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Leadership. An Intercultural Approach. Alternate take...

1. Leadership and competency approach illusion

Leadership is both concept and practice. In each of its two dimensions there is no agreement upon the essence of leadership and means by which it can be identified, achieved and measured. One crucial factor of this ambivalence is different disciplinary perspective of the definer in each of his attempts, not to mention some obvious differences between cultural contexts. Defining leadership we can find ourselves somewhere between Shackleton's [1995] approach, who states that leadership is "the process in which an individual influences other group members: subordinates or followers towards the attainment of group or organizational goals" [Shackleton 1995; Ball 2007, pp. 449–447], and that of Mullins [1999], who defines leadership as "a two-way process between a leader and followers" [Mullins 1999, Ball 2007, pp. 449–447]. Located wherever in the sphere limited by these extremes we cannot hence escape its three basic dimensions, such as: moral, emotional and relationship. They shape each of many possible definitions. That concern suggests that the study of possible factors and contexts of leadership should find its place more in the realm of cultural, social studies, and humanities, and less and less under the influence of technocratic managerial jargons.

One could ask what is leadership if not a set of competencies? The truth is that competency approach to leadership gives only an illusory promise to rationalize and simplify the processes of selecting, measuring and developing leaders, and this is maintained by Bolden and Gosling [Bolden, Gosling 2006, pp. 147–163]. It reflects a fragment of this complexity, as it is focused on the individual 'leader', while restricting consideration of leadership as a distributed relational process. Competency frameworks tend to reinforce individualistic

practices and in fact dissociate leaders from the relational environment in which they operate. Using a cute music metaphor by the mentioned authors, leadership in its richness encourages people in leadership roles to not only develop their *music reading* and *basic playing* skills but also their “interpretation, improvisation and performance abilities: emotion, intuition, moral judgment, experience” [Bolden, Gosling 2006, p. 160]. Adding more terms to competency lists will not solve the problem. At best a competency framework will only be a simple representation of a highly complex and changing landscape.

What leadership studies need is a type of research exploring the symbolic and narrative processes of collective sense making in organizations. Only this could support a shift from individualistic notions of leadership to more inclusive and relational perspectives. Competency discourse is restricting the kind of talk that contributes most to effective collaboration and collective engagement. It tends to become a somewhat bland noise far too limited in its vocabulary to express the fascination, emotion and complexities of leadership in action.

2. Alternative solutions for leadership studies

We have survived numerous approaches and trends in leadership studies. Starting from trait approach of the 1940s with naturally born leaders who need to be selected, through the 1950–60s style approach which interpreted a leader from an angle of his changeable behavior which needs only to be trained¹. Then, contingency approach of the 1970–80s with its situational variables, and finally new leadership of the 1980–90s with its many different faces: transformational, charismatic, visionary, laissez-faire, with managers of meaning, mutual applications of old heroic leadership. Here again we are back with individualistic bias, which should be challenged as there is no sense denying that, quoting Bolden and Gosling’s [2006] words, it is “more beneficial if organizations are looking to move beyond individualistic notions of leadership towards more inclusive ‘post-heroic’ and collective forms”. One can think here of a kind of alternative for this egocentric circle, with several challenging concepts and good practice of dispersed or consensual leadership. This came first with the contemporary reality of intense intercultural contacts, with striving for integration and the need of new sensitivity for culture. It takes leadership theory and actions into more effective and humane or social direction. What is maybe currently exciting and gives the best answer to these needs, is discursive leadership. The concept seriously introduces analysis of managerial discourses as described by Fairhurst [2008, pp. 510–521].

¹ Of course this was rather perspective of the democratic western world, and not the one of authoritarian realities on the eastern side of the iron curtain or other countries under dictatorship in many places of the world in the 2nd half of the XXth century.

There is only one step ahead to speak about Leadership Fantasies researched and presented by Sveningsson and Larsson [2006, pp. 203–223]. This concept, hidden behind attractive words, reveals how managerial claims of leadership seem inconsistent with the actual practice. The authors of research indicate that many leadership ideas could be seen as a kind of fantasy related to identity work rather than actual practice. Its sources could be found in management education and the planned cultural change, consciously or unconsciously transferred from one to another managers generations as a kind of managerial ideology and narrowly viewed elite formation. The question here is whether individuals chosen to be identified as leaders are really a special category of people?

