> and other disciplines (e.g. ecology, sustainability science, and anthropology) is crucial, not only for broadening the value-horizon of students and faculty but also for boosting their creativity in solving business and management problems.

Business and management education is very one-sided today as it focuses on the development of cognitive-intellectual capabilities and forgets the other sides of human existence, namely the (emotional, ecological, interpersonal/ social, existential/spiritual etc.). True business and management education should target holistically by nurturing art, community, nature, and spirituality using the head, the heart, and the hands of the students and faculty.

Today's institutions of business and management education are interested in producing only scientific-technical knowledge; however, the grand challenges of the Anthropocene require mobilising all kinds of human knowledge, and not just expert knowledge based on science and technology. New forms of knowledge should be created which provide novel insights into the unknown parts and aspects of reality while having relevance for renewing theories and practices of business and management.

The fate and survival of humanity in the Anthropocene depends on responsible business and management practices. Consequently, business and management education should bring forth responsible practitioners, who are taking prospective moral responsibility not only for themselves and their own organisations, but also for the greater good, including nature, society, and future generations. Ethics is a foundational part of business and management education that involves helping and directing the moral development of learners by strengthening their moral sensitivity, moral imagination, moral judgement, moral decision making, and an inclination for making moral actions.

For enhancing the problem-solving capabilities of society, business schools and other institutions (e.g. accreditation bodies, professional associations, education or funding organisations, donors and philanthropies, etc.) of business and management education should embrace transdisciplinary, stakeholder-engaged, solutions-oriented research to catalyse progressive changes in the human-earth systems.

This new direction in business and management education would benefit from the integration of innovative teaching and learning methods. These include experiential learning—such as utilizing various experimental games and decision-making exercises—and cross-cultural approaches that consistently address the cultural biases inherent in any given business practice. Additionally, it would involve whole systems thinking, which explores the broad range of stakeholders, including nature and future generations. The approach would also encompass critical inquiry to make explicit the hidden assumptions in problem formulation, existential questioning to define management issues in terms of self and identity, and the examination of new business models that simultaneously promote human flourishing and ecological regeneration.

## **Implications**

There are various practical implications for developing an embodied wisdom learning in (management) education (Küpers, 2017; Küpers & Gunnlaugson, 2017; Küpers & Pauleen,

2015; Rooney et al. 2020). We will need both a critical reappraisal of the existing educational forms and imagining new ones.

Importantly, integrated wisdom-based education systems would resist unnecessarily valorising instrumental technocratic and economic policy constructions. It would resist inappropriately restrictive copyright provisions (Rooney et al., 2006). It would not ignore the indisputable importance of culture and creativity in education and society.

Reformed and transformed ways of integrative education make room and give time for somatic and semantic, emotional, and intuitive knowing as well as non-discursive learning, without debilitating intellectual standards of analytical rigour and reason-oriented criticism. Instead of sterile or formulaic views of reality captured in 'sanitised' material or artificial simulations based on just a few variables or simplistic conceptualisations, *Bildung* enacts quite the opposite. Education and training in management must expose students to the messy complexity, poly-cause ambiguities, paradoxes, and dilemmas of actual and problematic management practices. Besides reform of existing study programs, one way to transform higher education is institutional reaccreditations that provide a strategic entry into embedding sustainability and a wisdom-orientation across curricular and co-curricular settings in innovative sustainability education and literacy connected to civic engagement programs (LeVasseur & Ciarcia, 2019). Correspondingly there is a need not only for monitoring, but also further developing and more comprehensively institutionalising the accreditation standards that prioritize sustainability-integrating education.

For realising an embodied, wisdom-oriented *Bildung*, experimental and relationally sensitive ways of arts-based learning (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009; Küpers, 2017) are helpful. This includes drawing and painting with various techniques, like drawing, collage, sound, poetry, narratives, role-play, and other art-forms that develop expressive sensibility, spiritually and morally refined sense, decision-making skills and a more holistic learning.

To realise embodied spiritual, wisdom-oriented educational practices, learners require access to available material and financial as well as affective, emotional, cognitive, and social resources which refer to political implications.

The corresponding redesign of curricula needs to include modules that combine ethical and aesthetic dimensions with leadership education, providing opportunities for students to explore moral practices and ethical principles more deeply. We suggest to also implement pilot workshops that foster an appreciation for interconnectedness and sustainability in business decisions, gathering iterative feedback to refine the approach.

