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Leadership 2010 6: 331

DOI: 10.1177/1742715010368759

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Leadership

6(3) 331–349

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DOI: 10.1177/1742715010368759

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Abstract

In this paper we attempt to bring art and craft together in the enterprise of leadership, first by reframing the art of leadership in light of fine art thinking, and then joining it to notions of craft. With this, we develop an approach to leadership where artistry is closely dependent on, yet distinct from, craft. Finally, we discuss the ramifications of this perspective for leadership practice and research.

Keywords

art, leadership, management, organization studies

Introduction

Like many other 'art of' within management and organization studies, the 'art of leadership' appears on the rise. Various joinings of 'art' and 'leadership' increasingly appear in the popular leadership literature (e.g. McCaffrey et al., 2001; Manning and Curtis, 2002; Nahavandi, 2002; Green, 2004; Jones, 2006), within prominent leadership centers and training programs (e.g. the Center for Creative Leadership; The Banff Center; The Center for Art and Leadership at the Copenhagen Business School), and the academic literature (e.g. Schein, 2001; Guillet de Monthoux, 2004; Adler, 2006; Hansen et al., 2007; Taylor and Ladkin, 2009).

An example from the popular literature is William Cohen's book *The New Art of the Leader* (2002). In it we see chapter titles like 'The Combat Model: The Eight Universal Laws of Leadership', 'Secrets of Motivation', and 'Seven Steps to Taking Charge in Crisis Situations'. Each chapter mixes personal anecdotes and popular cases with propositional,

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science-based frameworks (e.g. Maslow's motivation theory) to adduce guides for leaderly action.

Different from this is the art of leadership that appears within the 'fine arts' – art galleries and museums, literature, film, and so on. Even though these works do not employ the phrase 'art of leadership', they still can be considered an art of (as well as about, around, and for) leadership. An example is Per Morten Abrahamsen's photographic portraits of leaders. As Eric Guthey and Brad Jackson (2005: 1059) note,

The often striking style of Abrahamsen's portraits of prominent businessmen – as well as their exhibition alongside his arresting photos of authors, artists, celebrities and models in various outlandish poses and stages of undress – draws attention to the dynamics at play in other types of CEO corporate photography.

They go on to describe one such portrait:

In the picture Nørregård-Nielsen [chairman of the New Carlsberg Foundation, a wealthy arts organization] stands among a number of statues in the foundation's New Carlsberg Glyptotek museum, his head tilted awkwardly into a picture frame and his gaze fixed self-consciously on the camera. The photograph seems to refer in jest to the presence of the photographic frame, and Nørregård-Nielsen's uncomfortable smirk appears directed at Abrahamsen himself for putting him in such an awkward pose... When Abrahamsen reviewed his photograph with us, he pointed out with enthusiasm that Nørregård-Nielsen looked posed and stiff. He recalled that the Carlsberg chairman was very upset about the way the portrait turned out, and that the next time they met he accused Abrahamsen of tricking him. For this reason alone, Abrahamsen likes this portrait. (2005: 1071–1072)

Different again are the ways that 'the art of leadership' appears in leadership education. In some cases, educators use outsider artworks like Picasso's *Guernica*, Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, or Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, to 'illustrate essence' (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009; Talbott, 1994; March and Augier, 2004); that is, provide more aesthetic and less 'listwise' depictions of leadership. In other cases, educators have students make art in the interest of skill transfer (e.g., going from leading a dance to leading a task force), refinement of technique (e.g., writing a play to refine a message), or personal discovery around one's styles and intentions (e.g., building a sculpture of one's job as a way of surfacing unconscious assumptions about it).

At first glance, the wide disparities in these usages may seem strange, and even contradictory. It appears that the 'art' in the art of leadership can mean almost everything and anything. If we consider the term historically, however, the reasons for these differences become more evident. As various art historians, philosophers, and sociologists have noted, classical times framed art differently than the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance and Baroque periods had versions that differed again from modernity's usage (cf. Becker, 1982; Gadamer, 1986; Kamber, 1998; Adajian, 2007; Davies, 2007). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED 2nd Edition, 2009) and the Chambers Dictionary of Etymology (2008), the word 'art' has its origins in the Latin 'ars', which means to fit together, or join ('artus'/joint, 'arma'/tools), as well as the Greek ('arti'/just, 'artios'/complete) and Sanskrit ('rtih'/manner or mode). The term originally meant skill that came from learning and/or practice, and was commensurate with the Teutonic word 'cræft/craft' (originally meaning 'strength, force, power, virtue') and the Greek word 'technē' (skillfully made or constructed, and the root of the words technique, technical, and technology). As the

OED (2009) notes, 'art and craft were formerly synonymous and had a nearly parallel sense-development'. Both art and craft developed secondary associations with 'cunning and trickery' (e.g. crafty tradesmen, and Dickens' Artful Dodger), craft beginning 1200, and art around 1600. Perhaps capitalizing on this association, the mid-1600s saw art beginning to refer to clever effects and creative skill, particularly in the areas of painting and sculpture. The term 'fine arts' ('those which appeal to the mind and the imagination'; OED, 2009) was first recorded in 1767, and the definition of art as 'the application of skill to the arts of imitation and design, painting, engraving, sculpture, architecture; the cultivation of these in its principles, practice, and results; the skilful production of the beautiful in visible forms' appears in English dictionaries only after 1880 (OED, 2009). Davies (2007: 54) summarizes this as follows:

The fine arts were described and typed at the close of the eighteenth century and the associated notion of the artist as a genius unfettered by the rules of a craft or by social conventions was presented at much the same time. Along with this went the idea that the aesthetic attitude is a psychologically distinctive state of distanced contemplation. The creation of art museums and an interest in the works of past eras date from the same period. Prior to that time, Western artists were employed as servants and worked mainly to order. Their art was expected to be functional. Its purposes were to illustrate and instruct, to uplift or delight, to glorify God or art's patrons, to improve the social environment or, at least, to make it more pleasant.

