

Decision Making in Business: Using the Tools of the Philosophical Practice

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Abstract

The decision making in business is an essential component of the management, where the leader, together with his team, are concerned with identifying and finding the optimal solutions to support the decision-making process or to meet the organization's objectives reflected in the company mission statement. The paper highlights the role that philosophical practice can play in organizations, which provides the management team with specific philosophical tools, such as short Socratic dialogue or dilemma training, as well as practical ways to apply critical thinking, as a tools including in the management process, thus increasing the decision-making capacity for the leaders of the organizations. The critical thinking, often considered to be specific to the educational system, finds its application in the business environment, with help of the philosophical consulting, a specialized practice of philosophical counseling.

Key words: Socratic dialogue, dilemma training, critical thinking, philosophical counseling, leadership

J.E.L. classification: M10, M14, D91

1. Introduction. Premises of the philosophical consultancy applied in business

If we look more closely at some of the characteristics of ancient philosophers, we observe at least three different approaches, which lead us to the current orientation of philosophical practice for the leaders. A first approach was that of Socrates, who can even be considered a model of "not doing that", and who often managed to attack his interlocutors with his questions, unfolding in the ancient agora, and which led him to a tragic end, condemning his actions. The next approach was that of Plato, through his Academy, he was concerned for training the leaders of his time by the philosophers, thus he becoming a meta-consultant, but the results were not as expected, some of his subjects having the contrary actions with the teachings received in the Platonian school. A third approach it was found at Aristotle, who put the foundations of the ancient institution of the private counseling, he becoming a tutor or mentor of some leaders, one of this being the emperor Alexander the Great. This form of tutoring has been taken over and perpetuated over the centuries by other philosophers, who addressed to monarchs and nobles, as philosophical counselors, and this actions can be framed today to be specific to philosophical consultancy for organizations.

The similarity comes from the fact that the entire concentration of economic activities specific to those times took a place around the royal courts or the aristocratic class, which was interested in exchanges of materials and business, and today they take place in the specific entities from economy. With these concerns, philosophers such as Hobbes, Descartes, Hume, Locke, Spinoza, Bentham or Frege were nominated by the contemporary promoter of philosophical practice, Lou Marinoff, who published a book on the subject (Marinoff, 2002) and he highlighting the role of organizational consultancy in the general field of philosophical practice, defined by him as its apogee, by the fact the new specialist will also know the practices specific to the philosophical counseling of the person or the facilitation of groups, using the tools from philosophy (Marinoff, 2016). According to professor Marinoff, the only premise underlying the emergence of philosophical counseling is the implementation in contemporary society of the idea that virtuous

people are desirable to the detriment of those who manifest vices, and the conclusion which he reached indicates a need to implement organizational philosophical practice, because „The philosophical consultant helps organizations to be more virtuous. A philosopher can have no higher calling; an organization, no loftier aspiration” (Marinoff, 2002, 159).

2. Theoretical background. About the role of philosophical practice in decision making process

In previous research we have highlighted the fact that philosophy through its practice can have an important role in the management of organization (Hategan, 2018a), which we can say that implicitly the philosophical practice can take a role in decision-making, a specific process of the leadership activity. The decision making process can use philosophical practices such as: a short Socratic dialogue, adapted to organizational consulting; dilemma training, as a new process presented by the Dutch Business Counseling School; or some methods of philosophical counseling applied to corporations, such as the methods generically called PEACE (Marinoff, 2010) or MEANS (Marinoff, 2013) developed by American philosophical practice.

Studying the interdisciplinary links of philosophical counseling with other fields of activity, was identified in my previous paper some aspects of critical thinking (Hategan, 2018b), it is a specific tool for the educational system which can be attracted and used in philosophical practice, becoming here the necessary tool for a new specialist who has become a practitioner of philosophy and he use them in his consulting work, as a useful tools in decision making process. Critical thinking will also have a more important role in this organizational field, where the critical thinking skills can also be developed by a specialist in philosophical consulting, not only by the regular specialists of education, who currently can develop these skills of the critical thinking, or by coaching the specialists who train leaders, in a specific training and personal development process applied to them, and this process recently was analyzed in my interdisciplinary study, finished for publishing. In order to highlight the role of the presented tools, used particularly for the philosophical practice, they can be successfully applied in business, and will be presented some defining characteristics that generate their involvement in decision making, as a specific process destined to the leadership or managers of the company.

3. A short form of Socratic dialogue applied in business

This form is an adaptation of the Socratic dialogue, initially developed by the German philosopher Leonard Nelson, being currently considered a philosophical practice for groups, where the philosophical practitioner becomes a new specialist, being also called a facilitator, who leads the whole process American pragmatism also has spoken in this sector, by reducing the time allocated to such application, from 2-3 days initially devoted to a group practice, to just a few hours, by adapting working hours and compression of some stages, so that the procedure can be successfully accessed by the teams of managers and leaders working in the business environment.

