

Proverbs: Ancient Wisdom for Contemporary Organizations

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the relevance of Proverbs for contemporary organizations. Topics in Proverbs that provide organizational wisdom include ethical business dealings, skillful work, hard work and discipline, giving and receiving advice, planning, effective work group interaction, truthfulness, wise speech, and leadership. Examples of proverbs illustrate each topic, and recommendations for application are included.

Proverbs: Ancient Wisdom for Contemporary Organizations

INTRODUCTION: ANCIENT WISDOM LITERATURE

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of writings intended as a teaching resource with application to daily life. Although written thousands of years ago, this ancient wisdom literature has application for the effective functioning of contemporary organizations. I will first give some background by discussing the definition of wisdom and the purpose of wisdom literature, briefly exploring how stylistic elements were used to emphasize content. The main portion of the paper will be dedicated to showing how the content of proverbs, as a type of wisdom literature, addresses concerns regarding human conduct within the context of organizational wisdom.

In ancient wisdom literature, wisdom was seen to have various but related meanings: meaning in life, meaning of life, the way to success, and the discovery of the order of creation and conformity to it (Bergant, 1984). Broadly, wisdom has to do with one's understanding of or approach to reality (Murphy, 1981). Although our view of wisdom today may be less comprehensive, nevertheless meaningfulness in one's job (e.g., Job Characteristics Theory, Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and in one's life (King & Napa, 1998) is still a valued goal.

Wisdom is not just intelligence or knowing facts, but also having insight and the ability to navigate life well, including the ability to avoid problems, the skill to deal with them when they arrive, and even the ability to interpret what other people are saying in order to react appropriately (Longman, 2002). This latter ability even sounds a bit like our modern construct of emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). Wisdom includes having discretion and pursuing action that is right, just, and equitable (Longman, 2002).

The primary view of this literature is that wisdom is obtained by observing people and things (Clements, 1992). Thus, wisdom literature was based on observation and could be in the form of instruction, a life experience example (e.g., *Job*), a debate (e.g., *Ecclesiastes*), or, most commonly, short proverbial sayings. The Biblical book of *Proverbs* expresses its purpose as follows:

For learning about wisdom and instruction,
 for understanding words of insight,
 for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
 righteousness, justice, and equity;
 to teach shrewdness to the simple,
 knowledge and prudence to the young—
 Let the wise also hear and gain in learning,
 and the discerning acquire skill,
 to understand a proverb and a figure,
 the words of the wise and their riddles. (1:2-6, *NRSV*)

Wisdom literature could be experiential (telling things the way they are and leaving the reader to draw practical conclusions) or didactic (characterizing a certain act or attitude so as to influence the reader's conduct; Murphy, 1981).

Wisdom literature in general, but particularly the proverb form, was intended to be pragmatic. Nevertheless, the writers wanted to communicate their advice well, and made use of figurative and poetic language (Clements, 1992; Longman, 2002). The parallelism and imagery, as well as the personification of Lady Wisdom in the Biblical book of *Proverbs* are good examples of this artistic language (Clements, 1990; Longman, 2002). The authors used these literary devices to get deeply into the mind of hearers, drawing them into answering and asking questions, perhaps helping them to work out painful issues (Kidner, 1985).

The content of proverbs, as with wisdom literature in general, deals with human experience set in the context of everyday life: home, family, marketplace, political and other

organizations (Atkinson, 1996; Clements, 1992; Murphy, 1981). As Atkinson states, “It is by reflecting on what actually makes for the best in home life and social relationships that the wise are able to pass on to others what they have discovered” (p. 25). Proverbs depict “the art of living skillfully in whatever actual conditions we find ourselves” (Peterson, 1996, p. 282)—they describe a life that is well-managed (Kidner, 1985). Because they deal with human nature, many proverbs are timeless and impart wisdom as much today as they did as far back as 1000BC when they were first written (Kidner, 1964).

Proverbs generally express an insight widely held to be true—though not necessarily followed. Perhaps we could call “Rewarding A While Hoping for B” (Kerr, 1995) an Organizational Behavior proverb (Kerr even uses the word “folly”!). Proverbs and other wisdom literature also recognize the idea of contingency, being sensitive to the context (Longman, 2002).

For example:

Do not answer fools according to their folly,
or you will be a fool yourself.
Answer fools according to their folly,
or they will be wise in their own eyes. (26:4-5, *NRSV*)

The correct action depends on the right time and circumstance.