Notably, the more recent usages of the term have not supplanted the earlier meanings. As Kamber (1998: 40) notes, "'art" is still used to refer to anything (i.e. any craft, occupation, practice, branch of learning, etc.) in which skill may be attained or displayed'.

With this, we can better account for the different uses of the term 'art' within the field of leadership. We suggest that most of the contemporary art-of-leadership literature is adopting the earlier version of *art as craft*, and often technical craft at that (where 'technical' denotes systematic skill, particularly within mechanics and industry; cf. Chambers Dictionary of Etymology, 2008: 1120). When Cohen (2002) lays out his 'Seven Steps for Taking Charge of Crisis Situations' as part of an art of leadership, he is concerned that readers systematically apply all seven in the order and in the way that he presents them. From this perspective, the leader-as-artist functions as an artisan who trades in factual knowledge, recipes, and techniques. Leadership artistry gets judged on the degree to which it is well-arranged and practically functional. Cause and effect, predictability, and objective standards all form important considerations. In contrast, art works representing leaders seem to draw on contemporary notions of fine art, playfully inviting multiple perspectives and interpretations. And leadership education (along with most of the academic literature) seems to use an unquestioning mix of the two. Thus our various art of leadership groups appear and act differently because they are referencing distinctly different versions of the same term, one which has undergone substantial changes over the last two centuries.

At this point, we could pack up our books and go home, reminding ourselves that language goes as it goes and that artistic license ostensibly means that anyone working in leadership can call whatever they are doing 'art'. Such a *laissez faire* position has low operating costs; one can easily apply the moniker and get on with being an artful leader, whatever that means.

Yet such a position also means not having much to share, trade, or grow on. Leaving the art of leadership to mostly mean craft-as-art, with fine art knocking at the door, is to ignore the ways that contemporary art perspectives can assist leadership with achieving newness,

difference, freshness, meaningfulness, and depth (Hatch et al., 2005) – all of which are focal properties within the fine arts. It also fosters increasing levels of confusion among leadership educators, researchers, writers, and practicing leaders interested in developing and promoting the art of leadership, particularly as art-as-craft definitions become increasingly anachronistic and the contemporary artworld extends its definitions, commentary, and influence into the areas of organization and economics (cf. Austin and Devin, 2004; Guillet de Monthoux, 2004; Brellochs and Schrat, 2005; Velthuis, 2005; Barry, 2008). Regarding this last point, while Kamber (1998) is correct in saying that ‘art’ is still used to denote craft, what gets brushed under the table by this is that ‘still being used’ is not the same as ‘used well’. The denotational difference between art-as-craft and the fine arts definition is that the latter ‘is the most usual modern sense of art, when used without any qualification’ (OED, 2009).

Put differently, we believe the art of leadership is currently on the wrong train, pulled by an outmoded engine that is gradually running out of steam. Instead, we suggest that leaders, leadership researchers, and leadership writers start qualifying their use of ‘art’ in light of contemporary art discourse, and with this, begin to conceptually decouple art and craft in the interests of strengthening both. By considering the differences between the two *and* considering each in light of the other, we believe the field of leadership can gain a potentially richer and more generative playing field to develop on.

Consequently, we devote the rest of the paper to two broad tasks. The first is finding a contemporary approach to art that can conceptually locate an art of leadership. Using a combination of art theories, we arrive at a framework that is primarily definitional and descriptive. In the subsequent section, ‘From Theoretical Classification to Practice’, we turn to more normative considerations. We use two contrasting cases of artistry, one from the formal artworld and one from executive practice, to help identify the kinds of thinking and action that make leadership artful.

The art parts: Some foundational possibilities

When considering possible foundational platforms for an art of leadership, we started with the philosopher and art theorist R. J. Collingwood (1938). He, too, was concerned with what he saw as the general conflation of ‘art proper’ with non-art, and particularly craft. Hence, he took pains to closely define craft, presumably with the intention of more cleanly separating it from art. As Gary Kemp (2009) summarizes:

The term ‘craft’ refers to activities which typically exemplify the following six characteristics; none are individually necessary, but the less of them that an activity exemplifies, the less sense there is in calling it a craft: (1) The applicability of a distinction amongst actions as means and actions as ends. A baker, for example, whips the egg whites in course of mixing the batter, for the eventual end of baking a cake. (2) A distinction is involved between planning and execution. A carpenter, for example, assembles bits of wood according to a plan for say a table, and for the most part, the more exact the plan, the better. (3) In planning, ends precede means in that the latter are chosen for the sake of the former, but in execution the means precede the end. (4) We can generally distinguish between raw material and finished product. (5) A distinction can be drawn between form and matter: the craft is transformation of the raw material into the finished product. (6) Crafts stand in three sorts of hierarchy: (a) The raw material of one craft is the finished product of another; for example the sawmill produces plywood, which is in turn the raw material for builders. (b) One craft has as its end product the tools which are employed as means

in another. (c) Some trades work in concert to bring about the finished product; for example, the manufacture of a computer may involve separable manufacture of the chip, the hard disc, the monitor and so on, so that the final assembly is 'only the bringing together of these parts'.

Kemp (2009) goes on to qualify Collingwood's perspective on art by saying:

The point is not that works of art never display any of these features; the point is that some works involve none, without its detracting from their status as art. Therefore the essence of art cannot have to do with any features correctly treated by a theory of craft. . . . Or rather, success in being craft is strictly immaterial to its being art; no craft-features make an object into a work of art.

