

SERVANT LEADERSHIP THROUGH ARTS – A STATE OF THE ART

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Abstract: The future leaders are growing in the digital era and through a profound crisis. These future leaders demand for purpose, meaning and connection and they will be working in organisations also shaped by the globalisation of knowledge, markets and customers and the information and communication technology. The Artful Leadership project aims at developing the new generation of servant leaders through arts. The Erasmus + Programme co-funded the Artful Leadership consortium to research and develop new learning resources that can empower a leadership shift. The research phase allowed the project consortium to explore the main drivers changing society, business and learning and to ask which model of leadership will be more suitable to live and be successful today and in the future; as well as, which tools could be more effective to reach and engage future leaders through a learning journey and disrupting with the onetime training event. The approach to servant leadership was subsequent and allowed to understand the background, its main characteristics and what the impact when experienced in different organisations is. Finally, arts based learning concept, characteristics and good practices were explored focusing on the impact it brings when applied into management and leadership educational programs.

Keywords: servant leadership; artful based learning; education.

1. Introduction

The main goal of the Artful Leadership project is to create innovative digital learning resources about Servant Leadership, supported by arts-based learning methods and deployed through different methods and techniques (e.g. digital storytelling, visual art, design thinking, etc.).

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In order to deploy new learning contents and training activities about a new leadership paradigm, one must be also prepared to answer the learning challenges posed by a generation of active learners, digital natives who are graphically/visually oriented. The relevance of concepts such as web based, open access, collaboration and creativity is critical for the success of any learning activity designed for the new generations at work.

As research has been showing that the traditional management and leadership paradigms are no longer answering the current challenges that organisations are facing, different authors are applying a more creative and innovative work and learning environment [1].

In terms of leadership characteristics, organisations look for a model which impacts by: strengthening the sense of belonging of employees in relation to the organisation, increasing their efforts and conscientiousness in their attitude towards the organisation, the work, colleagues, and clients; setting the basis for a sense of autonomy that encourages creativity and risk innovation; and, empowering team performance through an inclusive and supporting climate.

The Servant Leadership model is understood by the academic leadership research as being capable to fit this fifth Age of work, both inside organisations – in meeting the needs of highly talented employees – and for the community – serving multiple stakeholders [2].

By using an arts-based approach to deliver new leadership competences, the Artful Leadership consortium fostered those transversal skills development and contributing to the growth of a new generation of workers and leaders that will be characterised by new thinking patterns and more meaningful and ethic work and leadership styles.

The goal of arts-based learning is not to teach people to be artists, but to create intense immersive learning experiences through artistic processes that facilitate new insights and perspectives about business challenges, hence contributing to individual and organisational learning and development [3].

The research stage of the Artful Leadership project intended to provide a clear and synthetic overview about the core concepts of the Artful Leadership project – the servant leadership characteristics and the artful based learning approach – and how these concepts may be combined to maximise the potential impact of a leadership development strategy.

2. Research methodology

The research stage of the Artful Leadership project has been designed in order to assess and analyse: the in-depth knowledge about the target group and future end-users- leaders, school managers and Millennials&Gen2020 generation – its characteristics, needs and desires; the evolution of the Servant Leadership model; the Arts-based learning potential as a learning tool applied to management and leadership education; the emergence of new learning methods linked to arts-based learning, such as digital storytelling, design thinking, etc.

Our research methodology was designed as a quest for knowledge, one where both researchers and research participants have an active role. In fact, the approaches and techniques selected allowed for a continuous involvement of the research participants, not only as respondents but as agents of analysis, reflection and action.

The research journey was designed around three main phases:

Phase 1 – Across the Valley of Desk Research: aiming at providing deeper insights into both domains (Servant Leadership & Arts-based learning) it allowed the consortium to have a broader perspective about the current developments on the specific fields of study. Phase 1 was conducted in a divergent-convergent continuum and embraced two main stages.

–1st stage: two sources of data were explored – Media research collection and Personas. The first – Media research collecting aimed to collect a diverse set of resources from different sources and in different formats related with the project topics. The Personas were developed in order to collect information

about inspirational characters in the domains of Leadership, Arts & Learning.

- 2nd stage: the research team analysed the information, references and sources selecting the most appropriate resources to the Artful Leadership aims. In the end, the consortium listed a total of 50 literature references linked to the Artful Leadership domains.

