Beyond the leader-centric approach

Leadership phenomena and aesthetics in a conductorless orchestra

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to go beyond the leader-centric approach to highlight the shared leadership phenomena happening in organizations where there is no head leader. Seeing interactions between the orchestra members through the lens of aesthetics is a useful way of understanding leadership phenomena.

Design/methodology/approach – The different approaches used are interviews, participant observation, analysis of video, photo materials and journalist review.

Findings – The managerial evidence says that without a head leader nothing is possible in organizations with a high level of complexity is not proved in a conductorless orchestra. The orchestra without a conductor shows that leadership is an aesthetic phenomenon. The conductorless orchestra is enhancing the sensitivity of organizational practices in a situation where beauty is a common goal to achieve. Studying leadership through the aesthetic lens is very relevant to understand this phenomenon, and shows that leadership is a co-construction between leaders and followers (and therefore negotiated).

Research limitations/implications – It has to be compared to a non “amateur” orchestra where power struggles are maybe more visible.

Originality/value – No study has been done on aesthetics and the no-conductor orchestra.

Keywords Aesthetics, Leadership, Sense-making, Organizational practices, Conductorless, Orchestra

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The leadership issue, literature of which is very abundant in the field of organizational studies, has been recently enlightened by new debates on the aesthetics of organizations. For approximately 30 years, a lot of research on organizations has integrated the aesthetic dimension into their discussions. As E. Reinhold underlines it:

[...] in parallel with these various facets of reality, the academic world has developed since the end of 1990s a new research stream named “Organization and Aesthetics”. Several reviews dedicated special issues to the Art and Organization phenomenon, such as Organization in 1996, Human Relations and Tamara: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Studies in 2002 and Culture and Organization in 2006. In Denmark, within the Copenhagen Business School, a whole department named “Management, Politics and Philosophy” concentrates many of young researchers associating art, philosophy and management (p. 126).

These new perspectives renewed a very polarized and blurred state of art on leadership (Duke 1986; Grint, 2011). Many axes of opposition (dealing for example with the
questions of leadership centralization/decentralization, its social construction or on the other hand, the importance of the individual qualities of the “hero” leader, the adequacy between styles of leadership and types of situations, etc.) increased the difficulties to understand this complex phenomenon (Grint, 2011). The potential conflicts on leadership issues being rather numerous, the aesthetic approach added new fruitful highlights: this critical approach goes further than rational theories on leadership and underlines that “sensitivity” is a key factor to understand the leadership phenomenon. (Hansen and Bathurst, 2011):

[...] an aesthetic approach entails an exploration of sensory experience and sense-making, and the felt meaning that are both produced by and guide our interactions and decisions. [...] The agenda underpinning critical studies is to understand power relationships and encourage emancipation from dominant or constraining power structures and worldviews. To this end, contemporary organizational aesthetics has introduced an alternative perspective to leadership studies involving the non-rational, felt meanings that pervade everyday organizational life and which form the basis of emancipator effects (pp. 255-256).

According to Jimenez, the definition of aesthetics indicates that it does not include only “beautiful” but also “sensitivity” in opposition to “rationality” (Strati, 1992):

A history of aesthetics is conceivable if we give to this term a wider meaning: it would not be the history of theories and doctrines on art, on what is “beautiful”, or on works of art, but rather the history of sensitivity, imagination, and speeches which tried to consider sensitive knowledge, seen before as inferior, as an answer to the privilege given to the rational knowledge in Western civilization (Jimenez, 1997 p. 26).

2. Conceptual framework

As Jimenez’s (1997) definition of aesthetics shows it, aesthetics studies in the field of management are underlining sensory experiences as a fruitful way to understand leadership as an embodied phenomenon.

2.1 An embodied leadership

Leadership is therefore analyzed in a more embodied way, people bodies being valued and revealing the “sensitive”. Ladkin (2013, p. 322) shows in particular in Merleau Ponty’s writings that “the body”, or more exactly “the flesh”, affects the way we perceive ourselves as “leader” or “follower “and how the signals sent by our bodies are perceived and interpreted by others in different ways. This work is consequently linked to a new paradigm where leadership is socially built:

[...] the notion of leadership as a socially constructed activity is part of the larger move in theory towards understanding social phenomena as outcomes of the interplay between individual sense-making, collective cultures and institutional norms, rather than based in any verifiable reality (Avelsson and Deetz, 1996; Astkey, 1985; Searle 1995).