Considering leadership Simkins [2004] compares two distant views: the traditional and the alternative. In the first view leadership resides in individuals. It is hierarchically based and linked to office. Leadership occurs when leaders do things to followers and it is different and more important than management. This view emphasizes leaders as different, who make a crucial difference to organizational performance. Effective leadership is generalizable. The alternative gives quite opposite perspective. It keeps that leadership is a property of social systems and can occur anywhere. Instead of traditional individualistic view, leadership is understood here as a complex process of mutual influence. The alternative approach gives us a clear view that leadership – management distinction is unhelpful. Anyone could be a leader and leadership is one of many factors that may influence organizational performance. What is crucial for leadership is the context. Both views should be considered cautiously. What is my profound concern here, is that leadership studies are basically social studies. They base on the process of social interpretation. We are studying organization members and seeking to make sense of events as part of a larger context through which events are given meaning. This is about influencing meanings given to organizational events influencing choices and actions.

3. Leadership and culture: universal or intercultural concept

One of the main questions asked here is about Leadership as a universal idea. There is a universal necessity for something recognized as leadership. And in this sense probably only specifics vary by society and by setting. What is a risk here is the shadow of global technological, modern bias. In reality we are combining to produce a tension between opposing forces toward convergence and continuing cultural distinctiveness in leadership throughout the world.

One reasonable question is, does intercultural dimension is relevant for leadership? We can easily see it in leadership development practice as we have obvious leader formation national styles, This is the place where national culture is an intervening variable in leadership development, when we notice cross-national leadership style differences and its factors. Several authors, like Derr and Laurent [1989] give theoretical, cross-cultural perspective on socially and

culturally accepted career path systems, their internal and external dimensions, factors, programs and cultural reality for developing the leader in many local contexts. Here we have a cultural model of leadership dynamics. It gives us a way from national cultures (its basic assumptions) first to Cognitive Map, and also to Organizational Culture (its values, norms, artifacts). This Cognitive Map is a two-way relation with individual differences, and the latter are in exchange with leadership development and dynamics, which are as well under pressure from Organizational Culture.

When dealing with Leadership and its spectrum within Intercultural Studies, we have or rather, we are used to thinking about many both obvious and challenging problems, such as: Leadership as an aspect of international business strategy or Multinational Corporations and their organizational realities. What is considered is the Global Leadership concept and managerial roles in global strategy implementation. Another fashionable and basic problem is the question of management of Diversity within organizations. It is crucial for a promoted change, and intellectual shift, from International and global leadership to Cross-cultural leadership concept and its implementation. A serious discussion is raised as we have different meaning of 'cross-cultural' in current discussions. Finally, Leadership within this dimension of studies is considered as Leadership of multicultural work teams.

But this type of inter-cultural studies is even more about how culture more or less directly affects leadership. Here we are striving for an answer of what are the cultural aspects of the relations between leaders and those with whom they work. There are many issues having implications for leadership: religion, elites, historical leaders existence, modernization process (technology), functional demands and other aspects of cultural reality, cultural differences, and finally, pure cultural values in many possible implementations.

When people are asked to define culture, what they mention most frequently is: a way of life, tradition, a set of rules, art, beliefs, and set of values, but also language, food, and religion. What word culture brings to popular mind is such expressions as: language, nonverbal communication, space and time orientation, religion and belief systems, pattern of thinking, self-images, set of values, material culture and aesthetics.

Culture is at least the set of values, attitudes, beliefs shared by a group. Culture sets standards of behavior for continued acceptance and successful participation in that group. It is passed on and learned by newcomers from more experienced predecessors. In leadership we are looking for role models, we are imitating people who seem to know how to get along in the group. What is in the centre here is establishing group's common identity and continuity. There are many categories of basic cultural dimensions, for instance: People's Relation to Nature, Time Orientation, Nature of People, Activity Orientation, People's relationship with others, Concept of Space. Forces that shape culture, mentioned quite often, are