Phase 2 – Into the woodland of a participatory research: this activity included two key processes of interaction with the target groups:

- Present Acknowledgement: to select, analyse and share projects or organisations that could act as inspirational sources for end-users.
- Future Foreknowledge: to map society trends, particularly related to Learning and Industry environments.

In total, six strategic foresight workshops were organised in the four countries of the partnership, involving more than 70 participants from different backgrounds (e.g. Academia, Business, Policy Makers, etc.).

Phase 3 – Climbing the hills of practice: at this stage the aim was to compile and analyse all the elements previously gathered, in order to map the key leadership competences and ensure a comprehensive analysis of the artful based methods that can be used to support leadership training and development.

The research activities were applied in four European countries – Portugal, Netherlands, Italy and Greece – and the national reports and analysis translated to English in order to present a first overview report to a Panel of Experts, invited by the consortium and counting with 10 experts from diverse academic and professional backgrounds. Their inputs fine tuned the final research report and helped the consortium designing the next steps for the Artful Leadership learning path [4].

3. Insights and exploratory leads for managerial and leadership education

The analysis proceeding the research activities allowed for a better understanding of the cultural, societal and managerial perception about the project topics, namely: who are today's and future's leaders; how the Servant Leadership model responds to the current and future challenges; what is the potential of Arts-based learning for management and leadership education.

3.1. Trends affecting today's and future's leaders

Most businesses are experiencing a crossover between the share of their workforce that is 50 years and older and the share that is younger than 40 years old [5]. Moreover, and besides this mix of self-characteristics, keeping current employees motivated to work involves new compliance measures that foster social innovation and responsibilities.

These complex environments of individual's specificities and market demands start new arrangements in organisational and managerial design that define a new age of work – the Fifth Age of Work [6]. Thus, today's and future's leaders wouldn't be only dealing with different human characteristics and expectations, but they will have the need to work in and with new work spaces and digital tools that manage communications between people around the Globe.

The digital age is immersing employees in technology throughout their lives. "In addition, the internet is empowering people in a new and different way to create and share their ideas, giving rise to new content, entrepreneurs and markets" [7]. The way managers, from top to bottom organisational structures, are dealing with team management is also changing and demanding a set of new strategic skills that both they haven't developed in the last years and the educational entities aren't ready to offer. "These may include a set of transversal skills and competences (e.g. leadership and entrepreneurial abilities, project and innovation management competences, using data, negotiation, ethics, flexibility, creativity, etc.), as well as the capacity to inspire and manage multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary and virtual teams" [8].

Such set of skills and competences must be developed considering the synchronous and asynchronous management realities with virtual and non virtual teams. To inspire such knowledge and preparation for tomorrow's needs, educational institutions must share this same understanding of the world. They need to "recognise that preparing students to become effective and enlightened leaders is critical to their future job prospects, leading deeply fulfilled lives, and becoming positive contributors to society in increasingly difficult times. The need to think differently about preparing young people for the future is driven by a number of major forces. One is the Millennial generation itself" [1].

The inputs gathered and analysed during the research activities support that citizens are aware of the changes, the trends and the future as an under construction space. Nevertheless with the large amount of digital contents and information, citizens experience an absence of inspirational and engaging methods exploring the under-developed set of skills and competences. Even with the free access to new digital contents every day, European managers miss a better understanding of how to deal with daily challenges – the lack relies on the mismatch between what the digital market offers, in terms of contents and managerial tools, and in which the labour market is turning into, in terms of people, environments and scale – different from what were the labour-raised challenges 20 years ago.

3.2. The evolution of the Servant Leadership Model

"The servant-leader is servant first (. . .) It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions (. . .) The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature" [9].

The concept of servant leadership has been developed and studied since the 70' by several authors [10, 11] and from different perspectives – business, academy, politics and governmental organisations. And all the results show how the servant leadership model is capable to fit this fifth Age of work, both inside organisations – in meeting the needs of highly talented employees – and for the community – serving multiple stakeholders [2].

From the origin of the concept of servant leader many assumptions emerge, most of all connected with the essence of the leader. The leader, as the one who serves others [the followers] and guides them towards the same direction, has a set of distinctive characteristics as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Framework of the key characteristics of servant leadership by author [12].

