HOW TO IMPLEMENT CORE VALUES?

Promoting practical wisdom in business entities by means of the Socratic method

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Abstract

In this paper, the Socratic method – a method central in the discipline of philosophical practice – is presented. It will be shown how it can be of use in order to sustainably implement ethical values in companies, as well as how it can foster practical wisdom (phronesis) in business entities. For this purpose, the content of this paper consists of a presentation of the Socratic method in a manual-like style, a short case that exemplifies eventual outcomes of the Socratic method when applied in the economic sector, and a discussion about the relevance of phronesis in business contexts.

1. Introduction

> "Contrary to the Socratic wisdom, in which we are wise insofar as we recognize and accept our limitations, we are experiencing the opposite in organizational, managerial and political hubris. […] If the current ongoing financial and ecological crisis that is unprecedented in kind and scale taught us one thing, it is that without practical wisdom, business cannot be sustainable, no matter how sophisticated our financial or managerial formula." (Küpers & Pauleen, 2013: 1f).

When having a first and brief look into the everyday working life of business entities and organizations, practical wisdom seems to be as relevant as sugar is important for growing pepper. However, when putting the business practices, that is, the daily working routines and procedures of CEOs, managers, employees etc. into a bigger, even global picture, as Küpers and Pauleen in the previous quote suggest, then one might get a different impression. In fact, by today the role and relevance of practical wisdom in business is increasingly discussed by representatives of both academia as well as economy (see ibidem). In this discussion, however, the concept of *practical wisdom* is not solely understood in the way Plato or Aristotle introduced it (who called it *phronesis*). Rather, also resources from religious wisdom traditions are taken into account (see Malloch, 2015). In light of the fact that we are living and working in pluralistic cultures and societies, this not only seems to be natural but of significant importance. The kind of practical wisdom to be found in, for example, Christianity (see Naughton, Habisch & Lenssen, 2010), Chinese classical traditions (see de Bettignies, Xuezhu,

Habisch & Lenssen, 2011), Judaism (see Kletz, Almog□Bareket, Habisch, Lenssen & Loza Adaui, 2012), Islam (see Garah, Beekun, Habisch, Lenssen, & Loza Adaui, 2012) or Indian and Buddhist traditions (see Sirodom, Loza Adaui, Habisch, Lenssen & Malloch, 2014) represent treasures of mankind and therefore seem to be invaluable resources for economy to 'wise-up', as it were.

However, given the available length, this article will mainly deal with a conception of practical wisdom as rooted in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. In the following I will present what is called the Socratic method, representing a methodological approach central to philosophical practice – an internationally growing academic discipline and movement intending to harness the wisdom of various philosophical traditions, i.e. for the public, private or business sector (see Weiss, 2015). In order to find answers on the guiding question of this article, namely 'How to implement ethical core values in business entities by means of the Socratic method?' the different steps of this method are first presented in a manual-like style (so that the reader can facilitate a Socratic dialogue on her own) (see chapter 2). Furthermore, in this chapter it will also be described how to philosophize by means of this method and what philosophizing here actually means. In chapter 3 it will be shown, what results from the Socratic method when applied in business contexts. This will mainly be done by presenting and analyzing a short case. After that the relevance of *phronesis* (*practical wisdom*) in business contexts will be discussed in chapter 4. Finally the paper is concluded in chapter 5 with several critical remarks on business ethics in general and *phronesis* in particular.

2. The Socratic method

The Socratic method is – among many others – an often-used methodological approach within the academic discipline of philosophical practice (see Weiss, 2015). This discipline came up in the early 1980, mainly in the form of what can be called *philosophical life counseling* (see Achenbach, 1983). Over the years, philosophical practice turned into an international movement, with respective academic journals, international conferences and university courses. The amount of literature on the subject is respectively extensive by now and as a matter of course one can find a variety of different theoretical, as well as practical approaches, within this field. Today philosophical practice is by far not limited to counseling, but one can find it in educational settings (see i.e. Hansen Helskog, 2016) and research settings too (see i.e. Han-

sen, 2015). The different methodologies and practices range from one-on-one formats to group formats in which about 50 people can participate (like the so-called *Philo Café* (see Weiss, 2015: 323f)).

The Socratic method, as presented here, represents a form of group dialogue (ideally practiced in groups up to 20 participants), in which the participants do not need to have any philosophical pre-knowledge. Nevertheless, it is highly suitable to make people reflect about issues at stake, i.e. at their work (see Hansen, 2015). Originally this method was developed in the 1920s by Prof. Leonard Nelson (who was of course inspired by the Socratic dialogues of Plato), with the intention to teach his students not only about the history of philosophy but how to actually *philosophize* (see Heckmann, 1981). A philosophical investigation performed according to the Socratic method consists of several steps. Over the years, this method was further developed by others in order to fit the different contexts and purposes (see Weiss, 2015: 215f). Fields of application are, for example, schools (see Weiss & Ohrem, 2016), universities (see Hansen, 2015), business companies (see Svare, 2015), hospitals (see Ladegaard Knox, 2015) and even interreligious organizations (see Jenssen, 2015). Due to the different contexts, also the intentions behind the Socratic method can differ from dialogue to dialogue and from philosophical practitioner to practitioner. Intentions may vary from developing core values (see Svare, 2015), to foster interreligious dialogue (see Jenssen, 2015), or to get into a state of wonderment (see Hansen, 2015), just to name a few. Later in this article I will describe how to use this method in order to implement core values in business entities.

Depending on the respective intention, but also on the context and the practitioner, the number and content of the steps of such a dialogue can differ. In the following I will describe those methodological steps according to which I mainly facilitate such a Socratic dialogue. These steps are presented in a manual-like style, so that you – the reader – can use it if you would once like to facilitate such a dialogue, for example at your work. However, the following manual as such is not specifically designed for business purposes. It can also be applied in educational fields, like schools as well as in public domains or more privately, just among colleagues and friends.

2.1 The different steps of a Socratic dialogue

In the following the different steps of a Socratic dialogue are presented. One does not have to be a philosophical practitioner in order to apply the Socratic method and in fact, different professionals make use of this methodology in different contexts. However, it has to be noted that the role of the facilitator is crucial in order to make such a dialogue work. Therefore, this role is now briefly described in general terms before the different steps of the method are presented.

The facilitator of a Socratic dialogue has a neutral role, which means, the main task is to 'manage' the different opinions and points of view of the participants in a neutral way, and in accordance with the different steps of such a dialogue. Therefore, it is highly advisable that facilitators strictly avoid bringing in their own opinions and views. Furthermore, exchanging different views is important in a dialogue, but this should happen in a fair and fruitful way. Should participants get into a heavy discussion it is the facilitator's responsibility to 'calm down' the situation. . Finally, the facilitator has to be familiar with the following steps so that the different steps of the dialogue can be performed as smoothly as possible. Additional information on the role of the facilitator is given in the course of the following manual.

1) **Choose a topic**

- *The guiding question*: If you have a look at the Socratic dialogues of Plato, then one of their main features is that Socrates is investigating a term, like courage or justice, together with his dialogue partners. Many of these dialogues start with the philosophical question *"What is (i.e. courage)?"* This "What is…?"-question also represents the beginning of a Socratic dialogue as presented here. Terms and topics can be, for example, honesty, good cooperation, best practice, responsibility, or whatever the group is up to.
- *How to choose a topic?* A respective topic can be chosen together with the group by simply asking the participants what kind of topics seem to be of interest and relevance for them. If there are several topics, you can make a democratic decision. If the topics are rather vague or formulated in whole sentences, then look for a keyword that can be put into the question "What is…?". For example, if one participant says "I am interested in how we can improve communications at our department" then the keyword can be "good communication" and it can be put into the guiding question "What is good communication?". Of course, you as the

facilitator can also choose a topic in advance, in case the time for the dialogue is limited or if a specific topic already has been 'ordered' by the respective department of a company.

