Adebowale Jeremy Adetayo

Phronesis and library selection

Dilemmas in Nigerian faith-based universities

Nigeria is a religiously diverse country, home to between 250 and 400 different ethnolinguistic tribes with three prominent religious beliefs. Except for the southwest, which has a large population of Christians, Muslims, and indigenous African religions, the southern regions are predominantly Christian. Islam is widely practiced by the Hausa-Fulani in the northern areas, whereas Christianity is practiced by numerous minority ethnic groups in the region. This diversity can also be found in universities, as religious organizations control many private institutions.

Christian groups own the most well-known and prestigious private institutions in Nigeria. Among these universities are Babcock University, which the Seventh-day Adventist Church owns; Covenant and Landmark University, which the Living Faith Church owns; Bowen University, which is owned by the Nigeria Baptist Convention; Redeemer's University, which is owned by the Redeemed Christian Church of God; and Joseph Ayo Babalola University, which is owned by the Christ Apostolic Church. Other faith-based universities include Crawford University, which is owned by the Apostolic Faith Mission; Mountain Top University, owned by the Mountain of Fire Ministry; Madonna University, owned by the Catholic Church; and Ajayi Crowder University, which the Anglican Communion owns.

These universities frequently hire people of various religious beliefs, including in the library workforce. Because of the varied moral identities of different religions, these religious variations within the library staff frequently generate library resource selection dilemmas. Given that selection dilemmas may be characterized by value-laden moral dilemmas, the concept of phronesis is a viable solution to these dilemmas.

Phronesis is practical knowledge that expresses itself in prudential judgement that negotiates and acts on confusing circumstances for the common good.[1] Phronesis is not trapped in the knowledge of what is excellent. It is a far better understanding of how to cope with ethically difficult circumstances in real life, situations in which our standards and values must be implemented.[2]

Guided by morals and ethics, phronesis is a higher quality tacit knowledge acquired by practical experience, information that enables one to make deliberate and foresighted judgments and take appropriate and proper action in a specific circumstance. A phronetic strategy of this type would be both transdisciplinary and morally informed.

Adebowale Jeremy Adetayo is systems librarian at Adeleke University Ede, Osun State, Nigeria, email: adebowale.adetayo@adelekeuniversity.edu.ng

Phronesis: Understanding the concept

In the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle posits that there are three human dispositions: *episteme* (epistemology, theory, or knowledge), *techne* (techniques or skills), and *phronesis* (ethical/ moral judgment, practical wisdom, or prudence). Out of these three dispositions, *phronesis* is the highest virtue that humans should aspire to possess.

The term *phronesis* or "practical wisdom" has been defined in terms of practical common sense, moral insight, and practical intelligence, to name a few. However, each of these translations represents a different aspect of the popular Aristotelian concept. Focusing on the ethical and moral character, emphasis is on the imparting attention of rationality and the nature of perception and insight of *phronimos* (prudence or far-sightedness).

Furthermore, phronesis is a moral and intellectual virtue and is defined as the capability to decide and take on the best possible action in a context-specific situation to work for the common good.[3] Phronesis is not about producing things, it is about value judgment. Phronesis does not aim to present rules, regulations, and techniques perfect for all circumstances, instead it stresses the adjustment and fine tuning of knowledge, particularly in a specific situation.

Phronesis and library resources selection dilemma

Library resources include print and nonprint materials and are mostly made up of books and periodicals.[4] In most Nigerian institutions, the acquisition library is in charge of acquiring these resources by purchase, gifts, or exchange. The selection of these resources necessitates adhering to the criteria outlined in the selection policy. However, acquisition librarians at Nigerian faith-based university libraries are frequently confronted with dilemmas that make it difficult to acquire resources ethically and without bias or restriction. In order to solve these problems, phronesis is a possible option.

The most recent conceptualization of phronesis suggests that phronesis must perform four separate but linked tasks and that these functions may be represented by a four-component model.[5] These functions are known as constitutive functions, integrative functions, blueprint functions, and emotion regulation functions.[6] Kristján Kristjánsson's study suggests using phronesis in the selection dilemma of materials in faith-based university libraries within this framework. Acquisition librarians will face several situations that will need them to use their knowledge and skills and their phronesis while they work on obtaining resources for the library.

Constitutive function is the capacity to recognize an ethically salient circumstance and identify the appropriate virtue(s) germane to that scenario. At this phase, after identifying a conspicuous moral aspect of a specific circumstance requiring a reaction, librarians will be able to weigh many options and decide that, for example, bravery is necessary when the danger to one's work is not overwhelming. However, the item at stake is exceedingly valued.

