

Artistic quality as leadership success

The conductor's leadership role in the act of music making

Sanja Petricic
University of Arts, Belgrade, Serbia

ABSTRACT

Art can be valued in many different ways. For example, it could be valued from an economic, social, cultural or any anthropological perspective, depending upon the desired outcomes of the research. This article elaborates on a concept of defining artistic quality of the orchestra as the conductor's leadership success. To specify the artistic quality of the orchestra the researcher relies on the model introduced by Boerner (2002) that has been further developed in this paper. The objective of the researcher is to further develop a model for the evaluation of performance quality in the framework of the artistic quality as the leadership success of the conductor. Comparing the results of acquired data in the first set of interviews and the model presented in Boerner's study (2002), the researcher proposed a new version of the model for the artistic quality of the orchestra. Also, in designing the model, the researcher relied on her artistic experience as well as music training in a highly recognized institution such as The Juilliard School in New York. It is also pertinent to this research that she received her graduate degree in collaborative music that provided her with in depth understating of ensemble playing. The results of this research aim is to offer syllabus suggestions for majors in conducting, music education and art management at undergraduate as well as graduate levels. Conclusions are drawn both for leadership theories and for the selection and training of orchestral conductors.

Keywords:

Art management
Artistic quality
Conductor
Leadership
Music making process

1. Introduction

Preparing an orchestra for a concert provides a great example of art management in practice, using similar techniques and principles applied in the highly competitive world of business. Motivation levels inside the orchestra must be maintained, conflicts among orchestra members must be resolved and effective time management skills are required for the high quality performance. Leadership skills of the conductor determine how well the entire concert will go (Byrnes, 2009). By comparison, the skills required to prepare a successful concert are also the skills required to run a successful business. However, one of the essential differences between business and art management is the idea of goal achievement. For business management financial profit is considered as the primary goal where as in art management the artistic excellence is perceived as the main goal achievement.

Chiaravalloti (2005), argues that from the cultural management point of view, the perspective view of artistic quality implies that the only way to build indicators of artistic quality is to use a standardized questionnaire and to work with quantitative data, thus omitting a priori all other existing possibilities to inform the management about the artistic experience of the audience, for example through the visual or narrative indicators.

One of the most systematic attempts to the evaluation of artistic quality in opera houses has been made by Boerner (2002). She argues that the *definition* of artistic quality has the same meaning as the *conception* of artistic quality, and it presents the necessary basis for the evaluation of the results of different management styles in opera houses.

The objective of her research was the development of a model for the directive management style in opera houses including both profile and performance quality. The profile quality describes the season program offered by an opera house, consisting of works selected and artists involved, where as the performance quality describes the quality of the performed program, the individual performance.

The goal in this research was to further develop Boerner's model for the evaluation of performance quality in the orchestra, as the leadership success of the conductor. This research is included in my PhD thesis where I further explore the effects of conductor's leadership style on the artistic quality of the orchestra applying mixed research methods as part of the naturalistic inquiry.

There have been studies done where orchestra members have responded to surveys and questionnaires (Boerner, 2005). It has been concluded that often times what is needed to examine leadership effectiveness is to simultaneously examine constructs at both individual and group levels of analysis (Kirkman and Rosen, 1999). Based on extensive reading, I have concluded that there is a need for the use of qualitative research in order to add depth and meaning to statistical findings that were done in previous research studies on the same topic.

Comparing the results of acquired data in the first set of interviews and the model presented in Boerner's study (2002), I proposed a new version of the model for the artistic quality of the orchestra. Also, in designing the model, I relied on my artistic experience as well as music training in highly recognized institutions such as The Juilliard School in New York. It is also pertinent to this research that I received my graduate degree in collaborative music that provided me with in depth understating of ensemble playing. Aside from presenting numerous attempts to analyze these phenomena, I have provided my personal in depth understanding of the issues raised.

2. The conductor as the leader in music the making process

According to Boerner and Krause (2004), the main focus of the artistic endeavor for the conductor is the success of an orchestra. The artistic quality of the performance is perceived as the joint interpretation produced by multiplicity of musicians in the orchestra. Further more, they suggest that individual quality criteria such as sound and tempo must be coordinated through synchronized playing of the orchestra by the guided conception of the interpretation. On the other hand, Adorno (1968) points out that the decisive factor in the performance must be the congruity of interpretation.

