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The Leading Conductor – The Leadership Concept between Management and Cultural Sciences

Abstract

Management teaching and management publications are frequently focused on learning from cases and best practices. While this opens the way to holistic considerations of phenomena related to management, the result is frequently an abstract reduction of complexity. For example, although relying on the stories about famous leaders such as Jack Welch or Steve Jobs, leadership research tends to neglect important aspects of leadership practice, such as aesthetics, linguistics and embodiment. Following merely positivist traditions and building on predominantly quantitative studies (Lawler, 2005), leaders are reduced to their cognitive abilities, rationality and social procedures. They are considered bodiless abstractions or system elements (Ropo & Sauer, 2008). I will use the example of the orchestra conductor, a hero leader who influences his/her team of musicians with smooth movements of the baton and thus a popular but oversimplified metaphor in leadership research (e.g., Atik, 1994; Hunt, Steluto, & Hooijberg, 2004; Mintzberg, 1998). Following an aesthetic leadership approach (Hansen, Ropo, & Sauer, 2007), I investigate the interfaces and overlaps between artistic and managerial practice, between cultural and management studies. The suggested contribution builds on the concept of (cultural) translation (Bachmann-Medick, 2008) that aims at reinventing concepts through interdisciplinary translation rather than further illustrating the original and thus develops both disciplines, as “when concepts enter different genres they do not remain intact” (Beer, 1999, p. 186). The orchestra conductor’s example also contains a strong notion of ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’, understood as a fully embodied presentation of events in the co---

presence of an audience, that is mostly absent in management and leadership research.

References

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