HUMILITY AND DECISION MAKING IN COMPANIES

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Abstract

The literature on humility has grown considerably in recent decades within the fields of psychology and ethics, as have the applications of humility in organizational management, leadership and the functioning of teams. This paper is intended as a further contribution to this literature. Its starting point is the hypothesis that an excellent manager must be a virtuous person and it indicates what is involved in managing an organization as justification for this hypothesis. It also explains the distinctive qualities of humility and how this virtue fosters management quality.

[1] Professor emeritus, "la Caixa" Chair of Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Governance, IESE.

HUMILITY AND DECISION MAKING IN COMPANIES

Introduction

In previous decades, the pioneering work of G.E.M. Anscombe (1958), Philippa Foot (1978), Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) and other philosophers opened the way for a new approach to the theory of virtues. In later years, this approach emerged in business ethics through the writings of Robert Solomon (1992) and others. Since then, the literature on virtues in management has grown extensively.

Humility (along with its complementary virtues such as modesty, patience and magnanimity, or its opposing vices such as pride, arrogance and narcissism) has been the subject of a large number of theoretical and empirical studies. There are studies from the psychological viewpoint (Davis et al., 2011; Exline and Geyer, 2004; Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Rowatt et al., 2006). There are other studies from the ethical viewpoint (Argandoña, 2015a; Frostenson, 2015; Molyneaux, 2003; Roberts and Wood, 2003).

Other studies investigate many applications in management and leadership (Chatterjee and Hambrick, 2007; Collins, 2001; Hayward, Shepherd, and Griffin, 2006; Hiller and Hambrick, 2005; Li and Tang, 2010; Morris, Brotheridge, and Urbanski 2005; Nielsen, Marrone, and Slay, 2010; Ou, Waldman, and Peterson, 2015; Owens and Heckman, 2012; Owens, Johnson, and Mitchell, 2013; Owens, Wallace, and Waldman, 2015; Picone, Dagnino, and Minà, 2014; Sousa and Dierendonck, 2015; Tang, Lee, and Yang, 2015; Vera and Rodríguez-López, 2004).

So there is already a considerable body of critical knowledge about the importance of humility in business management, leadership and teamwork. However, the reader of this copious literature is justified in feeling dissatisfied. Apart from their scholarly interest, which is very important for psychologists, philosophers, economists and management scientists, what do these papers contribute to our understanding of the manager's task and training? What normative reasons can be given to want to possess this virtue, particularly to someone who does not have it? And if this person wants to acquire it, how can he or she go about doing this?

In this paper,[1] my intention is to determine the role of virtues in general and humility in particular as applied to managerial work, by developing what seems to me to be the main argument for someone responsible for running a business: a manager must be ethical if he or she wants to be

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[1] This paper is based on another presented at an annual meeting of the European Business Ethics Network (EBEN) (Argandoña, 2013), which in turn gave rise to an article published in the Journal of Business Ethics (Argandoña, 2015a).

an excellent manager.[2] If the manager is not ethical, he or she might be financially successful and be acknowledged for successes but, as MacIntyre (1984) pointed out, success is not a synonym for excellence (Beabout, 2013). What goes wrong in the haughty or arrogant manager? And does a humble manager really manage *differently*?

This paper continues with an explanation of what managing is and the role played by virtues in managerial work. It then sets out humility and what makes the humble manager "different," before offering some conclusions.[3]

Managing

Managing consists of coordinating people's activities in an organization to achieve certain goals that, in one way or another, are in everyone's interest, although for different reasons (Pérez López, 1993). In the case of a business enterprise, managing basically consists of three tasks:

1) Designing and developing a potentially profitable business project. This is the task of the entrepreneur and, when the business has got off the ground, of the strategist.

2) Making the project a success in the specific context of the firm and its market. This task corresponds to the executive, organizer or manager.[4]

3) The third is the task of the leader and is based on the fact that the firm is a community of people (Melé, 2012), which includes owners, managers, employees, suppliers and perhaps also customers and the local community. Managing is about getting these people to agree to change the conduct they would have adopted if left to their own devices, in order to achieve the shared goal (Polo and Llano, 1997, p. 113).

