

# The Mindful Manager

## A Guide

*Dr Peter Lenney*

### What is the course all about?

The Mindful Manager teachings deal with leading/managing as a history-writing future-crafting ethical practice for which **good judgement** is key.

The course targets the development of the student's **Practical Wisdom** – their capacity to exercise good judgement.

### Where did the teachings come from?

I arrived in Lancaster some 19 years ago to begin a PhD. I had spent more than 20 years in the business world, mostly in the industrial coatings industry, and had risen through the ranks of research, technical management and marketing to become the worldwide business director of a large division of a multinational corporation. Over the years I had become fascinated by the disparity between what was said in the management textbooks & business schools, and the 'real world' that had faced me every day. I decided to do my PhD on the realities of managerial work. I spent some six years on this study- three years in the field watching & listening to managers, and three years writing & reflecting on this material, and my more than 20 years in practice. This extended period of research and reflection led me to understand that, in my executive past, I had been remarkably well trained in very many technical and practical aspects of managing and leading, but was, in a strange way, seriously under-educated in many areas that now revealed themselves as seriously important. Most crucially - philosophy. As Erica Benner said "*..the best ancient philosophers are more alive and have more practical value than most contemporary writers.....what makes them great is that they pose and explore, with clarity, mostly unmatched by their successors, the most perennial questions about how to go about organising our shared human life*"

### Practical Wisdom – what it is and why we need it!

The world in which managers/leaders are asked to make **choices/decisions** is, as the military describe it, **v**olatile, **u**ncertain, **c**omplex, and **a**mbiguous. It is a **wicked world**, as I characterise it - a 'V.U.C.A.' one that is suffused with divergent interests & clashing perspectives. It is a world that bears little resemblance to the caricature in the business/management textbooks. It is also one where the choices are **ethical** in character, as they are most frequently choices as to what **ends/goals** we should have, and what **means/methods** we should use to achieve them.

It is also a world where, sadly, there is **no science of decision/choice** to assist us, nor any firm ground of truth on which to stand. Though many philosophers have attempted to give us a 'science' of choice none of these attempts survive serious scrutiny, and the attempts of management science in this arena do not, to my mind, merit even cursory attention.

The leader/manager has to make **judgements** in their navigation of the wicked world – judgements as to ‘*what is going on? & why what is going on, is going on? What should be? & how we should get there?*’ The ‘science’ and mathematics of finance, economics, big data, operations research, and many other such endeavours may provide putative answers to many questions we ask - and they may be very important questions to which we need some possible answers in order that we can make our choices - but there is no decision science available that can make these precarious choices of means & ends, nor the foundational choice of what to take into account in our choosing of means & ends – what we might term our beginnings. These choices are all judgements that we must make, and are themselves, founded on other judgements.

If we judge the judgements someone makes as being ‘good’, we characterise the judging person as being practically wise. **Practical Wisdom is the capacity ascribed to those we judge to have made good judgements.** One can manage/lead without practical wisdom, but no one manages/leads well without it.

Managers/leaders need practical wisdom to navigate the wicked world because **good judgement** is required in the choosing of means & ends - and, as we will later discuss, in the choosing of ‘beginnings’

But firstly maybe we should ask - ‘**what is it to judge?**’ To judge is to make a choice – it is not to simply act in habit or by rule. If one judges, one takes responsibility, chooses and owns one’s choice. The practically wise individual ‘**chooses to choose**’ and makes what we judge to be ‘good’ choices – those choices may well be to act in habit or by rule.

It is, however, one thing to give this powerful virtue of good judgement the label of practical wisdom, and stipulate its importance. It is a whole other thing to discern how those we see as wise come to possess this excellence in judgement – and, most crucially, mark a path as to how others might acquire it!

In this regard Aristotle, its originator, was clear on one thing – practical wisdom only comes with/from experience.

As Joseph Dunne opines “*practical wisdom has been shown as a fruit which can grow only in the soil of a person’s experience..... Apart from the cultivation of that soil, there is no [method of] making it available in a way that would count*” [1993, p358].

With this contention I agree – but cultivate the soil we can - by tilling the ground & planting some seeds from which wisdom may grow.

### **Practical Wisdom demystified**

Practical wisdom is not a superpower, nor is it, as the psychologists may have you accept, yet another ‘intelligence’ - it is not an innate capability – one is not born wise, and age does not necessarily make one wise.

