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COF – Seminar
5 - 7 February 2015
Villa Romana, Florence

The function of wisdom – about what
is good and what is evil the good and
the evil and the opportunity of a
responsible use of our power of
choosing

Florence, February 2015

SUMMARIES OF THE WORKSHOPS

The seminar program consisted of a brief inaugural speech during the welcoming aperitif, four talks by international experts and four workshops on open questions conducted by the speakers themselves and a provocateur.

WISDOM - A MATTER OF EXPERIENCE?

With Mike Thompson and Teodorina Lessidrensca

Wisdom is associated with many virtuous characteristics like ego integrity and maturity, extra- and intrapersonal skills, deep understanding of life, empathy with people without needing to know them well, understanding the world at large, etc.

Wisdom is the quality that shapes actions in a way likely to lead to good judgment and optimal outcome for all involved.

Wisdom is expert knowledge in the pragmatics of life.

Personal experience is linked to specific culturally imprinted values and virtues, emotional stereotypes and ways people are related to society and the community. Perception of the common good is determined by culture. How wisdom is applied can depend on the prevailing cultural environment, but on a conceptual level wisdom should express itself in the same way, regardless of cultural differences.

Wisdom is learning from practice. Age is irrelevant.

Wise decision-making is acquired through the capacity to cultivate three human faculties: rational capability, intuitive insight and humanity of character.

Experience is one of the elements and factors that lead to wisdom. Wisdom cannot be achieved through experience alone. Aristotle talks about “Practical Wisdom” and concludes that wisdom is an exercise, it can’t be thought, it is built through practice and developed through experience.

WISDOM – A MATTER OF RESPONSIBILITY?

With Martina Macpherson and Paul Broholm

Responsibility is something you have to work for.
Trust is something you have to earn.

Responsibility is demonstrable by actions.
Trustworthiness is demonstrable by behavior.

Wise decisions are built on a perceptible sense of responsibility, ownership, accountability and stewardship.

They give weight to balance, for example among time, interest, stakeholders.

They take past experiences into account and reflect on what can be learned from them, aware that past performance may not be a guide to the future,

Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Actions can be delegated responsibility cannot.

WISDOM – A MATTER OF NATURE?

With Carmelo Cantone and Roberta Tempone

Linked to wisdom, nature embraces the gift of common sense and the ability to contemplate.

Neuroplasticity research shows that experiences, learning, family and other factors have an actual physical effect on the structure of our brain cells. This inevitably means that the nature of each and every one of us is in constant, never-ending flux.

Nevertheless individuals can be naturally gifted in taking wise decisions.

They have the ability to observe and understand situations very quickly. Their immunity to fear (and the judgment of others) grants them a more lucid thought process less clouded by conventions and rules.

In their professional environment they are guided by their expertise, and can intuit what has to be done. They are confident with themselves and aware of the trust people place in them.

In microcosms such as prisons, events that unfold “outside” are perceived in very marked and complex terms. Quality is not synonymous with “customer satisfaction” and a compromise has to be sought to reconcile wellbeing and security, which highlights the limits that constrain human choice.

Decisions made in situations of this nature must contemplate more than merely implementing the law. Common sense within the bounds of rules and norms must be allowed to make itself heard. Wisdom means being able to create an empathic balance between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ by deciding to give one’s best in the interests of everyone concerned.

WISDOM – A MATTER OF EDUCATION?

With Rolf Schwedhelm and Severine Vadon-David

Education and the school system do not teach wisdom. They generate knowledge but not understanding.

Education is also a system of values and behavior learned inside the family.

Wisdom includes rationality; sensitivity, understanding and emotional stability are basic requirements. It is about sharing information and experience, and collecting experience from **all** the people.

The path to wisdom requires fostering exchange, observation, balance, asking questions and seeking answers.

Wisdom is not learnable like a language.

The starting point is crucial because wisdom depends on who you are inside not on what you know. The Shaolin Monks believe that one can never learn wisdom **because one wants to.**

Wise people are not necessarily famous and not necessarily always wise!