PROVERBS FOR CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONS

In this paper, I have chosen to focus on proverbs as a specific type of wisdom literature because it is the most applied in format and context. I have used the Biblical book of *Proverbs* as a representative of this type, both because of its wealth of examples relating to organizational life, as well as my own relative familiarity with this text. In contrast to other writing on the application of Proverbs to business (e.g., Zigarelli, 2004), I have chosen to take an explicitly inductive approach. Rather than using proverbs to support accepted business practices, proverbs

related to management were listed and then categorized into themes. Management principles explored in this paper were derived from these themes.

Following similar practices of other authors who use scripture in the context of their disciplines (e.g., Zigarelli, 2004), citations of proverbs given in this paper come from multiple versions. Zigarelli (2004) notes that no single version captures the entirety of the proverbs' meaning. One translation the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV; 1989)* a word-for-word translation using traditional language and current scholarship. Quotations are also taken from *The Message* (Peterson, 1996), a version specifically crafted to present vivid images and ideas in everyday language, and which resonates well with applications to contemporary organizational life. Using the combination of the two versions helps to underscore the proverbs' message.

The management literature has begun to discuss the concept of organizational wisdom, which involves "*the collection, transference and integration of individuals' wisdom and the use of institutional and social processes (e.g., structure, culture, leadership) for strategic action.*" (Kessler, 2004). The desired result of organizational wisdom is an effective organization, one that has a clear mission, carefully-planned strategic goals leading to anticipated results, cohesive and productive teams, good leadership, and ethical, skilled, and hard-working employees. Organizational wisdom cannot exist without individual wisdom, and even individual wisdom is dependent upon organizational members being willing and able to acquire, share, and act on each other's knowledge and experience. Taken together, *Proverbs* depicts many attributes of an effective organization. Good leaders promote integrity in business dealings, hard work, and skilled work. They foster organizational wisdom through information sharing, planning, and constructive feedback. Leaders model interpersonal attributes, such as being truthful, circumspect, and calm, that lead to positive consequences at the group and organizational level.

These proverbs may suggest action, describe consequences, or describe contrasts between optimal and suboptimal states. Ethical behavior is emphasized, of course, but also simply useful suggestions.

Business Dealings

Proverbs makes several explicit references to business dealings, focusing particularly on honesty and integrity. Cheating is explicitly discouraged.

Switching price tags and padding the expense account
are two things that God hates. (20:10, *Message*)

Curses on those who drive a hard bargain!
Blessings on all who play fair and square! (11:26, *Message*)

Honest scales and balances are the Lord's;
all the weights in the bag are his work. (16:11, *NRSV*)

God hates cheating in the marketplace
he loves it when business is aboveboard. (11:1, *Message*)

Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle,
but those who gather little by little will increase it. (13:11, *NRSV*)

The proverbs advocate ethical behavior, not merely complying with legal standards. Statement of the consequences for dishonest transactions includes being found out and losing wealth in the long run, thus advocating a utilitarian approach to ethics (Hosmer, 1995) that goes beyond merely complying with legal standards. Integrity is viewed as an important aspect of wisdom in a work setting (Manz, Manz, Marx, & Neck, 2001). Driving a “hard bargain” is not the ultimate goal. The principles expressed here are consistent with the emphasis on customer service in business (Schneider & Bowen, 1999), whether the customers be external or internal. Furthermore, effective internal customer service facilitates transference of organizational wisdom (Mohrman, Cohen, & Mohrman, 1995). Zigarelli (2004) has also noted the relevance of

proverbs such as these for internal business relationships such as giving honest, accurate performance evaluations.

Skillful Work

Good, skillful work in general is commended, and merits both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards:

One who is slack in work
is close kin to a vandal. (18:9, *NRSV*)

Bad work gets paid with a bad check;
good work gets solid pay. (11:18, *Message*)

Well-spoken words bring satisfaction,
well-done work has its own reward. (12:13, *Message*)

Do you see those who are skillful in their work?
they will serve kings;
they will not serve common people. (22:29, *NRSV*)

Note the suggestion to observe others, again a means for gaining wisdom. Exhortation to skillful work includes less tangible products such as well-spoken words. Poor work is disparaged and will receive just consequences. This focus on quality is consistent with the current focus on quality and satisfying the customer as evidenced by TQM efforts, the Baldrige Award, and programs such as Six-Sigma. Although these programs emphasize quality at the organizational level, they can only be achieved by individuals giving high priority to quality work and to sharing knowledge together with others in the organization.