- *Avoid 'negative terms'*: When choosing a topic, it is advisable not to decide for a 'negative' term, like mobbing, death, violence, etc. The reason for that is simple: Such terms can provoke the dialogue participants to share still unresolved, painful or even traumatizing experiences. Now there is nothing against reflecting and evaluating such negative experiences, but a Socratic dialogue does not seem to be the proper place for that. As such, they would rather hinder the philosophizing process than foster it, on the one hand. On the other hand, 'negative' terms can cause negative 'vibes', which can turn a dialogue aiming at discovering different perspective at a topic into a debate or discussion (which both are mainly about figuring out who has the better arguments). For example, if the group would choose the topic 'mobbing' and then a participant shares an experience in which he or she was once mobbed by colleagues (who are also participating in the dialogue), it is very likely that the dialogue as such will come to an abrupt end. Therefore, choosing a 'positive' term seems to be wise. Should however a negative topic arise, the facilitator does not have to directly reject it, but guide the participants into reformulating it into its diametrical opposite, or as close to it as possible. In this way "violence" or "death" can be reformulated into "peacefulness" and "life".

- *Write down the guiding question*: As soon as the topic is chosen (i.e. good communication), it is put into the guiding question "What is (i.e. good communication)?" – write down this question on a black board or flip chart before you continue with the next step. This can help you as the facilitator in the course of the dialogue to remind the participants of the topic under investigation, and avoid the conversation 'drifting away'.

2) **Remember and share a story-like experience in few sentences**

- *Remember an experience in regards the topic*: In the second step, participants are invited to remember an incidence in their lives where they have experienced the topic under investigation. For example, if the topic of the dialogue is 'responsibility', then the participants are asked to remember a concrete experience in which they have once acted responsibly or saw someone acting responsible – both options are possible.

- *Choose story-like experiences*: Ideally, such experiences or incidences have a beginning, a main part and an end (and are therefore story-like). Experiences starting with "Every time when I use the public transport I act responsibly because…" are not story-like (they miss a concrete beginning, main part and end). This makes it hard for other participants to imagine

these experiences in concrete terms (for example, when exactly did the experience happen, who was involved, what was the weather like, and how did the respective person feel in that situation, etc.). For this reason, such experiences are not very suited for a Socratic dialogue. In such a case the dialogue facilitator should ask the respective person to describe a specific case, a specific situation when he or she once took the public transport. In doing so, the respective participant can start the story with "Once I acted responsibly when I took the public transport…". In general, the sharing of experiences should start with "Once I experienced (i.e. responsibility), when…" or similar formulations (note the difference between "Once…" and "Every time…"!)

- *Tell the story in few sentences and give it a title*: After you as the facilitator has given some time to reflect and remember such an incidence, one participant after another is invited to tell their story-like experience with only a few sentences, in the sense of a summary. After a story is shortly told, the storyteller gives it a title, which the dialogue facilitator writes down on a black board or flip chart, before continuing with the next story.
- *Share only 'safe & secure' stories*: It is important to mention that the dialogue participants should only share experiences that feel 'safe' for them, in order to share them with the group. Furthermore, for the participants it is also allowed to say, "I don't have a story".
- *What if the group is big and time is limited?* If there are more than 15 people participating in the dialogue or if time is limited, it is advisable in this step to let only 8-10 people share their stories in short terms.

3) **Choose a story for further investigation**

- *Choose a story from the list*: After the second step is finished, the participants choose one of the stories from the list (which is written on the black board or flip chart) that they would like to investigate further.
- *How to choose?* A possible way to do this is again by making a democratic decision: Each participant has two votes, so everyone can choose his or her two most favorite stories.

4) **Retell the story in more detail**

- *Are you in the picture?* The chosen story is then told once again by the respective participant - this time in more detail. The goal of this step is that the other participants get a clear picture of the story and the concrete circumstances under which it happened.
- *Ask factual questions*: After the story is retold, participants get the chance to ask 'factual' questions, i.e. about how many people who were involved in the story, what feelings the sto-

ryteller had when experiencing this episode, at which day-time it took place, what the weather was like, etc. Of course, the storyteller is allowed not to answer certain questions, if they appear to be too personal. Finally, each participant should be able to see the story like 'a movie in front of their 'inner eye'.

- *Make the story common goods*: Before proceeding to the next step, the dialogue facilitator asks the storyteller, whether it is o.k. to 'make this story common goods' for the group now.

5) **Sensitize to the topic**

- *When did the topic 'kick in'?* In this step participants reflect upon at which point in the story the topic under investigation started to reveal itself. At which point of the story did the topic 'kick in', so to say? The goal of this step is to sensitize them to the topic in the context of the respective story – how does it start to appear, how was it put into practice, etc.?
- *Alone or in the group?* Participants can either discuss these questions in the group, or they can take a moment to reflect on their own. This again, depends on the time available for the dialogue.

6) **Make definitions**

- *See the story like a 'block of stone'*: This step is about making definitions about what the topic under investigation means according to the story told. Here, in a metaphorical sense, the participants can see the story like a 'block of stone' in which the figure of the topic (i.e. the 'figure of responsibility') is 'enclosed'. And now the participants' task is to 'cut out' this figure. In other words, the intention of this step is to separate the essential from the unessential. In order to do so, the participants are invited to make definitions about the topic in the context of, and according to, the story.
- *Be creative*: In order to make definitions, participants can be quite creative here, since there are no wrong definitions – as long as one can give an argument for why she came to the respective definition. For example, to say, "Responsibility is like a bull in a china shop", and when asked why, answering, "I don't know, it just came to my mind", is not a proper definition as it lacks a supportive argument. On the other hand, to say "Responsibility is like a bull in a china shop" and when asked why, the answer would be "Because – in a metaphorical sense – it makes you aware of everything that could get broken and forces you to take respective actions" is a proper definition as the reason how the conclusion was made is present. As you can see with this example, to a certain extent, this process of making definitions can be

similar to making free associations. Which means, in other words, that it is not only critical and rational thinking employed in such a dialogue, but also associative thinking.

- *Help participants formulate definitions*: Sometimes participants come up with an idea for a definition, but they don't know how to put it into proper terms – they are literally struggling for words. Here, the task of the facilitator is to help formulating – however without forcing opinions about the topic onto the respective participant. You as the facilitator should always keep a mediating, neutral position in the dialogue process.
- *List the definitions*: Another task of the dialogue facilitator in this step is to write down all definitions on the black board or flip chart. For example, if the topic is 'responsibility', you would write down "Responsibility is…" and then list the definitions.

7) **Repeat the procedure**

- *Pick another story*: After the previous step is finished, the group picks another story from the list and repeat steps 4) to 6).
- *How many stories should be investigated?* How many stories that are told in detail and reflected upon depends, again, on the time available. However, it might contribute to the outcome of the dialogue if more than one or two stories are investigated.

8) **Make general definitions**

- *Move from the concrete to the general*: One of the main philosophical features of a Socratic dialogue is what could be called the movement from the concrete (concrete stories) to the more abstract (general definitions on the topic). This movement is central to this step of the dialogue and it is performed as follows: If several stories have been told and examined, then there are also several definitions to what the topic means according to each story. Now, after the stories have been investigated the group tries to make one, two or even three more general definitions out of the definitions already made. In order to do so, it is advisable to make all the definitions, which have been developed so far, visible for the participants – for example, by pinning the flip chart sheets with the definitions next to each other on the wall.
- *Search for the 'golden thread'*: By means of an open dialogue, the participants examine the definitions on the flip chart sheets (or on the black board) more closely. The goal here is to see and discuss whether some of these definitions are similar, or whether there is some sort of 'golden thread' to be found in several of these definitions. Another guiding question in this step of the dialogue can also be "What seems to be essential in these definitions, in order to make a more general definition that would define the topic adequately?" Based on this evalua-

tion of the definitions, the participants are invited to make more general definitions of the topic under investigation.

- *What if no general definition can be made?* Sometimes it can be that no common conclusion is reached, and that no general definitions can be made. This however, is not necessarily a sign that the dialogue as such has failed. On the contrary, what counts is the dialogue – the process of inquiry – since it is this process as a whole that sheds new light on the topic under investigation.