Looking from the point of view of the philosophical practitioner, Marinoff supports the initiative and he calls it a short Socratic dialogue, stating "a brief taste of Socratic dialogue is better tahn non at all" (Marinoff, 2002, 165). We recommend applying this work procedure only in the organizational environment, adapted to the simplified procedures and specific organizational rules, which can be applied by a trained practitioner for the specific facilitation of the organizational environment, which aims to make a decision by consens of participants.

An approach to the application of philosophy in business is presented at a conference dedicated to philosophical practice, held in Oxford in 1999, where two researchers presented the usefulness of Socratic dialogue and dilemma training, two programs that can be learned and successfully applied by philosophers in the business environment, because „philosophers can realise a dialogue between people” (Bauduin, Jongsma, 2001). Referring specifically to Socratic dialogue, these researchers indicate that short dialogue can be applied to leaders, managers, consultants and people with responsibilities within a company, who have the authority to implement certain decisions, and the dialogue procedure helps participants to improve mutual communication, to acquire the concepts of ethics, through the situations or concepts investigated, avoiding at the same time the

communication dilemmas, by using the conversational and dialectical techniques specific to philosophical practices. This procedure is different from classical method of the Socratic dialogue used in the facilitating groups of people from outside the company, and where the group is formed on criteria other than organizational. The purpose of the group application is to find a universal definition, validated by participants through examples and counterexamples, and the debate of ideas starting from the formulation by the facilitator of a universal question, to which the group is trained to answer, and where „the facilitator works like an orchestra conductor, without having a voice in the general choir, but making sure that everyone sings properly, beautifully and unison” (Marinoff, 2010, 426).

4. Dilemma training

The procedure also called the dilemma training, based on the concept of putting in difficulty, it is used to solve ethical problems generated in the process of work, in the form of ethical or moral conflicts, and it was being initiated as a program by Professor Henk van Luijk in the '80 at a research institute -The European Institute for Business Ethics- and was later introduced in the program of training and education of practitioners in philosophy, promoted by the American Philosophical Practitioners Association (www.appa.edu). Within this concept of training, initially developed to be applied to the ethical dilemmas, it has been extended through its area of application to other dilemmas generated by the process of managing a business, which cannot be solved by classical decision-making, usually by a manager, or for other situations who involving the participation of other stakeholders, referring to the issues related to some values arising from ethics, strategy and organizational governance.

This form of training for decision making has become a component of the training program for the specialization of philosophical or corporate consultant, as defined by Marinoff in his handbook of philosophical practice (Marinoff, 2002, 165), which can examine a problem or dilemma, but he not having an express concern, for solving the dilemma or the problem itself. The practice was originally presented by the Dutch Professor Henk van Luijk, in the form of seven questions included in successive work stages, the answers to which actually outline the stages of the decision-making by solving the moral or ethical dilemma using this process. The seven step plan model for a moral dilemma designed by Professor van Luijk include the some questions for practitioners: what is the moral core problem? what are the parties involved? who are answerable? what information do I need? what arguments can be brought forward? what is my conclusion? how do I feel now? (van Luijk, 1993). In the model the practitioner intend to know about the rights and interests of all those involved, to make a decision for dilemma or a corection for the problem.

Going through the seven stages of the process is done by the facilitator launching the questions, which generate the answers from participants, and he will use of tools from philosophy, such as: exemplification, use the elements of argumentative logic, the mental experiments based on assumptions, analysis of moral values or other elements of work that can lead a group or person to particular conclusion. The process is generated by the questions posed by the facilitator, based on both the knowledge of the participants and highlighting the emotions generated by making a decision, and he will involve specific elements of critical thinking and creative thinking alike, which generate specific answers according to the basic questions, defining each stage. Each dilemma training process for making a decision or solving dilemma, implicitly becomes a training for the future of the participants, which through the clarifications gained, and they accumulates its own experience that can be used permanently in the decision-making or organizational process.

The philosophy practitioner use in the working group a set of at least seven specific questions and he asks each participant to actively participate in the process, aiming to outline a conclusion, leading to a decision, wich must include a short analysis of emotions related to the final choosing. The questions used aim to generate answers regarding the identification of the problem and the participants in the case; who are the people involved in making a decision and what information they need; what are the arguments needed for clarification; what conclusion can be drawn at the end of the training process; what are the emotional states related to it, in sense of accepting the decision taken for the future. Referring to the seven-step model, other researcher Ida Jongsma notes that the process presented by Professor van Luijk "can be a co-counseling, training or

implementation of the program at the workplace", this process being presented in the Netherlands usually by to a trainer, who is not a philosopher, as academic or practical training, since „this skills do not come naturally with a philosophy degree” (Bauduin, Jongsma, 2001, 204).