As part of long-term strategies business school programs need to be restructured to facilitate whole-person development and to promote transdisciplinary collaboration, integrating non-Western and indigenous management perspectives to foster creativity and comprehensive problem-solving capabilities. Furthermore, it will be vital to embed wisdom-oriented and spirituality-integrating practices into the institutional framework, promoting sustainability and thoughtful leadership over profit maximisation.

In more general terms, an integral approach that brings together transformative education in sensu '*Bildung*', spirituality and wisdom may include the following orientations and practices (Molz & Hampson, 2010):

- A lifelong and life-wide practice across formal and informal learning opportunities;
- Engagement with dimensions and aspirations of the whole human being in a dynamically harmonious way;
- Cultivation and facilitation of inner qualities (for all ages and in all domains of life)
- Connectivity, such as that between disciplines; occupations; cultures; theory and practice; private and public; beauty, truth and goodness;
- Engagement with the challenges and opportunities of the given era regarding, for example, governance, technology, social justice, ecology
- Respect for the evolving freedom and uniqueness of the learner — education as self-determined, unfolding in an emancipatory way along individual trajectories;
- Facilitation of a non-dogmatic, critical, experimental, and experiential enjoyment of being, becoming, doing, relating and caring.

### **Adapting Bildung to the contemporary global business environment and integrating non-Western perspectives**

In the rapidly evolving landscape of global business, where cultural sensitivity and ethical leadership are paramount, the principles of Bildung can help cultivate leaders who are not only competent but also morally grounded and culturally aware. To adapt Bildung to the contemporary global business environment, organisations can embed its principles into their leadership training programs, emphasising the importance of lifelong learning, self-reflection, and ethical considerations in decision-making processes. This might include fostering environments where employees are encouraged to pursue continuous personal (and transpersonal, spiritual) development through diverse cultural experiences, cross-disciplinary educational opportunities, and active engagement in ethical discourse and practice, e.g. mindfulness training. By integrating Bildung into corporate culture, businesses can develop leaders capable of navigating complex global challenges with a balance of intellectual rigor and moral integrity as well as wisdom, instilling a sense of stewardship and ethical responsibility. While critics argue that the concept of Bildung is deeply embedded in European cultural and intellectual traditions, potentially marginalizing non-European worldviews and educational philosophies and may not be universally applicable, particularly in non-European contexts, we think that it is not bound to Eurocentric roots and positions. Integrating non-Western perspectives on education and wisdom can significantly enrich and challenge the traditional Bildung approach. Many non-Western educational philosophies, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, indigenous knowledge systems, and other holistic learning traditions, emphasise community, interconnectedness, and the importance of wisdom in practical life. These perspectives can complement Bildung by adding a greater focus on collective well-being, experiential learning, and the application of knowledge in real-world contexts.

Furthermore, the urge underlying Bildung is to build character, virtues and values, which is common to many cultures. Some form of Bildung philosophy has been developed in many non-western cultures including India, China and Japan and in different religions as well as transcultural dimensions (Sander, 2019). For instance, Confucian education emphasises moral development through the cultivation of virtues such as benevolence,

righteousness, and propriety, which parallels Bildung's aim but extends it by stressing relational ethics and social harmony as well as life-long learning.

Taoism offers a experience-based holistic education with its emphasis on interdependency of all, balance, harmony with nature, and nurture of innate potentials. Part of the Taoist wisdom is advocating for wu wei, or "non-action" which encourages minimal interference and allowing learning to unfold naturally. In education, this can translate to creating learning environments where students are free to explore and learn at their own pace.

Indigenous educational practices often integrate holistic teaching methods that include hands-on experience, storytelling, and community involvement. These practices can challenge Bildung to move beyond individual self-cultivation towards a more inclusive, community-oriented approach as well as including traditional ecological knowledge and resource management in sense of a sacred ecology (Berkes, 2008).

Incorporating non-Western perspectives can lead to a richer, more diversified concept of professional, personal (and transpersonal) growth and transformation in global business contexts. This integration promotes a balanced approach where intellectual development is harmonised with ethical sensibility and social responsibility, preparing business leaders to operate effectively and ethically in a multicultural world.

By acknowledging and respecting the diversity of educational philosophies, contemporary adaptations of Bildung can foster global business leaders who are not only intellectually capable and morally sound but also culturally competent and socially engaged.