Key characteristics	Laub (1999)	Wong & Davey (2007)	Barbuto & Wheeler (2006)	Dennis & Bocarnea (2005)	Liden, Wayne, Zhao & Henderson (2008)	Sendjaya, Sarros & Santora (2008)	Van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011)
Empowering and developing people	Develops People	Serving and developing others Consulting and involving others		Empowerment Trust	Empowering Helping subordinates grow and succeed	Transforming influence	Empowerment
Humility	Shares Leadership	Humility and selfnessness	Altruistic calling	Humility	Putting subordinates first	Voluntary Subordination	Humility Standing back
Authenticity	Displays Authenticity	Modeling integrity and authenticity				Authentic self Transcendental spirituality	Authenticity
Interpersonal Acceptance	Values People		Emotional healing	Agapao love	Emotional healing	Covenantal relationship	Forgiveness
Providing direction	Providing Leadership	Inspiring and influencing others	Persuasive mapping	Vision	Conceptual skills		Courage Accountability
Stewardship	Builds Community		Organizational stewardship Wisdom		Creating value for the community Behaving ethically	Responsible morality	Stewardship

As the field of research around servant leadership grows, several interpretations for the key characteristics also emerge. The Artful Leadership consortium has selected Van Dierendonck proposal [10] of a servant leadership model based on 6 key characteristics (Table 1) that describes the essence of a servant leader as someone who is humble, authentic, understands and experiences the feelings and motivations of others, expresses stewardship, empowers and helps developing people and provides direction.

Table 1. 6 key characteristics of a servant leader [10].

Servant Leader Characteristic	Description
empowering and developing people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – giving people in the workplace responsibility for their own actions. – acknowledging the talents and strengths of employees. – encouraging employees in their actions and in their personal growth. – acknowledging that employees are not merely subordinates, but that each is an individual in their own right
humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – acknowledging that they [servant leaders] are neither omniscient nor omnipotent, and that employees may have more knowledge and experience. – acknowledging fallibility and the limits of one's own knowledge, which helps to facilitate a learning environment: one in which employees can learn and develop through their own experimentation and by learning from others.
Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – showing to employees that not only can they be themselves, but also that the work environment genuinely encourages and welcomes this. – acting with integrity: do as they have promised; show consistency in actions and morality; and be true to themselves and the spirit of the leadership principles they preach.
Interpersonal acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – understanding and experiencing the feelings and motivations of others. – accepting employees as individuals: being empathetic and forgiving, accepting that people can and do make mistakes.
Providing direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – showing what is expected from each employee. – making work dynamic and have it tailored to the abilities and needs of employees.
Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – taking the responsibility for the larger institution and to focus on service instead of control and self-interest. – acting as caretakers but also as role models for others. – setting the right example, leaders can stimulate others to act in the common interest.

Recently the research has also highlighted compassionate love as a core component of servant leadership. Compassionate love is the attitude that “will encourage a virtuous attitude in terms of humility, gratitude, forgiveness and altruism. This virtuous attitude will give rise to servant leadership behaviour in terms of empowerment, authenticity, stewardship and providing direction” [13].

Moreover, several authors have been testing the benefits of this leadership model in organisational contexts. Research correlating the positive impact of servant leadership in different aspects from work has been showing how this model fits the new ways of doing business and suggesting how organisations may input the necessary flexibility to face it. Some examples are the following: firm performance (Peterson, Galvin & Lange, 2012), team effectiveness (Hu & Liden, 2011; Irving, 2005), job

satisfaction (Anderson, 2005; Drury, 2004), trust (Dannhauser & Boshoff, 2006; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010), organisational commitment (Asag-Gau & van Dierendonck, 2011; Liden et al., 2008), commitment to change (Kool & van Dierendonck, 2012), creativity (Neubert et al., 2008), integrity (Bobbio et al., 2012), organisational citizenship behavior (Ehrhart, 2004; Bobbio et al., 2012), engagement (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) and psychological empowerment (Asag-Gau & van Dierendonck, 2011) [12].

3.3. The potential of arts based learning

“As leaders and management educators seek to find other ways of communicating, creating knowledge, and making sense of the complexities of managing in the New Economy, we are likely to see the continued growth of arts-based learning in organisations” [14].

Thus, arts-based learning has emerged as a viable approach to enhance employee skills in areas such as communication, creativity, innovation, leadership, high-performance teamwork, change management and intercultural communication [15]. This happens because arts based learning can empower people in organisations to see more and see differently, discovering new ways of seeing and doing things in an artistic intervention, can be an energising experience that activates the will to act and engage in change, leading to outcomes of both personal and collective value [16].