This is possible because each of the individuals involved has a different motivation and, what is more, these motivations change over time but may induce people to work together on the firm's project. There are three types of motivation (Pérez López, 1991, 1993; Argandoña, 2008a, 2008b, 2015b):

1) Extrinsic, based on what the agent receives from the organization, which may be financial (salary, career) or nonfinancial (recognition).

2) Intrinsic, based on what the agent does in the organization: job satisfaction and operational learning (operative knowledge and skills).

3) Transcendent[5] or prosocial: based on the "what for" – why the agent does what he or she does in the organization, because of the consequences that the agent hopes it will have for

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[2] This is the *normative* reason for virtues in the firm. There is another, *instrumental* reason for the consequences of virtue-based management (Frostenson, 2015), which has been used in many papers.

[3] The paper's narrative thread is taken from Pérez López (1991, 1993), as developed in Argandoña (2008a, 2008b, 2015b), among other papers.

[4] This task can be subdivided into many more: designing the goals and communicating them, obtaining the resources and deploying them, seeking, motivating and coordinating people and adapting assignments to these people's abilities, organizing the work, issuing commands so that people do what the manager wishes, adapting all of this efficiently in a changing context so that the planned results are achieved, measuring and evaluating the results, reviewing the strategy and the plans, etc. Note that all of these imply relationships with people – in other words, they are also part of the third task.

[5] This type is called transcendent because it transcends the individual.

people. The agent's actions will have positive or negative consequences for other people – customers, suppliers, colleagues and society in general. This is the most visible aspect of what the agent does and the one that usually earns other people's praise or censure.

However, it is not the most important aspect because, when these motivations give rise to decisions, they lead to the agent learning lessons, which we will call evaluative or ethical learning. This learning creates operative habits (virtues or vices) and these are the actions' ethical consequences for the agent.

For example, an employee who lies to a customer "learns" to lie and develops the vice of falsehood. In the same way, the manager who orders or allows the employee to lie becomes deceitful him or herself and, furthermore, "learns" to be unfair to the employee. To the extent that this fact is public, the manager "teaches" other employees to behave in the same way. On the other hand, the manager who encourages employees to put customers' interests before their own is "teaching" them to be generous and accommodating.

For managerial work, developing virtues or vices is important for several reasons:

1. The manager must know that moral learning takes place all the time: in those who make the decisions, those who authorize them, those who will have to support them or block them, those who execute them and, often, in those who observe them. This happens whether or not the decision maker knows or realizes this.[6]

2. Moral learning is the result of the actions' "what for" – that is, the agent's intent. That is why the morality of an action (such as giving money to a needy person) cannot be judged solely from its external outcome (the need that is covered) but it is also necessary to consider the agent's intention (compassion for that person or personal vainglory and desire for ostentation).

3. Any decision must be assessed from several viewpoints: its economic and psychological results, operational learning, and also evaluative or ethical learning. The decision's economic appropriateness is not sufficient justification on its own. It must be correct from all viewpoints, and it is the manager's responsibility to make sure that this happens.

4. The consequences of this learning are not automatic but depend on the moral quality of the organization and its people – that is, the organization's mission, objectives, structure, incentives and culture – and also the circumstances prevailing at the time (economic crisis, euphoria at successes, financial difficulties, conflicts, etc.).

5. Decisions have consequences for each individual's conscience but they go beyond that. For example, an employee who is ordered by his boss to lie to a customer may gain his superiors' approval but he has learned to lie. Then the employee may consider himself authorized to lie to the company but his boss will not understand the relationship between the initial order and the consequences. A decision that causes negative evaluative learning is described as inconsistent (Argandoña, 2015b) because it gives rise to behavioral changes that we know will happen but not how, when or with what consequences. Such aspects are unknown because, among other reasons, they depend on factors such as the frequency and direction of learning, the degree of trust that has been developed within the organization, and what is happening in the firm's immediate environment.[7]

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[6] Here, we are not discussing these people's degree of moral or legal responsibility.