- *Take the general definitions back into the context of your story*: However, if one or two, or even three general definitions can be made, then all participants are invited to take these definitions back into the context of their own story, no matter whether they told their story or not. The guiding questions for this part of the dialogue are: How do these general definitions 'feel' for the participants in the context of their own story? Do these definitions make the participants see their own stories in a new perspective? Or do the participants gain a self-insight or become aware of something by means of the general definitions in the context of their story? Are the definitions defining the topic under investigation adequate when reframed into the context of their own stories – or is something essential missing? Here the participants can 'test' the general definitions.

9) **Perform a summarizing open dialogue**

- *Reflect on the process and the outcomes of this Socratic dialogue*: The final step of the dialogue is an open philosophical discussion, where the participants can share their opinions, insights or doubts about the results, process and processes of the dialogue. This step represents a meta-dialogue of the dialogue at hand.

- *Appreciate different opinions*: However, it has to be noted that this step is not about holding different arguments against each other, or about dismissing certain points of view. Rather, it is about finding and summarizing different perspectives on the topic – because this is what a dialogue actually should be: a joint investigation where different views are appreciated in order to get a deeper and broader understanding of the topic (see Lipman, 2003: 84).

2.2 Philosophizing by means of the Socratic method

The Socratic method as described in the previous manual, has little to do with an open philosophical dialogue as performed, for example, in the methodological formats of *philosophical counseling* or so-called *Philosophical Cafés* (see Weiss, 2015). In the latter two, opinions, ideas, arguments and points of view are shared and reflected upon in a rather free and unstructured manner, and much of the philosophical inquiry is left to improvisation as well as to the spontaneity of the participants. The Socratic method, on the other hand, pursues a 'step-by-step' investigation. However, since many people might hold the opinion that philosophizing rather resembles a free flow and exchange of thoughts, ideas and questions, one can legitimately ask whether following the steps of a Socratic dialogue can be understood as a philosophical activity at all. Do participants of a Socratic dialogue actually *philosophize,* or do they just fulfill given tasks by following certain steps?

Philo-sophia – the love of wisdom

In order to find an answer to this question, we first have to ask what we actually understand by the term 'to philosophize'. In general terms, and with regards to the history of philosophy, I suggest that philosophizing means to reflect and investigate human existence (or certain general aspects of it, like freedom, suffering, meaning, justice, courage, etc.) with the intention to get a deeper understanding of it (a similar definition is also suggested by Teichmann & Evans (see 1999: 1)).

When referring this short definition to the literal translation of the term *philosophy – the love of wisdom (philo-sophia)* – the term 'to philosophize' could then also be interpreted in the sense of a striving, a seeking and searching for wisdom as, for example, Pierre Hadot suggests in his extensive work "Philosophy as a Way of Life" (1995: 265f), which had, and still has, a significant influence on the discipline of philosophical practice. This brings us to the difficult question, what is wisdom? According to Hadot, wisdom – for the ancient philosophers – was "a way of life which brought peace of mind (*ataraxia*), inner freedom (*autarkeia*) and cosmic consciousness." (ibidem) Hadot, however, also adds, that "the ancients knew that they would never be able to realize wisdom within themselves as a stable, definite state, but they at least hoped to accede to it in certain privileged moments, and wisdom was the transcendent norm which guided their action." (ibidem) Therefore the term - *philo-sophia* – the *love*, or the *striving,* and *searching for wisdom*.

In his Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle differentiates between to kinds of wisdom: theoretical wisdom (*sophia* – in a general sense, the awareness of universal truths) and practical wisdom (*phronesis* – in a general sense, the awareness of how to live a good and virtuous life, which is traditionally often simply translated with the term *prudence*) (see Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, Book 6). In the context of the Socratic method as presented here however, as well as in many other investigative approaches of philosophical practice, philosophizing as a *search for wisdom* seems to be most often (but not always) concerned with the latter – with *practical wisdom*, that is, *phronesis* (see Lahav, 2001: 9f). This is also reflected in the fact that by means of the Socratic method often terms like honesty, courage, justice, responsibility, and other virtues are investigated with a practice-oriented focus. Furthermore, and in more general terms, many philosophical practitioners deal with several aspects of *the good life* in general in their respective approaches, or with the development of philosophical coping skills for concrete existential challenges (see Weiss, 2015). For this reason, this article will mainly address practical wisdom (*phronesis*), and not theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), otherwise we might loose the focus on the question of how to implement core values in business entities.

Phronesis – or: A (very) short definition of practical wisdom for our times

In the introduction to their anthology "A Handbook for Practical Wisdom. Leadership, Organization and Integral Business Practice", Küpers and Pauleen point out that,

> "Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* rests on a vision of moral clarity and normativity that is in stark contrast to our prevailing moral pluralism, making contemporary agreement on the quality of *phronesis* challenging at least. […] So how might *phronesis* be reinterpreted, understood, applied and extended in a world radically different to that of its progenitor?" (Küpers & Pauleen, 2013: 6f)

This question, posed by Küpers and Pauleen, seems to be of significant relevance for philosophical practice, when understood as an activity to search for practical wisdom. A first answer can be found in Martin Heideggers famous series of lectures, "Plato's Sophist", which to a good part deals with the Nichomachean Ethics of Aristotle. In one of these lectures Heidegger states "Phronesis is nothing other than conscience set into motion…" (Heidegger, 1997: 39). If we go along with Heidegger, then practical wisdom is related to, but not identical with, conscience – it is conscience 'in action'. It is *lived* conscience, as it were. Furthermore, by

relating *phronesis* to conscience, Heidegger underlines its ethically and existentially oriented character, which also reflected in other definitions and translations of *phronesis* like *prudence* (more traditionally), *mindfulness* (as suggested by McEvilley (see 2002: 609)), or *moral knowledge* (see Gallagher, 1992: 197f). Therefore, and depending on the context, these terms will be used synonymously with the terms *phronesis* and *practical wisdom* in the following.

***Phronesis* is not teachable**

Hans-Georg Gadamer, who attended the lectures of "Plato's Sophist" and later adopted Heidegger's reading of Book VI of Aristotle's Nichomachian Ethics for his own hermeneutic theory (see Coltman, 1998: 11), emphasizes Aristotle's distinction between moral knowledge (*phronesis*), technical knowledge (*technè*) and theoretical knowledge (*episteme*) (see Gadamer, 1997: 107). This "threefold distinction between theoretical, technical and moral knowledge" (Gallagher, 1992: 197) seems to be of high relevance in order to understand the nature of *phronesis*: In the chapter "Self-understanding and Phronesis" in his book "Hermeneutics and Education", Shaun Gallagher points out that while "for Plato both theoretical knowledge (like geometry) and technical knowledge (like medicine or flute playing) are teachable" (Gallagher, 1992: 197f), moral knowledge (*phronesis*) is not. In the dialogue of Meno, when Socrates and Meno investigate the question whether virtue (in the sense of *phronesis*) is a form of knowledge, which is learnable but not teachable, Meno has no clue what kind of knowledge this could be (see Plato, Meno, 96), however,

> "Socrates obliquely hints at the answer: 'We are probably poor specimen, you and I, Meno. Gorgias has not adequately educated you, nor Prodicus me. We must then at all costs [language which is reminiscent of 86b-c] turn our attention to ourselves and find someone who will in some way make us better' (96d). Obviously, if I turn my attention to myself I will find only one person, me. Socrates suggests that one must look to oneself in order to become virtuous. In effect, the knowledge that one can learn but not be taught is self-knowledge. If virtue is knowledge, it is in some sense self-knowledge. There is no teacher who can tell me who I am in a way that is superior to my own possibility of finding out for myself." (ibidem: 198).

Moral knowledge (*phronesis*) requires self-knowledge

The figure of Socrates is known for the phrase "Know thyself" (*gnōthi seauton*), derived from an inscription of the temple of Apollo at Delphi. But furthermore, he is also known for stating that the highest goal in life is to live a good and virtuous life (*eudaimonia*). If we assume – as Gallagher suggests – that "self-knowledge is intimately linked with phronesis" (ibidem), then

the activity of philosophizing (in the sense of a striving for practical wisdom) is a process of self-reflection in order to learn and develop moral knowledge (*phronesis*). That is: a deeper understanding of ourselves, our worldviews and beliefs, our attitudes and values, and how we can put them into practice (and eventually transform them), in order to respond to any given situation in a virtuous way and with regards to the aim of living well overall.