We would summarize Collingwood's position by concluding (rather simply) that craft is largely about *exemplary arrivals* – about insuring that one arrives at preconceived and pre-established states through efficient and effective means. For a given problem A, process B is important inasmuch as it gets us to C in timely, cost-effective, and otherwise practical and expedient ways. Conversely, Collingwood's 'art proper' seems largely focused on *extraordinary departures* – art is 'imaginatively expressive' (of emotion) in ways that depart from usual emotional and cognitive states. Further, art,

is not what Collingwood calls the 'bodily work of art,' but rather the 'total imaginative experience' the bodily work engenders in a suitably equipped audience. . . . The spectator, then, is not one who apprehends or perceives a material thing, but one who realizes a certain intuition. (Kemp, 2003: 173–179)

Even so, Collingwood argues that the art medium/art body constitutes an important 'assist' for realizing the ideated, imaginative sense that the artist is trying to manifest:

The medium not only expands, intensifies, and refines the imagination, it also provides the very forms without which the more rarefied achievements of the imagination could never, in practice, be realized. The artist's technical mastery, then, is the acquisition of a vocabulary or repertoire of the imagination, not merely a means of externalizing the imagination. (Kemp, 2003: 179)

Relative to an art of leadership, Collingwood's formulation suggests that leadership is artful when it reaches and works with followers' imaginations, as fueled through their senses and experiences. In this, it is consistent with calls for 'embodied leadership' (e.g. Sinclair, 2005; Ladkin, 2008). Further, it points to the necessary interrelationship between leadership ideas and the mediums and objects that leaders use to create ideational focus, suggesting that while such objects are important, they are also substitutable and should not be confused with the imaginative experience itself. In other words, physicality is important and necessary for achieving leaderly art, but does not constitute the art.

The problem with Collingwood's perspective, however, is that it under-specifies when a 'total imaginative experience' should count as, or even lean towards being considered as, art. For instance, when a leader communicates a detailed picture of a desired organizational future, filled with profit targets and behavioral descriptions, everyone's imagination is necessarily engaged, perhaps in emotionally felt ways. Because Collingwood has told us that art is not a craft, and because such leadership acts fulfill most criteria for being craft (means in service to an end), it is clear that such a leaderly vision is not art. Yet it is unclear what *would* be counted as art within leadership. The same has been said about Collingwood's theory within formal art discourse (Kemp, 2009).

Institutional art theories attempt to address the ‘what would count’ question by insisting that artistic merit be judged by the formal ‘artworld’ (e.g. Danto, 1981; Dickie, 1974). However, given that there are no comparable institutions in management, institutional theories tend to leave an art of leadership out in the cold. Comparatively, Ellen Dissanayake’s definition of art as ‘making special’ (1980: 401) – ‘things made special or the act of making special’ – gets around references to institutions by considering art as a more biological, evolutionary behavior, something that cuts across societies and professions. As Davies summarizes (2005: 10):

It is plain that Dissanayake’s theory applies most comfortably to what might be called ‘low’ or ‘folk’ art; that is, to domestic and personal decoration or to local conventional and common public practices, rites, and ceremonies in which all members of the community participate, often together. To be suited to meeting the evolutionary functions she describes, art must be local, current, and accessible, not alienated from the wider populace and incomprehensible without a background of ‘theory’ and the mediation of critics. Moreover, art must be functional; it must make things aesthetically special in a fashion that enhances or supports their makers’ or consumers’ potential for reproductive success.

Relative to leadership, Dissanayake’s approach is appealing given that ‘making special’ is clearly a critical dimension within leadership literature – particularly that which considers leadership as the act of making a desirable difference (e.g. Bass, 1985). Yet, Dissanayake’s definition runs the risk of being insufficiently discriminative as well. The ‘special’ within ‘making special’ is not well articulated in terms of our previous distinctions between art and craft – ‘special’ can as easily refer to the craft parts of making, as it can to the artistic outcomes of making. Putting a man on the moon was a special act of leadership, but thinking of it as a piece of art would be stretching it – especially if seen from the view of contemporary art discourse.

As Davies (2009: 260) comments, ‘very general theories, like these, run the risk of reducing the arts to denominators so low and common that what they identify as evolutionarily relevant is not characteristic of art as such.’ He paves the way for a workaround by suggesting that:

the modern European conception is of art with a capital *A*, while her [Dissanayake’s] concern is with a broader but no less legitimate sense of the term; namely, art with a lower case *a*. Also, and this is the difficult part, she needs to establish that these two meanings are connected, with small *a* art as the genus and capital *A* art as one species alongside others, such as folk art, domestic art, religious art, and so on. (2005: 12)

Bearing the above limitations and arguments in mind, we find ourselves drawn to the ‘first art’ literature (e.g. Levinson, 1979, 1993; Carroll, 1988; Carney, 1994; Davies, 1997, 2007). In asking ‘what was art before it came to be called *Art*?’ it combines a number of the perspectives above, including historicity and context, the fact that artworks, both ancient and contemporary, are regularly assigned widely agreed-upon properties, that what starts out as ‘not art’ or ‘lowercase *art*’ may, through various encounters and cultural shifts, become informed by, and even become, uppercase *Art*, and that both *art* and *Art* rely on, but are different than, craft. Importantly, it creates space for an *art* of leadership that can coexist with an *Art* of leadership.¹

Though the first art literature is quite extensive, for our purposes the most important arguments come down to something like this: First art – works that form referential

beginnings for other approaches to art – did not start out as art. Such works were not meant for ‘distanced contemplation’. Nor did their makers employ predominantly artistic heuristics when fashioning the work, that is:

the work’s location within the tradition (if and how it is original or unusual, whether it emulates, subverts, rejects or redirects the default conventions and art practices of the time, the extent to which its use of the tradition is self-conscious, the genres and styles within which it is located, influences to which it is subject), as well as from its title and its use of symbolization, quotation, allusion, parody, irony, allegory, and the like. (Davies, 2007: 87)