Trying to reach a conclusion on the usefulness of using this practice to make business decisions, we need to take the Marinoff's observation on this practice, and at least to support the effective management of the analyzed problem or dilemma, which highlights the need to examine the situation, without explicitly seeking to resolve it. This is a good reason why the decision-making process can become flexible, adaptable to each situation and generate the conclusions that can be accepted and implemented by the participants to the dilemma training.

5. The PEACE method

With the publication of his book, which soon became a best-seller, Lou Marinoff introduces us into new field, the management of problem, by presenting his own counseling method that contains five distinct steps, which he call the PEACE method, noted as an acronym from the first letters of the component stages, respectively: the problem, emotion, analysis, contemplation and balance (Marinoff, 1999). The acronym chosen expresses, in addition to the name it gives to the method, its character of being "the surest way to a lasting peace of mind." (Marinoff, 2010, 92). The promoted method has been practiced by other practitioners of philosophical counseling, whom Marinoff likens to other specializations, stating that “we are like a matrimonial agents: we help our clients find the philosophical interpretation, applicable to themselves and their situations, with which to live and to prosper for the rest of their lives” (Marinoff, 2010, 108).

From presentation of the PEACE method (Marinoff, 2010, 92-100), the author states that the first three steps can be reached by the beneficiary individually, without requiring the express presence of a philosophical counselor; in the sense that the person can identify the problem with which faces at some point, without making judgments about it; this stage being followed by the observation and recognition of the emotional response generated by it, realizing only that they can be constructively channeled to overcome the problem; after which they voluntarily move on to the third stage, that of analyzing the situation, by identifying options for solving the problem.

In the next step the philosophical practitioner will be present, who supports a process of contemplation, on the problem, using the emotions generated by it and the options resulting from the analysis of the state of affairs, all this being made by a contemplative philosophical process, which introduces some elements of philosophy: in the form of an idea, text or philosophical interpretation that can clarify the problem. At this stage, an overview of the problem is achieved, which can lead to a balance, this is specific to the last stage of the method, through the problem can be overcome or a decision can be made about it. This original way of using philosophy in solving problems and making life decisions leads the author to conclude that "practicing philosophy means exploring your own inner universe" (Marinoff, 2010, 108).

The PEACE method is a unique form of practice, available to the person by the practitioner in philosophy, who supports his client to reach a personal philosophical perspective, made towards the end of the application, by the step back, using the stage of individual contemplation on the problem and to the emotions attached to it, which will generate the so-called final balance, defined by the author to be "the adoption of a philosophical way capable of encompassing your whole situation and allowing you to reconcile with yourself and move forward." (Marinoff, 2010, 98).

6. The MEANS method

Inspired by the Socratic model of the examination of life, American practitioner Marinoff presents in the form of the acronym MEANS a new variant of philosophical investigation of a person's life, where the first step in this philosophical counseling is given by "understanding one's own philosophy of life" (Marinoff, 2013, 489), which can be achieved by identifying so-called moments of truth, but they are in fact the moments of balance for life, which can generate a philosophical evaluation of life. These truth moments are marked by M letter in the acronym of the method, and indicating the person's response to the balance situation, reflected by the philosophy of life accumulated up to that point, and start a philosophical assessment of it. The next step in this

method is given by the person's expectations of himself, others, or his life, and are defined in the definition as expectations (noted E in acronym), which Marinoff says a "prevent a philosophy of constructive life" (Marinoff, 2013, 490) as they prepare us for discomfort, but we can easily get rid of it, if the expectations will be exceeded. The conclusion is that the reduction of expectations will implicitly mean the reduction of unforeseen situations, which can be generated by their non-fulfillment, and harmful disappointments are thus avoided in the person's life, when they become obsessions or prejudices manifested by a person, which can affect his philosophical path (Marinoff, 2013, 493) and it can extend in space and time alike, affecting the person's life.

In this way Marinoff explicitly highlights attachments to sections of the past, marked in the form of a person's memories, and which contribute to define the person's identity; these being included in the process of self-knowledge, and prospected by psychological practitioners. The next step is given by negative emotions, which are denoted by the letter N, and they "force us to do harm instead of good, and to experiment and cause the discomfort in our turn" (Marinoff, 2013, 501). Practitioners recommend us that these negative emotions (caused by expectations and attachments) be transformed into neutral or positive emotions, through the mental games, exercises or through manifestation of the artistic skills, which can change the polarity from negative to positive, thus eliminating or diminishing the manifested negative emotion. The last letter (noted S) of the acronym MEANS comes from the characteristic of choices, the "subtle" type, which will generate a philosophy of life, as Marinoff says: "This is the biggest challenge we face: to make more good choices than bad choices" and "once you use the MEANS method to build the furniture for the philosophical house, that it will become your philosophical home" (Marinoff, 2013, 505).