### **A descriptive vignette of teaching embodied 'Aesth-Ethics' in a master study-program 'management'**

The following case study describes the design and practice of an embodied education that integrates ethical and aesthetic dimensions, and in a way illustrates a form of wisdom learning. It is based on a module and seminar on 'Ethics and Aesthetics' in a masters study program at Karlshochschule International University in Germany. It offered ways of inquiring and specific, experimental assignments that allowed wisdom learning and to intuit again (Küpers, 2017). This module is part of a master-study program at a private, but accredited international German business school with an aspirational mission of education.<sup>2</sup>

Students come from different backgrounds and countries, and some have work experience. The seminar and workshops for this module were facilitated via co-teaching with a professor from an academy of arts, who is an expert in art-based learning. As facilitators, the teachers tried to create a psychologically and socially safe, trustful learning environment, where activities and tasks were offered as voluntary.

Building on previous experimental and experiential learnings during the study program, this module was part of the final phase, before students attend a research colloquium for developing their master's theses. Accordingly, students experienced experimental learning processes in various modules, including simulations, role-plays, and field trips. For example, during a so-called partly self-organised 'edu-tour' they were involved in creative projects related to ecological, social and/or cultural sustainability (Küpers & Wee, 2018).

The overall aim was to encourage students to be creative participants in experimental and experiential learning. Specifically, the design and learning objective of this course is to

provide possibilities to experience and reflect moral, ethical and art-related, aesthetic dimensions

Aspiring to experiencing and understanding critical, utopian, and pragmatic dimensions of ethics and art/aesthetics (Küpers, 2005a), this course contributed to developing ethical and aesthetic capabilities and competencies as well as being engaged in embodied, applied knowledge and creative practices.

As a preparation in the first sessions, students engaged and reflected on their own previous experiences and implicit knowledge about the topical field and in relation to course readings, including self-researched sources and in-class activities. The latter included mind-mapping, and clustering via small group work, and exercises that were both sensual and helped to make sense regarding ethical and artist/aesthetic processes and dimensions. Taking inspiration from connecting ethics, art, and leadership in practices of leadership development and technique and practices from the arts, various experiential and creative media were integrated. Throughout the course various sensorial elements and art-related media helped to stimulate deep and generative learning, aiming at going beyond contrived cognitive orientations and verbal learning through texts, lectures, and discussions. Correspondingly, the learning involved engaging and cultivating senses and multisensory experiences, experimenting with various forms of embodied and collaborative inquiries, including an assigned task of creating 'artefacts' or 'art-works'.

Furthermore, technology was utilised, particularly mobile phones, for photos and videos, whilst being involved in de-familiarising and improvising excursions into the entwined nexus of 'culture-and-nature'. These excursions, manifesting as a process an exciting alternative compared to conventional frames, included blind-folded walks through the busy city into a park and visit of a provocative tour through an exhibition on modern art.

The distinct experiences in different environments allowed experiments with bodily dis- and reorientation, but also realising the significance of trust, empathy and pro-social experiences and ethical practices. Thereby, different senses, affective subtleties and sensory potentialities and proto-ethical qualities were leveraged and processed that otherwise would be glossed over or just being 'labelled'.

Employing these exercises was interrupted and punctuated by reflection periods, in which students were invited to think individually and critically, but also to share and discuss their experiences in small groups. During these reflections and sharing, participants could make connections back to other learnings and forward to envisioned professional practices. Conducting further exercises and experiments served as a means of exploring the embodied, ethical, and artful moments of leadership in real time, followed by critically processing, reflecting and projective storytelling and sharing. In this way, students learned to interpret leadership as a situated 'ethical' art form in and of itself, characterised as much by its wisdom-related, phronetic qualities and artfulness as by its technical skills. Students not only de- and reconstructed notions and understandings of leadership but reflecting about the role of moral practice and ethical principles.

Being sensually and aesthetically sensitised, they took different perspectives, especially compared to conventional economic-analytic and managerialist approaches. As part of cultivating an ethical and aesthetic pursuit or artful craft, guided by 'excellence', they learned



what it means to embody ethics. There were various observational, conversational, and exemplary insights, understandings and feedback gained, reflecting the effects and implications but also limitations and challenges, like time and cost-expensive requirements including experiences of students feeling overwhelmed.

