Virtue as Competence:

A Conceptual Integration of Competence Thinking with MacIntyrean Virtue Ethics

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Abstract

Recent management education debates identify room for greater emphasis on character building within business school pedagogies. As way forward, we suggest virtue ethics as an agent-centred character-building ethical approach that provides guidance in management education where norm- and outcome-oriented ethical approaches have limits. However, its whole-person and life-span perspective makes it difficult to develop virtue ethics competence in business schools. We thus conceptualise a *virtue as competence* learning framework for management. We do so by integrating Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue approach with the Intellectual–Behavioural–Personal (IBP) competence framework that specifies independent and interdependent dimensions of intellectual, behavioural and personal competence. The *virtue as competence* learning framework guides learners to develop virtue competence. We make three contributions: First, we explicitly address the whole-person and life-span perspective of virtue and thus address the lack of systematic approaches to virtue ethics learning in managerial studies. Second, by conceptually applying the IBP competence framework to the learning of a whole-person ethics approach, we address particularisation of competencies in the competence debate. Third, we offer concrete inspirations for a character-building pedagogy that develops whole-person competence and address the scarcity of ethics pedagogies that develop *behavioural* and *personal* competence.

Submission Keywords:

Flourishing; competence; virtue ethics; MacIntyre; management education.

Introduction

In their recent special issue, McPhail *et al.* (2024) imagine business schools as a force for good and pointedly ask "*where is character building in the business school pedagogy*"? We offer an answer by developing a *virtue as competence* learning framework for character building in business schools. Although dominant ethical frameworks fall in one of the three categories of deontological ethics, utilitarianism and virtue ethics (Rocchi and Bernacchio, 2023), business ethics education largely neglected virtue ethics as character-building ethics approach and focused on deontology and utilitarianism (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1994; Ferrero and Sison, 2014). In general terms, deontology offers clear guidance introducing principles to establish what is morally right. It has its limits when judgements include trade-offs between two undesirable behavioural options and insufficiently considers the consequences of ignoring contingencies' effects on actors (Marchese, Bassham and Ryan, 2002). Utilitarianism focuses on the greatest good for the greatest number, with the risk of not considering fundamental norms (e.g. inclusion of minorities), potentially supporting action that humans consider intrinsically wrong (Furman, 1990). While academic discourse developed nuanced responses to criticism of each approach (see Baron, Pettit and Slote, 1997), deontology and utilitarianism are rule-based and have been criticized for neglecting the role of the actor as moral agent (Solomon, 1992).

Virtue ethics, in contrast, is agent-centred (Annas, 1995) and asks what is best for oneself in one's attempt to living a good life, i.e. for one's human flourishing (Hartman, 2017). It looks at the coherence of a course of action with the person's attempt to live a good life and takes into account the social and historical context when evaluating behaviours. Virtue ethics further considers the interdependence of behaviour and character and thus constitutes "a more integrated, balanced, and nuanced framework" (Sison, Beabout and Ferrero, 2017, p. viii). While overshadowed during the Enlightenment, virtue ethics was revived by contemporary theorists

such as Anscombe (1958) and MacIntyre (1981). Only from the late 1990s onwards has virtue ethics gained recognition in the business ethics discussion (Alzola, Hennig and Romar, 2020).

Despite the increasing academic attention on virtue ethics (Sison *et al.*, 2018), its whole-person and life-span perspective focusing on character development makes it difficult to develop virtue ethics competence in business schools (Sison *et al.*, 2017). We address this by integrating virtue ethics with competence thinking to develop a *virtue as competence* learning framework. The choice of competence as the pedagogical concept to develop character building is guided by the learner-centrism of competence that corresponds with actor-centrism of virtue ethics and character building.

In our argument, we first introduce virtue ethics with human flourishing as purpose of human life, and the specific ethical approach by contemporary philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1994; 2007) that connects the achievement of a good life to three elements defining a virtue: (i) *practice* (contributing to the good inherent to an existing human activity with specific characteristics), (ii) *narrative unity of life* (coherence over one's life span across various roles), and (iii) *tradition* (embeddedness in the social and historical context). We then discuss competence thinking and introduce the Intellectual–Behavioural–Personal (IBP) competence framework (Laasch, Moosmayer and Antonacopoulou, 2023) that considers intellectual, behavioural and personal competence at an independent and interdependent level. We integrate the two approaches towards a *virtue as competence* learning framework that provides a conceptually grounded structure of distinct elements and processes for building whole-person virtue ethics competence. Finally, we present inspirations for applying the learning framework in educational practice.

We make three contributions. First, by conceptualising how learners can develop competence on each of the three core elements of MacIntyre's virtue approach, the framework

addresses the whole-person and life-span perspective that limits existing pedagogies (Sison *et al.*, 2017). Second, by conceptually applying the IBP competence framework to the learning of a whole-person ethics approach, we address the artificial separation of competence domains (Laasch *et al.*, 2023, p. 751) and contribute to the competence debate. Third, we offer concrete inspirations to develop *behavioural* and *personal* competence and thus go one step towards the character-building pedagogy that McPhail *et al.* (2024) have been looking for.

Virtue Ethics – MacIntyre's Approach to Human Flourishing

Human Flourishing

Virtue-based ethical approaches have essentially three characteristics. First, each life has a *telos*, or a purpose, which is the achievement of the good life or human flourishing (Aristotle, 2000; MacIntyre, 2007). Second, as a flourishing life is that of a person and not resulting from a single action, the essence of virtue ethics is agent-centred rather than action-centred (Annas, 1995). Virtue ethics is a first-person and person-centred approach to ethics. Third, as the ethical entity is a life in its entirety (Hursthouse, 1999), the life of the acting subject is understood as a narrative unity (MacIntyre, 2007).