Discipline versus Laziness

In addition to skillful work and planning, *Proverbs* advocates hard work and discipline. In keeping with the proverb form, the reasoning is practical—bread on the table, freedom, and a smooth path. The contrast between diligence and laziness is emphasized.

In all toil there is profit;
but mere talk leads only to poverty. (14:23, *NRSV*)

The hand of the diligent will rule,
while the lazy will be put to forced labor (12:24, *NRSV*)

The one who stays on the job has food on the table;
the witless chase whims and fancies. (12:11, *Message*)

The way of the lazy is overgrown with thorns,
but the path of the upright is a level highway. (15:19, *NRSV*)

Make hay while the sun shines—that's smart;
go fishing during harvest—that's stupid. (10:5, *Message*)

Lazy people make ridiculous excuses: "The lazy person says, "There is a lion outside!/I shall be killed in the streets" (22:13, *NRSV*), while motivated workers accomplish their tasks: "The appetite of workers works for them;/their hunger urges them on" (16:26, *NRSV*). Lazy individuals are portrayed in vivid terms:

The lazy person buries a hand in the dish,
and will not even bring it back to the mouth. (19:24, *NRSV*)

As a door turns on its hinges,
so does a lazy person in bed. (26:14, *NRSV*)

These two proverbs are good examples of the experiential type of proverb discussed earlier that tells things the way they are and leaves readers to draw their own conclusion. The following passage is more didactic, using the ant as a role model for showing initiative instead of doing nothing:

Go to the ant, you lazybones;
consider its ways and be wise.
Without having any chief
or office or ruler,
it prepares its food in summer
and gathers its sustenance in harvest.
How long will you lie there, O lazybones?
When will you rise from your sleep?

A little sleep, a little slumber,
 a little folding of the hands to rest,
 and poverty will come upon you like a robber,
 and want, like an armed warrior. (6:6-11, *NRSV*)

Proverbs clearly states the consequences for being lazy:

The lazy person does not plow in season;
 harvest comes, and there is nothing to be found. (20:4, *NRSV*)

Laziness brings on deep sleep;
 an idle person will suffer hunger. (19:15, *NRSV*)

Do not love sleep, or else you will come to poverty;
 open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread. (20:13, *NRSV*)

Diligent work gets a warm commendation;
 shiftless work earns an angry rebuke. (14:35, *Message*)

The appetite of the lazy craves, and gets nothing,
 while the appetite of the diligent is richly supplied (13:4, *NRSV*)

A lazy life is an empty life,
 but "early to rise" gets the job done. (12:27, *Message*)

The craving of a lazy person is fatal,
 for lazy hands refuse to labor (21:25, *NRSV*)

Unfortunately, there are consequences for others as well: "Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes,/so are the lazy to their employers" (10:26, *NRSV*). These proverbs are consistent with organizational behavior research supporting the importance for organizations of hiring employees with conscientiousness as a personality trait (Mount & Barrick, 1995). A primary criteria for consistently great organizations is to "get the right people on the bus" (Collins, 2001).

Planning

Achieving organizational goals, such as developing human capital in organizations by first "getting the right people on the bus," requires planning. *Proverbs* also advocates this important management function, suggesting that careful planning leads to success: "The plans of

the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want” (21:5, *NRSV*). Although a dynamic business environment requires decisions to be made quickly, neglecting to take the time necessary to plan can be a major management pitfall. Effective planning also requires gathering knowledge:

Plans are established by taking advice;
wage war by following wise guidance. (20:18, *NRSV*)

The wise lay up knowledge,
but the babbling of a fool brings ruin near. (10:14, *NRSV*)
An intelligent person is always eager to take in more truth;
fools feed on fast-food fads and fancies. (15:14, *Message*)

Dear friend, guard Clear Thinking and Common Sense with your life;
don't for a minute lose sight of them. (3:21, *Message*)

Sound thinking makes for gracious living,
but liars walk a rough road.
A commonsense person lives good sense;
fools litter the country with silliness. (13:15-16, *Message*)

Knowledge means more than simply collecting information; it also means insightful analysis of that situation. Note that the quotations allude to both efficiency and effectiveness. There is also a relevant warning that one can chase after transient schemes that are not really wisdom at all.