Overall, the module confirmed the effectiveness and value of experiential learning and bringing together learning about ethical and aesthetical dimension and practices in one course. It showed how senses do 'make sense' for an enacted, transformative 'wisdom learning' (Küpers & Pauleen, 2015) that integrates ethics and aesthetics practically. Staying with and coming anew to their various sensory modes (Springborg, 2010), students dwelled in moments of different states of being and relationships. This included experiencing how tacit knowing corresponds to sensory, aesthetic knowing and gut feelings. The learners not only noticed how their bodily states altered but also how atmospheres and communication, as well as patterns of intentions and tensions had changed.

Learning experientially with the (self-)employed techniques and exercise allowed them to develop capabilities of approaching complex issues with intensified forms of awareness and other ways of 'knowing' and a-rational or a-logical approaches while practicing and cultivating and ethical and aesthetic sensibilities and competencies.

The feedback by students, systematically collected via an institutionalised evaluation system, confirmed the effectiveness and meaningfulness of the course. In particular, it suggested that the offered experiential approaches mediated realisations and meanings that would be unavailable by conventional rational-analytical ways of propositional knowledge and teaching. The feedback also showed that not only was the level of energy, motivation, and commitment higher, compared to other courses and approaches, but this learning freed up ideas, and liberated an intensified sensing, feeling and creative thinking and action.

Statements like: "This allowed me to awaken my inner child" and "I could let the artist within me express herself, tapping into unknown potentials", confirm activation of dormant potentials and drivers.

Providing experiential and experimental approaches and learning situations. Integrating disruptive educational (micro-)strategies intended to defamiliarise students' perception and orientation and deliberate unsettling of conscious control and comprehension invited to a realisation that otherwise would not have occurred. Being involved in 'investments' into *ethical and aesthetic risk-taking* (Mack, 2013), while affording opportunities to 'enliven and impassion' (Dey & Steyaert, 2007), students were challenged to 'find their own form' (Taylor & Hansen, 2005) and 'trans-form' (Küpers, 2011). Doing things for their own sake, which includes *not being graded*, students were experiencing *intrinsic values* of ethical and artful events and processes. At the same time, they were developing, enacting, and maintaining a reflective practice of aesthetic and ethical qualities that can be linked to dimensions and components of transformational leader- and followership. The module mediated, via de- and rehabitualisations and ethical and aesthetical learnings, opportunities for an integral transformation, comprising inner and outer, individual, and collective dimensions.

Through engagements with various ongoing ethic-oriented and arts-based activities, students tapped and activated potentials to find alternative and playful ways to perceive, relate and act, thus learning differently. The capability of intensified receptive awareness and

enacting capacities to embrace and juxta-reposition otherness of multiple realities, heterogeneous contents and complexifying perspectives gave them opportunities to experience different perceptions, feelings, thoughts, encounters, and actions, sensitising and modifying their way of studying, learning, working and living. The ethical and artful co-inquiry design and employment of artful means invited and challenged students to explore and learn to think otherwise, arriving at alternative possibilities previously unthinkable.

The artworks ‘worked’ in that the assigned tasks rendered impressive and inspiring ‘outcomes’ and artful expressions beyond conventional formats. Creating these art-works facilitated working with overlapping meanings with a ‘thinking through making’ (Lammer, 2012). It was an exercise in ‘artful making’, including the interdependent and intertwined elements of release, creative ensemble, and play, but also the values of co-creating and leading themselves and others in more empathetic and creative ways.

Experiencing the relationship between artful processes, ethics, and leadership they learned leading more beautifully as well as activating novel potentials for responding differently and empathetically. For instance, perceiving organisational and leadership situations as more or less beautiful, sublime, comic, or grotesque ways and value them for their own sake or as more (or less) ethically acceptable, fair, just, and wise. In this way, the experienced and reflected transformation may contribute to realising other and wiser forms of organisational and management or leadership practices. The experiences of explicit and implicit embodied processes, related to ethical and aesthetic dimensions facilitated discoveries of ‘bodied’ mindful forms of knowing and dealing with not-knowing, and engaged action and non-action.

As a form of radical reflexivity what this module allowed a complexifying reflexive co-agency or what could be called as a neologism ‘re-flAction’ as interplay of reflection and action to emerge, which unites aesthetic reflexivity (reflection) and aesthetic agency (action) (Springborg & Sutherland, 2015) including learning how to know what is known and what is not known/done or could be known or done differently.