This builds on the assumption that all humans ultimately seek their 'flourishing' (*eudaimonia*) in all their activities and that a good and flourishing life drives human behaviours (Hartman, 2013). The exercise of virtues is constitutive of and necessary for human flourishing (Alzola *et al.*, 2020). Although rules and consequences, typical of deontology and utilitarianism, still matter in the ethical analysis (Rhonheimer, 2011), the focus is on a person's life in its entirety and coherence. Good action is not just doing the right thing, it is acting for the right purpose and ultimately being a good person. This is as much shaped by *what* we do as by *why* and *how* we do it.

The question that virtue ethics needs to answer is, how to determine and live the good life through which we flourish (MacIntyre, 2007). While some authors fundamentally question if participation in today's production processes can lead to human flourishing (Bielskis, 2023), MacIntyre (2007) gives a positive answer, although he had been consistently critical to capitalist work and bureaucratic forms of organizing (MacIntyre, 1984 [1968]). MacIntyre (2007) developed a foundation of managerial practice that addresses the shortcomings of wage-labour by advancing ancient virtue ethics towards a positive proposal for a good life today. For him, a central part to human flourishing and the search for the good life is the ordering of goods, i.e. clarifying which goods are more worth striving for than others (Bernacchio, 2018). Such ordering is the core function of practice, and by conceptualizing work as participation in practices, MacIntyre's approach addresses the Marxist critique and contributes to our understanding of meaningful work and employment that is developed in the business ethics and organization studies literature (Beadle & Knight, 2012).

While we acknowledge that virtue ethics is a wide field with diverse interpretations including Swanton's target-centred virtue ethics, Positive Organizational Psychology, and Confucian ethics (see Ferrero and Sison, 2014), we build on MacIntyre's eudemonistic approach. We do so not only for it being a positive proposal, but also because MacIntyre is a leading living moral philosopher engaging with today's living conditions (Bernacchio *et al.*, 2023). His work has been widely applied to businesses and other organizations and his conception of internal goods as purpose of all business activity aligns with Spence and Taylor's (2024, p. 1198) suggestion to approach "management as a purposeful … science … guided by a practical and practised *ethos* (learned virtues and habits)", thus connecting to the debate of management as force for good to which we contribute.

Scholars and students alike find references in their field of interest (e.g., Beadle and Moore, 2020) from professions in general (Serrano del Pozo and Kreber, 2015) to finance (Rocchi, Ferrero and Beadle, 2021) and high frequency trading (Sobolev, 2020) to nursing (Sellman, 2000) to circus arts (Beadle and Könyöt, 2006) and to our own practices of teaching (Macfarlane, 2004) and research (Macfarlane, 2009).

A flourishing life is reached through virtue, and MacIntyre (2016, p. 190) defines virtues as "just those qualities that enable agents to identify both what goods are at stake in any particular situation and their relative importance in that situation *and* how that particular agent must act for the sake of the good and the best". This definition nicely integrates the *practice* (goods), *traditions* (relative importance of goods), and clarifies the prominent role of the individual life understood as a narrative *unity* (act for the best) (Beadle, 2017). We explore these three core concepts of MacIntyre's conception of virtue in detail.

Practice: Internal and external goods

MacIntyre (2007) defines *practice* along three aspects. First, practice is a human activity with specific characteristics: *coherent, complex, socially established,* compatible with the general management debate (Feldman and Worline, 2016). Second, practice makes it possible to realize "internal goods", and to enhance the excellence of the activity itself; this normative aspect is reflected in notions of professional practice that "serve society and the world" (Laasch, 2021: p. 7). Third, participating in the practice enables the practitioner to *become a better person, precisely through the development of virtues,* and it allows enhancing the practice itself. This third aspect adds the person focus of virtue ethics and highlights the duality of practicing as learning (practice for the auditing degree) and thus developing oneself, and practicing as performing (practicing the auditing profession) and thus contributing one's best to improve the

practice. It also points to the interdependence of behaviour and character (Sison *et al.*, 2017, p. viii).

Among all possible co-operative and socially established human activities that are coherent and complex, only those can be virtuous through which "inherent goods in this form of activity" are realized. These inherent or "internal goods" have at least two characteristics: they can be defined and specified only in relation to a specific practice, and they "can only be identified and recognized by the experience of participating in the practice in question" (MacIntyre, 2007, pp. 188f). Internal goods identify both the excellence of the practitioner, who is performing the practice, and the excellence of the practice itself (MacIntyre, 2007; Moore, 2017).

MacIntyre distinguishes external from internal goods. Internal goods are desired for themselves (e.g., friendship) and are by their nature unlimited and therefore easily shared for the benefit of the community. In contrast, external goods such as money, power and status are instrumental to the acquisition of additional goods, and scarce and exclusive as my possession prevents others from possessing the same good. External goods are procured and distributed by institutions, which are crucial for the sustenance of practices. When agents focus on external over internal goods, they lose integrity and practices are distorted (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 195); in consequence, external goods of institutions would invade rather than support practices (MacIntyre, 1994).

A virtuous person thus habitually pursues the goods "internal" to the practice (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 191). External goods are just *means* that serve higher ends; if their possession and use do not respect the limits established by the moderation that is implied through the virtue, they do harm (Hursthouse, 2013). The objective of the economy, then, for Aristotle (1990), is to provide the conditions that make acts of virtue, and ultimately human flourishing, possible and easier.