religion, political power distribution, strong and charismatic secular or spiritual leaders, holy scriptures, Historians and story tellers: and their heroes, legends, myths – reinforcing, sustaining culture, then Physical surroundings and then the manner in which people sustain themselves economically (natural resources, natural limitations, opportunities). There are Core Value Dimensions mentioned: Human Nature: Good, Evil, Neutral? Purpose in Life – Doing or Being? Societal Role – Individualist or Collectivist? Nature and Fate: Controllable or Controlling? Time orientation: past, present, future, Preferred Mode of Communication – High Context or High Content, Power distance: Direction or Consultation? Uncertainty Avoidance: Structured or Unstructured? Masculinity – Femininity: Tough or Tender? The Universal – The Particular: Absolute or Situational Ethics? Work – Life relation: Specific, Diffuse, are Work and Business Separate from the Rest of Life? How Status is Attained: by Aspiration or Performance?

Considering Leadership and Values we have to realize that the question of response to another culture is first a question about our culture. That is a core, that intercultural approach is a values problem. You cannot avoid it at least with many challenges of managing Cultural Diversity at the workplace. People asked about priority of values answer very differently, depending above all on national belonging and generation. These were the basic categories indicated in the research on priority of values around the globe. And when asking what people value most, we need to emphasize generational variable, this could be exemplified very clearly with Japanese society divided to traditional and new generation. When first, traditionally oriented age group mentions group harmony, group achievement and group consensus on the top of the values list, the younger social stratum indicates freedom, relationship and family security.

What is than called here Intercultural Approach? This is not as one sided as it is supposed to be and this is probably a proper moment to think of an 'alternate take'... like in Miles Davies' performances. The basic dimension is the obvious one, like being between national cultures, religions, and so on. Another, less often used, being between organizational cultures, even if within the same national or language context. And another one, even more inspiring, more overwhelming, introducing alternative methods, narrations, inspirations. This last angle could be further divided into discursive, narration-centered and focused on creativity, arts and broadly speaking aesthetics. It contains a kind of thinking always outside the box, like studying leadership with the help of new disciplines and its specific approaches like social studies, cultural studies, anthropology, ethics, linguistics, and finally philosophy, aesthetics and other subtle humanities. That is also why we have at least four perspectives of studying leadership: social construction of leadership, then relational perspective, discursive perspective, and last, aesthetic perspective of studying leadership.

Slawek Magala is the management scholar worth mentioning here. He tries to combine all these dimensions of intercultural interest: managerial challenges of

dialogue between cultures, organizational discourses dilemmas, then narrations, metaphors within management studies and practice, and finally several aesthetics challenges for these issues. His book *Cross-Cultural Competence* [Magala 2005] discusses several crucial problems, of Managing Cultural Diversity and a leader's role in it, when Democracy is the model, and Words are the medium.

4. Leader as Narrator. Second Sphere of Intercultural Approach

This is about mentality transformation from controlling to coaching and introducing democracy beyond the factory (office) door. The Leader is perceived here as a narrator in the organizational discourse. Understanding the power of communication and language enable you to utilize words to manage organizations. Different managerial metaphors like for instance 'hands', 'human resources', 'team players', not only affect people differently, but also trigger different thoughts. Resources can be exploited and developed, Hands are only utilized, and, symbolically, come independent of minds, brains and bodies. By using different metaphors and communicating through them, managers create different realities [Clegg, Kornberger, Pitsis 2004].

There are in fact many roles a leader plays in controlling, disseminating, and even changing and designing organizational cultures. In coaching new employees, a leader shows them 'how things are done around here', thus breaking them into organizational culture by socializing them into accepted practices. Mintzberg [1973] says properly that communicating activities occupy up to 90% of managerial working time. Communicating a vision, a mission, a newly designed organizational culture, a leader is a skilful narrator – he has to know how to 'tell stories'. Clearly, communication matters, and so does the language in which it takes place. The interest in the varieties of story-telling or in organizational discourses has been further fuelled by the evolution of organizational forms from the hierarchical pyramid of an industrial bureaucracy to a more flexible, temporary and loosely coupled network of organizational clusters, chains, platforms, and teams. Magala indicates that this leads directly to the increasing demand for more intense, frequent, detailed, differentiated, and personalized communication, then search for new theories and methodologies to throw more light on the "social life of information" [Magala 2005, p. 156]. The 'cultural turn' in organizational studies gave an additional impulse for researchers to pay attention to how people talk and to what they talk about (stories, myths, even gossip). This cultural turn has been reinforced by the 'linguistic turn' in the 20th century philosophy. But we should be aware that this analysis of the processes of social communication could not be reduced to the sender who determines the message, to the channel which disseminates it and to the receiver who swallows it gullibly. There is a lot of indeterminacy here. The sender uses ambiguity, counting on receivers to make choices. The channel modifies or subverts the message and the receiver