Seeking and Receiving Advice

An important aspect of gathering information for planning and other purposes is accepting suggestions from knowledgeable others. Sharing organizational knowledge includes giving, accepting, and using constructive feedback in ways that lead to personal, and eventually organizational, effectiveness (Probst, 1998). It implies a desire to learn as well as to reflect critically on one's own behavior. Wisdom implies double-loop learning—not just attempting to solve immediate problems, but engaging in learning that addresses the root causes of those problems (Argyris, 1991). “Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still” (9:9,

NRSV). The following proverbs illustrate the importance of knowledge transference and integration:

An intelligent mind acquires knowledge,
and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. (18:15, *NRSV*)

Buy truth and do not sell it;
buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding. (23:23, *NRSV*)

Apply your mind to instruction,
and your ears to words of knowledge. (23:12, *NRSV*)

A wise heart takes orders;
an empty head will come unglued. (10:8, *Message*)

Arrogant know-it-alls stir up discord,
but wise men and women listen to each other's counsel. (13:10, *Message*)

Receiving negative feedback is not always pleasant, but perceptive individuals know that it is wise to seek improvement for the betterment of both themselves and the organization.

Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life,
but one who rejects a rebuke goes astray. (10:17, *NRSV*)

Poverty and disgrace are for the one who ignores instruction,
but one who heeds reproof is honored. (13:18, *NRSV*)

Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,
but those who hate to be rebuked are stupid. (12:1, *NRSV*)

Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom for the future. (19:20, *NRSV*)

Humility in receiving correction is also related to admitting and learning from failure (Melrose, 1995). *Proverbs* 6:1-3 is a warning not to make a commitment one cannot keep, but rather to admit one's mistakes.

Dear friend, if you've gone into hock with your neighbor
or locked yourself into a deal with a stranger,
If you've impulsively promised the shirt off your back

and now find yourself shivering out in the cold,
 Friend, don't waste a minute, get yourself out of that mess. (6:1-3, *Message*)

Organizational decision makers can become so committed to a course of action that they continue in it even though objective knowledge of the situation would suggest otherwise. They seek to preserve the status quo or even engage in escalation of commitment rather than to admit that the initial decision was wrong (Hammond, Keeney, & Raiffa, 1998).

At the same time, those who give advice or feedback need to consider the method in which they communicate information: "A gentle tongue is a tree of life,/but perverseness in it breaks the spirit" (15:4, *NRSV*).

Truthfulness

As organizational members interact with each other, information exchange must be truthful, circumspect, well-spoken, and without anger. Although *Proverbs* does not apply these sayings to organizations directly, it provides good advice for the transference and integration of organizational wisdom. Truthfulness, required in order for information exchange between employees to lead to organizational wisdom, is highly commended:

The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom,
 but the perverse tongue will be cut off. (10:31, *NRSV*)

Truthful lips endure forever,
 but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. (12:19, *NRSV*)

A truthful witness saves lives,
 but one who utters lies is a betrayer. (14:25, *NRSV*)

Honesty lives confident and carefree,
 but Shifty is sure to be exposed.
 An evasive eye is a sign of trouble ahead,
 but an open, face-to-face meeting results in peace. (10:9-10, *Message*)

Truthful witness by a good person clears the air,
 but liars lay down a smoke screen of deceit. (12:17, *Message*)

Don't talk out of both sides of your mouth;
 avoid careless banter, white lies, and gossip. (4:24, *Message*)

Truthfulness is essential for establishing and maintaining trust, whether it be among coworkers, team members, leaders and followers, or with other stakeholders.

Wise Speech

Gentle, helpful advice and truthfulness are both examples of the more general principle of wise speech. Communication that is careful, deliberate, and responsible benefits the organization and the individuals in it, both in terms of goal achievement and morale:

The mind of the wise makes their speech judicious,
 and adds persuasiveness to their lips. (16:23, *NRSV*)

The more talk, the less truth;
 the wise measure their words. (10:19, *Message*)

Rash words are like sword thrusts,
 but the tongue of the wise brings healing. (12:18, *NRSV*)

Frivolous talk provokes a derisive smile;
 wise speech evokes nothing but respect. (14:3, *Message*)

Irresponsible talk makes a real mess of things,
 but a reliable reporter is a healing presence. (13:17, *Message*)

Knowledge flows like spring water from the wise;
 fools are leaky faucets, dripping knowledge. (15:2, *Message*)

The clever do all things intelligently,
 but the fool displays folly. (13:16, *NRSV*)

The words of the wicked are a deadly ambush,
 but the speech of the upright delivers them. (12:6, *NRSV*)

The mouth of a good person is a deep, life-giving well,
 but the mouth of the wicked is a dark cave of abuse. (10:11, *Message*)

Wise speech is supportive of fellow employees and gives one credibility. Wise organizational members are circumspect and do not have reputation for idle gossip. Their words can be trusted. Kindness and gentleness in speech may make the listener more receptive to the content of the message.