In other and more simple terms, *phronesis* in a post-modern society can be understood as an ethically oriented and informed awareness (or mindfulness as McEvilley calls it (see 2002: 609)) towards given situations, which finally comes to expression in the way we re-spond to these situations (that is, 'respons-ibility', so to say (see Frankl, 2000: 29)). In this respect – and now we come back to Heidegger again – Jeff Malpas, in the online "Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy", states that

> "For Heidegger the concept of *phronesis* is important, not only as a means of giving emphasis to our practical 'being-in-the world' over and against theoretical apprehension, but it can additionally be seen as constituting a mode of insight into our own concrete situation (both our practical situation and, more fundamentally, our existential situation, hence *phronesis* constitutes a mode of self-knowledge)." (Malpas, 2015: online)

By assuming *phronesis* as some kind of moral self-understanding, we can also conclude what the activity of philosophizing means, as presented here: In simple terms, if we intend to raise ethically oriented and informed mindfulness or awareness (that is, gaining *practical wisdom, prudence, moral knowledge* – depending on the different authors' translation of *phronesis*), we must also be willing to raise self-awareness (that is, gaining *self-knowledge* through self-reflection) – and philosophizing is the process in order to do so. Without self-knowledge we cannot develop and learn moral knowledge (see also Hadot, 1995: 274). Therefore, to phi-losophize here represents a kind of learning process based on self-investigation (and not on teaching/being educated).

Practical wisdom and the Socratic method

In a Socratic dialogue, as described previously, it is certainly neither theoretical knowledge (for example, universal truths or principles, i.e. in the form of moral theories), nor technical knowledge that would be taught. But can moral knowledge (that is, practical wisdom) be learned by means of such a dialogue? At least to the extent in which the dialogue participants are seriously willing to engage in self-reflection, that is, to reflect on a certain term's mean-

ing, i.e. honesty, justice, etc., as well as on what it means for oneself in a practice-oriented manner, i.e. how one once practiced and experienced this term (or virtue). In this respect, the previously mentioned Jeff Malpas, in a chapter about Gadamer's hermeneutical foundations called "Dialogue and Phronesis", states that for Gadamer,

> "The dialectical structure of Platonic questioning also provides the model for a way of understanding that is open to the matter at issue through bringing oneself into question along with the matter itself." (Malpes, 2015: online)

With regards to a Socratic dialogue as presented here, this means that only by "bringing oneself into question along with the matter itself" (ibidem), moral knowledge (or moral self-understanding) can be further developed and deepened. In a Socratic dialogue, investigating the topic under examination in a way detached from the lives and experiences of the dialogue participants would be insufficient in this respect. Such required personal involvement and engagement can and should of course not be 'forced' onto the participants. Rather, it has to happen voluntarily. And it is in this sense that the people participating in a Socratic dialogue in fact *can* philosophize (it is not granted that they will) – they *can* do self-reflection in order to deepen their moral self-understanding, but they *do not have* to. And of course, even if participants intend to gain self-knowledge, it is not guaranteed that they will. This is simply because philosophical methods or practices are not like methods in natural science, where you can more or less predict a certain outcome – in philosophical inquiries it is open what the result will be. In this respect, Anders Lindseth can be mentioned, who stated that the method of philosophical practice has to be an open, a dialogical one (see Lindseth, 2015: 47).

Philosophizing – an activity of striving for *phronesis*

Finally, it has to be admitted that the activity of *philosophizing* – with reference to *phronesis* as outlined here – might appear to be quite narrowly defined. Is philosophizing not so much more than intending to learn and develop *phronesis*? Yes it can be, but the question then is how to 'protect' such a definition of philosophizing from 'vaporizing' into all kinds of activities like mere critical reflection, discussing, dialoguing, etc., which without doubt can be of significant relevance for philosophizing, but they are not *limited* to it (critical thinking can also be found in other areas, like politics, for example). Therefore, and in line with Hadot (see 1995: 265f), I suggested a rather literal translation of *philosophizing* in the sense of *striving and searching for wisdom*. Since philosophical practice in general, and the Socratic method in

particular, seem to be mainly – but for sure not exclusively – concerned with a search for practical and not theoretical wisdom, defining the activity of philosophizing in the sense of an intention to learn and develop *phronesis,* seems to be at least a legitimate interpretation of the term.

On the 'didactical' elements in a Socratic dialogue

The next question now is, what kind of didactical elements there are in place in a Socratic dialogue that intend to support and foster this activity of philosophizing. With reference to Socrates' proverb "Philosophy begins in wonder", the Danish university professor and philosophical practitioner Finn Thorbjørn Hansen, states in his article "The Call and Practices of Wonder" that,

> "The most basic and most fundamental driving force in a good Socratic dialogue and in a philosophical practice as such is the momentum of being in an authentic wonder. But the phenomenology of wonder and especially the phenomenology of being in a community of wonder also show that true wonderment and wondrous dialogues are not something you can fix or produce by having the right techniques, skills or dialogue tools. It is more like art. You have to be in a state of surrender and vulnerability, and in a fundamental not-knowing mode, as well as in an openness and listening to something that calls on you in a way where you have to give a personal response." (Hansen, 2015: 217)

This statement reminds of what has been said previously about moral knowledge and that it cannot be taught. In a similar sense, Hansen argues that wonder – as the beginning of philosophy (*love of wisdom*) – cannot be 'created' or 'produced' by certain techniques (in the sense of technical knowledge as described by Gadamer (see Gadamer, 1997: 107)), nor can it be taught how to get in to a state of wonder:

> "I don't think it is possible to construct or steer a process to wonder and wonderment as if it was a question of didactics or knowing the right methods and techniques. But I have over the years learned that it is possible to create or better: call upon an atmosphere and ways of being which can (but never to be sure) bring us to the neighborhood of or doorstep to wonder. This is only what we can hope for when we use deliberate practices for wonder. […] In any case, my experience is that we can practice certain kinds of Socratic dialogues and reflections that may help us loosen up and unfreeze our former rigid and fixed and frozen concepts and understandings, meanings, ideas and assumptions about a subject matter, a value or a phenomenon." (Hansen, 2015: 225)

Taking these thoughts of Hansen into account, it appears that our initial question of this paragraph – the question for didactical elements in a Socratic dialogue – is misguided and out of place. Instead, speaking of *practices* seems to be more appropriate. In specific, it is the term 'didactical', which is misleading – indicating that there would be teachable techniques in order to gain self- or moral knowledge. But there obviously aren't any (see ibidem). Therefore the guiding question of this paragraph has to be reformulated: What specific kinds of practices are there available in a Socratic dialogue that can support and foster the activity of philosophizing?

Philosophical practices in a Socratic dialogue

A central practice in a Socratic dialogue, as presented here, is the 'movement' in the thinking process, which goes from the concrete to the general – from concrete experiences to general definitions – by means of critical thinking. This movement from the concrete to the general has also been characteristic for the Socratic dialogues of Plato, like in the previously mentioned dialogue of Meno, where through a critical examination Socrates and Meno come to the conclusion that virtue is not teachable, but still learnable. In general, it is this movement that is essential to the method, which Socrates made use of in his dialogues called *maieutics* (the *midwifery of the soul* as Socrates also described it) – a method (or better; practice) to bring forth wisdom (see Plato, Theaetetos: 150c). Therefore, if assuming *maieutics* to be philosophical in nature, then we can conclude that employing this practice in a Socratic dialogue can foster the activity of philosophizing.