[7] Empirical studies on the results produced by certain forms of behavior often fail to take these conditions into account.

6. Decisions do not happen on their own. Many are part of continued or repeated strategies, policies or projects. Others give rise to repeated interactions between the manager and the employee and, in any case, they have lasting consequences for the agent. This means that the evaluation of an action must span a period of time. Except for certain specific and particularly important decisions, what really matters is not each decision's moral content but the impact on the agent's character.

7. Managers' moral responsibilities go beyond their individual personal decisions because these responsibilities also encompass the firm's mission, organization, structure, incentives and culture. "Managers who want to create and maintain ethics in their organizations need to know how structures, systems, people, and culture can be deployed to accommodate ethical behavior and make unethical behavior disadvantageous" (Hartman, 1998, p. 553).

A good manager makes good decisions from an economic viewpoint (financial return) but also to ensure a good work environment in the firm, to generate positive operational learning (knowledge and skills) for employees and for him or herself, and to generate evaluative learning (virtues). That is, the manager strives to take into account *all* the consequences of his actions for him or herself and for others.[8] At first sight, this seems an impossible task, for three reasons:

1. The very nature of management problems: there are complex human problems, with multiple dimensions (economic, technical, psychological, political, social and ethical). There are nonoperational problems, which cannot be identified from their symptoms. And there are problems in which many variables are involved, where it is impossible to know a priori which ones are the most important. The solution does not follow a predetermined sequence of operations and it is often impossible to reach a consensus on what needs to be done.

2. The setting in which these problems manifest themselves: managers have to make decisions on the basis of insufficient and uncertain information, with little time for reflection or consultation. They do so in a setting in which there is usually very little awareness of or concern about ethical issues, and they are under the obligation to ensure that they are effective and efficient. They have to produce results with authority and professionalism, knowing that any mistakes may have serious consequences.

3. There is yet another reason for skepticism when performing a searching ethical analysis of any decision: if the agent does not know how and when the behavioral changes caused by evaluative learning will happen, is it reasonable to expect the agent to be able to take into account all consequences of his or her decisions on him or herself and on other people (Argandoña, 2015b)? As Abbà (1992, pp. 127-128) explains: "It is relatively easy to make a decision of principles. Problems start when a subject as complex and fragile as the human subject seeks a path of self-realization in the complexity and variety of specific situations. There are problems for reason, which must seek out, anticipate, remember, invent and take account of so many relevant circumstances and, even before that, discern those circumstances, judge them and prepare a precise plan. There are problems for the will, which must issue desires and interests, overcoming impediments, pre-existing inclinations and indifference and there are problems for the passional appetites, which have great influence in this context: docility to respond to incentives

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[8] This is not consequentialism, which reduces the relevant consequences to a single dimension – the economic one – or a small number of dimensions, omitting evaluative learning.

and deterrents to amend his own objectives and to defer to the demands of higher criteria." However, he adds: "This place where fundamental decisions readily collapse is the place where virtue must reside." In other words, virtues end up helping the decision maker with a task that is not covered sufficiently by principles (deontological or utilitarian) so he or she can learn what is good.

Virtues

"Roughly, a virtue is a deep-seated trait of character that provides (normative) reasons for action together with appropriate motivations for choosing, feeling, desiring, and reacting well across a range of situations" (Alzola, 2012, p. 380). It is an acquired, firm, stable quality that helps people perform actions focused on excellence, not mechanically but with freedom and effort. It has an intrinsic value and is not a means to achieve other ends (Cameron, 2011). Being virtuous to earn money, to get to the top of one's profession or receive media acclaim is absurd, because it induces action against virtue itself.[9]

The exercise of virtue has four dimensions, as Aristotle explains in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. T. H. Irwin, 1985):[10]

1) *Intellectual or cognitive*: a virtuous person "perceives a situation rightly – that is, notices and takes appropriate account of the salient features of a situation" (Hartman, 2008, p. 322). That person grasps the problem's ethical content, not on an abstract level through the application of certain general principles but on a concrete level, in the present environment and for the specific people affected by it. "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 191). The purpose of the decision is to solve a real, complex problem for which ethics is an important dimension.