A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger. (15:1, *NRSV*)

In contrast, angry words harm relationships and impede information flow. Several proverbs advocate managing and controlling anger allow relationships, and the information exchange derived from these relationships, to flourish:

One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city. (16:32, *NRSV*)

A fool gives full vent to anger,
but the wise quietly holds it back. (29:11, *NRSV*)

Those with good sense are slow to anger,
and it is their glory to overlook an offense. (19:11, *NRSV*)

A violent tempered person will pay the penalty;
if you effect a rescue, you will only have to do it again. (19:19, *NRSV*)

Fools show their anger at once,
but the prudent ignore an insult. (12:16, *NRSV*)

Slowness to anger makes for deep understanding;
a quick-tempered person stockpiles stupidity. (14:29, *Message*)

Work Group Interaction

In addition to suggestions for organizational interaction in general, *Proverbs* is replete with helpful advice for work group interaction. Effective groups need to share organizational knowledge and reduce interpersonal conflict in order make decisions and to be productive (Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, & Bourgeois, 1997); however, effective information exchange can be

difficult within groups (Dose, 2003). *Proverbs* addresses all of these issues. The writer recognized that many tasks cannot be done alone: “. . . do not rely on you own insight” (3:5, *NRSV*). Rather, work may require the expertise of several people (Mohrman et al., 1995), “Without counsel, plans go wrong,/but with advisors they succeed” (15:22 *NRSV*). *Proverbs* even appears to recognize the benefits of techniques such as brainstorming (Osborn, 1957), “Iron sharpens iron,/and one person sharpens the wits of another” (27:17, *NRSV*) . . . and the problems with interpersonal conflict, “Do not quarrel with anyone without cause,/when no harm has been done to you” (3:30, *NRSV*). A proverb in *Ecclesiastes* shows how individuals working together can be more productive: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.”(4:9-10, *NRSV*). Finally, *Proverbs* shows the implications for selection: “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise;/but the companion of fools will suffer” (13:20, *NRSV*). Team composition in terms of both values and skills is important for organizational success, particularly for knowledge workers (Dose & Klimoski, 1999; Mohrman et al., 1995).

Leadership

Good leaders embody the preceding qualities. They understand the business, provide motivation and guidance to their followers, love truth, speak knowledgeably, kindly, and judiciously, and are slow to become angry. Effective leaders not only exhibit these characteristics themselves, but they help their followers to grow, become accountable, correct unacceptable behavior, and learn to emulate the leader’s wise example. Good leaders create loyal followers and foster effective communication among them. They have a significant influence in creating the culture through which the organization can prosper. Although *Proverbs*

initially spoke of “kings,” these sayings are applicable to leaders of all types, as evidenced by Peterson's (1996) contemporary translation, *The Message*. Many of these proverbs also show the relationship of leadership to other aspects of organizational wisdom.

Love and truth form a good leader;
 sound leadership is founded on loving integrity. (20:28, *Message*)

The mark of a good leader is loyal followers;
 leadership is nothing without a following. (14:28, *Message*)

Without good direction, people lose their way;
 the more wise counsel you follow, the better your chances. (11:14, *Message*)

Good-tempered leaders invigorate lives;
 they're like spring rain and sunshine. (16:15, *Message*)

Leaders gain authority and respect
 when the voiceless poor are treated fairly. (29:14, *Message*)

A good leader motivates,
 doesn't mislead, doesn't exploit. (16:10, *Message*)

Leaders who know their business and care
 keep a sharp eye out for the shoddy and cheap. (20:8, *Message*)

After careful scrutiny, a wise leader
 makes a clean sweep of rebels and dolts. (20:26, *Message*)

Good leaders abhor wrongdoing of all kinds;
 sound leadership has a moral foundation.

Good leaders cultivate honest speech;
 they love advisors who tell them the truth. (16:12-13, *Message*)

Good leaders have integrity and encourage integrity in others. They provide renewal and energy to their followers, and merit respect and loyalty. Management scholars have observed that consistently great organizations have leaders who are strong-willed, yet humble (Collins, 2001). Proverbs concurs with the virtue of humility: “Do you see persons wise in their own eyes?/There is more hope for fools than for them” (26:12, *NRSV*).