is interpreting, translating, transforming, and using the message in ways that cannot be fully predicted in advance. That is why a critical researcher within leadership studies should try to reconstruct other, alternative cases of story-telling, sometimes accessible only in an oral form. Magala is reminding us that fragmented, local, ‘polyphonic’ story-telling in organizations leads to the reconstruction of ‘microstories’ [Magala 2005, pp. 162–163]. What he recommends is to reinterpret all stories, communications, pieces of information and detect the instability, complexity, processes, and heterogeneity below the surface of ‘official’ communications that try to create an impression of stability, hierarchical order, well structured, functional coherence. He pushes researcher’s attention to the “dichotomies, contradictions, rebel voices, other sides of the story, ironic twists of the plot”. And that is why managerial acculturation includes not only “how we do things around here” but mainly “how to do things with words” [Magala 2005, p. 164]. Even words in the same language can – if they reflect organizational practices and different national values – acquire different meanings, different cultural and social reality.

5. Third Sphere of Intercultural Approach to Leadership: influence of Creative Processes and Aesthetics Studies

One may doubt whether it is responsible to speak about artistic culture and creativity while considering intercultural approach to leadership. Instead of that, there is something refreshing and hopeful in the recent reflection of management and organizational studies theoreticians². They are giving new content and added value not only to ancient Platonic and Aristotelian ethics and aesthetics interdependence in any context or practice of society.

This part of the article will focus on the undervalued part, rediscovered and integrated now into the attractive, alternative approaches of organizational and management studies, labeled under a common brand of intercultural, non-conventional management. Leadership is here not only seen from the perspective of other national, religious cultures, other organizational cultures, other narrations and metaphors, but also new inspirations and fresh experiences borrowed from other practices, like these found in experiences of artists, perceivers and interpreters. This has a strong credit to the dominating trends in humanities and art interpretation schools of last decades, like hermeneutics, semiotics, and even phenomenology re-discovered³.

² Above all, in alphabetical order in different managerial disciplines of studies: M. Banai, J. Nirenberg, M. Menachem [2000], F.J. Barrett [2000], S. Boerner, Ch. Freiherr [2005], R.J. Boland, F. Collopy (eds.) [2004], K. Cadenehead, G. Fischer [2000], P. Guillet de Monteaux [2004], J.R. Hackman [2002], D. Holt [2004], S. Linstead, H. Höpfl (eds.) [2000], R.J. Mockler [2002], B.J. Pine, J.H. Gilmore [1999], B.H. Schmitt, A. Simonson, [1997], A. Strati [1999]. For bibliographic details look into References list.

³ Several attempts to find an application for it in management studies, for instance: B. Czerniawska, G. Sevón (eds.) [2003], L. Ehrlich [2005], P. Guillet de Monteaux [2004], A. Strati [1999], J. Umiker-Sebeok (ed.) [1987].

It is not a comfortable situation to introduce word 'creativity' in management studies. The term and meaning of creativity in business and managerial use were almost devastated within transfer of easily accessible knowledge and popular, less scientific publications. What I would suggest is to speak more about creation or creative processes, following George Steiner brilliant philosophical narration in his 'Grammars of Creation' [Steiner 2001] than about just narrowly understood lateral thinking concept and other painfully popularized ideas. What is researched and crucial here, being a part of serious management and organizational studies, is the inspiration adapted to business and management practice from arts development and theory, performer actions, creator's reflections and hard philosophical aesthetics⁴.