Moreover, this interactivity between leaders and followers driven by body perceptions takes place in an embodied and relational space:

[...] as the notion of flesh posits the complete inter-connectivity bewteen perceiver, perceived and world, it emphasises the inseparability of leaders, followers and the context within which their relations are enacted. (Ladkin, 2013, p. 328).
Ropo et al. (2013) enhance this finding by specifying how much material spaces are the theater of sensual and symbolic embodiment which guide the individuals in their actions:

[...] material places lead people through embodied experiences such as feelings, emotions and memories of the place. These experiences form and shape the direction of their actions, interpretations and judgements. The performative nature of material place is not determined but symbolic and sensuous (p. 381).

2.2 The artist leader, a source of inspiration for the leadership theories
This sensitive (or even sensual) dimension of bodies and their impact on leadership matters consequently bring numerous authors to use art and artists: it is for them a way to understand more precisely perceptions phenomena and their dynamics on the leader/follower relationships. Barry and Meiseik (2010) question “the art of leadership” based on a new art conception: it goes beyond the craft side of techniques use and opens new interactivity perspectives. The multiplication of points of view, interpretations and imaginary creations led by our experiences and senses are leading researchers to highlight a real “art of leadership”.

Ladkin and Taylor (2010) insist moreover on three central points of recent literature on aesthetics and leadership:

(1) Embodiment, which shows interaction and physical commitment between human bodies (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Springborg 2010; Rippin and Gaya Wicks, 2010).

(2) Capability to contain contradictions (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Biehl-Missal, 2010): “containing and working with contradictions and paradox is indeed central to most artistic endeavors. Artists must develop their ability to work with both light and shadow elements of their chosen forms” (Ladkin and Taylor 2010, p. 238).

(3) Development of artistic sensitivities (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010).

Furthermore, to better understand the different sides of this artistic dimension of leadership, or of the “artist-leader” (Woodward and Funk, 2010), the musical sector was studied in particular through the jazz example (Weick, 1998; Bougon et al., 1977) or through the classical music figure of the orchestra conductor. The latter has been used for a long time as a reference point in the management field. N. Logie underlines that many authors used the conductor metaphor to understand organizations: P. Drucker to analyze the relationship between integration and specialization (Drucker, 1950; Logie, 2012) and to highlight the various hierarchical structures (Drucker, 1988; Logie, 2012); W. Bennis to underline the balance between the instrumental expertise in the orchestra and the authoritarian role of the conductor (Bennis, 1989; Logie, 2012); or H. Mintzberg to illustrate the notion of “covert leadership” (Mintzberg, 1998; Logie, 2012). Moreover, the analysis of relationships between the musicians and the conductor was used to illustrate the negotiations process and conflict management as the classical orchestra has very specific organizational characteristics, i.e. routinized way of functioning, anonymization, lack of autonomy of the rank musicians, disappointments for musicians not to be a soloist and quasi-omnipotence of the conductor (Arian, 1974).
New researchers recently decided to tackle new issues concerning leadership and to go beyond the question of hierarchy and power structure in the orchestra:

- role of trust and organizational climate on the group cohesion and thus on the performance of the orchestra (Biasutti, 2013);
- impact of the expressiveness of the conductor on the concert quality (Morrison et al., 2009);
- role of the conductor on group creativity (Hunt et al., 2004); and
- importance of the conductor’s transformational leadership based on several components (Avolio et al., 1999; Boerner and Freiherr Von Streit, 2005) such as charisma, inspiration, motivation and intellectual stimulation (Boerner et al., 2004): it is the opposite of transactional leadership which considers negotiation as the central point of the exchange between the leader and the musicians (Atik, 1994).

These new research streams tackle the question of the group performance and the quality of interactions between conductor and musicians during the musical performance. Aesthetics will intervene at the same time, as these attempts to renew leadership theories. The charisma of the conductor is one of the first issues to be analyzed through the lens of aesthetics, using E. Kant’s definition of the sublime (Ladkin, 2006).

Therefore, recent literature on aesthetics and leadership insisted on the relational experience of leadership through the lens of “sensitivity” and “sensuous” interactions. Koivunen and Wennes (2011) used aesthetics to analyze the leadership of the conductor, underlining three components in their research:

1. a relational listening (mutual adjustment through mutual listening);
2. an aesthetic judgment (formulation of an opinion or a faith from a sensual perception); and
3. a kinesthetic empathy, in other words, the “embodiment” of an idea or an interpretation through body gestures.

Then Bathurst and Cain (2013) studied more recently the aesthetics of gesture as a way to co-create a common initiative:

Our discussion locates both musical performance and leadership as gestural acts that invite bodies to be in relationship and conversation together in order for music and leadership to be realized in practice (p. 359).