Poor leadership can take many forms, including lack of restraint, sincerity, or good judgment, all of which have negative consequences:

An intemperate leader wreaks havoc in lives;
you're smart to stay clear of someone like that. (16:14, *Message*)

Mean-tempered leaders are like mad dogs;
the good-natured are like fresh morning dew. (19:12, *Message*)

It takes more than talk to keep workers in line;
mere words go in one ear and out the other. (29:19, *Message*)

When a leader listens to malicious gossip,
all the workers get infected by evil. (29:12, *Message*)

A leader of good judgment gives stability;
an exploiting leader leaves a trail of waste. (29:5, *Message*)

Among leaders who lack insight, abuse abounds,
but for one who hates corruption, the future is bright. (28:16, *Message*)

Leaders ignore these instructions concerning wisdom at their own peril: "The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense" (10:21, *NRSV*). Although proverbs apply to organizational members at any level, leaders have greater responsibility for financial, human, and other resources, and must apply wisdom to their decisions. Although organizational leaders set an example for the rest of the organization to follow, they must still be willing to seek and take counsel: ". . . Fools despise wisdom and instruction" (1:7, *NRSV*) and "Fools think their own way is right,/but the wise listen to advice (12:15, *NRSV*)." Recent events (e.g., Enron, Arthur Andersen) have shown the consequences of unethical leadership that expresses little concern for the followers or for the organization as a whole: ". . . but the folly of fools misleads" (14:8, *NRSV*). Hopefully, other organizations and their leaders are wise enough to learn from these mistakes.

Summary and Implications

The previous section has explored the content of individual proverbs, classifying them into sets that address similar topics. Taken together, these proverbs are useful in multiple ways. First, as evidenced above, they provide a variety of suggestions to enhance organizational effectiveness by dealing with multiple aspects of organizational life. Second, they deal with behavior at the individual, group, and organizational levels. For example, individuals must plan their own work, but planning is important at an organizational level as well. Individuals must be proactive in seeking feedback, but institutional mechanisms can also be put into place to encourage feedback. Finally, their universality and timelessness gives weight to the advice they advocate. Multiple cultures advocate the same principles, and the advice given thousands of years ago is consistent with current organizational theory and empirical research. With this degree of support, awareness of the principles these proverbs advocate may encourage managers to apply them personally, but perhaps more importantly apply them to organizational systems in order to encourage such things as organizational wisdom. Techniques such as those used by the Hartwick classic cases, which use literature to explore organizational topics, might be used to disseminate the content and applicability of *Proverbs* to important organizational issues. The degree of emphasis of certain higher-order topics such as communication and diligence might indicate to managers and management instructors the relative importance that should be assigned to these topics in practice or instruction.

Conclusion

The topics discussed above represent the proverbs most applicable to organizational wisdom, as well as the counsels most emphasized by the book of *Proverbs*. Many would fall under the rubric of the following proverb: "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is

due;/when it is in your power to do it" (3:27, *NRSV*). This "good" might be advice, truth, leadership, or many other actions that foster organizational effectiveness through wise individual information exchange. Note that *Proverbs* views these good actions as being pragmatic as well.

In closing, the following passage illustrates the work of an omnipotent, caring Creator.

Wisdom is the speaker and the passage precedes a plea to the reader to listen to instruction.

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
 the first of his acts of long ago.
 Ages ago I was set up,
 at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
 When there was no depths I was brought forth,
 when there were no springs abounding with water.
 Before the mountains had been shaped,
 before the hills, I was brought forth—
 when he had not yet made earth and fields,
 or the world's first bits of soil.
 When he established the heavens, I was there,
 when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
 when he made firm the skies above,
 when he established the fountains of the deep,
 when he assigned to the sea its limits,
 so that the waters might not transgress his command,
 when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
 then I was beside him, like a master worker;
 and I was daily his delight,
 rejoicing before him always,
 rejoicing in his inhabited world
 and delighting in the human race. (8:22-31, *NRSV*)

God is depicted as ordered, just, and involved with both the physical universe and human relationships (Clements, 1992). Wisdom is a manifestation of divine providence; God works through wisdom to create a bond between his creative intention and the working of the world as we experience it.

In sum, these proverbs illustrate that wisdom has value both for people as individuals and collectively in groups and organizations. Two final proverbs sum up wisdom's worth:

Become wise for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. (2:10, *NRSV*)

Know that wisdom is such to your soul;
if you find it, you will find a future,
and your hope will not be cut off. (24:14, *NRSV*)

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