2) *Emotional*: "Virtues are dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 149). This dimension reinforces the previous one. The problem does not leave the agent unmoved. His or her feelings drive the agent to action but he or she must not seek the emotionally most satisfactory or least contentious solution but the best solution from all viewpoints. The decision must be, above all, rational. The attitude to emotions must be to acknowledge them, express them and control them.

3) *Motivational*: virtues are not primarily acts but dispositions that arise, first, from the agent's intentions or motivations, and later, from the formation of habit. As we have said already, without the correct intent, the agent will never develop virtue.

In this dimension, the agent feels driven, committed, to act resolutely in the specific situation in which the agent finds him or herself, even though the decision chosen may not appeal to him or her (Pérez López, 1993). Such action includes the acceptance of moral obligations that imply

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[9] Virtue ethics has distinctive content and addresses many issues that are not relevant here. Cf., for example, Alzola (2012, 2015), Annas (2011), Harman (2003), Koehn (1995), Moore (2005), and Swanton (2003).

[10] Cf. Alzola (2015) and Hartman (2015).

commitments to other people and to society in general (Hartman, 1998, p. 551)[11] because the agent acts out of transcendent motivation.

4) *Behavioral*: at the conclusion of the process, the virtuous person carries out the chosen action, because he or she has the necessary strength of will to overcome short-term pressures and the temptations that may turn that person from his or her path (Alzola, 2012; Argandoña, 2011a, 2014; Polo, 1996). Virtues will "sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 219).

Virtues are not automatic mechanisms in the decision-making process. They do not dictate the specific actions that must be performed but enhance the agent's ability to choose and act (Abbà, 1992, p. 172), an ability that we could call self-governance or self-control (Pérez López, 1991; Argandoña, 2008a, 2008b). This ability manifests itself in the fact that a person chooses an alternative that is less attractive to him or her, even though that person can choose another alternative that, in the short term, is more satisfactory, while affirming his or her freedom to act in another way. Virtue by itself does not define the agent's actions. The direction taken by these actions depends on the person's situation and the relations he or she seeks to establish with his or her environment and with the goods that person finds in that environment (Abbà, 1992, p. 38).

In any case, observation of a virtuous action is not sufficient to define the existence of virtue. An arrogant person may perform an act of humility, either through error or because he or she hopes to receive praise, but this does not transform that person immediately into a humble person. And a person who acts in a specific case against what is virtuous is not totally lacking in virtue because of that (Curzer, 2005): "More needs to be said about the motives and intentions of the person, about his or her deliberation and reflection, about his or her emotions and values, and about his or her ends and motives" (Alzola, 2015, p. 302).[12]

All this forms part of moral character, which is "an individual's characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior associated with moral/ethical and immoral/unethical behavior" (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 6). The subject is not the performer of an isolated action but of a conduct, of a set of more or less ordered and interrelated actions that arise from that person's deepest and most enduring intentions, processes and emotions (Abbà, 1992, pp. 110 and 165). A person with a good moral character acts consistently in accordance with values that give shape and meaning to his life (Hartman, 1998; Kupperman, 2001).

To summarize, it is possible for a virtuous manager to become an excellent manager because he or she is developing the habits that enable that person to make better decisions, both now and in the future. These habits involve avoiding negative evaluative learning and, insofar as possible, facilitating positive learning, in the manager him or herself, in the organization and in the people

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[11] Alzola (2008, p. 354) highlights this dimension when he reminds us that "human beings are morally weak, especially when confronted with a resolute authority, a unanimous group which sees the world in a very different way than they do, or an intense situation that elicits 'counterdispositional' behaviors. Our weakness is not just cognitive – i.e., situational pressures make us lose our moral compass – but also motivational. We avoid exposing ourselves to disruptive social situations by telling others what we think."