Therefore, information is transmitted through body gestures which allow musicians to create mutual and collaborative exchanges in the co-creation of a common space (Bathurst and Cain, 2013).

2.3 Leadership and aesthetics as an attempt to go beyond the leader-centric phenomenon

These studies showed somehow a shift from the leader-centric approach to a new way of conceptualizing the leadership phenomenon. The study of followers became a new way of questioning the relationships between the leader and his followers: “The study of followers as key components of the leadership process through their enactment of
followership has been largely missed in the literature” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2013, p. 83). These authors also argued that:

[…] this oversight is due in large part to confusion and misunderstanding about what followership constructs are and how they relate to leadership. This confusion happens because we have not understood leadership as a process that is co-created in social and relational interactions between people (Fairhurst, Uhl-Bien, 2012; Uhl-Bien et al., 2013, p. 83).

Therefore, leadership is socially built:

Constructionist approaches see leadership as constructed in relational interactions among people that produce leadership and outcomes (Derue and Ashford, 2010; Ospina and Uhl-Bien, 2012). They consider followers to be active participants with leaders in co-constructing leadership, followership and outcomes (Uhl-Bien et al., 2013, p. 84).

It seems as a result that analyzing leadership through the lens of aesthetics can be very interesting to understand the relational dynamics between the leader and the follower (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 672):

[…] finally, relational leadership might also explore the role of aesthetics in the leadership process (Grint, 2005; Heron and Reason, 2001; Ropo, 2005; Strati, 2000). As defined by Taylor and Hansen (2005), the study of aesthetics is concerned with knowledge that is created from sensory experiences, e.g. how one’s thoughts, feelings, and reasoning around their sensory experiences might inform their cognitions.

These research papers showed the relational process that occurs in the leadership phenomena, aesthetics highlighting interactions between the conductor and its followers, taking into account not only the verbal expressions but also the body gestures that indicate the interactions between the leader and his followers. Uhl-Bien (2006, p. 672) in her attempts to define what is relational leadership underlines the growing interest of taking into account “the living body” of the leaders and followers:

[…] on a more personal level, Ropo (2005), describes aesthetics perspectives to leadership that include reactions to beauty and the presence of the living body (e.g. the body as a source of knowing, lived experiences, sensuous perceptions). It could also include senses evoked from the physical places and spaces in which humans encounter one another with emotions, multiple voices, listening, touching and bodily presence (Ropo, 2005).

Therefore, in this research, we decided to deepen the analysis made by authors interested in leadership and aesthetics, but to apply it to the no-conductor orchestra. Indeed no article can be found on that subject, especially because few orchestras perform without a conductor even if such practices are increasing. As many researchers were fascinated by the leader-conductor, few works exist on the leadership seen through the lens of relational spaces. Conductorless artistic organizations suit these kinds of research questions, as vertical hierarchy is less significant in that type of situation. Two articles can be considered as key references to question the functioning of a no-conductor orchestra: Kodyakov’s work which insists, for example, on the duality control/cooperation in a no-conductor group as well as that of Vredenburg and Yunxia He (2003) which highlights the advantages and inconveniences of such a practice on the quality of the musical result and on the musicians’ commitment (but it skims through the leadership question). So, we will question in this research whether the absence of a directive leadership embodied by the conductor has an impact on the aesthetic quest of musicians and if the latter impacts the organizational practices from an aesthetic point
of view. Indeed, if we noticed above that the aesthetic question of leadership is very
recent concerning the conductor figure, how does it work in a no conductor orchestra?
How is the aesthetic goal, in other words, the musical performance, understood by
musicians? Which impact could be noticed on organizational practices and leadership?
What can we learn on the leader/follower relationships? To answer these questions, we
worked on a case-study led in a quality Parisian amateur orchestra which has
experimented working with and without conductors for several years. These different
practices helped us to compare different forms of leadership.

3. Methodology used in the case study
The Orchestre Symphonique et Lyrique de Paris (OSLP), a non-profit organization was
founded in 1995 (law of 1901); its main objective is to democratize the access to classical
music. The ultimate aim for these musicians is:

To allow the public who is not used to going to concert halls to listen, in good conditions, to
some symphonic music without paying […] in the churches of the capital […] The audience is
an attentive, warm public, of different ages and from very diverse social origins. It sometimes
enjoys for the first time, the magic of the symphonic orchestra and the direct contact with the
artists […] The principle of free participation, which gives the possibility to the public to
financially support the orchestra during the entr’acte collection, the respect of the concert
ceremonial freed from codes of social representations, which sometimes exclude a public who
is afraid of being badly accepted in concert halls: these elements give to the organizers and to
the performers the energy and the happiness to create such an event! […][1]

This orchestra consists of high-level amateur, professional musicians belonging to the
biggest Parisian orchestras who gather together on working sessions, generally at the
weekend, to rehearse. This group is made up of variable ensembles of musicians whose
number vary according to the program chosen (chamber music, symphonic ensemble,
opera etc.): between 15 and 75 musicians are thus participating in the orchestra
depending on the music performed. Concerts take place mainly in the Parisian churches
where rent is cheaper than the institutional concert halls. This is essential to a
non-professional group.