While some elements were more memorable than others, participants experienced that it was the complementary blend of components properly integrated in this module that made it special and effective. This implies that isolating or removing some elements or not connecting them would be limiting. Concerning a holistic approach of learning by *hands, hearts and head*, participants used them in various ways: They used their hands and bodies by grasping and processing materialities of various tangible media and being embodied space and situation with co-present others. With reference to their hearts, they experienced feelings, emotions and moods flowing and engaged in an affective, empathetic ‘knowing’ and relating. Finally, they used their heads for getting a reflective and critical understanding of meanings and implication of what they were doing. Importantly, it was not a practice of lonely hands, hearts, and heads, but students co-created and moved through a shared experiential field in which they were learning together, hence gathered; a specific co-creational ‘we-space’ serving as a kind of community of an implicit wisdom-learning.

While the overall response was positive and most students enjoyed being involved, some had reservations towards or struggled with this kind of experimental approach. Despite that it was a relatively safe learning environment, some students suffered from emotional or

mental hesitations and blockages. There were students, who found such experiments and the tasks quite unfamiliar and felt that they lacked the supposed necessary skills to engage in them. A well-thought-out design, specific preparation and continuous coaching and encouragement are vital for counteracting the mentioned tendencies. Furthermore, the choice of possible media was selective and constrained. Students were considering writing, composing, and singing songs, acting out dramatic scenes or choreographing dances, which would require other, more expensive forms of documentation or recording. Using again (limited) verbal and explicit language in the artist's statements and reflection paper created a tension to non-verbal and more implicit forms of expression in the art-works.

Finally, questions about evaluation and the transferability of this learning to life-worldly management and organisational context arose. The use of novel, expressive forms of creation and writing that demonstrate engagement with particular concepts is challenging for any assessment and evaluation. Because arts-based, or ethics-integrating education, fosters different ways of learning, the corresponding evaluation needs to capture the different aspects of what has been taught and what has been learned. As the creative expressions revealed something of students' attitudes, personalities, identities or personal relationships within the contents, and specific transformations it is difficult to assess or even being unethical to judge. What is needed instead are sensitive designs for approaching assessment and specific qualitative treatments and feedback. In the given case, the reflection-papers were given formative, rather than summative feedback and the artworks and artefacts were not formally graded at all. Furthermore, additional criteria for creative and reflective work were considered, including looking for evidence that the student has imaginatively engaged with ideas and perspectives that are different than their own as well as how being imaginative and authentic were brought together by narrative coherence and plausibility. Rather than theoretical accuracy. Constrained by the given institutional setting and examination-system, the teacher remained the ultimate assessor and validator, reproducing a powerful hierarchy. However, considering various features of this innovative experiment the needs and expressions of the embodied and reflective learners were incorporated in an emancipatory way.

Correspondingly, for the co-teachers, the educational practices became not only more flexible, creative and artful, but rather this experiment provided them an opportunity for deeper learning experiences, even calling to teach what they don't know. The roles of a superior or policing explicators and regimes were reduced, and a liberated inquiry was facilitated, allotting students a reflective self-assessment and serious appreciation of peer feedback.

What those involved in these experiments experienced, was a kind of *unformation* (Cooper, 2006/2023) experience that is a lateral pre-sense or latent sphere in and through which information is a sense of being in-formed i.e. educated is both constructed and sent on or 're-lated' by being cultivated as a field of forms.

Overall, the embodied learning as it became alive in this experimental ethics-and-aesthetics-in-practice, appears as being a 'proto-phronetic' approach for a transformative and integral education and wisdom-learning, that not only made and makes a difference, but allows for other differentiations to emerge. Future research, especially longitudinal

investigations is called for exploring systematically various outcomes, and long-term effects or impacts of the presented or other akin approaches on students' professional and personal development. Future research is also called for contextualizing Bildung even more within the field of spiritual- based business ethics and to explore how this approach is cultivating a sense of business ethics.

### **Strategies for integrating spirituality in secular management curricula**

Generally, to navigate potential resistance and to integrate more spirituality into management curricula educators can adopt a multi-faceted approach, using the following strategies and practices:

#### **1. Framing Spirituality in Universal Terms**

Emphasising universal values such as empathy, integrity, aesthetics, and mindfulness can help make discussions on spirituality more inclusive and less likely to be perceived as promoting specific religious views. This approach encourages the appreciation of spirituality as a facet of human experience relevant to personal and professional growth.