[12] Aristotle (1985 Irwin edition) says that what makes a person virtuous is not the action observed but the outcome of the dimensions mentioned earlier: cognitive (knowing what is good), emotional (appraising it as good), motivational (wanting to do it) and behavioral (doing it).

who depend on the manager.[13] On this foundation, it is possible to develop an understanding of the different ways in which each of the virtues – in our case, humility – acts.[14]

Humility

Humility is a character strength associated with the virtue of temperance, which moderates the natural instinct to put oneself in front, to show superiority, stature or preeminence (Pieper, 1965). It was not always well understood because it was identified with a lack of self-esteem (Aristotle, 1985 Irwin edition). This explains why, for centuries, it was not considered a desirable trait for people in positions of government or leadership or those who had been invested with power and authority. However, once humility started to be understood properly, it became a full member of the list of virtues required for organization management.[15]

As we already explained in our discussion of virtues in general, in humility too there are four dimensions: 1) intellectual or cognitive, 2) motivational, 3) emotional, and 4) behavioral.[16] In turn, these dimensions can be viewed from an intrapersonal or interpersonal viewpoint (Argandoña, 2015a; Davis et al., 2011):

1. Intellectual or cognitive dimension. A humble person has at least two significant types of knowledge:

   a) Self-knowledge: the humble person possesses realistic and objective self-knowledge (Aquinas, *Summa theologiæ*, 2006 Gilby edition, vol. 44, 2a2ae, Q. 161, art. 6; Q. 162, art. 3 ad 2). This knowledge encompasses the person's abilities and understandings, personality and character, cognitive and operational strengths and weaknesses, imperfections, his or her material, spiritual and evaluative assets and liabilities, and the consequences of all this: the humble person's accomplishments, errors and successes.

For a manager, self-knowledge is essential if he or she is to make good decisions, shoulder his or her responsibilities, be more transparent, make fewer mistakes, be accountable, not hide or justify any mistakes, not have hidden agendas, etc. (Argandoña, 2015a).

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[13] A virtuous manager will need something more: for example, the knowledge and skills that are characteristic of a competent manager, which are also a moral duty for a person devoted professionally to managing organizations.

[14] MacIntyre (1984) points out other characteristics of virtues that may hold particular significance for business management: they are developed in the search for the goods that are inherent to practice (is management a practice?), they are an essentially community task in the context of certain traditions (are virtues meaningful in other business "traditions"?), they are developed in a narrative, through telling a story – that is, explaining a life's *telos* or purpose – and they do not seek to obtain material benefits or consequences. Cf. Moore (2015, pp. S102-S103).

[15] Humility is not a *role-specific* virtue but rather a *comprehensive* virtue that is necessary for all people and at all times (Audi, 2012, p. 278).

[16] Many authors list the ingredients of humility: for example, accurate self-assessment of abilities and achievements, self-awareness of mistakes and limitations, openness to new ideas, information and advice from others, capacity to keep successes and accomplishments in perspective, low self-focus, and appreciation of others (Tangney, 2005); self-awareness, developmental orientation or teachability, appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and low self-focus (Owens, 2009); manifest willingness to view oneself accurately, display of appreciation of others, and openness to feedback (Owens et al., 2013). To these, Ou et al. (2014) add low self-focus, self-transcendent pursuit and transcendent self-concept.

The agent's self-knowledge arises from three sources: 1) his or her own experience and self-reflection, with its biases and limitations; 2) what other people know about the agent and convey to him or her, and 3) the "abstract" or "rational" knowledge (Pérez López, 1993) that philosophy, science, history and other disciplines, including common knowledge and experience, provide about the agent.[17]

Objective self-knowledge is the means for realistic self-assessment and self-esteem (Brennan, 2007). The subject does not despise him or herself and neither does the subject find any reason to glorify him or herself unduly, which eliminates barriers in dealings with other people.

b) Knowledge of external reality and people: self-knowledge cannot be separated from the knowledge that the agent has about his or her environment, including other people, for at least two reasons. First, because that reality points to possibilities and limits in terms of the agent's actions, which in turn influence his or her self-knowledge. Second, because it enables the agent to define his or her "position in the world," which also forms part of the agent's self-knowledge. This may be important for business management, particularly in defining the organization's mission and the goals.