The narrative unity of life

As the second proposal to living a good life, MacIntyre (2007) suggests that we should aim to live our life in one narrative unity that spans over different social roles and over times. It is this unity that pulls our life towards its purpose (telos), something that would not happen if there were different (sequential or parallel) life compartments with different purposes. MacIntyre (2007, p. 219) specifies that the purpose of our lives is reached (1) in a continuous search for the virtue, that he calls "quest for good", (2) this striving for virtuousness gives us orientation even when this is difficult, (3) the continuous search is a learning journey on which we gain knowledge about ourselves and about the good and thereby become more virtuous and get closer to the good. The narrative unity of individual life is the understanding of each person's life as an entire story, with a beginning, development, an end and with other people's lives with which it forms a common plot, and, above all, a protagonist, without whose perspective that life cannot be evaluated properly (Gahl, 2019).

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre (2007) explains how there are obstacles to considering human life as a narrative unity. Modernity brought about the division of the self into roles, allowing a person to function differently depending on the context, resulting in "compartmentalization" leading to the unvirtuous habit of showing different moral characters depending on context, thus undermining "integrity" (MacIntyre, 2006). Such compartmentalised non-virtuous behaviour is facilitated by life-spheres (work, family, friends) that are increasingly distinct, global and separated (Sison, Ferrero and Guitián, 2018), and with alienated machine-like labour structures that undermine freedom and flourishing (Bielskis, 2023) and disconnect workers from professional traditions. The conception of *unity* has thus the potential to address critical

management positions and Marxist critique by incorporating coherent, non-alienated life as condition of a good life.

The narrative unity of life comes with a strong learning implication. Annas (2011, p. 84) clarifies that "learning about one virtue, then, requires some grasp of the way it figures in different areas of one's life; we can't understand bravery in just one compartment of our life, but have to be able to exercise it over other areas in an uncompartmentalized life". Learning about virtues is a necessary step for human flourishing and requires learning to be "independent practical reasoners, able to use our rational powers for the pursuit of a meaningful life" (Bielskis and Mardosas, 2014, p. 201). The cultivation of virtues should thus be the avenue to human flourishing as the paramount aim of education (Curren, 2022) and education should stimulate actions that contribute to character building and human life as narrative unity (MacIntyre, 1994; Robson, 2015). We contribute to this ongoing debate on human flourishing as aim of education (de Ruyter and Wolbert, 2020; Kristjánsson, 2016) and develop a virtue learning framework.

Tradition – Embeddedness in a social and historical context

The context for virtue is the narrative unity of life and the context for individual lives is "tradition". MacIntyre describes traditions as the order of preferences of a community. They are wider social contexts than individual life narratives, where practices and institutions are shaped and extended through generations, and where past, present and future work together to form the character and the history of a society. They can be considered as repositories of standards of excellence where individuals can find the best solutions to solve practical problems (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 222).

A person, living in a specific historical and social context, finds herself embedded in a "hierarchy of fundamental goods" (Higgins, 2003, p. 282), which represents the goods that the

community finds worth pursuing. Consistent with this explanation, MacIntyre (2007) further specifies the role of tradition for virtue: (1) A tradition is always a particular historical and social argument, (2) within which a hierarchy of internal and external goods is established. (3) Virtues find their purpose in sustaining such traditions, i.e. the flourishing life is one that supports such traditions. Contexts in which external goods are prioritised over internal goods, e.g., resulting in prioritisation or abuse of power or hierarchical rank, would not be virtuous traditions as they would not enable practices, which by MacIntyre's (2007) definition prioritise internal goods. Actors seeking to live a virtuous life would thus disengage from non-virtuous traditions.

Competence at Intellectual, Behavioural and Personal (IBP) Levels

Competence introduced

Competence describes a person's ability to expertly perform certain tasks, to fill certain roles, and to represent a certain profession (Lans, Blok and Wesselink, 2014; Shove, Pantzar and Watson, 2012). In this sense, management competence refers to the capacity of organizing and leading activities in organizations (Gilbert, 2013; Sandberg *et al.*, 2017). Competence thinking varies between focusing on measurable *outcomes* (Daouk-Öyry, Sahakian and van de Vijver, 2021) versus *processes* of personal development (von Weltzien Hoivik, 2002; 2009).

Considering *outcome* as learning (Boyatzis, 2008), students accumulate competences during a management program to *have* management competence. This view became prominent with education shifting focus from teaching to learning, as it makes learning quantifiable and measurable (Bloom *et al.*, 1956). Outcome-focused competence thinking is reflected in EQF, and AACSB's Assurance of Learning (AOL) expects learners to be "able to demonstrate proficiency over a set of competencies" (Borschbach and Mescon, 2021). However, outcome thinking directs management attention to deficiencies of learners who don't meet competence targets (e.g.

Edwards, 2016). Moreover, it reduces management to boxes, risking a 'monoculture' of managerial thinking (Ruth, 2006) and overlooking that "competence is particularistic, situated, contextual and socially constructed" (McKenna, 2004, p. 668).