Rather, these first art works were utilitarian. They were ‘made to serve extrinsic functions, such as the propitiation of the gods, the enrichment of ritual, the communication of religious and other lore, the illustration of virtue and vice, the glorification of its owners, and so on’ (Davies, 2007: 84). Michelangelo’s paintings in the Sistine Chapel are an example. Yet there was/is something about them that separates them from the regular utilitarianism of craft, something that makes them particularly ‘special’ relative to other craftworks. That something is their aesthetic intent and properties, ‘typical instances of which are unity, balance, integration, lifelessness, serenity, sombreness, dynamism, power, vividness, delicacy, triteness, sentimentality, tragedy, grace, daintiness, dumpiness, elegance, garishness and beauty’ (Davies, 2007: 86; also see Strati, 1999; Taylor and Hansen, 2005). Within this view, the aesthetics of a work must be essential to its functioning for it to count as *art*. If the aesthetic features are merely decorative, the work is not art. It is this aesthetic embeddedness of the work that moves it in the direction of the ‘departure’ category of art rather than the ‘arrival’ category of craft. The work, which has its intended practical ends, nevertheless goes beyond those ends, and may even render those ends insignificant in light of its aesthetic properties. In many classical works of art, for example the Sistine Chapel paintings, these effects are sufficient to push a work into being considered high *Art* by the contemporary artworld.

Relative to an art of leadership, the first art literature suggests that there are some leadership acts that, despite their utilitarianism, can be considered *art* rather than craft. These are acts that, despite their origins in craft considerations, fundamentally depend on their aesthetic properties to achieve their intended effect. An example would be Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech. The speech was meant to help end racial segregation in America. Its purpose was decidedly utilitarian. But its complex aesthetics, ones which have made it a legend, were essential in achieving its goals. Without the dream motif, which was conceptually and rhythmically varied and amplified, the speech would not have had the enormous influence that it did. Gandhi’s use of the spinning wheel to induce a country-wide boycott of mass produced European clothing has similar properties. Though Gandhi’s actions, including the design of the wheel itself, were highly crafted and utilitarian, it is the overall sublimity of his staging that resulted in the wheel becoming such a powerful symbol of local autonomy. Further, such leadership-as-art may come to be seen as having more formal artistic properties, albeit ones that are relevant to the domain of leadership rather than the professional artworld. For example, both King’s speech and Gandhi’s spinning wheel have come to be regarded as highly original and redirective (i.e. artistic) exemplars within the respective domains of leadership oratory and civil change. They have become disconnected from their time and place, and become signifiers for an *Art* of leadership.

The first art literature helps carve out part of an art of leadership – a classificatory dimension that, among other things, says that acts of leadership can be considered artful,

even though they were not intended to be art. With this, it also gives aesthetics an important role, saying that aesthetic intent and dependence should be considered a fundamental determinant of *art*. For instance, Gandhi's spinning wheel began as *art*, and with time and emphasis, separated from its place and utilitarian context, it gradually became more of a worldwide example of an *Art* of leadership.

Such a framework is consistent with the other articles in this issue, most of which embody some version of Wicks and Rippin's 'non-aggrandising' perspective on art. Within each, we see particular attention being paid to the aesthetic nature of leadership, from Wicks and Rippon's dolls to Bathurst et al.'s Hurricane Katrina. Where leadership particularly rests on sensuous performance, as in Biehl-Missal's dramaturgic considerations or Springborg's art as 'an arrangement of conditions intended to make us perceive some part of the world more directly through our senses', we can expect aesthetic merit to form a key consideration in whether a leadership act is or is not deemed artful. Meanwhile, leadership acts and frameworks that rely more on ideational rupture may lean towards the judgment criteria employed in the formal arts, particularly those seen within conceptual art (Springborg, this issue).

While our framework might be helpful from a classificatory, descriptive, and legitimizing perspective, it does not have much to say about how a leadership art might be enacted. For the sake of conceptual development we have more or less ignored craft, saying that it is only important inasmuch as it generates aesthetic effects that can result in *art*. This understates craft's importance and the intricacies of its involvement with both *art* and *Art*. If, as Davies (2007) argues, craft is the bedrock from which *art* may spring, then we need more insight into how this can come about before making normative suggestions. With this in mind, we move towards more hands-on considerations, considering how *art*, *Art*, and craft might be practically brought together in the enterprise of leadership.

From theoretical classification to practice

To explore how the classificatory and explanatory framework developed above might inform an art of leadership research and practice, we turn not to more formal theories, but to two case examples, one taken from a fine arts practice that focuses on economics, management, and leadership, and the other from a leadership practice that embodies a number of artistic properties. In comparing the two, we see various ways in which the elements introduced above might come together when trying to produce leadership art.

If you can't measure it

As a professional artist, Henrik Schrat typically uses economics, organization, management, and leadership as subject matter for producing visual *Artworks*. In one of his projects, he took the old proposition 'If you can't measure it you can't manage it' and turned the words into a large mobile where each word, made out of wood, turns independently of the others on different planes (Schrat, 2005). Since the words never manage to line up into the original sentence, and recede or approach in three dimensional space around a vast number of possible focal planes, one can only grasp the whole phrase as a memory, even as the visual referent keeps pulling that memory apart (see Figure 1). We asked Henrik if he would discuss the making of this artwork in relation to his experience of art and craft processes in general, to which he graciously consented; all the quoted passages below are his.



Figure 1. Henrik Schrat (2005) *If you can't measure it, you can't manage it*. Plywood, steel, black ink. 240 cm × 180 cm × 180 cm

One of the first things he noted was that the spatial problematization of the phrase was his 'proposition' or 'conceptualization'. Put differently, he was proposing that measuring might not confer managing at all, and that the original proposition, which seemingly invites no contestation, can in fact have other possible interpretations. The finished work gives rise to numerous associative paths and interpretations (and the following are ours). Since the original phrase/proposition is so widely used in management circles, it is implied that its deconstruction may lead to rethinking what management might be and do. As well, the mobile's movements visually and viscerally link to current chaos and complex adaptive systems theories in organization studies, which themselves contest linear and rational management theories. These various conceptual vectors wink in and out like the artwork itself.