To carry out this study, we had 17 semi-directive interviews, so as to understand the
role played by aesthetics in a conductorless orchestra:

(1) six people attending regularly the OSLP concerts, having listened to the
orchestra in various situations, with and without a conductor;
(2) seven professional musicians participating regularly in the orchestra in various
situations, with and without a conductor:
• among which five musicians play string instruments (two violinists, one
violist and two cellists); and
• among which two musicians play a wind instruments (one horn player and
one flutist).
(3) four amateur musicians (two violinists, one violist and one cellist).

It seemed necessary to represent through these interviews the diversity of the orchestra
in its components (amateurs versus professionals, wind instrumentalists versus string
instrumentalists, musicians versus the public) to increase the diversity of opinions to
understand the role played by aesthetics in this organization. Interviews were stopped
according to the principle of saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Thietard, 1999) once reached:

[...] when we find no more additional information which can enrich the theory [...] . It is thus up to the researcher to consider whether he has reached the stage of saturation or not. Generally the data collection stops when the last units of analyzed observations did not bring new elements (p. 220).

To deepen our analysis, participant observation (Jones, 1999) has been led during sessions with conductors and without conductors, both during rehearsals and performances over a two-year schedule (three sessions without a conductor and two sessions with a conductor, so around 30 working sessions as a violinist). Along with the semi-directive interviews, this immersion opened the possibility of feeling this aesthetic experience in both situations and collecting precious observations on the aesthetic experience of leadership.

As the semi-directive interviews do not allow a direct access to the sensitive on aesthetics in organizations, it seemed essential to add observations “from inside” the orchestra. But as we did not want to neglect the “outside” vision of the orchestra, archive documents were analyzed: a video without the conductor, various photos of concerts made during these two types of performances and an audio recording from a journalist review made after one concert. This change of perspective added a more general and distanced focus, and was very useful to observe aesthetics without a conductor in terms of space allocation. Both perspectives, from inside and from outside the orchestra, seemed to be a very precise way of understanding the leadership interactions and the relational process between musicians.

This combination of semi-directive interviews and participant observation aims at answering criticisms which underline that observation is not used when dealing with leadership. According to Bryman (2011, p. 19), “given that much of the study of leadership is actually about the behavior of leaders, it is perhaps surprising that observation is rarely used. Instead, researchers typically use questionnaires to tap leaders’ behavior. Lowe and Gardner (2000) found in their review of a decade of articles in The Leadership Quaterly, that in only 8 per cent of articles was observation used for the collection of data”.

Each kind of materials was analyzed through different axis which included verbal and non-verbal analysis:

• Concerning verbal elements, we made an analysis of content on lexicons and on issues mentioned by the interviewees (Thietard, 1999, pp. 502-503). It allowed us to select different items, which allowed us to draw general themes concerning leadership and aesthetics (it was made through the interviews, the discussions during the rehearsals and the journalist review).

• We also made some visual observations and paid attention to the expressions of musicians, on their body gestures and body interactions from an “inside” (participant observation) and outside perspective (video and photo materials).

The visual observations and the conclusions made on the verbal materials were compared and analyzed. The diversity of the methods used allowed us to find several axes of recurrence and convergence between the materials and to draw different axis in the presentation of the results concerning leadership and aesthetics. These results
showed that the prism of aesthetics can bring a greater understanding of leadership in an original conductor-less situation.

4. Results
The results were structured through the different items that are presented below.

4.1 The place of musical aesthetics in a no-conductor orchestra
Questioned about the differences of aesthetics with and without a conductor, the musicians feel a particular shape of aesthetic quest in a no-conductor orchestra. Indeed, if they all came for “passion”, “love” of the music and to produce “the most beautiful interpretation within the allotted time and means’ constrains”, the quest for the most beautiful interpretation belongs to them as it is a kind of co-construction led by the solo violin “the solo violin takes the initiative of moving and is relayed among the orchestra sections”. In the orchestra, the conductor defines the musical and aesthetic vision, whereas in a no-conductor orchestra, each musician has a part of personal freedom in the expression of the musical line and can discuss the collective choices made in terms of aesthetics:

The conductor is so much in the center that you are obliged to see him, and you can’t take initiatives because his gesture is very significant. With the solo violin, it is easier because he is far away and the initiative is more feasible.