The second view addresses this by conceptualizing competence as *process* of practising (Sandberg and Pinnington, 2009). Students are practising during and beyond management programs for *being* competent managers (Lindberg and Rantatalo, 2015). Competence recently gained prominence in the ethics, responsibility and sustainability (ERS) debate (Osagie *et al.*, 2016; Dzenghiz and Niesten, 2020). Laasch *et al.* (2023) review ERS competence and derive a framework that integrates intellectual, behavioural and personal (IBP) competence levels. For each level, they conceptualise an independent dimension, and an interdependent dimension highlighting the process character of competence and corresponding with the social embeddedness of MacIntyre's virtue approach. As they further position their work as whole-person competence framework, which aligns with virtue as whole-person ethics, we chose to integrate their framework with MacIntyre's virtue approach to build a *virtue as competence* learning model. We introduce the framework details before developing further on the whole-person aspect.

The Intellectual – Behavioural – Personal (IBP) competence framework

The *intellectual competence layer* includes *Knowing* and *Thinking*. *Knowing* captures the acquisition of and access to knowledge stored in one's own memory or retrieval from outside sources (Huitt, 2011) and collective knowledge manifested in practicing (Gherardi, 2016). *Thinking* covers intellectual application of knowledge, i.e. connecting existing knowledge to create new ideas or to theoretically solve a problem (Krathwohl, 2002), and "collecting, assessing and applying knowledge" (Bootsma and Vermeulen, 2011, p. 174). Evaluation,

judgement, and decision-making processes often include such application of (known) methods (Osagie *et al.*, 2016, p. 241).

The *behavioural competence layer* covers action or behaviour in the world. *Acting* describes independent behavioural competence (e.g., Lans *et al.*, 2014), emphasises the capacity of "working independently" (Yoon *et al.*, 2020, p. 8) and includes competence to engage with the material world. *Interacting* competence covers the interdependent behavioural dimension in the framework and "enables behaviour in relation with others" (Laasch *et al.*, 2023: 746). This dimension includes social skills and interactions with stakeholders, thus emphasising interactions in the social world establishing behavioural competence in social and historical contexts.

The *personal competence layer* is about manifesting and developing identity. It is thus centred on the definition of traits, values, beliefs, habits and virtues, and their development over time in an actor's life. It distinguishes a *being* from a *becoming* dimension. *Being* describes "character and personality traits" (Flentje *et al.*, 2019, p. 6) in their status-quo, independent of external influences as rather stable personal characteristics (Vanaki and Memarian, 2009). In contrast, *becoming* focuses on the interdependent and dynamic nature of personality in human interaction. It describes personal development as moral maturing over time (Adobor, 2006), in interaction with the world (Pless, Maak and Stahl, 2011), interdependently impacting one's own identity and considering an actor's impact on society (Benito Olalla and Merino, 2019). The distinction makes explicit reference to independent and interdependent levels in humans' construction of their identities (Cross and Markus, 1994).

Whole-person competence

While the IBP framework explicitly includes virtue ethics competences (Bastons, 2008; Tsoukas, 2018), compatibility with virtue approaches mainly comes from IBP being a *whole-person*

competence framework. Laasch *et al.* (2023) ask how different competence domains can best be developed, one at a time or interweaving competence domains using the same pedagogy. They suggest moving from their six entities of competences (3 layers x 2 dimensions) to what they call "processes of competenc*ing*" (Hellermann, 2018). The term competenc*ing* clarifies that a person becomes competent by practicing in the double sense of the word: by going through processes of competence *acquisition* and the process of competence *application*.

Whole-person competence has been identified as an important approach to education and development (e.g., Anteby *et al.*, 2015; Podger *et al.*, 2010). Laasch *et al.* (2023) explicitly point to flourishing education, character education and wisdom education as examples of whole-person education. Our suggestion is thus to develop *virtue as competence*. Intellectual, behavioural and personal competence need to be aligned in the creation of a coherent life in moral unity, contributing to a specified internal good in the historic social context of existing traditions. Virtue is developed through its understanding, practice, and integration into one's identity: a virtue is caught, sought, and taught (The Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2017). We develop this in the following *virtue as competence* learning framework.

Virtue as Competence – A Learning Framework for Human Flourishing at Intellectual, Behavioural and Personal Levels

The *virtue as competence* learning framework is developed by conceptually applying the MacIntyrean virtue-related concepts of practice, unity and tradition to each of the three dimensions of the IBP framework (*Figure 1*). For each dimension, the conceptual connection of virtue and competence is developed before suggesting what makes a learner competent in the relevant dimension and offering guiding questions for learners' reflection. We then discuss

processes of contextualisation (vertical), habitualisation, and reflection (both horizontal) as conditions for virtue competence development.

--- Insert *Figure 1* about here ---

Intellectual virtue competence

The overarching *knowledge* aspect is that of virtue ethics striving for human flourishing through behaviour that strives for virtue (process) by applying the virtues (outcomes). It accepts a wide range of behaviours as good, when the right means are chosen to achieve a good end, which contributes to human flourishing. Acquiring virtue competence leads the learner to *knowing* that a virtuous person contributes to the good of a *practice* and that such practice is embedded in the context of one's personal life in *narrative unity* and in social and historical context as described in the *traditions*. Knowledge is described in detail above and included as line definitions in *Figure 1*, and thus not made explicit in the intellectual competence column.

Intellectual competence further includes *thinking* as the intellectual application of knowledge to a situation, to one's life and to one's social and historical context. First, this includes identifying the *practice* and its internal goods and their distinction from external goods. Ultimately, the clarification of internal goods reflects the competence view that students should be able to clarify what it takes for a graduate to be competent (Gherardi and Strati, 2018). The competence discourse further established that responsible practices need to be enacted in private lives (Shove and Spurling, 2013) and in work roles (Lindberg and Rantatalo, 2015). In virtues terms, learners need to intellectually connect the creation of goods in a specific situation to agents' lived past and aspired future across their private and professional roles and be able to assess their coherence and maintain a *narrative unity of life*. They also need to be able to identify alternatives if they anticipate incoherence.