For example, faculty A needs a necessary book for a forthcoming accreditation process. However, the acquisition librarian in charge discovered that the requested book is too expensive and exceeds the amount authorized for faculty A. Simultaneously, the librarian has budgeted for faculty B, who is also preparing for accreditation. Nonetheless, management expects the librarian to prepare adequately for the accreditation for both faculties using the funds allotted. If the librarian decides to buy the book for faculty A, faculty B may suffer
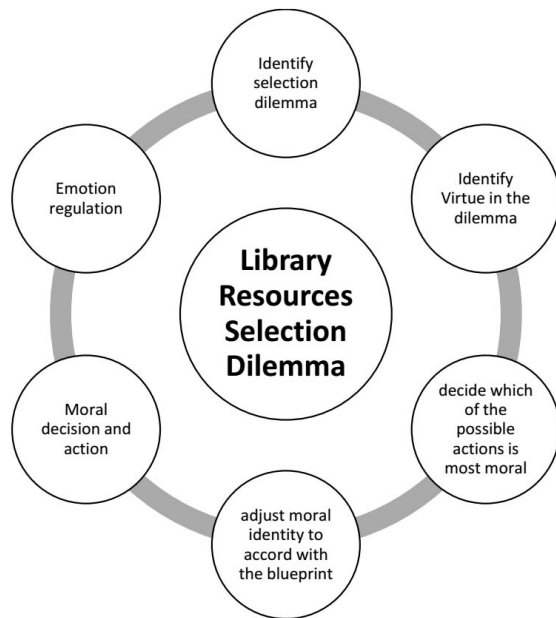
Figure 1. Library resources selection phronetic model.

as a result. If the funds allocated to faculty B are solely used for faculty B, faculty A may fail the accreditation exercise. In this ethical quandary, the librarian must weigh the alternatives.

The integrative function allows the individual to choose the most moral of the possible actions. Consider a situation where a librarian's religious views dictate that resources that contradict personal beliefs be avoided, but job loyalty pushes oppositely. Alternatively, a circumstance could arise in which professional ethics prohibits censorship but university management requires it. In these dilemmas, it is considered that the librarian will be best placed to evaluate such concerns in a way that demonstrates proper regard for all of the options and to integrate them alongside everything else that's found to be essential in life overall.

The blueprint function enables individuals to adjust their own moral identity to conform to the blueprint, thereby furnishing it with motivational force. This does not imply abandoning their moral identity, instead, it relies on the person's whole perspective of life and decides where particular goods fit on the broader framework and how they interact with other commodities. For example, a librarian who accepts a position in a faith-based institution that contradicts their personal views must be willing to modify moral identity to conform to the organization's blueprint without necessarily giving up independent thinking or beliefs.

The emotion regulation function is related to the actualization of appropriate moral emotion. At this step, the librarian's emotions are aligned with the interpretation of a given circumstance, moral judgement, and choice, providing motivation for the proper response.[7] It is important to note that emotional regulation should not be seen as emotional repression or policing, but rather as the infusion of emotion with reason, which calibrates the emotion in accordance with the ethically and logically justifiable medial state of feeling, and the consequent harmony between the two.[8]

Conclusion

The intellectual meta-virtue of phronesis's importance in libraries cannot be overstated. It must be the linchpin of any solid, comprehensive strategy to resolving ethical quandaries in libraries. To address library resource selection dilemmas, librarians at faith-based universities may use phronesis as part of the decision-making process. They can do this by recognizing the selection problem, finding the virtue in a dilemma, determining which of the potential actions is the most moral, adjusting moral identity to conform to the blueprint, making the moral decision, taking the appropriate action, and finally, controlling their emotions in light of their decision as shown in Figure 1.

This process has been used in my institution when we had a selection dilemma in which we had to select which resource to use for an approaching accreditation. At that time, we

lacked the funds to obtain the required resource. However, someone on the team proposed an unethical idea to use a controversial free platform to obtain the resources we required. This caused a dilemma since we could just go through with the idea without having to pay for it. We opted to find virtue in the issue after recognizing it. We asked ourselves several questions relating to the moral implications. After considering the ramifications, we decided to see whether there were any alternatives to get the same outcome without endangering moral standards. At the end of this phronetic process, we were able to make the best moral judgement by collaborating with another institution that had what we needed.

Notes

1.   R. Chia, 'Foreword', in *A Handbook of Practical Wisdom: Leadership, Organization and Integral Business Practice,* ed. Wendelin Küpers and David J. Pauleen, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781315564814/handbook-practical-wisdom-wendelin-küpers-david-pauleen.

2.   Anton van Niekerk, "The Ethics of Responsibility: Fallibilism, Futurity and Phronesis," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 6, no. 1 (28 August 2020): 207–27, https://doi.org/10.17570/STJ.2020.V6N1.A12.

3.   A. Ahmed and T. Z.A. Khan, "Phronesis Embedded Leadership and Its Role in Conflict Management," *Organization Theory Review* 1, no. 1 (2017): 11–22, https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/OTR/article/view/212.

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5.   Catherine Darnell et al., "Phronesis and the Knowledge-Action Gap in Moral Psychology and Moral Education: A New Synthesis?" *Human Development* 62, no. 3 (1 June 2019): 101–29, https://doi.org/10.1159/000496136.

6.   Kristján Kristjánsson, "Twenty-Two Testable Hypotheses about Phronesis: Outlining an Educational Research Programme', *British Educational Research Journal,* 2021, https://doi.org/10.1002/BERJ.3727.

7.   Olajumoke Bolanle Williams-Ilemobola et al., "Librarians' Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management in Private University Libraries in South-West and South-South, Nigeria," *Information Impact: Journal of Information and Knowledge Management* 12, no. 1 (1 September 2021): 33–46, https://doi.org/10.4314/iijikm.v12i1.3.

8.   K Kristjâansson, *Virtuous Emotions* (Oxford University Press, 2018), https://catalog.lib.kyushu-u.ac.jp/ja/recordID/4397385/. ⌖