Naturally, once again, everyone recognizes that the solo violin guarantees to a certain extent the overall harmony of the interpretation and can have in certain cases real authority in the choices made “During the rehearsals, the solo violin takes the leader’s role, but when we play, he can become a follower”. However, the musical choices of the first violin must have the possibility to be discussed and to get the global consent of the group, whether the suggestions come from young professionals, amateur musicians or qualified professionals […].

Consequently, in a concert with a conductor, the feeling of success is based on the will of the conductor and on the pleasure felt by the musicians to be able to perform “his vision, his interpretation” of the piece […] Whereas in the no-conductor orchestra, the success of a concert is measured by the challenge to build together a piece of work which is coherent and harmonious in terms of musical aesthetics:

The success of a concert with a conductor can be the effect of surprise on the interpretation. We have less possibility to be innovative in the no-conductor orchestra but the success is linked to the pleasure to have applied what was decided between us and to innovate in smaller details. Sometimes the conductor can be a veil between us and the others even if it should not be the case.

So, if aesthetics is an interactive process between conductors and musicians (Koivunen and Wennes, 2011), it seems that in the no-conductor orchestra, the co-creation of common aesthetics is more developed than in the orchestra with a conductor, where the leadership is traditionally considered as directive (Boerner et al., 2004). We could also mention many criticisms made toward the authoritarian conductor, seen sometimes through the political figure of a “dictator” (Buch, 2002): narratives of musicians give verbal evidence to these statements (Merlin, 2012). Aesthetics as a common goal is quite close to the sense-making concept of (Weick, 1995; Ladkin, 2013) which takes place during the rehearsal and the performance [which is a specific moment where the
aesthetic judgment, the relational listening and kinesthetic empathy (Koivunen and Wennes, 2011) are present without stepping backward]. Is this co-creation of common aesthetics embodied through organizational practices which could be different from an orchestra with a conductor?

4.2 The aesthetics of organizational practices: A “beautiful and common practice” which is inseparable from the aesthetic quest of the musicians’ group

The musicians interviewed explain that it is particularly difficult to separate the quest for a common aesthetics inspired by the solo violin (leaving a bigger place to the collective), from the organizational practices of the no-conductor orchestra where the aesthetics of the “sensitive” and the corporeality take a specific place in the interactions between musicians:

We look at each other more, we can pull faces, laugh […] I am obliged to know where the others play, at which moment each one has to play less because it is another person who has the leading voice […] whereas with a conductor, we are not obliged to pay so much attention because he has to adjust the balances and the beginnings of the pieces. There is more attention paid to the sound, to the rhythm and to the balances in the no-conductor orchestra. You have to put your ear somewhere else and not where you sit.

Our observations converge with the words of these musicians and show the importance of the aesthetics of “being among peers”, valuing a greater intimacy between the musicians. The sensation can be relatively intense with a conductor, but body movements are more visible in the no-conductor orchestra, as people are more physically committed:

[…] it is more passive with a conductor, we are invaded by the general sensation of the orchestra […] Without a conductor, it is more necessary to create the physical sensation, to show it. There is a bigger personal commitment but in both cases intensity could be very strong in very different ways.

The solo violin has a very important physical commitment to be understood and shows what he wants to achieve by playing in front of the orchestra: “it is necessary to show this so that people understand, we show what we want, we get our hands dirty”. Furthermore, musicians explain that without a conductor, the beauty of the musical gesture and the search for a beautiful practice brings the members of the orchestra closer. It seems that in the context of the no-conductor orchestra, the “sensitive” in its broader meaning takes a bigger importance: synchronicity of breaths, beauty of looks and gestures, common movements […] Some musicians are looking for a common emotion facilitated by a greater proximity and an emotional intimacy:

The intimacy between the musicians is bigger. If you want to find people’s look in a no-conductor orchestra you are going to find it, whereas in the orchestra with a conductor, everything is very centralized towards the head leader […] We are more receptive to the expressions of others. Not only the sound is important but also the attention to breaths, to gestures, to people stamping their feet, to the general enthusiasm, to visual expressions […] As a result, we can underline certain things when we feel that the others are feeling the same emotion, the same musical intention.