The first step is to think about human relations practiced in human resource departments and its policies. Here the first task would be to break through them, and rather working on missions and tools for something called Human Enablement policies. Following Kim and Mauborgne's [Chan Kim, Mauborgne 2005] comparative metaphor of *Red and Blue Oceans Strategies*, we could find a good illustration of the possible shift in approach. When the conditions for a red one are really bloody, focusing on competing in existing market space, beating the competition, exploiting existing demands, the Blue Ocean Strategy is much more wanted. The conditions here are: creating uncontested and making new space, then making the competition irrelevant, creating and capturing new demands, and treating differentiation as the first, basic condition. This should be just an illustration for much better prepared explanations for creativity factor in management and leadership like that of Mauzy and Harriman⁵. Not giving a ready recipe for obtaining the higher quality of creative component, they indicate several basic components like, intrinsic motivation, paradox of curiosity and fear, necessity of breaking and making connections, and obligatory proper evaluation. These are several tools for sustaining the change and making a climate for creativity in managerial settings or contexts. Guiding the organization creativity is possible with three constant actions performed by the leader. The first one is watching, with a sense of monitoring and understanding, the second activity is acting: initiating Change, building a Coalition, planning and experimenting. Finally learning, by gathering feedback, capturing lessons, and adding the Body of Understanding.

The best, and more direct body of good examples of interdependence between leadership and creativity is evident in the sector of the so called Creative Economy [Howkins 2001], with all these industries producing books, films, music, tv programmes and other copyright products, US number one export goods, as

⁴ Understood rather as ontology of art and its impact on other spheres of life, like in my classical lectures from the field: K. Berger [2000], R. Ingarden [1983 and 1989], R. Scruton [1974 and 1983].

⁵ J. Mauzy, R. Harriman [2003]. I also consider very helpful a book by S.H. Kim [1990].

they are outselling clothes, chemicals, cars, computers, planes industries. In the XXIst century people who own ideas regulated by copyright and patents have become more powerful than people who own machines. When in the 1960s leadership meant to organize, in the 1970s – to motivate and in the 1990s – to develop, beyond 2000 leadership means to create environment for creativity. This goes hand in hand with the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann's⁶ idea of de-paradoxification, when paradoxically opposite realms like, business and arts, industry and culture, organization and aesthetics, theatre rehearsals and leadership trainings, when well managed, support themselves and build a new integrated quality. This could not be possible without alternative narration in management provided by intercultural studies and necessity to open for new voices. But leadership is supported not only from actors performance approach and theater director's experiences. It borrows from visual arts, like in the case of SEI headquarters and West Collection case, which reshaped organizational structures of the investment enterprise [West, Wind 2007]. But even stronger alternative for traditional leadership approaches are the lessons learned from musicians. Let us think not only about such artistic contributors to management theories like orchestra conductors⁷ and their support for auditive leadership concept. Some studies took as a model for self-management and consensual management profiles the Orpheus Process [Hackman 2002], a practice with the name taken from Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, one of the rare self-managing cultural organisms, an ensemble without conductor with rotated, consensual leadership and responsibility. Orpheus case is a model for a new sense and perception of ownership, and innovative insight into structure and potentials of team voluntary membership, interpersonal trust and face-to-face communication as observed by Hackman [2002].

Even more inspiring for innovation in leadership is the jazz improvisation model for practice. It has minimal structures that guide autonomous contributions, puts in a centre of action embracing risk and letting go of the familiar, it gives us more information about exploring the edges of competence. Jazz performance practice develops provocative learning relationships. This is the art of affirmative engagement. Again paradoxically, it creates incremental disruptions that demand openness to what unfolds⁸.

⁶ N. Luhmann [1995], Luhmann's concept was reminded in the context of leadership by M. Sundgren, A. Styhre [2006] in their unusual study of pharmaceutical industry cases.

⁷ These potentials are attractively described in N. Koivunen [2003]; this topic is also discussed in: S. Boerner, Ch. Freiherr [2005, pp. 31–41] and S. Parasuraman, S.A. Nachman [1987].

⁸ Jazz in management studies, mainly: F.J. Barrett [2000, pp. 229–245]; D.T. Bastien, J.H. Todd [1988, pp. 582–602]; M.J. Hatch [1999, pp. 75–100]; K. Kamoche, M. Pina e Cunha [2001, pp. 733–763]; M.L. Lengnick-Hall, C.A. Lengnick-Hall [1999, pp. 65–70]; R.E. Purser, A. Montuori [1994, pp. 21–31]. Worth mentioning is also the literature on improvisation of a sort of philosophical essay of B.E. Benson [2003].