Besides this movement between the concrete and the general, one can also find additional practices in the Socratic method, which seem to be philosophical in nature. These practices can vary depending on the way a philosophical practitioner is performing a Socratic dialogue. In the previously described manual, one of these practices for example, would be the phenomenological investigation as described in step 4, where the respective story is treated and investigated by the group as a phenomenon that all participants can relate to in a way. To a certain degree, this step resembles what Husserl called *bracketing* or *phenomenological epochè* (see Husserl, 1982). Another practice would be the personal self-reflection, as described in step 8. There the general definitions are taken back into the context of one's own experience, which can cause a change in one's understanding of the term under investigation or even a change in one's moral self-understanding. For example, one can realize in what different ways a certain value, like responsibility, can be practiced due to the different examples

given by the other dialogue participants. However, in contrast to other philosophical practitioners, I do not hold the opinion that the main purpose of Socratic dialoguing as described here, is to find a common and general definition of the term under investigation by means of experience-sharing and critical examination. Without doubt, finding and formulating general definitions out of stories and experiences represents a central process in a Socratic dialogue. Nevertheless, it is exactly this process, which, on the other hand, opens up for a process of self-reflection, and that is: By referring the investigated term (i.e. responsibility), as well as the resulting definitions and the examined stories to me, to my personal situation, to my life-world, I can learn to understand and reflect myself better as well as my attitudes and mind-sets, my values and behaviors. Due to such a process of self-reflection I can learn to become more mindful towards the term under investigation and its practice in concrete situations (i.e. I can learn how to take responsibility in a given situation). And I can even learn to make changes accordingly in my behavior. This self-reflective practice can take place and happen unexpectedly at any point or throughout the whole course of a Socratic dialogue. And though some might judge it a psychological practice, I see it – based on our explications about philosophizing – to be genuinely philosophical in nature, since it first and foremost can foster the development of *phronesis* (i.e. by becoming aware how to act responsibly in a given situation).

3. What results from the Socratic method when applied in business contexts?

The question now is how can a philosophical practice like the Socratic method be of use for a business entity in regards to its ethical performance? And furthermore, is philosophizing – in the sense of the previously described *search for (practical) wisdom* – relevant for business organizations at all?

The Socratic method, essentially based on storytelling and experience-sharing, is already successfully applied when companies intend to develop (ethical) core values, i.e. in the form of a code of conduct or a mission statement (see i.e. Svare, 2015). The philosophical practitioner Helge Svare is describing such a development process explicitly in one of his articles (see 2015). However, as Svare points out, it is only after finishing the development of such core values when the actual challenge begins, because "how may a company work with

values in a way that give them meaning in its daily work and not only exist as 'empty' words on a website?" (ibidem: 245) In other words, implementing ethical core values can be by far more demanding than developing them. The situation becomes even more problematic, if such values are conceptualized by the upper management and then 'commanded' down onto its employees. In such a case, the chances are high that a respective code of conduct, how ever innovative it might appear, will not be of a sustainable nature. This is simply because employees often miss a clear and conceivable idea of how to perform and practice such a code of conduct in the context of their concrete work situation – not to mention missing the whole process of *why* it should be implemented (see i.e. Küpers & Pauleen, 2013). In order to show how such a dilemma can eventually be avoided by means of the Socratic method, a short case is presented in the following. This case is altered and fictional attributes have been added in order to keep the identity of the organization and the participating individuals confidential. Of course, such "fictional attributes would obscure a truly scientific study, since data need to be objective. However, philosophical truth, and more specifically moral truth, can also be expressed through literary means, such as the fables of Aesop or Jean de la Fontaine" as the philosophical practitioner Shlomit Schuster put it (Schuster, 1999: 22). Therefore, and in order to point out the philosophical and moral implications of this case, references to the steps as presented in the previous dialogue manual will be included.

A short case study: A Socratic dialogue on courage

Imagine a company, which has several sub-units located in rural areas and far away from the headquarters. To a great extent, the sub-units (which have between 10-20 employees) operate independently from the headquarters – communication between them is kept at a minimum as long as the sub-units deliver the expected outcomes. At a certain point in the past the headquarters decided to develop new core values for the whole company. However, to save costs, time and energy, only the upper management was involved in this development process, which in fact unfortunately is often the case when it is about the development of core values). After finishing this process successfully, a set of four core values was 'on the table', formulated in four adjectives: *just, open, professional, and courageous*.

The formulation of core values in terms of adjectives has for sure certain advantages, because they can not only be attributed to the company's performance as a whole, but they can also guide the actions of individual employees. In other words, the intention behind the development of these core values was that the employees – in whatever they would do for the company – should act justly, openly, professionally, and courageously. Of course, this sounds

like a great idea. And in fact it is, but how to proceed from this idea to its implementation? In simple terms, what did it mean for an engineer or a secretary at one of the sub-units to be just, open, professional and courageous in the course of his or her everyday work?

Without paying much attention to this practical challenge, the headquarters then just sent out the new set of core values to the respective leaders of the sub-units with the task to implement it there. No further specifications were given about how to do that, or an explanation of why exactly these core values were chosen over others just as possible, like *friendly*, *accommodating*, or *precise*. As a matter of principle, the leaders were left to decide on their own how to 'solve that problem'. In many of the cases, the leader of a department or a sub-unit just sent out an email in which he or she would inform the employees about the new set of core values, and invite them to live up to these values in their work. Why such a strategy has not necessarily a sustainable effect, seems to be obvious – not because employees are generally not willing to put core values into practice, but because a concrete idea of *how to do* that and more importantly why is missing. Such circumstances can easily turn core values – which actually should guide the performance of employees on a daily basis – into nothing but empty words. And for those employees already working by such values, it can in fact also be a matter of frustration to be told to do what they are already doing.

Being aware of that, the leader of one of the sub-units decided to go a different way. Due to his affinity for philosophy, he came up with the idea of having a series of Socratic dialogues performed on each of the different core values. So, he invited all his employees to participate in these dialogues, which were facilitated by several philosophical practitioners. The participation was voluntary, but almost all employees joined in despite the fact that several of them were quite skeptical towards this new approach. It was not only because most of them were completely inexperienced in philosophizing together with others, or because none of them had ever received any education in philosophy. Rather, it was because they entertained serious doubts that philosophy or the activity of philosophizing could be of any benefit at all in the course of their daily work routines. Entertaining such doubts seems to be legitimate, and as a philosophical practitioner one often meets them when working with business entities. By using the Socratic method however, these doubts often fade into the background, when the step of remembering a story in which the participants once experienced the topic under investigation is introduced. Remembering, telling and listening to stories are activities many people cannot only relate to, but many even enjoy them, in fact.

In the present case, the first dialogue was about the question what it meant to be courageous at work. The topic was not really chosen by the participants, since the upper man-

agement already had provided a set of four core values . However they could decide between these four values, and by means of a democratic decision they agreed to do a dialogue on the term 'courageous' (see step 1 in the previously presented dialogue manual). In order to create a more relaxed atmosphere, this dialogue took place in the evening hours and outside the facilities of the sub-unit. A separate room was rented in a nearby restaurant, where some finger food and wine was served. This does of course not mean that Socratic dialogues cannot take place in the facilities of a company and during the regular work hours. Performing them in settings, which rather resemble a social gathering than a work shift however, can contribute to a more open-minded attitude with the participants. After about 20 minutes of small talk, which served as some kind of 'warm up', the dialogue started. It turned out that it was not so hard for most of the participants to remember, tell and listen to stories where they once were courageous at their work, or when they once observed someone else being so.

After all participants had the chance to share an experience in short sentences about being courageous at work (see step 2), each story that has been told was then closer examined concerning the topic under investigation (see step 3 – 7). In step 5 & 6, where it first was about analyzing where in the story the topic started to appear, and then secondly, making definitions what the term under investigation means according to the respective story, some participants were more active than others. This is often the case in such dialogues, since for some participants it feels more natural to analyze (i.e. engineers, teachers) than for others. Here it was important for the dialogue facilitator to support those who were more reluctant to formulate and communicate their ideas and definitions. A dialogue in general, and a Socratic dialogue in particular, should be understood as an inquiry in which a topic is investigated and examined *together*. And it is this *togetherness*, which represents one of the unique features of a dialogue compared to other forms of group communication, like a debate or a discussion, for example (where it is more about finding the 'right' argument or 'winning' the debate). In a dialogue however, which is sometimes also defined as a *community of inquiry* (see Lipman, 2003: 84), the goal is to find different and various perspectives on the topic – because it is only due to this diversity of perspectives that a more overall picture of the topic can come to the fore.