In her study Boerner (2004), points out that it is a conductor's duty to determine the artistic conception and particular interpretation of existing works as well as new commissioned works of the orchestra's music repertoire. The members of an orchestra usually do not participate in developing a conception for the interpretation and also they do not have much freedom in realizing that conception either. Their responsibility is to realize the conductor's ideas for interpretation where they are immediately controlled and criticized by the conductor (Boerner and Krause, 2001).

Since most of the orchestra members are trained for solo performance, this could have a negative impact on their motivation because of their artistic freedom being restricted. However it is assumed that if a conductor displays confidence, superiority, power, reliability and charisma, musicians tend to follow his lead expecting that the result or artistic quality will be satisfying (Boerner and Krause, 2004).

As Allmendinger (1996) describes musicians in the orchestra as well – trained professionals with a high degree of intrinsic motivation, Boerner (2004) raises the question of why the conductor's leadership style is not participative or delegative, but instead directive. This question is interesting in reference to the model of goal-directive leadership (Gebert and Ulrich 1991) assuming that directive leader behavior in the orchestra can be explained in terms of the leadership goal, which in this paper refers to the artistic quality of

the orchestra. Their point of view was confirmed by one of the participants in this research:

In the act of music making, the conductor is following his own voice, his own wishes, desires, convictions. He is trying to convince us that this is a great piece of music. By doing so, he needs to be able to persuade us that we want to do what he wants to do, having a clear vision and inviting us into that vision, making us feel that we are the ones who are making it happen (participant 1).

There is a certain duality in this kind of leadership behavior that needs to be addressed. First, there is a common attitude of orchestral musicians who very often come to rehearsals well prepared, able to play all the notes perfectly, but without any character, waiting for the conductor to add the musical expression or to make music for them. In this case, a conductor is taken as the symbol of power; an authority figure who dominates not only in the interpretation of the music but also over the music in general (Guzeliman, 2002).

The second part of duality in conductor's leadership behavior is the fact that even though the conductor is defined as the power figure, one of the main goals in his work, which is a production of sound, at the same time, presents the limitation of his power. The actual sound is not produced by the conductor, but instead by each individual musician in the orchestra, which means that the conductor could only organize or change the character of music without producing the sound himself.

This poses the question of the conductor's actual power in the act of music making. In her research, Boerner (2004) claims that in the interest of congruity in the orchestral performance, a balance of sound and rhythm among all members of the orchestra must be obtained. The degree of synchronization of intonation, articulation and dynamics between individual players in the orchestra presents the essential quality in the performance. Along with that idea, precise ensemble playing requires individual mastery on the instrument as well as the ability to collaborate. This presents one of the biggest challenges for the musicians in the orchestra since each one of them has a different sound, for example intonation or articulation, which has to be adjusted to the orchestra's sound. My

personal point of view was confirmed by another participant in the pilot research interview saying the following:

Our personal contribution is not required. The conductor is not after individual sound in the orchestra, therefore we have to repress ourselves as artists being completely responsible for the final product. This is very frustrating for us (participant 2).

The conductor needs to be aware of the fact that each member of the orchestra has been trained as a solo performer before entering the orchestra. Because of these phenomena, the conductor's goal in the act of music making is not only to dictate but to enable musicians to be themselves in a state of creative participation. This argument introduces the first research question: *Do limitations of the conductor's power enhance creative participation within the orchestra?*

The question relates to Byrnes's (2009) argument of leadership presenting the use of power to influence the behavior of others. He further argues that in organizational settings of the arts, the power to control others is more often potential than an absolute. Within each employ group in art organizations, there are limits to how effectively power can be used to control the work output. Unfortunately, history provides many examples of individuals abusing their power through leadership. The following section gives examples of famous conductors who abused their leadership power but kept a high level of artistic quality performance and how that contradicts the contemporary view

of conductor' leadership approach towards the orchestra.

3. The Servant-Leader approach of the conductor's leadership style

A contemporary view of leadership by which the conductor is defined as a leader who serves the ensemble in all aspects of the job, from programmatic decisions to day-to day methods used in rehearsals, is crucial for optimal growth of individual members as well as the group (for example symphony orchestra).