2. Motivational dimension. The agent possesses a "database" that contains his or her knowledge and experience. In each case, the agent draws from this what he or she considers relevant for understanding him or herself and the agent's environment. This is because humility is not an abstract disposition but is deployed in the concrete circumstances of each situation. However, the most important thing is the motivation, disposition or attitude that makes this knowledge possible. Here we identify five aspects:

a) Attitudes or dispositions to self-knowledge,[18] which include:

   i. The development, with effort and over a period of many years, of the necessary capabilities and skills to accomplish self-knowledge, and the willingness to continue doing so in the future or, at least, not prevent it, refusing to carry out any actions that might reduce this capability.

   ii. The attitude (operative habit) of recognizing one's defects and errors and one's accomplishments and abilities, of learning, of asking for forgiveness, of correcting defects and errors and nurturing accomplishments and abilities – including recognition of the possibility of acting improperly.

   iii. The disposition (virtue) to judge and appraise oneself realistically and, insofar as possible, objectively, and the self-respect that comes from this.

   iv. The disposition to act always in accordance with one's self-knowledge – that is, to be sincere and not try to hide one's weaknesses or exaggerate one's strengths.

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[17] The knowledge that here we call "abstract" plays another important role in virtues: to explain how we must behave and why. This is the rationality component in the acquisition of virtues. It is complemented by another, virtuality, which is the education of the will to acquire the corresponding operative habit (Pérez López, 1991).

[18] In this paper, words such as "attitudes" and "dispositions" are used to designate the nature of the operative habits or virtues, without seeking to give them the technical meaning they have in psychology, such as "behavioral dispositions to act in conformity with certain rules of action" (Alzola, 2015, p. 295).

v. The stable disposition not to be satisfied with what one sees in oneself but to try to improve it.[19]

vi. The possibility of being a model for others and the responsibility that derives from this (leading by example).

All of these aspects are closer to the sphere of will than to intelligence. The intellectual virtue of humility becomes a moral virtue.[20]

b) Attitudes to the knowledge of external reality. To make correct decisions, the agent needs the right dispositions to have objective and impartial knowledge about his or her environment. This forms part of the virtue of humility,[21] allowing recognition, for example, of the limitations imposed by the environment on the agent's ability to influence it.

c) Openness to others. This is the agent's disposition to receive information about him or herself, allowing him or herself to be known and corrected (teachability). This openness manifests itself in qualities such as not feeling threatened by the knowledge that others have about oneself, not having feelings of inferiority, not comparing oneself with others, being willing to learn from everyone, not depending on the approval of superiors, peers or inferiors, not concealing or justifying mistakes, not hiding successes or accomplishments but not exaggerating them either, not holding grudges, always being willing to forgive, and asking for counsel.

d) Attitudes to others. Some characteristics of humility are combined here with a battery of social virtues that receive input from self-knowledge and the attitudes and dispositions mentioned earlier. People who know and respect themselves are able to recognize the strengths, merits and achievements of others, without exaggerating or belittling them. They are able to show respect to others, exercise benevolence and justice, help others, share projects with them, give them opportunities, be patient, show empathy and approachability, etc.[22]

If the agent values humility as a virtue, he or she will also try to foster it in others. Other manifestations are empowerment of others (encouraging them to act), accountability (taking into account people's specific abilities to give them appropriate responsibilities) and stewardship (proposing shared goals), among many others (Sousa and Dierendonck, 2015).

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[19] This may be viewed as an act of arrogance. Whether or not it is will depend on the agent's intention.

[20] The virtuous person does what he or she must, what is correct. That person knows what he or she does, acts according to correct reason (through appreciation of what is morally good) and evaluates adequately what he or she does (Hursthouse, 1999).