**Practical wisdom is a practical-intellectual capacity that emerges from a nexus of dispositions & capabilities that can be pursued through practice & experience.**

**Practical Wisdom is a nexus of 5 dispositions and 4 capabilities.**

**Dispositions** are our attitudes of mind – the stances that we tend to take when dealing/engaging with aspects of the world – the ways we ‘come at things’

**The foundational disposition of Practical Wisdom is that of *ReFLEXivity***

– the attempt to have a perspective on one’s own perspectives.

Attempting to be reflexive is the first step to wisdom; as Socrates says “*on the path to wisdom one must first know oneself*”

Beyond the foundational disposition of reflexivity there are four other dispositions in the nexus from which Practical Wisdom emerges.

Those are the dispositions that one has towards **Others, Evidence/Knowledge, Issues/Problems**, and one’s own **Experience**.

**Capabilities** are the skills that complement and enable the dispositions – one might say our dispositions are our stances, and our capabilities our dances.

**The foundational capability of Practical Wisdom is that of *ReFLECTivity***

Reflectivity is the capability to engage in a dialogue with oneself about one’s cognitive, collaborative and emotional conduct.

**Reflectivity is the route to Reflexivity**, and to the effective development of the constituent capabilities & dispositions of Practical Wisdom.

Beyond the foundational capability of reflectivity there are three other capabilities in the nexus from which Practical Wisdom emerges.

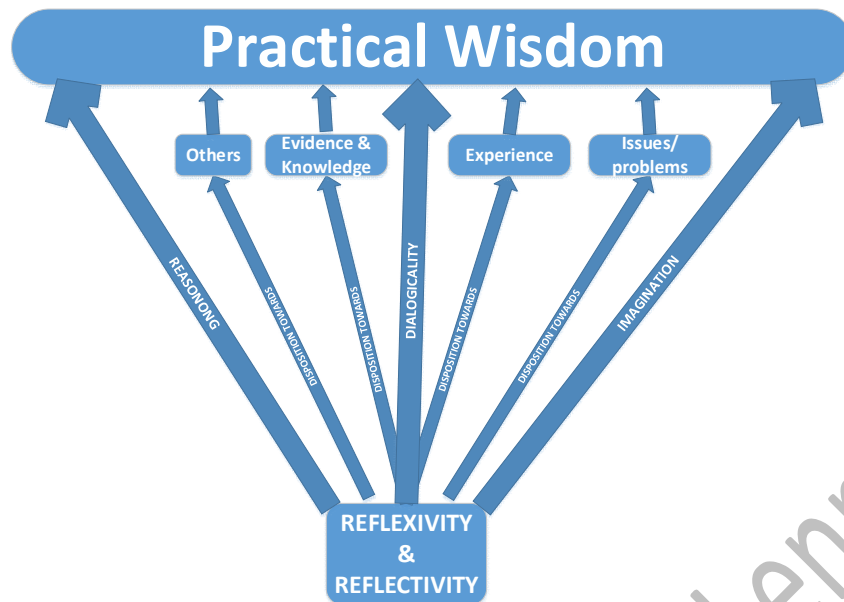
The other capabilities are those of **Reason, Dialogue and Imagination**

The reflective practitioner has the possibility of powerful and rapid conduct enhancement.

**The reflective practitioner that pursues reflexivity is on the path to wisdom**

**It is Reflexive-Reflective practitioners that we seek to develop.**

A graphic of the nexus we will pursue is shown below



### The Course & the Certificate

All the dispositions and capabilities of the nexus that constitutes practical wisdom are addressed within the course. Those that proceed to the certificate phase will achieve significantly more powerful understanding, and have a far greater possibility of developing the requisite dispositions and capabilities; but all of the ground will be covered to some degree in the one-term programme.

The course comprises 5 interlinked streams of learning activity

- A core strand attacks the topic of Practical wisdom itself
  - This strand consists of 2 threads of activity. One is based on watching, listening and reading, and the other on collaborative reading and synthesis
- Another 2 distinct but intertwined strands pursue the foundational disposition of reflexivity, and the foundational capability of reflectivity.
- A separate strand pursues the 3 core capabilities of Reason, Dialogue & Imagination
  - The emphasis of this strand in Term 1 is Reason & Dialogue; in the Certificate phase the focus is Imagination
  - The reasoning thread utilises a purpose designed interactive online course
- A separate supporting strand seeks to engineer a form of feedback on which much powerful reflective-reflexive activity can be based - 360.

The programme is laid out in detail in the Programme Guide.