With all this, he contended that he was working as many professional artists do – with concepts and propositions that, while different in character than the propositional knowledge presented in craft and technology, are just as central to the work process: 'Without a good proposition and strong conceptualization you cannot create good art.' Craft now comes heavily in at this point. He pointed out that for an Artist, conceptualization is strongly related to one's craft and the physicality's encountered when employing that craft. 'The material talks to you as you work', and the artist, to be successful, must necessarily work in this 'loop between crafting and material and artistic conceptualization'.

His original idea was to do the mobile in steel, which would echo the hard, precise, flat, and cold side of the original phrase, and of classical views of management. He painted the steel words black, originally with glossy paint and then in matt black. As he tried these variations out, using machine craft/technology to cut the steel, paint chemistry, and craft skills in balancing and composing, it hit him that the physical renditions did not resonate sufficiently with his concept. But he was not sure exactly why – it was a feeling of dissatisfaction that was hard to express.

Now the crafts and physicalities began ‘talking’ to him, leading Henrik to question his concept. He realized that the glossy ‘steely’ rendition trivialized things, reducing the measure-manage concept to a stereotypical throwaway, and masking the fact that the concept is quite old and somehow organic. So he tried wood. After a number of attempts, he settled on plywood as a crosswise referent to old woodworking and contemporary industrial wood. The plywood had a splintery unfinished look that set up more viewing tensions and invoked a ‘50s’ feeling. Still, the paint didn’t work for him. Regardless of whether he used glossy or matt finishes, something remained ‘off’.

The roughness of the wood and the 50s look of the font, which is a Times, prompted thoughts about histories and led him to realize that the measure-manage proposition was much older than paint applied over a substrate – it has permeated management thinking for centuries. In the end, he tripped over absorptive dyes as a solution, and after trying many different kinds, settled on China ink, one of civilization’s oldest dyes and one that creates a pervasive darkness. ‘The wood completely soaked the ink up, creating an inner blackness’ – no matter what angle the mobile is viewed at, and regardless of the wood’s splinters, cracks, and pores, it presents as an ancient-yet-new, dusty, wood-shop-like form that is black through and through, a form that despite its constant shifts, is changeless in its appearance, regardless of whether it’s illuminated by sunlight, other light, or its position in the room. Commenting on the overall process, he said:

What distinguishes art from craft is that its force resides in an interplay (bipolar play) of the two. So you can start on the conceptual side – as some artists do, the way you describe my process here – or you can start from the presentational side, throwing paint on a canvas, see what happens, and then conceptualize from that. No matter how you start, the ability to make the link, to build a concept from the mostly physical, create a formula, and link it to cultural history, is key. I have to state again that in this process there are big similarities to what scientific researchers do. But as an artist you are allowed to or are asked to leave parts open, where you have to trust your work and set traps for the observers, traps you yourself might not have the solution to. There is precision in measuring fields of ambiguity, and weighing them on the scale, and balancing them. But the ambiguity within them remains. This interplay between precision and ambiguity is central.

Our example here points both to how *Art* and craft can co-inform one another, and to the complex ways in which this might happen. Henrik’s bipolarity idea, where one intentionally jumps between materiality and concept, and craft and *Art*, relates to a long standing compositional principle within art and design, where one is advised to hold the whole loosely, adding and deleting parts across the workspace in a back and forth, gestalt-like, and gradually tightening way such that pleasurable resonances result (Austin and Devin, 2004). Rather than starting in one corner, making it perfect, and subsequently filling things in until one reaches the opposite corner, one is advised to gradually pull the whole canvas up (figuratively speaking) so that no one section is markedly more developed than the rest and the various elements vibrate with one another in ‘constellational’ ways (Barry and Rerup, 2006: 266). Though our example is drawn from the visual arts, the same considerations hold true within other art forms; e.g., improvisation (Barrett, 1989), or theater (Meisiek and Barry, 2007).

With this interplay between material and concept comes an interrelatedness of aesthetics and *Art*. Although the last several decades have seen professional artists eschew aesthetic considerations (cf. Danto, 1981; Davies, 2007), the mobile example clearly demonstrates

that aesthetics play a formative role in the creation of *Art* (cf. Davies' 2007 footnote 5, p. 87). Specifically, Henrik worked to create a number of contrasting aesthetic feelings (e.g. the mobile's material airiness and graceful font vs. its dark, flat, desiccated blackness). As well, the aesthetics of 'departure' were in continual interplay with the aesthetics of 'arrival'. The efficiencies of steel had to be compared to those of working in wood and to the sensuous properties of each medium. Trying to balance the lively motion of the work, the lifelessness of the finish, and other physical properties came to inform aesthetic considerations of purpose and accomplishment. Collectively, the work's aesthetics formed a platform for developing the mobile's Artistic properties (e.g. subversiveness, paradox, irony). Put differently, Henrik's aesthetic achievements created a foundation from which *art* moves could be made.

Finally, we see that there can be value in first 'throwing paint onto the canvas' and seeing where it might lead. Though Henrik portrays this as an either/or thing, where one can equally start with a concept and go to material or the reverse, our experience suggests that leaders mostly start with concept and go to material. Thought experiments are cheap, putting ideas out there is somewhat more costly, and changing physicalities can be more costly yet. The stakes are often so high in leading that 'throwing paint' and seeing where it lands can be an unnerving prospect. Yet doing so, at least from time to time, may be just the energizing tonic that leadership needs. Relative to Henrik's statement that the 'interplay between precision and ambiguity is central', throwing the paint first forces a certain letting go. One may have 'happy accidents' along the way, where things that aren't working play with compositional intent and take it to more sophisticated levels; for example the way in which Henrik's steel encounter pushed him to rethink the concept behind the mobile.