[21] This is what some authors call the transcendent dimension of humility (Furey 1986): to feel connected or part of a reality that is greater than oneself, such as God, the universe, beauty, science or moral perfection.

[22] The humble person seeks to develop authentic personal relationships with other people who have an epistemic value (they contribute to psychological development, self-understanding, self-conception and the ability to examine oneself with a critical eye), emotional value (they offer the opportunity to express one's feelings and engage in interactive relationships) and moral value (they develop character traits that are possible only in authentic relationships, such as gratitude and love) (Sakalaki and Fousiani, 2012).

One outcome of all this may be an atmosphere of trust and cooperation within the organization: breaking barriers, respecting, listening, inviting everyone to take part, supporting initiatives and participation, putting the firm's interest before personal interests, channeling motivations, etc.[23]

Another outcome may be the avoidance of negative learning. (Everyone is able to accept their responsibilities, they know themselves, they apologize, they include others, etc.) A further step could be to support people's development (including their ethical development). This, in turn, fosters unity in the firm – first around the mission or purpose but also as a human group, with some form of friendship (Argandoña, 2011b).

e) Low self-focus. This is a summary of the previous attitudes: not being full of oneself, keeping one's skills and achievements in perspective, not concentrating on oneself, attaching value to other people's things, etc.

3. Emotional dimension.

a) Emotions may act as motivators for humility, triggering or enhancing attitudes and dispositions related to this virtue. This could be in a positive sense (for example, giving prominence to other people) or in a negative sense (reacting with envy to other people's success).

b) Emotions can also inhibit these attitudes. Self-command or self-control helps prevent feelings and emotions from interfering with correct decisions.

4. Behavioral dimension.

a) Virtue is not confined to knowing what needs to be done nor to the disposition or wish to do it. It also moves the will to put into practice what has been decided.

b) The disposition to practice humility facilitates the exercise of other virtues or is even a necessary condition for them, to the extent that it is often difficult to identify humility as a distinct virtue. To quote the author of *Don Quixote*, "humility is the basis and foundation of all the virtues, and without it there is no other virtue worthy of the name" (Cervantes, 1613/1972, p. 205). Lack of humility is an impediment to exercising these virtues and, therefore, to performing acts that would be good governance objectively but which the arrogant or vain manager would not understand.

Other people are likely first to identify the actions related to these virtues and only later, after reflection and observation, will they see how these virtues are propped up by humility. In any case, behavior toward others will be mediated by these other virtues.[24] Humility gives its best fruit when it is combined with the other virtues, producing excellent moral character (Hartman, 1998).

Of these virtues, two deserve particular attention. One is prudence or practical wisdom, *auriga virtutum* or the charioteer of the virtues (Melé, 2009). It is prudence that enables us to judge, in each specific case, whether or not a humble action is an act of virtue: for example, whether it is

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[23] Within the relationships that are formed in an organization, the two parties – manager and employee – are active agents and both must practice virtues actively albeit, obviously, with different characteristics. Cf. Pérez López (1993) and Argandoña (2015b). Humility is a necessary virtue for both sides of a command-obedience relationship. The person who commands must be receptive to the initiative of the person who obeys, and the person who commands will not be fit to command if he or she is not able to obey. The person who obeys must always obey with initiative, which implies a certain exercise of command (Polo, 2012).

[24] This may shed light on the indirect role of humility in leadership.

advisable to place complete trust in a team member who is trying to manipulate a decision for his or her sole personal benefit.

The other virtue that deserves particular attention is magnanimity. The twin virtue of humility, it engages the will with that which tends toward the sublime (Aquinas, *Summa theologiæ*, 2006 Gilby edition, vol. 42, 2a2ae, Q. 129, art. 1). The magnanimous person feels called to do extraordinary things and makes him or herself worthy of them, acting with humility, sincerity and honesty, without any conceit or flattery (Pieper, 1965). Llano (2004) points out that humility is the virtue that guides decisions in the study and diagnosis phase, in the same way that magnanimity guides decisions in the choice phase.