The conductor’s absence makes it more demanding and more difficult in terms of musical coordination. For some people, it is a “real challenge”, “adrenalin” but also a happiness generated by this sensation “of common energy”, of “fusion”, of
“fluidity” between all the participants”. “Everybody is 200 per cent committed. It creates energy, an enthusiasm which is really fabulous. People are so motivated that it works. We feel like actors of our music [...]. Whereas in a normal orchestra, the conductor makes decisions on tempo, musical colors, etc. Each of us has individually a little more weight in the collective construction”.

The observations led during concerts showed a very surprising physical commitment, even more blatant than during the rehearsals, which enhances the mutual adjustment of bodies and musical intentions. The connection felt during the concert is one of the main criteria to evaluate the concert’s success (the possible mistakes are not at first taken into account):

This sensation is like a fluid which gets through everybody at the same moment and in whom everybody participates. It is very inexplicable. We feel good and united through the performance. We can assess in that case that the concert is a success.

We are living the present moment. This intimacy and this closeness are explained by certain musicians by the necessity of greater attention and responsibility toward the group. As underlined by a professional flutist “When there is a leader, it is more comfortable and we rely more on him”. Another musician adds “we should that with a conductor, it is necessary to make efforts to be so committed. We can easily put ourselves backward and be a little more passive”. A professional horn player states:

[…] when there is no conductor, from our position it is more complicated to see the others. Thus the listening of others must be even more important. You have to open up your ears because it is complicated to see all the gestures of the solo violin.

The sensual relation to the body is, to a certain extent, an axis of collective evaluation of the musical performance and is opposed to the pleasure that could arise from performing the exact musical vision of the conductor.

What is more, musicians are closer to each other than usual in order to communicate by senses and body movements, which give the impression of being intimate:

[…] for the wind instruments, we play farther in a normal situation with a conductor, but without a conductor we are closer, we have another type of position in the orchestra.

Space allocation is different and linked to the enhancement of sensitivity and body language: it is necessary to be closer to communicate through the sensitive signals produced by each musician. This intimacy in body proximity shows a co-creation of common spaces (Bathurst and Cain, 2013), which are relational spaces (Ladkin, 2013). The functioning of the no-conductor orchestra is quite close to chamber music but in a more developed way taking into account the complexity of the symphonic orchestra.

Leadership is much more distributed or shared between the members of the orchestra (D’innocenzo et al., 2014) even if the solo violin is responsible for coordinating the musical intentions and organizing the rehearsals. For the musicians, the solo violin is considered as a “guide”, a “reference point”, a “vector”, a “leader”, somebody who “is inspiring the others”, more than “the boss” or the “head leader”: indeed he does not have the monopoly on initiatives and is relayed among the other orchestra sections. The hierarchical dimension promoted in a very directive vision of leadership based on control and conformity (Buch, 2002), is not valued in the conductor-less orchestra, which instead insists on the aesthetic valorization as a new paradigm.
4.3 Aesthetics from the public point of view

Interviews carried out among the public show that it is somehow difficult to acknowledge the difference of esthetic quality whether there is a conductor or not. Indeed the quality of listening and the knowledge of the score should be very high to be able to make a difference for the public. It is therefore difficult to come to the conclusion that a no-conductor orchestra will produce a worse interpretation even if according to some listeners, the conductor usually guarantees the musical coherence and synchronization between the musicians.

We can see nevertheless that lots of people notice the importance of sensitivity and corporality in the no-conductor orchestra. They notice specific looks, individual movements which are more emphasized, a greater complicity between musicians and communication which is more circular: it seems that the orchestra is more organic somehow:

[...] the first thing which comes to my mind, is that the musicians have the possibility to express their individual sensitivity in their playing or in their position. There are more funny faces, expressive movements, swinging positions, interactions with the instruments whereas with a conductor, there is a barrier between him and the public: in this case, there are two worlds, the orchestra and separately the public. The conductor normalizes behavioural attitudes and expressions during the performance. The big difference with a no-conductor orchestra is the feeling of being “in” the orchestra. We don’t have this “door” which cuts the music space into two parts. We have the impression of feeling what the musicians are feeling, and follow their eyes [...].

They also detect a great energy and commitment which are very communicative and increase the pleasure of listening:

[...] it is fabulous to see these faces, these looks, these eyes: it makes me often cry. To see an adult putting the best part of himself in music is very touching. Something is happening physically in their muscles.

Some people even underline the sensuality of the performance:

[...] a concert is very carnal. If I look at these musicians, I see an extravagant outlay of sensuality, of sensual pleasure [...] I adore that and I feel reconciled with all human values [...].