Finally, learners need to identify the *traditions* relevant to a specific situation and need to derive the implications of these repositories of standards of excellence (MacIntyre, 2007), and they need to develop the intellectual competence to identify and/or develop alternatives where suggested decisions are in conflict with traditions. This interdependence of virtue of the individual and its context is compatible with the view that one's competence "depends on that of its environment" (Whitehead, 1927/1928 [1985], p. 110).

Learning points. Learners acquire the ability to identify professional *practice* and to clarify what internal good is associated with this practice and distinguish them from the external goods pursued by this sector's institutions to distinguish good from corrupted practice. They are able to explain an actor's *unity of life* and contrast it with compartmentalisation, and to recognize and assess the narrative thread in a person's life. Learners acquire and apply knowledge about the role of *traditions* and identify the contribution of a practice to traditions and ultimately to the good of the community.

Guiding questions. How does the cultivation of virtue enable individuals to adequately prioritise internal goods over external ones, thereby preventing corrupt *practices* within institutions? What makes a life in *unity* and how would you identify integrity versus compartmentalisation in a life narrative? What is the role of *traditions* to the contribution of a business activity and to the good of the community, and how do business decisions contribute to or harm relevant social and historical traditions?

Behavioural virtue competence

Action competence covers the development of excellences in doing something independently, focused on the material and nonhuman dimensions of acting (e.g., Shove *et al.*, 2012). Different practices require different competence sets (Lambrechts *et al.*, 2018) and learners need to acquire

those excellences needed for the creation of internal good in their *practice.* In doing so they need to make their life a *unity* across professional and private roles 'from office to home to office' (Shove *et al.*, 2012, p. 51). As learning practice is situated in communities of practitioners (Wenger, 2010), learners need to enact their excellences in ways that contribute to and respect the *tradition* in which their life is embedded.

A large portion of activities in our society is socially embedded and includes *interaction*. Related to *practice,* learners need to acquire competence of integrating others in the creation of internal good. Consistent with stakeholder theory, e.g., virtuous behaviour would assign a legitimate moral claim to those affected by one's own behaviour. Learners need to acquire competences that take the other into account when defining the good of organisational activity, they need to acquire response-ability (e.g., Nonet, Kassel and Meijs, 2016). When actors collaboratively create internal good coherent with the *unity* of their life narrative, we should expect that to be virtuous, all actors involved can pursue their individual lives' unity. Understood as "engaged practice for relating to the Other" (Gherardi and Laasch, 2021, p. 1), actors would thus need to consider the unity of others' lives in their behaviours and reflections, thus addressing some of the argument around unequal power relationships and unfree wage-labour that limit flourishing (Bielskis, 2023). Discourse abilities are crucial to find a coherent way for all involved, e.g. when accountants in a marketing agency clarify how they connect the good of the accounting and marketing practices. Approaches on negotiating between different legitimate narratives in other contexts (e.g., Bealt and Shaw, 2024; Watson, 2001) may inform learners' competence development. The interactive approach to *tradition* accounts for competence being situated in communities of practice (e.g., Nicolini, 2012). It prepares for engagement with entities like industry associations that represent traditions to ensure existing excellences from the past are maintained and brought into practice. This also includes learners' competence to develop

traditions coherently into the future and thereby contributes to shaping our future society for the good. This requires a competence to intra-act as part of the world (Kleinman, 2012), i.e. to make oneself part of a collective outside entity to maintain the good of the community.

Learning points. Learners enact the pursuit of excellences. They contribute to a *practice*. Learners develop ability to specify and enact behaviours that contribute to their own *unity* of life. They respect others' different life narratives. Learners enact *traditions* in their practice in a way that they become part of the tradition. They engage in bodies that maintain and develop traditions.

Guiding questions. Do I enact behaviours to ensures that *internal goods* are prioritised? Do I take action that ensures that I and my co-workers have access to sufficient external goods to support the creation of *internal goods*? Is my behaviour in line with my role and my past, present and future (*narrative unity*)? Do I support co-workers and subordinates in their attempts to live a life in *narrative unity*? Do I incorporate *traditions* in my private and professional decisions? Do I engage in activities (e.g. professional bodies) that ensure that *traditions* are maintained and developed further?

Personal virtue competence

Personal virtue competence highlights the conception of virtue and of competence as both outcome and process. The outcome view corresponds with *being* and the status-quo of one's identity and virtues. *Practice* specifies the status quo of one's personal hierarchy of goods. Derived from one's personal values, beliefs and identity, it includes the value one gives to family, love, power, money, hierarchical rank, freedom, or health. It captures one's own conceptions of a good life and further describes the extent to which the current identity is coherent across roles to live their *life in unity*. A person with virtue competence has values and

beliefs that are consistently aligned across their work life (Lindberg and Rantatalo, 2015) and in their private lives (Shove and Spurling, 2013) including family and civil society roles. Learners' values and beliefs would further be aligned with the *traditions* of their living context.