#### **2. Evidence-Based Pedagogy**

Incorporating empirical research that demonstrates the tangible benefits of spirituality-infused leadership and management practices, like enhanced employee well-being and improved organisational outcomes, can help underscore its relevance and appeal to empirically-minded audiences.

#### **3. Interdisciplinary Integration**

Leveraging interdisciplinary connections with psychology, philosophy, and ethics can create a more holistic and accepted integration of spiritual themes. Courses and modules that include case studies and contributions from various disciplines can illustrate the breadth and applicability of spiritual principles in business.

#### **4. Inclusive Language and Activities**

Utilising inclusive language and designing activities that do not affiliate with any specific religious tradition can mitigate apprehension. Exercises focused on self-reflection, ethical decision-making, and corporate social responsibility can foster a spiritual perspective without alienating secular or diverse student populations.

#### **5. Pilot Programs and Feedback Mechanisms**

Initiating pilot programs or workshops that integrate these concepts on a smaller scale allows for gathering feedback and iteratively improving the approach. Student and faculty feedback can provide valuable insights into how these themes are received and how resistance can be addressed effectively.

By adopting these strategies, educators can create a more receptive environment for integrating spirituality into business education. This inclusive and evidenced-based approach not only alleviates potential resistance but also enriches the educational experience, preparing students to become thoughtful, ethical leaders in an increasingly complex world.

## **Conclusion: Limitations, implications and perspectives**

Both business and management education and practices can be renewed by capitalising on the tradition of *Bildung* and by supporting the whole-person development of people. The described ways of an embodied wisdom-oriented, spirituality-integrating *Bildung* enact the very idea of education as '*e-ducere*', that is '*to lead out*'. Leading out of limiting boundaries and towards other ways of being. Experimenting with the unknown allowed those involved to discover or conjure up as-yet-unexplored possibilities for sensing, feeling, thinking knowing and imagining. Such form of education is an open-ended, dynamic process that leads to further developing and engaging in life-long learning and generating novel responses while being situated in a world of contingency.

In terms of limitations, in the context of contemporary neoliberal educational environments, *Bildung*'s holistic and intrinsic, transformative nature may be at odds with market-driven paradigms that prioritize standardized testing, extrinsic goals, measurable outcomes, and workforce readiness, and thus instrumentalization of education (Biesta, 2015). While educational systems worldwide are often driven by economic and pragmatic concerns such as funding, resources, and standardization, the partly idealistic and philosophical nature of *Bildung* can be difficult to translate effectively into real-world educational settings.

Furthermore, the traditional concept of *Bildung* has been linked with promoting individualism that can be done at the expense of communal and collaborative educational experiences (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005). Additionally, it has been problematised as related to the formation of an educated elite and part of a specific power-apparatus, rather than being an inclusive principle that applies to all societal strata (Masschelein & Ricken, 2003), implying the danger that benefits of transformative education may be less accessible to marginalized communities. A wise understanding and practice of *Bildung* would overcome these limitations by enacting a more integral orientation.

Some potential avenues for future empirical research include, conducting longitudinal studies to assess the impacts of *Bildung*-inspired educational practices on students' ethical decision-making and leadership capabilities in real-world business environments. Moreover, there is a need for empirical research to evaluate the effectiveness of arts-based and experiential learning modules in enhancing students' intellectual, emotional, and practical skills in comparison to traditional business education methods. Furthermore, Investigating the integration of spirituality and practical wisdom in business settings through case studies of organisations that have successfully implemented such approaches, could provide concrete evidence of their benefits.

*Bildung* as a way of education and wholistic learning that involves the body (embodied incorporated dimensions), the mind (cognitive, logical, rational thought), the heart (feelings, emotions, moods), and the 'spirit' of individuals and collectives. Bringing together, sensing, feeling, knowing and doing, which is effectuating the wisdom and spiritual orientation of *Bildung*. Spirituality is a powerful motivating and energising force in people's personal, professional, and public lives. It is strongly connected to moral development and ethical behaviour as well as aesthetic orientation, to the sense of meaning and purpose, and to rewarding experiences and relationships.

An integrated approach to sustainability and wisdom-oriented education would recognise the diversity of types of spiritualities in individuals, and the collective while trying to bring these diverse elements into a coherent picture that makes sense, and which is communicable in ways that learners can identify with.