This hypothesis is shared by the musicians who highlight that the absence of the conductor does not create a barrier and allows the public to look at them easily. The aesthetics of the orchestra is therefore more visible “it opens spaces [...]. Then the conductor is present, all looks are concentrated on him. Without a conductor, there is a better proximity between the musicians and the public”. Another musician underlines that the capacity of the audience is somehow better when it comes to noticing the interactions in the orchestra:

As the concert is a real performance, I can imagine that you don’t feel the same things when there is a conductor and when you follow his gestures. In a no-conductor orchestra, the solo violin is equal to others, and when you can see the whole orchestra, it allows you to let you wander wherever you want, to concentrate on what you hear, and it can create a difference in what you hear.

These verbatim and observations underline once again the co-creation of a shared space where gestures and emotions produce this “beautiful” organizational practices through
which leadership is built (Bathurst and Cain, 2013, p. 371). Therefore, our work confirms what Bathurst and Cain showed in their research:

Leadership, we claim, is similarly a collaborative process which continually invites people into the affective domain where actions will occur (the templum). Each individual performer is required to accept or block the other to enter this co-creative space (see Thomson, 2003, p. 122) and in affirming the other by gesturing “yes”, they invite the audience to make the same choice.

5. Discussion
The discussion concerning the abovementioned results tackles three main issues:

(1) the aesthetics of organizational practices in the no-conductor orchestra;
(2) aesthetics as a relevant way to study leadership; and
(3) the no-conductor orchestra and the leader/follower relationships.

5.1 Aesthetics of organizational practices in the no-conductor orchestra
The no-conductor orchestra renews the question of aesthetics and leadership in comparison with the work done on the aesthetics of the conductor and its impact on the musical performance (Koivunen and Wennes, 2011). Indeed if aesthetics matters have been dealt with through the conductor’s gestures, these works avoid the no-conductor orchestra which enhances new aesthetic communities bringing fruitful elements to the understanding of leadership. Though in this case, we can say that aesthetics in a no-conductor orchestra gives more space to the co-creation of common aesthetics even if it is driven by the solo violin. What is more, the attention of musicians is higher concerning body movements and emotions during rehearsals and performances than in a normal orchestra with a conductor. This aesthetic co-construction is seen as a cooperative enterprise: “it’s like a cooperative company, everybody invests in the project to make it work”. Moreover, the relationship between the public and the orchestra has changed: the conductor seen before as a central key of organizational behavior which disappears and is replaced by the aesthetics of gestures and emotions that make the public enter this relational space in perpetual redefinition. One result of this article is also to show the impact of this aesthetic type of leadership on the audience’s appreciation of the concert. It seems that it creates a feeling of intimacy and relational interactions which in other organizational situations could reduce partitioning and breaking phenomena for the benefit of the aesthetics of sensitivity and emotions. In other words, the no-conductor orchestra in its organization uses sense-making to create a common interpretation of music which is embodied by organizational practices where the aesthetics of gestures and expressions is valued and shared by the members of the orchestra. Space allocation is therefore modified, as the no-conductor situation creates some constrains that have to be overcome through the way musicians are distributed in the space (musicians are not distributed in the same way than with a conductor).

5.2 Aesthetics as a relevant way to study leadership
One conclusion of this article is also to show that studying the follower/leader through the lens of aesthetics is relevant, as expressions, body gestures and body interactions are a useful indicator of the change in the leader/follower relationships (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This is even more interesting in a no-conductor orchestra where one of our findings is
that sensitive capacities of musicians are even more developed and where body expressions and interactions are necessary for the success of collective action. As Uhl-Bien (2006) underlines it:

> Aesthetics can serve as a means for connection (Taylor and Hansen, 2005), as patterns that connect mind and nature (Bateson, 1979), or provide a sense of belonging to or being a part of a social group (Sandelands, 1998). For example, aesthetics can be sensory reactions to leadership images (Jackson & Guthey, in press) – images that evoke a sense of connection to a depicted leader (p. 672).

Aesthetics in the no-conductor orchestra is therefore essential not only to the functioning of the group, as musicians share aesthetics as a common aim (the quest for a beautiful interpretation), but also in their organizational practices as a necessary tool to perform together a complex score. What is more, it seems that this greater use of expressions and body gestures is contributing to the pleasure of playing together and to the evaluation of the performance’s success.