6. Integration of the Spheres. Intercultural Approach broadly understood

Intercultural approach to the leadership in the sense of its object of study and tools used, is considered here as a body of three main spheres mentioned above. As the general purpose of the paper was to provide an insight into some alternatives to the straightforward, 'classical' leadership managerial studies, this three-dimensional proposal for a description of the proper content of intercultural management on the example of leadership is in its shape as presented above a kind of original idea. Indicating several illusions of some mainstream oversimplified views on leadership in the realm of intercultural studies I would like to give hope for more humane, societal and creative developments. Current state of the research gives that hope for a more interdisciplinary spectrum of solutions for both the theory and practice of leadership. Again, there are at least 3 spheres of it. The first is quite obvious and contains all possible activities within intercultural management which deals with reality between cultures, nations, religions studied with help of social studies and other related fields. The second sphere, hidden and recently re-discovered, is the discourse, narration, metaphor and other cultural studies interests, which took a challenge of extending management studies. This extension was possible only because of a pressing need for dialogue in the context of intercultural and multicultural contemporary reality. Finally, the third sphere, projected, challenging and hopeful is the field of creativity, creation processes and philosophical aesthetics applied into management realities and theories, and this is especially relevant for leadership. That means arts, creation and performance as basic cultural inspirations for leadership theory and practice. Although it looks provocative and very lateral, this is a natural solution and should be an expected consequence of opening management scholarship to cultural studies and humanities. This happened by the way of democratizing managerial studies, allowing far from mainstream voices to be heard. And these are both discursive or narration-like and aesthetics applications in management.

This is evident not only from more and more present and influential management scholars' research texts on dependence of philosophical and practiced aesthetics and management fields of studies, but also from such masterpieces as Emily Dickinson's poem, which has a leadership motto in its content and which I would like to present as an epilogue⁹:

⁹ E. Dickinson (1840–86), *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Boston 1924, part I. poem XCVII, translated into Polish by another talented poet Stanisław Barańczak, from: Emily Dickinson, *Wiersze wybrane*, Znak, Kraków 2000: *Nie znamy własnej wysokości,/ Póki nie każą nam powstać // Wówczas – gdy wiernie Plan spełniamy / Nieba sięgamy wzrostem – // Heroizm w pieśniach sławiony / Byłby naszą normalną naturą // Gdybyśmy Miar nie wypaczali / Z lęku przed Królewską Posturą – //*.

*We never know how high we are
Till we are asked to rise
And then if we are true to plan
Our statures touch the skies –
The Heroism we recite
Could be a normal thing
Did not ourselves the Cubits warp
For fear to be a King –*

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an alternative view to the leadership managerial studies. Indicating several illusions of a straightforward view on leadership in the realm of intercultural studies and some oversimplifications, it proposes a three-dimensional perspective for intercultural approach to leadership. Current state of the research gives hope for a more interdisciplinary spectrum of solutions in this field of theory and practice. There are at least 3 spheres of it. The first is quite obvious and contains all possible activities within intercultural management which deals with reality between cultures, nations, religions studied within the framework of social studies and other related fields. The second sphere, hidden and recently re-discovered, is the discourse, narration, metaphor and other cultural studies interests, which took a challenge of extending management studies. This extension was possible only because of a pressing need for dialogue in the context of intercultural and multicultural contemporary reality. Finally the third sphere, projected, challenging and hopeful is the field of creativity, creation processes and philosophical aesthetics applied into management realities and theories, and this is crucial mainly for leadership. That means arts, creation and performance as basic cultural inspirations for leadership theory and practice. Although it looks provocative and very lateral, this is natural and should be an expected consequence of opening management scholarship to cultural studies and humanities. This happened by the way of democratizing managerial studies, allowing far from mainstream voices to be heard. And these are both narration-like, discursive and aesthetics applications in management. Like in jazz this is an attempt to provide the 'alternate take' for leadership understood within intercultural perspective.

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