Introducing this dialogue as a common 'project' in which different views are not only appreciated, but actually necessary, helped the employees to be more open-minded and creative. It reduced their 'anxiety to fail' as well as their stress level to 'say something stupid'. Finally, and based on the stories they were sharing, the group landed on 2 general definitions of what it means to be courageous (see step 8): 1. 'To be courageous means to take certain

risks and try out new ways of solving a problem, even though one cannot be sure to succeed' and 2. 'To be courageous means to communicate ones' ideas and points of view, even if one knows that one might face critique for them'.

In the sum-up round with the participants however, it turned out that it were not these two general definitions that were the most beneficial and essential outcomes of this dialogue. Rather, it was something different (see step 9): When asking for the benefit of this dialogue, the common tenor was that it was the different stories that were told (which cannot be presented here, for reasons of confidentiality). The different stories gave them concrete ideas on how to practice the respective core value in the different contexts of their work. By means of this dialogue, the set of core values started to make sense to the employees at the sub-unit. Sharing and reflecting experiences helped them to attribute practice-oriented meaning to these values. However, it was not a form of practical *knowledge* in a manual-like style that was produced in the course of this dialogue. Rather it was a form of understanding – moral understanding, as it were (or better *moral knowledge* in the way Gallagher introduced it (see 1992: 197f), that is, *phronesis*) – that was brought forth. Due to this understanding the participants became aware of certain attitudes, practices and even certain ways of communicating with each other, which they had in place at their work. And now they started to realize how they eventually could change them for the better, with regards to the value of courage. In other words, this dialogue made the participants aware of possibilities, where they could be more courageous at their work, which would also contribute to the (ethical) performance of the sub-unit as a whole.

Summarizing the effects and outcomes of the short case

Before having a closer look at the learning-effects of storytelling and experience-sharing, as well as the role of *practical wisdom* (*phronesis*) in business contexts, let us summarize this case in more general terms: When the members of a department are given a set of ethical values from superior management levels, a Socratic dialogue can be performed on each of these values (see step 1). In the second step of the dialogue, the department members are invited to remember a personal story where they once experienced the respective value, i.e. justice, at their work – either in their current position or in a previous one (see step 2). In this way of storytelling, which can be quite entertaining, the respective ethical value – which previously appeared to be rather abstract – is illuminated by concrete situations where it was once put into practice in the respective field of work (see step 3 & 5). Already in these steps, but especially in the following, where it is about making definitions, the participants often become

aware that a certain value might have different meanings in different situations (see step 6 & 7). In the last steps, participants can figure out what connects their narratives by generating a more general definition (see steps 8 & 9). In this way they get a more versatile and experience-based understanding (or awareness) of the respective ethical value in the context of their work.

4. Discussion: On the relevance of *phronesis* for business entities

In a previous chapter of this article it has been stated that *phronesis*, that is, *practical wisdom* or *moral knowledge*, cannot be taught – but it can be learned. In the following I would like to further investigate the philosophical reflection process as performed in a Socratic dialogue with regards to its 'learning-effects' on *moral knowledge*. With this I would like to shed light on the activity of philosophizing – in the sense of a *search for practical wisdom* – and its relevance for the ethical performance of business entities.

Experiential knowledge

As mentioned earlier, storytelling and experience-sharing represent essential practices in a Socratic dialogue. But what is it that makes stories and experiences from everyday life so resourceful for philosophizing? In simple terms, stories and shared experiences communicate something that could be called *experiential knowledge* – or *experience knowledge* as the Spanish philosophical practitioner and university professor Josè Barrientos-Rastrojo called it in his article "An Experience Workshop with Groups. Theory and Practice" (see Barrientos-Rastrojo, 2015: 375f). In the beginning of this article he states that,

> "Rather than what has been defended by analytic philosophy, the history of philosophy has described various ways of knowledge (poetic, symbolic or narrative, among others) and a lot of them are useful to know. Knowledge is not just the result of going on from premises, based on concepts, to conclusions; it can be achieved using other tools. This is the case of experience knowledge." (ibidem)

According to Barrientos-Rastrojo, there are different ways or forms of knowledge. In simple terms, *experience* or *experiential knowledge* differs from *logic-conceptual knowledge* (see ibidem), in the following way: Logic-conceptual (or maybe better: theoretical) knowledge is

concerned with, for example, analyzing different concepts of freedom based on reasoning. Experiential knowledge, on the other hand, is rather about knowing how it *feels* to be free or knowing how freedom is *experienced*.

Experiential knowledge and its relevance when implementing core values

When it is about implementing and practicing core values, experiential knowledge seems to be of significant relevance. Whereas theoretical or logic-conceptual knowledge was not of much help for the employees in the previous case (though they had vague and abstract ideas of what the core values meant, they had no clue how to put them into practice at their work), the experiential knowledge 'enveloped' in stories turned out to be more fruitful. The reason why I use the term 'enveloped' is because experiential knowledge is often 'hidden in our memory', so to say, and not present in our awareness. Even if I might know how, for instance, courage feels, it does not mean that I am currently aware of how to be courageous in a given situation. But something that is 'en-veloped' can be "opened up" and 'de-veloped'. This was the case with the employees as described in the short case: Even though all of them knew how it feels to be courageous and even though most of them had experienced courage at work previously, they did not know how to 'de-velop' that experiential knowledge in order to implement the respective core values (if they would have, the Socratic dialogue would have been dispensable). And here is where *maieutics* – the Socratic midwifery – comes into account.

Using Socratic midwifery to 'de-velop' experiental knowledge

The stories told in the course of a Socratic dialogue contain implicit information about what, for example, courage means (i.e. for the employees in the previous case) and how one can practice and experience it. Since this information or knowledge is implicit, it has to be explicated – it has to be 'brought forth', as it were. How is such a 'birth process' facilitated in a Socratic dialogue? First, respective stories are shared and – and that is important – imagined by the other participants. However, imagining a story told by someone else is not the same as experiencing this story first hand and for real. Nevertheless, imagining – you could also call it re-experiencing – a story can also be seen as a form of experience (this is similar to watching a movie: even though we do not participate in the plot, we sometimes experience it as if we would). Imagining an experience from someone else is the first step of sharing experiential knowledge. The advantage of experiential knowledge, in contrast to mere theoretical knowledge, is that stories and experiences are easily accessible. Due to their concreteness they can be imagined by anyone and not only by people who are experienced and trained in philoso-

phy, for instance. The fact that one and the same story can be experienced and therefore interpreted in different ways by different people, only contributes to the second step: the critical examination.

Telling and imagining a story might instigate experiential knowledge, but that knowledge is still not fully 'brought forth' – the 'birth process' is still 'going on', as it were. In other words, experiential knowledge is still not fully explicated at this point of the dialogue. One might still not be aware of what the topic of the dialogue i.e. courage, means in the context of the told story. This then is investigated and critically examined in the further course of the Socratic dialogue. For example, by asking questions like 'Where in the story did courage begin to appear?' or 'How can we define courage according to this story?' or 'What is it that several of the definitions from the different stories we examined have in common – and how can we put that into a more general definition?' However, even when these questions are more or less clarified by means of critical thinking, experiential knowledge is to a certain degree still 'enveloped' and not fully 'de-veloped' – developed into *experiential understanding,* as I would call it.