Thus far we have considered craft, aesthetics, and *Art*, leaving *art* aside. We have seen how both artistic and craft-aesthetic considerations can usefully inform concepts typically thought to be beyond the province of *Art*, for example the taken-for-granted precepts of business leadership. We have also seen how working in bipolar ways can be just as, if not more, effective than working linearly, particularly if one is seeking artistic outcomes such as meaningfulness, distinctiveness, and vibrancy. The problem, though, is that most leaders are not formally trained in the *Arts*, particularly within business circles (Taylor and Carboni, 2008). It is clear from Henrik's discussion that working artistically takes years of practice, which raises the question of whether non-*Art*-trained leaders can employ artistic thinking and methods, if not in the big *A* sense, then perhaps from a small *a* perspective. And assuming that this is even possible, is it desirable? With these questions in mind, we now consider a case of business leadership that highlights ways in which leadership *art* might happen and be cultivated. As we will see, a key factor in artistic leadership may indeed be 'throwing paint on the canvas'.

The white factory

Hydro Aluminum Corporation was an old line manufacturing corporation where none of the stakeholders had professional training in the *Arts*. As Eirik Irgens describes it (Irgens, 2000):

When the Hydro Aluminum Corporation (HAP) board asked Johnny Undeli to go to the town of Raufoss to become the new CEO of HAP-Raufoss, they had seen the writing on the wall, and it was written in red. The company was facing economic ruin in a market for aluminum products that was anything but promising. 'We were more than 300 employees in a company that seemed

like a social club. We hardly knew what it meant to be profitable', said former union chairman Armann Myrland.

Undeli's intention was to create a 'world class' company. Given that the company was in a mediocre industry, the only way that it would be worth holding onto was if it could somehow be turned into a leading performer. He began with a series of conventional, craftlike acts. He halved the number of top leaders from ten to five, did away with privileges like company cars, and moved the executive parking lot outside the fence, forcing the managers to mix together with other employees. Then, despite the company's being deeply in debt, he spent a million Norwegian crowns (about 130,000 Euros) on painting the production hall, floors and all, completely white. The factory was known for being extremely dark, dirty, and oily, which made the job that much more difficult. The employees thought he was out of his mind, but went along with it in the end. In a different move, when the night shift set a production record, he showed up in the middle of the night with a bag of champagne. As the union leader put it,

We shared the hall with another company. Only a half-wall separates us. We shook the bottles very hard and shot the corks over to the poor guys on the other side, into the dark ghetto. The mood was very good.

Employees also got flowers and other small presents. Social arrangements became common. Finally, at Christmas, without telling anyone, Undeli bought two whole pages in the local newspaper where he published the picture of all the employees with a seasonal greeting from HAP. During Undeli's tenure, HAP went from being the worst company in its industry to becoming one of the world's best.

The Undeli case depicts leadership as *art*. Perhaps the most artistic of his acts was the painting of the factory, done at the bottom of the company's fortunes with no real explanation and against fervent protests from the union leaders and employees. It is a literal example of Henrik Schrat's 'throwing paint on the canvas' – of how changing the materiality of the workspace can re-shape the concepts at hand and give rise to new ones. From an *Art* point of view, the act embodied attributes of subversion, peculiarity, and perhaps symbolization, though it was not intended as *Art*. The act was also referential, not to other artworks or traditions, but to his actions before. Prior to the painting, Undeli was seen as a steady, predictable executive. Given this view, Undeli's actions appeared that much stranger.

The Undeli case reflects many elements within our art of leadership framework. As with Henrik's mobile, we see an interplay of aesthetic and artistic attributes which appear to develop in relation to Undeli's experiments with materiality. There is also an iterative hermeneutic between craft and lowercase *art* as 'making special'. Sometimes he worked in a 'folk art' way (e.g. the newspaper photos) and sometimes in a strictly craft-based way (e.g. the bonus system). His shifts between material and concept, between various interconnected initiatives, and between formal structural changes and informal performative ones all exemplify Henrik's concept of 'bipolarity' – of toggling between poles.

At the same time, it is clear that Johnny Undeli, unlike Henrik Schrat, Per Morten Abrahamsen, or even Gandhi and King, 'backed into' his artfulness. Undeli already had his concept in place, forming a world class company, and then went down the cost cutting route to try and realize his idea. Yet it became apparent that cost cutting was not the same as 'world class' – there was nothing distinctive about it, and from a Collingwood (1938)

perspective, it did little to foster a 'total imaginative experience'. It 'wowed' no one. Consequently, he experimented with other possible renditions of 'world class', and in particular seemed to latch onto the idea of 'light', perhaps from having spent so much time in the dark and dirty factory. The painting of the factory literally lightened everything from a brightness perspective, but it also lightened by creating a sense of the ludic and wacky, symbolizing a break with the usual heavy industrial stereotype. The champagne event was also a form of lightening; champagne, with its rising bubbles, gives a sense of lightness, as well as representing a measure of elegance, something that was made even more vivid by virtue of its being served to the hardcore night shift. Yet shooting the corks into 'the dark ghetto' invoked the ludic sense of lightening up, and, like the painting event, fostered an interesting tension between light as pure and light as funny.

Between this example and the former one, we can conjecture that a practicing art of leadership may require a certain lightening up and that play, at least temporarily, is essential if artfulness is to emerge. The notion of bipolar toggling, and perhaps of switching between materials and modalities in constellational, gestalt-like ways, may be similarly important. Finally, we note that in both the Undeli and Henrik case, there was never really one 'opening night' – a clear finish point. Rather, there were many interconnected processes and creations which built upon one another. In both cases, there were various bounded experiments with material, form, and concept, all stitched together by an overarching, yet loosely held idea, and general values around richness, surprise, perseverance, and so on.