Taylor and Ladkin [17] categorise four processes in which arts-based learning methods contribute to the development of leaders and managers:

- skills transfer, fostering the development of artistic skills that can be applied in organisational contexts;
- projective technique, using the arts as a way of facilitating reflection through projection (revealing inner thoughts and feelings inaccessible through more conventional methods);
- illustration of essence, enabling participants to apprehend the “essence” of a concept;
- making, accessing our deep interior life using art making as a way to self-express.

Through these four processes, the arts and artistic practices lead learners in a strategic process of transformation, where leadership, culture, personal development, creativity and innovation all play a defining role [15]. In such a way that learners know and experience; the experiences can be understood holistically instead of through logical and systematic processes; and, because of the meaning these experiences have for learners they may have lasting impacts [18].

The advantages of arts-based learning are already known by the corporative and the academic sectors as in the last few years both are shortening the distance between arts and learners, especially when focused for leadership and management education. Some examples of this cross-fertilisation are observable in the first business-school-based center for Art and Leadership (in Denmark) and in a set of business schools such as Wharton, MIT, University of Chicago and Oxford University that are adding arts-based courses to their curriculum focused on leadership topics.

4. The model of Servant Leadership in the 5th Age of work

The capacity to be at a work with a purpose, ethical and flexible enough to accept and care about others emphasises the importance of the servant leadership model in today's organisations.

For the new generations at work and responding to a diversity of needs, characteristics and expectations; organisations can implement servant leadership to address the psychological needs of people in general, thus building a sense of community within the workplace. "If employees have a sense of belonging to something that they perceive is of genuine importance to them, a powerful spirit of responsibility is engendered, which in turn creates a greater likelihood of individuals putting in more effort and being more conscientious in their attitude to the organisation, the work, colleagues, and clients" [10].

The intention and passion in each procedure and result overtake the organisation's walls offering the community with meaningful final products and services. This ethical approach of business, which is linked with the servant leadership model, offers employees and

society a “focus on caring for people, integrity, trustworthiness and serving the good of the whole” [13].

Moreover, the ability of servant leaders to know and understand individuals, providing the needed orientation for growth and decision making, makes organisations inclusive and supportive. This knowledge based workers and organisations may then have the flexibility to adjust to changes with their peers, properly answering to stakeholders’ demands and civil society (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The relation between servant leadership and global meaning among knowledge workers [19].

<i>Meaning perspective of knowledge workers</i>	<i>Servant leadership basic characteristics</i>	<i>Practical examples of leadership behavior</i>
Calling orientation	Service to others Holistic approach to work	Allow workers to focus on their work and eliminate unnecessary overheads Allow for job crafting (people are able to define the boundaries of their own work) Create opportunities for workers to participate in social projects and activities outside the job that make use of their knowledge and skills Provide training and development opportunities fitting the specific needs of the worker
Membership association	Promoting a sense of community	Create communities of practice where workers can share their experiences and knowledge with peers Support the involvement of workers in external networks where they can share their experiences and knowledge
Need for autonomy	Sharing of power in decision making	Link work to society and goals beyond the organization itself Involve knowledge workers in creating the vision of the organization Create an environment of trust and psychological safety where knowledge workers feel room to take risks and be truly empowered Promote and support emerging leadership Support sound individual initiatives (even outside the delineated organizational strategy)

Being aware of the need to increase the levels of inspiration at work, to flourish creativity and innovative results, is guiding managers to the artistic process of creation. Seeing and interpreting the world through the artists lens and mind urges leaders to engage in “passionate creativity that have been more the domain of artists and artistic processes than most managers” [20].

Nevertheless, the characteristics foreseen by the servant leadership model are beyond the rigor and the discipline demanded decades ago by most of the organisations in that time period. They are related to the holistic side of management in which mostly leadership and management educational programs are not focusing yet. Due to the general distance that separated business organisations and the arts, the advantages of making

art and applying artistic processes to learning programs were not seen until the Academia demystified it. Today, higher educational programs and the research itself prove how arts based learning can have a decisive role in the improvement of indispensable and essential skills in today's economy, such as implementing and developing new ideas, taking considered and deliberate risks, and cooperating with other organisations in the community. The alignment of businesses with arts results in organisations more in tune with the creative process, transferring the knowledge to the workplace [3].

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