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By this theory, conductors in “servant-leader” role reject the notion that leaders must be autocratic and believe that all the musical goals could be reached if the focus is on serving the musicians and the music.

However it is worth noting that some of the most famous conductors in the music history such as Toscanini¹ or Karajan² used the opposite leadership approach that proved to be very successful. In his essay, Wierzbicki (1987) explains the entire Karajan’s leadership phenomenon by the following statement:

A conductor is, more than anything else, a leader. Musical knowledge and interpretive insight might be listed among a conductor's assets, but they count for nothing unless he is somehow able to make the players do his bidding. Sweet-talking an orchestra into going along with him won't do the trick. Whether he gains it through respect or through brute force, the conductor has to have firm command over all that happens both in rehearsals and in concerts (Wierzbicki, 1987).

Contradicting the theory of servant-leader approach, the second example raises the question of how much power becomes too much power for the conductor. In his essay, Wierzbicki (1989) states that Berlin Philharmonic, under Karajan’s baton, displayed perfection in sound and was famous for most polished orchestra in the world, because of conductor’s authority over what they did with their instruments. This is well exemplified by Karajan’s own words quoted Barenboim’s discussion with Said: “I think it was Karajan who said that there are only six things that you should tell the orchestra : too loud; too soft; too late; too soon; too fast; too slow “ (Barenboim, Said & Guzelimian 2002:51).

His power seemed to have been absolute in the act of music making. However, many players in the self-governing Berlin Philharmonic often times felt that Karajan over-stepped the boundaries, in terms of his administrative power and had more power than he or any other human being deserved. An example of the conductor’s limitless power is the scandal from 1982, when Karajan hired a twenty three year old clarinetist, Sabine Mayer, despite the fact that the members of Berlin Philharmonic highly disagreed with this decision, claiming that her sound and style did not fit in with their own.

When the orchestra refused to accept his decision, Karajan announced a suspension of all of the Philharmonic’s recordings, touring and festival activities. Finally, Mayer was offered a one- year probation contract, but she decided to leave the

orchestra before the contract had expired. Karajan blamed the orchestra for driving her away and in order to punish them he canceled one of their concerts at the Salzburg Festival and instead invited, at his own expense, the rival Vienna Philharmonic to perform (Wierzbicki, 1989).

From this example, it is clear that the earlier assumption of the conductor presenting a symbol of power by displaying confidence, superiority, reliability and charisma that musicians tend to follow is challenged by the contemporary leadership theory of servant-leader approach.

Wis (2002) argues that autocratic leadership views power as coercion (for example: “You will do this because I say so”), where as servant leadership views power as persuasion (for example: “You will do this when you understand why”). In the second example, conductors serve rather than impose, they empower rather than control.

I feel that there are certain challenges in contemporary leadership theory of servant-leader approach that need to be addressed. Due to the fact that high performance standards of orchestral pieces (for example Toscanini or Karajan’s interpretations of Beethoven symphonies) have been set in the past and are available for the public on numerous recordings, contemporary conductors as leaders are expected to follow these standards. This is well exemplified by one of the participants in the interview who agreed with my point of view:

Conductor is going after perfection, mainly because of music critiques that are looking for perfection. They have listened to many recordings of the same pieces and make comparisons that are always there and make pressure for the conductor (participant 3).

This raises the following question: if the conductor’s artistic freedom for the interpretation of familiar orchestra pieces is limited by the standards of previous interpretations, would the orchestra members trust his new vision? A second question is: if such performance standards were set by conductors who were extremely autocratic in their leadership approach, would contemporary orchestras follow the conductor who was less autocratic and move towards the servant-leader approach?

Beorner and Krause (2004) argue that the originality of the conductor’s concept for new interpretation of familiar orchestra pieces could be stimulating for orchestra musicians. The conductor, who is perceived as the charismatic leader, conveys trust and optimism among orchestra members, who accredit him with high artistic competence and by

¹ Arturo Toscanini(1867-1957), Italian conductor, one of the greatest virtuoso figures of the first half of the twentieth century. He was the musical director of La Scala, Milan and the Metropolitan opera, NY Philharmonic and NBC Symphony Orchestra in New York.

² Herbert Von Karajan (1908-1989), Austrian orchestra and opera conductor, a leading international musical figure of the mid twentieth century. He was the musical director of Berlin Philharmonic and Vienna State Opera.