Becoming describes personal development as moral maturing over time (Adobor, 2006) in interaction with the world (Pless *et al.*, 2011), interdependently impacting one's own identity and considering an actor's impact on society (Benito Olalla and Merino, 2019). It emphasises the process view of individual moral development. A competent manager is one striving for competence in the same way as a virtuous life is one spent striving for the virtues: "the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man" (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 219). To grasp virtue, learners need to capture the duality of outcome and process. For *practice*, this will cover the development of one's values, beliefs and identity in the process of striving for excellence. It also captures the dynamics of seeking the good in the realities of an individual life in *unity* over time and contexts: fostering the process view, learners capture the notion of development and maturing while remaining coherent in the lives they live. Morally maturing coherently within the *traditions* requires diachronic and intergenerational competence (Curren and Metzger, 2017) emphasising the interdependent view of *virtue as competence*.

Learning points. Learners are aware of their values and identity. Participating in a practice enables learners to achieve their flourishing, precisely through the development of virtues, and it allows enhancing the *practice* itself. Learners are aware of how their past influences who they are today. Virtues allow learners to make their life the *unity* they strive for. Learners live their life in a historical and social context. They function as bridge between past and future in a specified social context that enriches the *traditions* of the community.

Guiding questions. What are my traits, values and beliefs and how do I personally order goods such as interpersonal harmony, access to finance, courage, power? Can I develop my

hierarchy of goods and preferences to become a better person? How did my past life, my upbringing and my experience shape my identity? How can I morally mature, e.g. through professional and private choices that help me become a better person? What traditions am I part of and how do they influence me? How can traditions offer orientation for moral maturing?

Processes of contextualisation, habitualisation and reflection build virtue as competence

While the breakdown of whole-person approach into a nine-field framework reduces complexity for better learning, it is crucial to understand the fields' interconnectedness to embrace *competencing* as development of competence as process and the whole-person conception on which virtue ethics and the IBP framework build.

Vertically, *tradition* provides the context for a life in *unity* which is the context for *practice* (MacIntyre, 2007). None of them makes virtue in isolation (Annas, 2011), they need to be learned and applied together. Learners need to consider the three together to make contributions to practice that are coherent with their lives and the social context in which they act. By developing the competence to recognize potential frictions between the three, they acquire the prerequisite for addressing dilemmas with practical wisdom.

Horizontally, the first process that connects the vertical competence domains is *habitualisation*. Human flourishing is achieved through the development of *habitual* dispositions to do the good (Aristotle, 2000). Repeated behaviour for the good is a core driver of virtue. For MacIntyre (2007), a virtuous person is that person who habitually pursues the goods "internal" to the practice. And he points to the importance of experiencing practice to achieve virtue (MacIntyre, 2007). For unity, MacIntyre (2006) sees the *habit* of behaving with a consistent moral character in different social contexts, and integrity over time as element of virtue. Sison *et al.* (2017, p. viii) point to the impact of habitualised behaviour on identity highlighting the dual

dependency of "what the agent does" (behavioural) and "who that agent becomes" (personal competence) that reflects *competencing* as duality of application and acquisition of competence. With this in mind, habitualisation through repeated intellectual, behavioural and personal practice is a core process to connect the framework domains vertically to learn and achieve *virtue as competence*.

While a large portion of human behaviour is habitualised, *reflection,* the second horizontal process in the framework is used to respond to new situations and solve unfamiliar problems (Dewey, 1930). Reflection provides the analytical process of applying virtue knowledge to a situation to derive a wise and virtuous decision that is compatible with the actor's level of behavioural and personal competence. Such reflection is well known in experiential learning (e.g., Kolb and Kolb, 2005) where the cognitive connection of experience (behavioural competence) with own assumptions derived from values and beliefs (personal competence) constitutes learning. Reflection on how one's intellectual, behavioural and personal dispositions correspond in the creation of good across practice, unity and tradition is thus the second horizontal core process in our *virtue as competence* learning framework.

An educational perspective on *Virtue as Competence*

The learning framework developed above offers contributions to learners' professional and private paths to human flourishing, which represent the plenitude of being human (Sison and Ferrero, 2015). Our framework may help them to make their everyday professional efforts an integral part of their personal development as human beings in their roles as students, managers, members of civil society and of families. While the framework is not a teaching framework, educators and educational managers can use it as a structure to develop interventions by which

they want to guide learners along the process. We explore related challenges and present course and program level exemplars of *virtue as competence* interventions.

The challenge of bringing Virtue as Competence *into education*

Virtues approaches have three characteristics with distinct implications for 'teaching' virtues.

Agent-centred. Each individual has its own distinct telos, and the success of a life is thus agent dependent (Gahl, 2019). Similarly, the abilities needed to create goods differ between practices, and competence depends on the practice an actor aims to join (Lambrechts *et al.*, 2018). Teaching thus needs to centre on the individual learner in their individual life. Virtue education needs to guide learners to find their own telos and solution rather than teaching them generalized solutions to ethically challenging decisions.

Practice-embedded. Internal goods "can only be identified and recognized by the experience of participating in the practice in question" (MacIntyre, 2007, pp. 188–189). Pointedly, this implies that virtues could only be acquired in virtuous practice, virtuous management could only be learned in management practice, not in the classroom. Similarly, competence is best acquired through learning from situated action (Nicolini, 2012) reflecting *competencing* as duality of competence acquisition and application. This view emphasises the limitations of teaching *virtue as competence* in the lecture hall and promotes real-world learning opportunities, ideally in organizational life.

Life-long. Third, virtue ethics is not focused on decision making but on character building (Hartman, 2017). Congruent with development of whole-person competence (Laasch *et al.*, 2023), the emphasis is not on acquiring virtues as *outcomes*, but on the *process* of living a virtuous life. Learners are virtuous through their engagement in a continuous aspiration for moral excellence through practices embedded in a historical and social context, and by building a

coherent narrative throughout their entire life. Processes of flourishing are life-long projects. Teaching programs for virtue will therefore always be in some way incomplete. While it can never fully deliver *virtue as competence*, endeavours spanning over a larger portion of human lives are more promising than a single course.