Bildung can contribute to the wellbeing of humans and other species, nature, and planetary ecosystems (Shrivastava & Zsolnai, 2023) and spiritual-based business ethics (Zsolnai, 2022; Zsolnai, et al., 2022). Integrating inner and external dimensions for holistic and regenerative sustainability (Berejnoi Bejarano et al., 2019; Hes & du Plessis, 2015; Gibbons et al. 2020) may serve as an adequate response to the dangers of imminent collapse (Bendell, 2023).

The *interplay of practical embodied wisdom, spirituality, and transformative education* in and for a more sustainable business, organisation and management, will be critical for coping with and moving beyond the effects and problematics of the Anthropocene. Integrated and enacted they offer a creative potential for the transformation towards a post-capitalistic, value-driven economy. To be ignored at our peril!

With Whitehead (1957), who defined the task of a university via rhythmic ways of teaching and learning to weld together imagination and experience for an “intensified perception of presence” (1957, 3), we think that universities are called to create in an atmosphere of excitement, arising from disciplined imaginative generalised power and artful consideration which transforms knowledge and acting. Correspondingly, a process-based management education - via a refined perceptual awareness and acute empirical sensitivity as well as imaginative playfulness, related to an artistic rigour to nurturing an ‘*art of relevation/revelation*’ (Chia & Nayak, 2016) amongst students. By this orientation the seemingly irrelevant, the apparently unconnected and the hidden, inconspicuous, or overlooked are meaningfully and imaginatively linked together, which helps to process and reconfigure knowledge more creatively, aiding better judgement and thus making wiser decisions and therefore actions. The whole *aim of education is the “production of active wisdom”* (Whitehead, 1957: 37 emphasis added)<sup>3</sup> and an excellence that serves the flourishing of all beings in presence and a future to be-come.

## Disclosure statement

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<sup>1</sup> For example, other wisdom traditions like neo-Daoism can help exploring organic relationships of inner peace, outer peace, and ecological sustainability, and articulating co-creative nonviolence-oriented curriculum of an integrative creativity (Hongyu Wang, 2021). According to Hongyu Wang such organic relationality is a co-creative dance of embodied subject, (inter)subjectivity, and society that can help reorganizing curriculum structure, enacting a creative pedagogy even beyond words in attunement and improvisation, in intercultural space. Envisioning a renewed educational landscape a curriculum of integrative creativity can vitalise education, teaching, and learning, opening up new horizons in a time of crises and challenges to create new and sustainable pathways.

<sup>2</sup> As expressed in the Mission Statement:

<http://karlshochschule.de/en/university/university/karls-values/>

<sup>3</sup> In a speech made at Cambridge University in 1912, Whitehead, said that “Above all things, we must be aware of inert ideas, that is to say ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations. Education with inert ideas is not only useless; it is above all things, harmful” (Whitehead, 1929). Stating this, he was criticizing the paralysis of thought induced in students by the aimless accumulation of precise knowledge, inert and unutilized. Interestingly, he made similar assertions at a later address, given to Harvard University Business School in 1929. Here again he specified that university education is a discipline for the adventure of life (Whitehead 1933/1967: 98) and it is the function of the teacher to evoke into life wisdom and beauty (ibid. 98). All efforts should be directed towards practical realisation of values and enacting “wisdom as an artistic sense” (ibid. 39). For him, this orientation needs dialectically being processed through romantically informed, followed by precision-exercising modes of learning then leading to synthesising generalisation. Interestingly, the habit-forming body is integrated in Whitehead inductive–deductive rhythmic interweaving of modes of learning and a mental cultivation that are connected to the enhancement of ordinary everyday life by heightened value quality. For him the wisdom-oriented process of knowing and learning is transformative and emergent in the sense that a dynamic movement between qualitatively different stages affords new abilities, new knowledges, and, at the same time, provides a ground for further exploration and development. Overall, he essentially reminds us that “an education which does not begin by evoking initiative and end by encouraging it must be wrong. The active part of part of wisdom, functioning as “modifying agency” (Whitehead 1933/1967: 47) lies for him and for us in the molding of our future actions in accordance with insights into general principles that help to understand the particular events in our experiences. The emergence of a responsible, ethically oriented, and wise student is Whitehead’s vision of the ‘outcome’ of multiple rhythms of education. “For Whitehead, this symphony of rhythms — this rich pedagogy of repeating and alternating differences — is united in a drive towards a value-oriented growth and novelty, with art as an important mediator, and the art of life as its goal (Mathisen, 2015).