7. Critical thinking

In order to present the current trends regarding critical thinking and its role in applied philosophy, it is necessary to start from the first Romanian references that highlight these concepts, in this sense is Professor Gheorghe Clitan, who wrote about the practical role of argumentation, starting from informal logic, and expressly refers to the concept of critical thinking necessary for the practice of philosophy, because "philosophy acquires the status of critical thinking, while critical thinking becomes applied philosophy" (Clitan, 2003, 88). Another confirmation on the importance of argumentation and critical thinking can be found at Professor Stoianovici, who presents the two concepts in his book published with the same title (Stoianovici, 2005), followed by the philosophical researcher Mircea Dobre, who presents the subject a few years later, through his papers published in journals or volumes (Dobre, 2013, 2015) printed by the Romanian Academy, he highlighting the nature of critical thinking applied, through its support in the life problems solving, clarified with this concept. Other documentation about the American journalism area presents information about Peter Frank, specialized in business, referring in his book to a new connection between critical thinking and decision making, and he shows how it can help avoid the hidden traps by other decision-makers (Hammond, Keeney, Raiffa, 2006), and he emphasizes that we need to think critically throughout life, through all the situations we confront and which require decisions or choices to be made, in order to resolve them, thus he concluding: "The truth is that when you give up or forget to critically thinking, in fact you let someone else think for you. Someone else will make decisions for you. You will hear his opinions and you will adopt them. You will repeat what that person is saying and you will act as if you understand. You will present yourself to the world as someone else" (Frank, 2015, 243).

Another approach was taken by the British Tim LeBon, who presents the application of critical thinking, along with the concepts of lateral thinking and creative thinking where the critical thinking skills are those that can benefit the decision-making process, he showing that „that such a marriage of critical and creative thinking does indeed constitute significant progress towards wise decision making.” (LeBon, Arnaud, 2001).

Critical thinking applied in the business environment involves the acquirement of the some specific thinking skills, which can be developed by leaders, helped by a new specialist in philosophical practice or by a philosopher who has become an organizational consultant, who will rely to the various forms of work, such as: asking questions and reasoning techniques, generating hypotheses or studying frames of reference, using the causal reasoning and the role playing

methodologies, using the metacognitive elements and ethics applied, sometimes using the stress management techniques to promote critical thinking and facilitating the decision-making process in business (Schoenberg, 2015, 161). A previously study about the emergence of philosophical practice on the American continent (Hategan, 2019) talks about Elliot Cohen works, who founded the National Association of Philosophical Counselors and set up an institute in Florida dedicated to the critical thinking; he is also the promoter of a course of critical thinking, who provide to interested practitioners (Cohen, 2009), a new concern to provide clients with critical thinking skills, that can now be applied in the business environment.

All these recommendations show that the decision-making process can use the concept of critical thinking, and the skills thus acquired can become useful tools for a philosophical practice, and can be applied in decision-making process, in personal counseling or business consultancy.

8. Conclusions

Philosophy, through its practical approach represented by the philosophical counseling, makes the transition from generalized philosophical theories, as they were initiated by ancient philosophers, to a new type of the philosophical consulting, destined for organizations or companies, developing a new practice that uses the philosophical working tools, based to the reflexive or critical reasoning, which can be used successfully in the decision-making process, succesfully applied in the management process of the organization. The philosophical practitioner can become a useful organizational consultant to any leader or team of managers, who are concerned with making optimal decisions about the company's development strategies, or for solving the current corporate problems, wich they confront.

The organizational philosophical practitioner is the specialist who will use the conceptual resources of philosophy, which transposes his practice, its delivered to leaders, managers and staff teams within an economic entity, in forms of the philosophical counseling or trainings, until now these was offered by the coaching services or personal development programs, which the organization uses to train his leaders and staff involved to achieving the goals. The philosophical practitioner is the specialist who can transfers and develops within the process of organizational philosophical consulting, a new series of the useful skills to any leader or manager, and these have the role of transversal skills or soft skills, grouped in categories, such as „conceptualisation, argumentation, judgement, moral sensitivity and moral evaluation” (Contesini, 2016, 108). It remains as a future direction of research the identification of a new ways of philosophical practice can be applied in organizations, for the effective application of the concept of corporate social responsibility, starting from the analysis of the philosophical concept of the *Eco-Philosophy*, which can highlight some working tools that can be applied by the philosophical consultant, and its practice can be applied in the business environment.

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