In deriving educational implications, we recommend (1) the use of agent-centred learning interventions that guide learners to find their own solution that suits their life context rather than teaching one generalized solution (2) a strong integration of activities and experiences in real practice outside the traditional classroom, and (3) a serious consideration of program-long learning opportunities. We develop inspirational exemplars for developing virtue as competence at course level and at program level.

Educational inspirations at course level

Business schools are equipped with abundant pedagogies for developing *intellectual* virtue competence. *Readings* and *lectures* fit to develop knowing. For thinking, applied pedagogies using *movies* (see Werner (2014) for a general ethical view) and *case studies* (see Ruiz-Alba *et al.* (2017) for an example emphasising the virtue of prudence) are available. Effective virtue interventions provide details on the ethical question in an organisational context (practice), on the acting individual and their background and intentions (narrative unity of life) and on the historical and social context (tradition). They do not seek the 'right' answer but a wise decision that considers practice, unity and tradition.

Behavioural competence development is often left to *internships* and *work experience* outside the business school, which seem unfit for virtue learning as they lack specification of the competences that learners should acquire: while delivering the application aspect, they lack the acquisition aspect of *competencing* processes. *Simulations* and *role plays* are available to enact behaviour in the classroom and are popular to live through ethical dilemmas (Jaganjac *et al.*,

2024). They allow enacting individual roles in the classroom based on thorough narratives of each role's life trajectories (unity) and by creative choice of roles representing *traditions* as historic and social context (future generations, Richard Branson, Margaret Thatcher). As behavioural competence learning occurs more "naturally outside classrooms" (Fox, 2002, p. 89), Laasch, Moosmayer and Arp (2020) required students to change one daily-life habit over a 21-day *habitualisation* period to become more sustainable or ethical using one from a list of smartphone apps aiming to promote good behaviours such as mindfulness, veganism, or ethical decision making. Building on lifestyle-integrated mobile learning course design (Lee and Chan, 2007), the apps use smartphone features (notifications, GPS tracking, …) to inform and nudge, and to track behavioural progress. Learners were required to fill ongoing reflection diaries and weekly surveys. A concluding 3-day block course served to discuss their competence development and could easily target virtue learning addressing learners' compartmentalisation challenges (unity) or their responses to challenges in social contexts (tradition), e.g. how one learner's cheese-loving French family responds to and is impacted by one's shift to veganism (Laasch et al, 2020: p264), thus making acting and interacting explicit parts of the learning experience.

Personal competence and the question 'what do I stand for' can be addressed with personality questionnaires. Values clarification, e.g. in exercises such as Giving Voice to Values (Goodstein and Gentile, 2021; Gentile, 2010) can be used to help students make their values explicit and to learn how to translate them into behavioural impact (Christensen, Cote and Latham, 2018), thus making explicit the horizontal link in the model between personal and behavioural competence. Moosmayer (forthcoming) used the IBP-framework as *reflection* template in a largely participant-led project-based sustainable marketing course with first degree business students. Learners were required to document and reflect on their session-to-session

learning using the framework in an online journal which included learner-faculty interaction. This was combined with a concluding assignment to write a vision of oneself as a (future) professional in the field. To use this approach for virtue reflections in a subject course, faculty could introduce the virtue as competence framework guiding students to integrate the practice, unity and tradition concepts into their reflections.

Overcoming compartmentalisation of learning – Implications beyond course level

Narrative unity and coherence across different stages of and roles in human life is a core principle of virtue ethics (MacIntyre, 2007). However, business education seems *intellectually* compartmentalised with subject courses not reflecting the values taught in ethics courses (Moosmayer *et al.*, 2019) and *behaviourally* and *personally* compartmentalised as business schools leave the development of behavioural and personal competence to other compartments of society (Fox, 1997; Jenkins, 2012).

Compartmentalisation within the intellectual domain could be addressed by explicitly developing an understanding of internal goods and their relation to external goods in each *practice* that we address in the classroom further covering aspects of *unity* and the practices' *traditions*. For example, the Critical Marketing course offered as part of an MSc Marketing program at a British University includes these perspectives (Francu, 2024). It reflects *practice* in contents like 'Marketing Means and Ends for a Sustainable Society', *unity of life* in 'What Does the Definition of Marketing Tell Us about Ourselves?' or 'Parallel universes and disciplinary space: the bifurcation of managerialism and social science in marketing studies' and *tradition* in 'Evolution of Marketing as a Discipline: What Has Happened and What to Look Out For'.

Compartmentalisation between intellectual and behavioural competence comes from separation of intellectual education in business schools and behavioural experience in 'the real

world', the split of acquisition and application in *competencing* processes. While required internships and work experiences cater to the observation that practices learning is best situated in communities of practitioners (Wenger, 2010), they disconnect intellectual from behavioural competence development leaving it unlikely that taught virtue theory gets applied. In the apprenticeship model instead, participants "learn regulations, best practices and technical skills in a controlled environment, alongside hands-on opportunities with their mentor" (Missman, 2023). The German Cooperative State University (DHBW, 2024) offers 3-year academic business bachelors in which each learner has a full-time contract with an organisation in the practice for which the program educates (e.g., taxation, social work, international marketing). Learners alternate between intellectual trimesters at school and behavioural trimesters at work with a learning curriculum not only defined for the 'intellectual' trimester at university but also for the 'behavioural' trimester 'at work'. Interconnectedness of intellectual and behavioural competence development is ensured through a contractual commitment of participating companies to deliver a specific behavioural learning parcourse that corresponds with the intellectual curriculum. This allows a behavioural application of specific intellectual contents in the organisations, and practical experiences can be reflected at school, as they are somewhat comparable for all program participants. Due to their parallel engagement in competence acquisition and application, such part-time learners may be more open to encouragement towards contextualisation, reflection and habitualisation and thus undergo processes of *competencing* more successfully.