In order to explain what I mean with the term *experiential understanding* I would like to introduce what I call the *mirror-metaphor*: By looking into a mirror in the morning, I can see how I look. It could be (as we all know) that I do not fully like what I see in the mirror. So I make changes accordingly, i.e. wash my face, brush my hair etc. Now, the shared and examined experiences of a Socratic dialogue, as well as the developed definitions, can – in a metaphorical sense – be like mirrors too. For example, by referring the stories and definitions (i.e. about courage) to myself, my own situation, they can help me to reflect and 'see' what I 'look like' when it is about being courageous (i.e. I can ask myself, whether I would have acted as courageously as the person in the story, and if not, why?). If I don't like what I 'see', the stories and definitions can help me to learn to make changes accordingly. In this way the mirror-metaphor suggests a form of self-reflection, which can be performed in a Socratic dialogue – a way of reflecting myself, my experiences, my attitudes, my behavior, and my way of life in general. The result can be self-insight, and furthermore self-knowledge and self-understanding. That is: I can gain knowledge about myself and I can learn to understand myself better by means of the term under investigation (i.e. courage) and the related stories and definitions. Since this form of self-knowledge and self-understanding refers to the level of experience, I call it *experiential understanding*. And developing *experiential understanding* seems to be only a 'stone's throw' away from learning *moral knowledge* (that is, *phronesis*).

In this respect, a previously mentioned reference to Heidegger can be brought up again, in which *phronesis* is as a mode of self-knowledge:

> "For Heidegger the concept of *phronesis* is important, not only as a means of giving emphasis to our practical 'being-in-the world' over and against theoretical apprehension, but it can additionally be seen as constituting a mode of insight into our own concrete situation (both our practical situation and, more fundamentally, our existential situation, hence *phronesis* constitutes a mode of self-knowledge)." (Malpas, 2015: online)

Why should business entities be interested in developing *phronesis*?

By pointing out how storytelling and experience-sharing can essentially contribute to the activity of philosophizing, by means of the Socratic method, the question still remains why business companies should have an interest in their employees to develop *phronesis*?

The successful implementation of core values by means of the Socratic method as described here, depends on whether the dialogue participants – in the previous case, the employees – are willing to engage in self-reflection or not. If they are not, then such values cannot be implemented. In this regard, a company literally depends on the goodwill (which Aristotle called *eunoia*) of its employees. To assume that implementing core values would be similar to implementing a new tool into a machine in order to improve its performance, would simply be wrong – for two reasons: First, because core values can only be practiced and performed by human beings – there is no software, no marketing stunt that could 'do the job' instead. Secondly, because the implementation of core values has little or nothing to do with what Gadamer – with reference to Aristotle – called technical knowledge (*technè*), that is, knowledge of know-how (see Gadamer, 1997: 107). There simply is no quick-fix, no shortcut, no user-guide that could show how to put core values into practice adequately, or even why. Again, the knowledge required for that is *moral knowledge,* and it cannot be taught as i.e. Gallagher pointed out (see 1992:197f).

Therefore, if a company is seriously interested in implementing core values, then there seems to be no way around *phronesis* and the required self-reflection processes with its employees. Core values address the attitude (which Aristotle called *ethos*) of employees – they address their work attitude. And there is no handbook, no method – not even the Socratic method – that could guarantee a transformation or a change of attitude in employees. Therefore, the real change-makers, when it comes to the implementation of core values in a com-

pany, seem to be those who are willing to engage in serious self-reflection. Everything else appears to be not more than applying some 'make-up'.

Changing the corporate culture – the *ethos* – of a company

At first sight, it might sound too rigid and philosophically narrow-minded to suggest that only *phronesis* is 'the way to go' in order to implement core values adequately. However, to find support for my position, let us have a closer look at what Aristotle called *ethos* – the character of a person. In the second book of his work "Rhetoric", Aristotle defines *ethos* as consisting of three elements (see Aristotle, Rhetoric, Bk. 2.1.5-9): 1. *phronesis* (practical wisdom, in a sense being aware of how to act ethically in a particular situations) 2. *arete* (virtue) 3. *eunoia* (goodwill). According to Aristotle, *phronesis* is both sufficient and necessary for being virtuous. Goodwill, on the other hand, is essential because if a person is not willing to develop *phronesis* and virtue, then he or she never will. It is like an advanced game of *paper-scissors-rock* where the rock always wins. In order to show why the concept of *ethos* is important in order to implement core values, we have to introduce another triad of Aristotle's "Rhetoric" to which *ethos* belongs, also called *the three modes of persuasion* or *the three artistic proofs* (*pistis*), which read: a) *pathos* b) *logos* c) *ethos* (see ibidem, Bk. 2.2). To further explain these three terms, let us stay within the framework of rhetoric: According to Aristotle, a speaker must include all these three elements into a speech in order to convince the audience of what he or she is saying. There must be *pathos,* that is, to appeal to the emotions of the audience. But there must also be *logos*, that is, logical arguments that support the statements must be offered. And finally there must be good *ethos* (as described before), in order to establish credibility.

Now, let us see how we can translate and reframe *the three artistic proofs*, particularly the concept of *ethos*, into the context of a business company. *Pathos* here could be interpreted in the sense of appealing to the emotions of the costumers as well as the stake- and shareholders – tools for that purpose can be found, for example, in marketing and public relations That is, what advertising campaign does not try to appeal to the emotions of potential customers?. *Logos* in the context of a company can for example be interpreted in the sense of logistics and accounting, but also in the sense of business plans and strategies. The *ethos* – that would be the 'character' of a company, as it were – would rather refer to the corporate culture. And a corporate or organizational culture can be defined as "the collection of traditions, values, policies, beliefs and attitudes that constitute a pervasive context for everything we do and

think in an organisation" (Mc Lean & Marschall, 1985: 2), or more simple, with the words of Bright and Parkin, "This is how we do things around here" (Bright & Parkin, 1997: 13).

One could now conclude, that introducing new core values in a company, reflects the intention to change its corporate culture – its *ethos*, so to say. But a change of a company's *ethos* would also mean a change of *ethos* within the employees. Without a change of *ethos* within the employees (you could also call it, their work attitude), it appears to be rather hard to achieve a change in the '*ethos*' of a company, that is, a change in its corporate culture. Neither *pathos* (i.e., in the sense of PR campaigns) nor *logos* alone (i.e. in the sense of new technologies) could serve this task sufficiently. And here again, we arrive at *phronesis* as one of the dimensions of *ethos*, if we go along with Aristotle. Or, along the lines of the Declaration towards a Global Ethic (which then later was further developed into the UN-manifesto "Global Economic Ethic" (see Küng, Leisinger & Wieland, 2010)), a corporate culture cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness (or awareness) of its employees is changed (see Küng & Kuschel, 1993: 15).

5. Concluding and critical remarks

The guiding question of this article was, how to implement core values in business entities. In order to give a practice-oriented answer, the Socratic method was introduced and explicated by the means of a manual. Since this method is an often-used approach in philosophical practice, it was pointed out how and why it supports the activity of philosophizing. In doing so, philosophizing was outlined in the sense of a *seeking and searching for wisdom* – for *practical wisdom* (*phronesis*), to be more precise. Of course, in the sense of a critical remark it can be put into question whether philosophical practice in general, and the Socratic method in particular, are really concerned with a search for practical wisdom, and whether such practices indeed intend the development of *phronesis*. In fact, in this article I did not claim that philosophical practice or the Socratic method should, nor have to, be exclusively concerned with *phronesis*. However, in the course of this paper I tried to put forward certain arguments and lines of thought, which suggest that such an interpretation of philosophical practice is at least a legitimate option.

Furthermore, because wisdom in general, as well as *phronesis* in particular, can be understood in various ways, the term *phronesis* was narrowed down to a more simple defini-

tion. *Phronesis* was thus presented as an ethically oriented and informed awareness (or mindfulness), which finally finds its' expression in the way a person responds towards concrete situations (the person's 'response-ability'). Whether such an understanding of *phronesis* is legitimate is another question to be asked. The challenge in this respect is that both Plato and Aristotle conceptualized their idea of *phronesis* under quite different social and cultural circumstances compared to those of today. And here, again, we arrive at the question of Küpers and Pauleen, "how might phronesis be reinterpreted, understood, applied and extended in a world radically different to that of its progenitor?" (Küpers & Pauleen, 2013: 6f) In other words, can we ever reach a definition of *phronesis* that would entirely fit what Plato and Aristotle defined by the term on the one hand, and on the other, a definition that would still be of relevance for a post-modern, pluralistic society like ours? In this sense, the previous definition can only be a suggestion.