Despite their commonalities, Henrik's mobile was intended for the fine arts market, and Undeli's work was intended to be of practical value for the company. Only by extending Undeli's art, maybe with photos of the created artifacts, beyond its time and place, could it become recognized as a piece of fine Art (and perhaps by describing it in this article, we are contributing to its transformation). Considering Undeli's white factory as Art directs our attention to its artistic properties and downplays its functional aspects. But its origin nevertheless resides in art.

Between these two points come many potential combinations, which blend aesthetic and artistic attributes towards different ends. For instance, leadership that aims at upheaval might attend to artistic attributes such as surprise and inversion, and aesthetic attributes such as vividness, the fiery, and the grotesque. Conversely, a 'nurturing' art of leadership might seek the opposite. This opens the way towards different art-of-leadership constellations, ones which are not only proportionately different in their use of aesthetic and artistic attributes, but combine these in ways to form distinctive orientations, and which can potentially inform one another.

Discussion and conclusion

In our introduction to the article and the Undeli case, we asked about the possibility and desirability of an art of leadership that is situated in contemporary art thinking. Our general conclusion is 'yes' – such leadership is both possible and desirable, at least sometimes. From the possibility side, we have seen that there are ways of looking at art that allow us to locate and discuss leadership acts in artistic terms, both from a localized, folk art perspective and from a formal artworld one. Leadership artistry can range from the craft-based, utilitarian, aesthetically dependent, and locally relevant to something approaching more formal Art thinking.

We have also seen that leadership art is possible from a practice perspective. It can, as with the Undeli case, happen by accident, particularly where the leader is focusing on 'shaking up the system'. Yet the King and Gandhi examples suggest that it can also come about through intention, particularly where an aesthetic orientation towards the leader's craft is emphasized. To the extent that a leader is acquainted with formal Art thinking, it may also be possible to consciously imbue one's leadership acts with artistic attributes. This may be especially salient where leaders are focusing on things like surprise, deconstruction, and referentiality.

In terms of desirability, much seems to depend on why and where an art approach is being called for. In the leadership cases we have considered here, artfulness has arisen where the standard approaches have failed to bring about the leader's hopes and a breakthrough has been needed. Although desperation is one motivator, we can imagine that boredom and stagnation are others. Where organizations have considerable slack, yet are also stuck in production ruts, leadership artistry would appear to be a good thing. At the same time, strong *art* moves like Undeli's are unlikely to find much of a welcome in such environments, given their propensity for killing the golden goose. Thus, leaders in such situations are more likely to invest in professional art than in becoming artists themselves.

What about the great in-between? Those midrange leadership situations which are neither desperate nor boring? Ironically, this may be the arena where leadership artistry is most needed, and yet least thought of. Here, conventional leadership craft – the various approaches to goal setting, envisioning, motivating, planning, and so on, that were mentioned in the introduction – are typically working well enough, gradually taking everyone where they want to go in clear and rational ways. The bookshelves are filled with craft-based 'Art of Leadership' books. Decorative or performative works from professional artists may be purchased to inspire and warm things up (Clark and Mangham, 2004), and/or employees might use stereotypical art media as stand-ins for artistic thinking. Employees are sometimes given training in creativity and innovation with the assumption that this will keep everyone's eyes sufficiently open to new possibilities. Yet all this tends to create complacent 'one eyed views' and 'habitual blindness' (Cassirer, 1944). The artist's skill in radical and multidimensional seeing, thinking, and creating is simply not present, let alone cultivated, and organizational rigidities myopically grow to where some breakdown happens and the chances that artistry can help are small at best.

In keeping with the overall contours of the article, we believe that a more desirable way would be to cultivate departure-based leadership *artistry* alongside of arrival-based leadership craft, seeing them as different but complementary approaches that together can effectively offset habituation and calcification. Such artistry would work with the leader's materials at hand – meetings, spreadsheets, plans, strategies, speeches, and so on – using them as substrates for artistic thinking and action. Leaders would occasionally 'throw the paint', change media, materialize their concepts, change paces and rhythms, experiment with idea sketches and bold strokes, all with an eye towards creating perceptual fluidity, reverberations, and vibrancy. Perhaps they would create artistry 'portfolios' where a variety of interrelated *artistic* initiatives are pursued: some small, quick, goal centered, and more aesthetically focused, and others more *Art* centered and profoundly 'show stopping'. At the same time, they would sharpen their craft skills as they pursue the directions that their artistry opens up. In this way, leadership *art* becomes a rigorous, contributory, living thing rather than an extravagance or a reward for a hard day's work.

Along these lines, it may be necessary to extend or change our framework. The first art framework is somewhat misleading in that the upper case distinction implies that 'Art' is more lofty than 'art'. While this may sometimes be true, is it not necessarily so. There are instances of *art* which are grand (e.g. the Sistine Chapel paintings) and *Artworks* which are notably 'unlofty' despite their artistic aspirations and being formally labeled art (e.g. much of the art displayed in local art galleries and shows). As such, the framework underrates the value of forming varied portfolios of work, where 'lesser' efforts serve as building blocks or informants for larger ones.

If we consider the power or exemplariness of a work we would want to include: (1) local, aesthetically dependent, and craft-based instances of leadership, like an aesthetically moving talk given at a town council, (2) localized instances that are deliberately artistic and are characterized by their artistic attributes, such as a Christmas skit composed and led by a company's leaders, (3) notable, aesthetically dependent, and well crafted acts of leadership such as the King and Gandhi examples, and (4) notable works that are intended to be artistic, which might be considered art by the professional artworld, and which are informed by and/or informing of leadership; for example Picasso's *Guernica*, Warhol's *Mao*, Sibelius' *Finlandia*, and even the business model of Christo and Jeanne Claude. Such an approach opens the way for a more nuanced and developmental art portfolio where both lesser and greater leadership arts can be cultivated in relation to one another. Of course this is just one way among many to begin extending the art of leadership, and we introduce it here mainly to prod further thinking about the different ways in which leadership artistry might be developed, represented, and judged.