Compartmentalisation between intellectual and personal competence results from business schools leaving questions of values and identity largely to the family domain or to private life. As narrative unity of life implies a normative coherence of professional and private sphere (MacIntyre, 2007), this form of compartmentalisation could be addressed by creating spaces for

connecting students' professional with their private lives. The college system in traditional Anglo-Saxon tertiary education offers such spaces for learners to study and live together with faculty. Similarly, at The University of Navarra, students can live with faculty and mentors in university halls of residence that "provide residency program to students and promote the cultural, professional and human training to residents, projecting their activity at the service of the university community and society" (UNAV, 2024).This approach reflects the importance of psychological and physical involvement in an institution for competence development, particularly of affective competence (Pascarella, 1985), and makes explicit reference to its impact on society and ultimately goes back to Aristotle's suggestion to acquire virtue by living with the virtuous.

Conclusion – Claiming our transformative stake

Character building seems absent from business school pedagogy (McPhail *et al.*, 2024) and the difficulty to teach virtue (Sison *et al.*, 2017) may be one reason. We approached this by integrating MacIntyre's (2007) virtue ethics with the IBP competence framework by Laasch *et al.* (2023) to conceptualise a *virtue as competence* learning framework that helps learners to develop virtue competence on the intellectual, behavioural and personal levels. Our conceptual argument makes three contributions.

First, the virtue ethics learning debate was lacking a systematic approach to explicitly address its whole-person and life-span nature (Sison *et al.*, 2017). By integrating virtue and competence thinking, we contribute an actor-centred learning framework that helps learners to build their characters as managers serving as forces for good.

Second, the competence debate is moving from lists of competences toward a comprehensive understanding of whole-person competence (Gosling and Grodecki, 2020) but is

still limited by its "thinking in 'competence boxes'" (Laasch, 2023, p. 751). We contribute to the whole-person competence view by explicitly including the processes of contextualisation, reflection and habitualisation that connect the framework elements, and by showing that the IBP framework with all its 'boxes' can serve to enact a whole-person concept, namely virtue ethics. This may also help integrating character building in competence-oriented management processes in business schools.

Third, we contribute pedagogical inspirations for developing virtue as whole-person competence to address the scarcity of pedagogies that develop *behavioural* and *personal* competence. We account for the compartmentalised realities in today's business schools and offer inspirations for faculty seeking to integrate virtues into their regular business course, and to those who aim to contribute to students' whole-person transformation in their roles as programs managers, deans, or managers of the student experience. Our inspirations suggest different steps to shift from segmented competencies thinking toward processes of competencing and the cultivation of whole-person competence perspectives.

McPhail *et al.* (2024, p. 1108) asked *where is character building in the business school pedagogy or in the armoury of accreditation?* In line with the agent-centred perspective of virtue ethics, we focused on learning and pedagogy. We developed an individual learning framework from which we derived pedagogical inspirations. To be institutionally impactful, another step is necessary. Our dominant summative assessments and accreditations take an outcome perspective and focus on the provision of external goods. From a virtues view, they distract us from the creation of internal goods. If we take *virtue as competence* serious, we probably need to fundamentally rethink assessment and accreditation to take a process perspective and focus on internal goods provision in the future. Nevertheless, while AACSB's AoL reflects outcome logic, it allows more process considerations than most schools use. Borschbach and Mescon

(2021) highlight the inclusion of inputs from advisory boards, from surveying working students and their employers, and one-, three- and five-years post-graduation surveys with alumni and their employers. These sources may allow assessing development of competence as process and help building cases for life-long competence development. AoL could be made part of the solution: To capture *competencing* in their AoL architecture, DCU Business School combines their one-year work placement with a compulsory year-long reflection course that covers "XXX" competence.

For future research, our work invites future conceptual cross-fertilization, e.g. between MacIntyrean and Swanton's (2021) target-centred virtue ethics approaches, and suggests further exploration of competence as process, e.g. by exploring sequencing and orchestration of intellectual, behavioural and personal competence development and by distinguishing different learning processes for part- and full-time learners.

Our conceptual argument and the linking with whole-person competence suggests that virtue ethics can indeed be more impactful than rules-based ethics: virtue ethics does not aim at changing a single action but at transforming the actor. In challenging situations, virtuous managers avoid bad decisions not because they apply the correct rule or principle, but because they habitualised virtuousness that ultimately equips them with the practical wisdom to take decisions that best serve their practice in the context of their own life and the traditions of the professional and private communities in which they act. The framework thus speaks to the transformation rhetoric of schools, accreditation agencies and policy makers. More importantly, it gives inspiration to school managers and educators for specific steps toward whole-person impact. Finally, the framework helps management students and managers alike to make their everyday professional efforts an integral part of their personal development as human beings: to develop virtue as competence.

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FIGURE 1: THE *VIRTUE AS COMPETENCE* LEARNING FRAMEWORK