In the further course of the article, a short case was then presented, which should exemplify how core values can be implemented by means of the Socratic method. This short case should help especially those readers who intend to facilitate a Socratic dialogue in business contexts. It aimed at being a concrete illustration of the dialogue manual as presented in a previous chapter. A critical remark here can be that what I described in the short case appears to be rather idealistic. And I agree with that, to a certain extent. However, what I tried to point out and emphasize in the short case were several important features and aspects of a Socratic dialogue that a facilitator should be aware of when implementing core values by means of this method. In this sense, it was intended to give the case some kind of a normative character. But without doubt, each dialogue is unique and different, and such dialogues may not always work as "smoothly" as described in the short case, even if they are facilitated by experienced practitioners. In this sense this case was – on purpose – idealistic, in order to give practical hints for the dialogue facilitation, and to illustrate the rather technical dialogue manual presented previously.

After the short case, the role of *phronesis* in business organization was discussed. For this purpose we first had a closer look onto the process of a Socratic dialogue as such. Here, the stories and experiences that are shared at the beginning of such a dialogue were assumed to hold what was called *experiential knowledge* – a form of knowledge, which is different from *logic-conceptual* (or *theoretical*) *knowledge*. It was then pointed out why and how experiential knowledge on the one hand can offer a more practical, as well as practice-oriented, understanding of the term under investigation. On the other hand, it was suggested that experiential knowledge (in the sense of told stories and shared experiences) represents a quite use-

ful resource for philosophizing, since this form of knowledge is easily accessible for anyone due to its concreteness (it is easy to imagine). In other words, philosophizing, when based on experiential knowledge does not require any philosophical pre-knowledge, but only an authentic will (or "goodwill") to reflect and examine the shared experiences with regards to the term under investigation. At this point it was also further explicated how *maieutics* – the Socratic midwifery – comes into account in such a dialogue: In a metaphorical sense the story or the narrative-like experience can be seen like a semantic 'womb' carrying the term under investigation. Then the term has to be brought forth, and through the means of a critical examination the term is defined, so that it can 'stand for itself' – independently from the story. Based on the definitions of the term, which were derived from the different stories, the next step in the dialogue then is to try to make one or two more general definitions. Many philosophical practitioners view that reaching this level of abstraction as being the actual goal of such a Socratic dialogue, since the term is then properly defined and explained. There is no doubt that such an analysis is meritorious and honorable. Nevertheless, I hold the opinion that the Socratic method has more to offer than being just an analytical 'dissecting instrument'. In the respective chapter I therefore suggested an interpretation of the Socratic method as being a practice-oriented approach for self-reflection and, furthermore, for self-understanding. The experiential knowledge 'enveloped' in stories can be 'de-veloped' into experiential understanding by means of this method. The self-knowledge gained in a Socratic dialogue can turn into what Gallagher called moral knowledge, that is, *phronesis* (see 1992:197f). At this point it has to be admitted that performing a Socratic dialogue, for example in a company, will probably not immediately lead to life-changing revelations and fundamental enlightenments within the participants. The unique feature of the Socratic method as presented here, is something different: As Dan and Chip Heath have pointed out, stories and narrative-like experiences are not only easy to remember – much easier than an abstract idea or definition, in fact – but they are even memorized over long periods of time (see Heath & Heath, 2007). Since stories can operate like semantic 'wombs', which carry, for example, a certain virtue like courage, the chances are high that when I find myself in a situation similar to one of a story that was told and examined in a Socratic dialogue, I am rather aware (or mindful) of how to respond to that situation in an ethical way. In this sense, the examined stories of a Socratic dialogue enhance my mindfulness about when and how to practice a certain ethical value or virtue. I do not intend to say that doing Socratic dialogues will us all turn into better people, but participating in such dialogues can at least contribute to raising ethical awareness (which

could here also be called *practical wisdom* or *phronesis*) – even if this developmental process would be a process done in small steps.

The development of *phronesis* and the way it was presented in this article obviously resembles some sort of personality development, since it refers to the development of one's *ethos*, one's character. Whether the personality development of its employees is, or should be, within the responsibility of a company, however, represents a critical point for discussion. Then again, how can the core values of a company (especially when they are ethical in nature) be put into practice, if not by and through its employees? If we go along the three artistic proofs as conceptualized by Aristotle (that is, *pathos*, *logos* and *ethos*), and reframe them into the context of a business entity, then neither *pathos* nor *logos* seem to be sufficient for the implementation of core values. In this respect, the *ethos* of a company was identified with its corporate culture. Since a corporate culture represents the values, beliefs, attitudes, policies, which are in fact 'at work' and practiced in a company (see Mc Lean & Marschall, 1985: 2), introducing new core values requires a change of corporate culture and thus a change of the company's *ethos*. It goes without saying that a corporate culture is highly influenced by its human resources, that is, the set of individuals who make up the workforce of that company. Therefore, and as strange as it might sound, successfully changing a corporate culture requires a change in the work attitude within each single employee (that is, his or her personal *ethos*). And this is where *phronesis* (*practical wisdom* or *moral knowledge*) comes into account. Implementing core values and – on a broader scale – changing corporate culture through having employees (further) develop *phronesis*, is by far not fulfilled by having a couple of Socratic dialogues performed. Still, what such dialogues can do is to make employees aware of the moral and ethical aspects of their work and how they contribute to it. And this seems to be at least a starting point for the development of *phronesis* in business contexts in general, as well as for the implementation of core values in particular. Therefore, what I intended to point out in the respective discussion on the role of *phronesis* in business contexts was its actual relevance for corporate culture – without *practical wisdom* (or *moral knowledge*) a change of corporate culture (in terms of the *ethos* of a company) seems to be a rather hopeless endeavor.

To say that *phronesis* is of vital importance when changing corporate cultures, is of course a bold assumption. Therefore I would like to have a final closer look at it. *Phronesis* in the sense of an ethically oriented and informed awareness (or mindfulness) also includes a certain critical reflectiveness. Such critical reflectiveness does not only mean to reflect on how an ethical value can best be put into practice, nor what the value as such means, but whether and why the respective value is suitable and of relevance at all. Even if I, as an em-

ployee, can learn a lot about a certain value, based on the stories shared and critically examined in a Socratic dialogue, it does not mean that I see this value as a core value of the company. Let us go a bit further with this thought. Storytelling is an often-used management tool in economy, also called organizational storytelling (see i.e. Boje: 2008). In fact, telling stories with the purpose of managing organizations, communities, and even whole societies has long traditions, and it seems to be deeply rooted in the history of mankind (see i.e. Jackson: 2006). As a technique to convey and instill moral values, for example, storytelling can be found in almost any culture (see i.e. Archibald, 2008). However, it also has to be noted at this point that storytelling can be, and actually was misused as, a powerful tool to indoctrinate moral stances onto people without giving them the chance to critically reflect on them. Many religious beliefs, ideologies, worldviews and life stances have been communicated in such a way. In addition, there have also been stories that have been used as some kind of 'back-up system', that is, they would tell the people what would happen to them if they would stand up against these ideologies, worldviews etc. The 'purgatorial fire' of Christianity is just one of them. One could think similarly (even though on a 'smaller scale') about core values, which are chosen by the upper management and then 'forced' down onto the employees: Even if employees can share and learn from stories about certain core values, it was not them choosing these values. Of course, in a company with more than 5000 employees, the question is more than legitimate in regards to how these 5000 employees should develop a set of core values together that would fit the whole company. This seems to be a rather intense logistical task. Here, the adequate strategies are still to be developed. However, when concerning smaller units or smaller companies, then approaches like the one of Helge Svare, as mentioned in chapter 3, seem to be useful and applicable (see 2015). And finally, it was presented that critical reflectiveness (as a central aspect of *phronesis*) is essential for ethical decision making, since it addresses the self-responsibility of a person. Therefore it has to be taken into account when it is about the implementation of core values.

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