Conclusions

We have explained the characteristics of humility, mostly in the field of organization management. But what makes this virtue different?

We believe that the vices that are contrary to humility (arrogance, hubris and vanity) always start as deficiencies in knowledge, caused by not knowing the truth about oneself, one's projects and environment. Thus, the humble person is above all someone who has developed, to a greater or lesser extent, the operative habit of knowing him or herself, his or her capabilities, virtues and accomplishments, and his or her weaknesses and shortcomings, and of allowing him or herself to be known by others. The consequence of this operative habit is realistic and humble knowledge, which is what makes this virtue operative in managerial work.

This attitude to self-knowledge is confirmed immediately by the decision of the will to act in accordance with it, showing itself openly as it is, without trying to exaggerate its positive aspects or conceal its negative aspects.

The disposition to know oneself is manifested above all in interpersonal relationships. In a humble agent, these relationships will not be selfish because, if the agent nurtures the habit of knowing, assessing and respecting him or herself, he or she will also be in a position to know these people, their capabilities and accomplishments, their successes and failures. With a constructive outlook, he will be able to appraise them, respect them and help them.[25]

A humble person's behavior toward other people is developed through a range of prosocial virtues that derive from humility: love, affinity, courtesy, respect, gratitude, acknowledgement, trust, patience, etc. These may manifest themselves, to a greater or lesser degree, without humility but they will probably be absent in a proud or arrogant person.[26] Humility is enhanced by the other virtues and, if it is missing, the others will become largely sterile.

A manager is motivated to be humble by his or her quest for what is good for others (customers, suppliers, employees, owners, etc.) and for him or herself – that is, to act with transcendent motivation (Pérez López, 1991), avoiding negative evaluative learning and favoring positive learning. The other motivations (extrinsic and intrinsic) are not appropriate for creating and

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[25] This projection of humility onto interpersonal relationships may not always take place but it cannot be absent if humility is a well-grounded virtue.

[26] In any case, humility, like all virtues, must not be exercised as a means to other ends, such as professional success, reputation or profit (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 198; Moore, 2015).

developing virtues.[27] However, the power of evaluative learning should not be underestimated. If a person acts systematically moved by a transcendent motivation, even if that motivation is weak, he or she will probably "learn" new ways and motivations to fulfill other people's needs, especially if the transcendent motivation is projected onto the firm's mission, structure and culture.[28] One consequence of this is that humility can never be assumed as won (or lost) but must be built each day.

Humility's transformative capacity within the firm, like that of all the personal virtues, manifests itself first and foremost in the agent. Its impact on other people will be conditional on their capacity for evaluative learning. If those people continue to be proud and selfish, the organization's moral quality and its practices are unlikely to improve. However, the humble manager will improve: that is why we said that the most deep-seated reason why a manager should be virtuous is that he or she wishes to be an excellent manager. Nevertheless, humility is never an invitation to inaction, passivity or conformism. A humble manager will often have to be heroic to live this virtue him or herself (mediated by prudence) and to give it life for others, without compromising – even minimally – on the goals integrated into the firm's mission or purpose.

Virtues do not guarantee a project's financial success, which depends on many conditions. Some of these are external (demand, credit, costs, technology, and competition), while some are found within the firm (structure, organization, culture, and technology). There are other conditions within the manager him or herself (technical and financial knowledge, abilities, attitudes, values and virtues) and within other people in the organization (knowledge and abilities, willingness to cooperate, commitment, trust, and loyalty). However, in the absence of virtues in the senior manager and without a sufficiently developed moral character, there are many reasons to believe that the firm will not progress, even if it achieves spectacular financial results in the short term. The impacts of a lack of humility are not unequivocal but are mediated by many factors in the environment, in the firm and in people.

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[27] Normally, several motivations lie behind each action. The key is to identify the dominant motivation, the one that will prevail in the event of conflict.

[28] In the same way as sympathy for someone may turn into a friendship (Argandoña, 2011b) or dispassionate abidance with the law may be the first step to understanding the firm's social responsibilities.

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