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identifying with him, follow his artistic conception for the interpretation of the orchestral piece. This idea relates to empirical research conducted by Krause (2004) who found that high level of identification by employees with their leader resulted in significantly improved leadership success. Boerner (2004) on the other hand, makes a point that if the musicians see the conductor only as sympathetic figure, they would not expect a high artistic result or any restrictions on their artistic freedom. Instead, the more charismatic the conductor is, the more the musicians will identify with him. Therefore she made the assumption that a directive-charismatic leadership style improves the artistic quality of the orchestra more than a sympathetic leadership style.

In conclusion, despite the limitations to the artistic freedom, the motivation of the orchestra members is supported by directive-charismatic leadership style. Therefore, the second research question in this paper is: *could transformational leadership style support the musician's alignment to conductor's vision which results in positive influence on the artistic quality of the orchestra?* According to Byrnes (2009), norms of behavior and cohesiveness are most important elements of group development in art management, therefore an effective leader must understand the group dynamics of people that are brought together to achieve a common goal.

4. Methods and indications of researching the artistic quality

The experimental process is considered essential in determining artistic quality, therefore the factors forming the current conception of artistic quality are the ones that could be found or measured empirically. However, there are some limitations to the research. While the research objective is considered appropriate if the definition of artistic quality is instrumental to

manager's research on the effectiveness of different leadership styles, the consequent use of a standardized instrument for its measurement could be considered as a step towards *technocratisation*, since politicians or administrators may also have an objective instrument for quality evaluation, allowing them to make funding decisions (Nielsen 2003). This is what Chiaravalloti (2005) calls *perspective* view of artistic value, since there could be a unique definition of artistic quality and that it could be measured in different contexts and times for different works or productions.

The power of qualitative research comes from the level of involvement of the researcher with the participants of the research. Patton (2002) argues that the task of the qualitative researcher is to provide a framework within which participants can respond in their own way, how they view the world or that part of the world about which they are talking about. Through interaction within the situation, the human instrument can extend awareness of the realm of the felt and of unconscious wishes. Further more, the human instrument is able to provide depth and richness to the understanding of social and cultural settings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Interviewing is an important source of qualitative data because it allows the researcher not only to enter another person's world but also to understand that person's perspective (Petricic, 1998). According to Patton (2002), there are three approaches to qualitative interviewing: the informal conversational, general interview guide approach and the standardized open-ended interview. Since all participants in this research were musicians from professional orchestras, deeply involved and affected by the issues that were discussed in the interview, the researcher felt it was appropriate to use the interview guide approach. Applying the human instrument, both the researcher and the participants (conductors and the members of the orchestra), have evaluated the artistic quality of the orchestra as the measurement for the leadership success.