### 5.3 The no-conductor orchestra and the follower/leader relationships

Valuing the aesthetic co-construction of a shared performance and “beautiful” organizational practices leads us to induce a change of paradigm: leadership seen through the lens of control and conformity imposed by the conductor is not enhanced anymore (Khodyakov, 2007). This change of paradigm associated to a leadership shared between the members of the orchestra through time and space questions the issues of coordination, assessment and responsibility in organizations when aesthetics and sense-marking are linked (Ropo et al., 2013). The managerial evidence which states that without a head leader nothing is possible seems to be questioned in the no-conductor orchestra which demonstrates that a high level of quality and shared dimensions of leadership are possible (in opposition to the directive style of leadership symbolized by the conductor).

Furthermore, the co-creation of common aesthetics increases the “sensitive” capabilities and the creation of numerous relationship spaces whose focalization points are rotating through the change of leaders. These relationship spaces give more creative power to the musicians who are usually under the control of a conductor in their orchestra. This aesthetic co-construction of the musical performance and organizational practices corresponds to new notions of commitment, responsibility and vigilance to others that are underlined also by Vredenburg and Yunxia He (2003) in their study of the conductorless orchestra. These elements are essential to the quality of the musical performance but are also considered core values of the group.

Our study on the conductorless orchestra also gives a new insight on the relational components of leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Indeed even if the solo violin is somehow guiding the collective work during rehearsals, we noticed nevertheless that being a follower or a leader is negotiated and built through rehearsals but as well during the performance, as there is no vertical hierarchy. To achieve the performance, different members of the orchestra take the leader or follower role depending on the context given by the score but also by the intention expressed by the musicians. These changing roles are embodied through body gestures, facial expressions and space allocation which are varying according to the leader or follower status.
Therefore, one result of this study is to confirm that in a complex organization where the relationships between the musicians are more horizontal, being a leader or a follower is embodied through organizational practices where aesthetics is playing a greater role in the construction of the leadership/followership phenomenon. As Uhl-Bien (2006, p. 672) underlines it:

As applied to relational leadership, this perspective could focus on the aesthetic qualities of either the leader or the follower (i.e. an entity view), as well as consideration of how the relationship looks and feels – e.g. the extent to which it appeals to one’s aesthetic sensibilities, both consciously and unconsciously (i.e. the relational view) (B. Jackson, personal communication, September 2006).

6. Conclusion
In the no-conductor orchestra, sense-making (Weick, 1995) is generated by an increased sensory commitment of orchestra members which is revealing the construction of the leader/follower interactions and that is necessary for the achievement of common goals such as the musical performance. Therefore, the conductorless orchestra seems to show that one should go beyond a leader-centric approach to understand the leadership phenomena seen here through the lens of aesthetics as relational. For Uhl-Bien, relational leadership is reintroducing the leader/follower interactions and can be defined as:

[...] human social constructions that emanate from the rich connections and interdependencies of organization and their members (cf. Bradbury and Lichtenstein, 2000; Hosking et al., 1995).

[...] a “relational” orientation starts with processes and not persons, leadership and other relational realities as made in processes (Hosking, in press) (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 655).

Moreover, such results open some other fields of research linked to the aesthetics of leadership in various organizational situations. Indeed, if a conductorless orchestra increases the sensory and sensitive commitment of its members as a key resource to the organization’s functioning, it would be interesting to question the vertical organization and its impact on the sensory capacities of its members. Could a vertical and directive hierarchy be an element of limitation of sensory and sensitive capacities of its members? Which effects could it have on the definition and achievement of the organization’s objectives? Using the aesthetic lens to analyze the leadership phenomena and its effect on the organization depending on the context could be very rich and fruitful for future research. Getz (2009) in his book *Freedom, Inc.* does not tackle directly this question, even if he shows that organizations without a vertical hierarchy develop vigilance to others and creativity in solving organizational problems.

Nevertheless, questioning this redefinition of relationships and material spaces though aesthetics cannot avoid the issue of social control, less obvious but nevertheless present in the no-conductor orchestra. Indeed, the aesthetics built by the group can be criticized, as it could exclude initiatives which are not accepted by the group and therefore reduce the diversity of opinions. Moreover, narcissism can be noticed in the expression of subjectivity during rehearsals or after the musical performance, especially when “leader” musicians are involved. These kinds of behavior can lead to negotiations during the rehearsals and by a change in power distribution among musicians. Sometimes, a musician selected by cooptation and whose integration would not fit the values of the orchestra (or the aesthetic search/practices) could be excluded: nobody...
would call him for the next session without telling him specifically what was wrong. These conclusions should be deepened in other researches (as the “amateur” status of this orchestra reduces the power struggle between musicians) to compare these interesting results.

Note
1. Extract from the Internet site of this organization: http://lesdimanchesmusicauxdeparis.org/doku.php/oslp

References


**Further reading**


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