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Book Review

The Wisdom of Crowds. James Surowiecki

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Zübeyr Şakar*

The Wisdom of the Crowds is a book by James Surowiecki, which is at the intersection of social sciences, especially political science, management and economics, and psychology. This book is about the field of political psychology but also draws from the disciplines of economics, sociology, and political science. In the book, Surowiecki says that the dynamic and the intelligence of a group can exist if it includes differences and diversity, and states that group intelligence is more successful than that of the separate one-by-one individual. He also argues that a group's or a team's wisdom has a dynamic effect independent of whether it results in a positive or negative result in social decision-making processes such as economy and politics. The author bases these arguments on studies and results of the studies carried out by American sociologists and psychologists in the 1920s. For example, Surowiecki tries to strengthen his thought on the wisdom of the crowds by showing a result that the arithmetic average of all the predictions was 0.4 degrees close to the actual temperature value in the temperature

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prediction experiment which sociologist Hazel Knight applied to her students in the early 1920s. Likely, Surowiecki emphasizes that sociologist Kate H. Gordon discovered an accuracy rate of up to 94% in the weight estimation experiment she applied to students.

Contrary to the widespread belief that crowds can be easily manipulated and influenced in many fields such as economy, finance, military, and politics; this study claims that they have the potential to be results-oriented, pragmatic, and functional. In this context, the work provides a new perspective in the related field and gives key clues specific to almost every field of social sciences. For example, Surowiecki argues that if independent, free decision-making and free-thinking groups are supported, they have a function that increases efficiency, productivity, and eventually success. In a way, the approach encourages us to think in psychological contexts about concepts such as coexistence, polyphony, diversity, and majority rule respectful for pluralism, which we often encounter in the processes of making sense of and explaining theories of politics and democracy. In other words, the work brings to the fore the effort to prove the relevant concepts in political science literature with psychological theories.

Searching for various social evidence of the pragmatic and functional impact of multiple and polyphony on success, *The Wisdom of the Crowds* consists of two chapters and six subsections of each chapter. The subheadings in the first part contain mostly examples enriched with theoretical concepts. In this work, whereas the success of the Linux software company exemplified diversity and decentralization, the failure of the Bay of Pigs Invasion instantiated non-democratic decision-making. The sub-titles in the second part diversified with examples such as the importance of polyphony in the market mechanism, company management, scientific studies, and the political field.

Author Surowiecki argues that a crowd or group with diversity possesses collective intelligence and that this intelligence functions almost like a “collective brain”. For example, the author argues that a search engine like Google develops by prioritizing the links that the crowds click the most. Thus, he argues that crowds have a dynamic in which they dominate everywhere and in every way. Basing these arguments on previous studies, experiments, and their results, Surowiecki seeks to answer the question of why the collective mind of the crowd necessary is trusted rather than experts, elites, and perhaps leaders, in an age everywhere professionals, and intellectuals surround people. In addition, Surowiecki benefited from interpretation and exemplification methods and added his subjective point of view to the study. For example, Surowiecki argues in many parts of the book that it is better to rely on work and the wisdom of the crowds than the mind or opinion of a leader or elite. All these qualifications make the book a work whose qualitative feature is dominant.

To prove the justification of the theories of group behavior that he defends, Surowiecki deal with issues such as the Bay of Pigs Landing (Cuba Intervention), the leaderless democratic operation of the Linux company, the

"invisible hand" of the supply-demand balance, the international solidarity in the discovery of the Sars Virus, and Attack on Pearl Harbor as a case. In the analysis of these cases, Surowiecki is trying to prove that the more heterogeneous (pluralist and carrying different ideas) a group or crowds structure has, the more successful it will be, and the more homogeneous it will make the more unsuccessful decisions. In this respect, Surowiecki has consistency throughout the book when evaluated in the context of cases exemplified by arguments, hypotheses, and theories.

In addition, the examples given in the work are fairly appropriate and strengthen the mentioned arguments of the work. In addition, the authors try to give various examples from considerably different fields and to prove the theories that his arguments benefit from with various cases are the strength of the work. Also, the language of the work is notably plain, clear, and understandable. The text does not include many problems of expression arising from translation. In the forming book, although the subject of the work contains all scopes of life, there is no clear subject distinction and classification. But, the author takes care of explaining the issue with various examples. While the work refers to the importance and impact of the deliberative decision-making of the crowds in economic, social, and political life, it also analyzes the concept of leadership and discusses it again. In this direction, the book claims that the collective decision-making ability of the crowds will open the notion of leadership for discussion in the future. However, the relevant argument is not extensively and widely discussed with examples. The in the work, the idea of the superiority of the collective mind over the leader's mind is tried to be reconciled with the theories of democracy; however, this connection is not sufficiently enhanced. In this respect, explaining the relevant thesis by blending it with Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy and Sartori's book "The Theory of Democracy Revisited" could strengthen the argument of the work and diversify the examples. But, the consolidation, diversification, interpretation, and evaluation of the relevant argument leave to the reader's discretion.

The work argues that the behavior of a group or crowds is much more rational, rational, result-oriented, pragmatic, and functional if it contains diversity, contrary to the widely accepted theories in the literature and the experts and elitism that cover all areas of life. Thus, the work offers a different perspective on the field. In this respect, the work has a paradigm-shifting quality in the literature. In addition, the work demonstrates a significant aspect of interdisciplinary studies, drawing on fields as diverse as psychology, political science, international relations, economics, and sociology. The book, which attracts the attention of every reader interested in these fields, is also a reference guide for undergraduate and graduate students and interested researchers who want to work in an interdisciplinary field such as political psychology.

From the main idea of the work, it can be concluded that groups with diversity and heterogeneity can provide significant benefits in solving global

problems. For example, the solution can be suggested in the fight against global disasters and problems such as the Corona Virus (Covid-19) Epidemic, Climate Change, and Global Warming that is faced today. It also can be claimed that the solidarity of scientists from many nations in these three issues by putting forward international common wisdom will create faster, more practical and solution-oriented results. In this respect, the work also includes rational and functional evidence of solidarity, cooperation, group, and teamwork in local, national, and international issues. It is noteworthy that the work emphasizes the efficiency and success-enhancing role of individual autonomy, in-group freedom and liberal ambiance, and solution-producing mechanisms, which it proposes against the toughie of decision-making with only one voice. At the same time, the book reinforces the idea that problems of coordination mechanisms can be resolved through independent and polyphonic decision-making processes.

Finally, the work underlines the need for common sense in the processes of tackling problems and producing solutions in today's globalized world. The work emphasizes the vital contribution of democracy, cooperation, diplomacy, reconciliation, and pluralism to the issue of coexistence as a problem-solving method maintains its importance in the current term.