Speaking of judgment, a few comments are necessary regarding an art of leadership and the often political nature of both art and leadership. Despite historical clichés of artists as being 'beyond the madding crowd', art has long been 'an activity highly valued as the mark of civilization' (Davies, 2007: 53), and hence caught up with deciding what is important to look at, who gets to judge, what to judge, and how to judge. In other words, an art of leadership is 'loaded' in ways that leadership craft is not. In particular, the formal artistic approaches and thinking we have discussed here are fundamentally based on subversion and inversion, typically of the status quo. As such, they have decidedly political implications. To the extent that leaders seek a 'fine art of leadership', they will find themselves facing tradeoffs between the moves needed to 'shake the system', arrest current ways of thinking, and wanting to keep things moving and organized. To the extent that their artistic moves protest important values and beliefs, they risk becoming unpopular and thrown out. Thus, while artistic leadership may be desirable in some ways, it can also have less-than-desirable consequences which need to be considered.

Coming full circle, we can now re-examine what our art of leadership approach might mean for the three arenas introduced at the beginning of the paper: the popular leadership literature, leadership training programs, and academic work on art and leadership. Relative to the popular literature, we noted that much of the art of leadership literature uses 'art' when it is in fact discussing craft, with the underlying and unchallenged assumption that if leaders follow the authors' instructions, they too will magically join the artworld with all its attendant status perks. That's the bad news. The good news is that there seems to be a new generation of writing that treats the art of leadership in terms similar to those raised here. That is, the authors attend to aesthetics, reference *Art*, more clearly delineate art from craft, and lay out ways for different means

of cultivating leadership *artistry*. The book *Artful Leadership* by Michael Jones (2006) is a good example. Perhaps because Jones is himself a respected musician, he does a nice, if somewhat sentimental, job of blending *art*, *Art*, and craft considerations. Importantly, he attends to both the value and pitfalls of taking an artistic approach and provides suggestions for different forms of artfulness. In a variant of this, we are also seeing more *Art of leadership* books where works from the fine arts are used to inform and inspire. For example, Richard Olivier's (2002) work on Shakespeare and *Henry V* provides something of a tour de force on what leaders can learn from the Bard. Similarly, James March (March and Augier, 2004; March and Weil, 2005) uses Cervantes, Tolstoy, and Shakespeare to fuel his leadership thinking. If this trend continues, it may well be that the art-as-craft works will finally give up the ghost and be supplanted by ones rooted in more contemporary art thinking.

Even as the popular art of leadership literature tends not to discriminate between art and craft, arts-based leadership training and education often does a poor job of distinguishing between small *art* approaches to leadership and professional ones. It is not unusual to see arts-based leadership workshops that put activities like mask making and discussions of leaderly fine art all into the same basket, even though the underlying assumptions of each are quite different and lead to different ends. This is not to say that having different traditions in the same room is a bad thing; in fact, the opposite is probably true. Rather, we are saying that being more conscious of the differences might make for better pedagogy. As an example, one could use an aesthetically centered, 'small *a*' exercise in mask making that is aimed at discovering one's leadership appearance in conjunction with a 'large *A*' analysis of how Cervantes masks and unmasks the characters within *Don Quixote* for artistic effect. Used this way, the two approaches can complement one another and lead to deeper insights all around.

Finally, with respect to academic work within art and leadership, our article points to a number of research directions. One thing that has been completely untouched here is the role that science might play regarding the interrelationship of craft and art. For instance, how do various mediums and physicalities interact with leaderly conceptualization and the enactments of those concepts? What are the effects that various art, craft, and art-craft orientations have on leadership outcomes? How do different 'portfolios' of leadership art (both *a* and *A*) play out – what are their various effects? Such questions are only the tip of what is a very large and minimally charted iceberg. Yet they will need to be asked if leadership *art* is to take its place alongside of leadership craft and science.

We would like to conclude with a summarizing quote from Michael Jone's *Artful Leadership* (2006), where his interlocutor notes that:

[T]ruly outstanding leaders are not remembered largely for their professional, technical or cost-cutting skills, but for their wisdom, presence, intuition and artistry. These are the qualities that prepare them for making an organic response to critical situations. Technical knowledge is important, but it is only part of the story; listening, getting a 'feeling' for things and engaging others in imagining possibilities, is the larger part of it. So much of a leader's work today is not about playing the notes but listening for what's emerging in the space between. (p. 6)

As the 'nouveau' art of leadership represented in this special issue continues to grow, define itself, and create cracks in the bedrock leadership literature, we look forward to seeing what emerges in the 'space between'. We imagine that it will be rather beautiful.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the generous assistance of the following people: our friend and colleague Stephen Carroll, who in his art aficionado role opened our eyes to the many different ways in which fine art might inform leadership thinking; Henrik Schrat and our other artist friends for their extensive conversations around contemporary art discourse and practice; Stephen Davies and Richard Kamber who unstintingly provided us with primary materials on art theory and philosophy; and finally Donna Ladkin, Steve Taylor, and our anonymous reviewers, who so kindly and thoughtfully helped us to reformulate our thinking around Art, Craft, and Leadership.

Note

1. Because the *a* and *A* system of denotation can, in our experience, become quite quite confusing, we have restricted our use of it to 'art' and 'Art', leaving aside terms like artistic, artistry, artful, and Artworld.

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Fonte: Leadership, v. 6, p. 331-349, August 2010. [Base de Dados]. Disponível em: <<http://online.sagepub.com>>. Acesso em: 8 set. 2010.