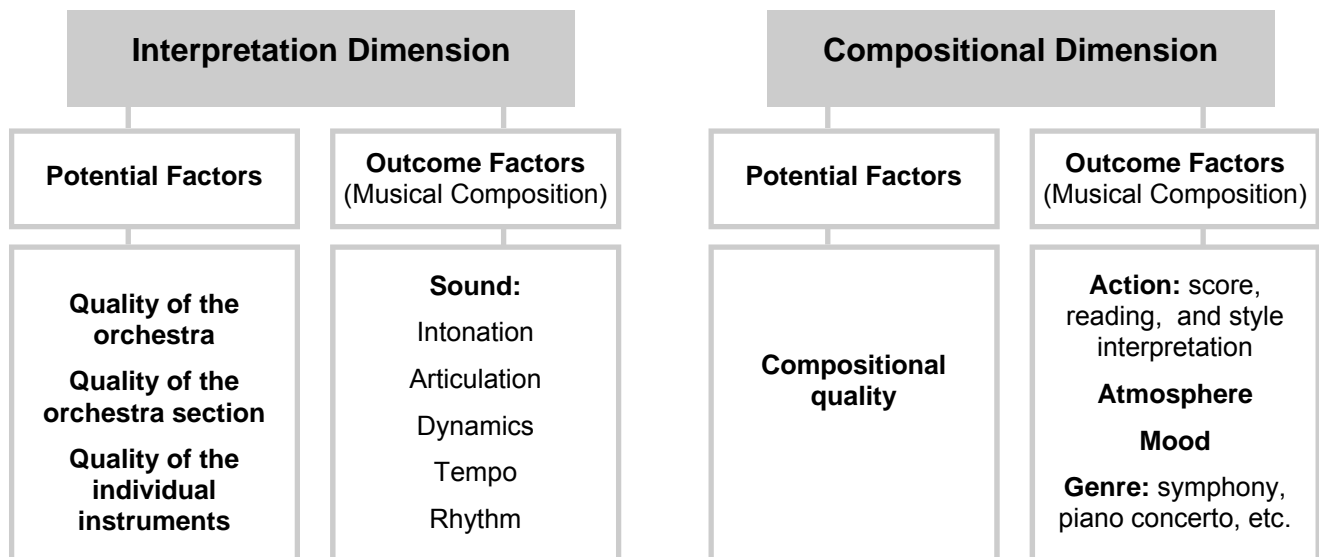


TABLE 1. PERFORMANCE QUALITY OF THE ORCHESTRA

Taken and adopted from *Artistic quality in an opera company - Towards the development of a concept* (429) by Boerner, S. (2002), Nonprofit Management and Leadership

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that in contrast to the conventional approach of the inquirer "knowing what is not known" the naturalistic approach of the inquirer is "not knowing what is not known". Because of this approach, the naturalistic inquirer goes through several phases in order to get some knowledge on what is *silent* or what he/she needs to find out about, to check the findings in accordance with trustworthiness procedures and to gain some kind of closure.

The object of the first phase, the so called "orientation and overview" phase, is to obtain sufficient information in order to find out what is important enough to follow up in detail. The initial approach to respondents is made in a very open-ended way, using questions of the "grand tour" type (Spradley, 1979), such as, "Tell me what you think I should know about the conductor in your orchestra." Depending upon the nature and complexity of the focus (problem, evaluand, and policy option), this phase can take from few days to many months. In this study I worked on the first phase for a week at the International music festival in Casalmaggiore, Italy interviewing six professional musicians and four graduate students from different orchestras in the United States of America, Canada and Europe.

Topics and issues covered were prepared in advance in outline form. The sequence of questions depended on the participant's preference. I discussed issues and topics with participants and let them choose which ones they were most comfortable with. The acquired data of the first set of interviews indicated some *silent* elements such as "the conductor as the power figure in the act of music making" and "the conductor as both charismatic and directive leader with a strong vision towards the artistic goals" that will be further explored in my PhD thesis: The effects of conductor's leadership style on orchestra's

artistic quality, using a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) including: survey questioners, interviews and field notes of the researcher.

5. Application of Boerner's model for measuring the artistic quality of the orchestra

Performance quality is not something that has been systematically investigated. With reference to performance quality in an opera company (Boerner, 2002), this paper refers to the performance quality of the orchestra. Boerner presents two key components: music dimension and stage dimension in her model for the performance quality of the opera, where as the researcher uses different key components: interpretational dimension and compositional dimension pertained to the model for performance quality of the orchestra. Each component is classified in terms of potential factors and outcome factors. Combining potential and outcome factors allows the viewer to define characteristics describing the quality of the performance such as: the sound of strings, the color of the woodwinds and so on.

Based on the above components, I further developed the model by introducing sub elements for the potential and outcome factors in both dimensions such as: section in the orchestra and individual instruments (for potential factors in interpretation dimension), compositional quality (for potential factors in compositional dimension) and score reading, style interpretation, genre (for outcome factors in compositional dimension).

The congruity of the factors described in the model, presents the essence of the performance quality (Adorno, 1968). This is understood as the

Fit	Conceptual - Abstract	Technical - Concrete
1st order fit: Interpretation dimension and compositional dimension	Atmosphere and sound	Tempo and music genre
2nd order fit: within dimensions (for example interpretation dimension)	Sound	Dynamics (volume of orchestra sections, individual instruments)
3rd order fit: within the potential factors of a dimension (for example, section of the orchestra)	Sound	Tuning and intonation of individual instruments in the orchestra

TABLE 2. THE FIT CRITERION FOR PERFORMANCE QUALITY OF THE ORCHESTRA

Taken and adopted from *Artistic quality in an opera company - Towards the development of a concept* (430) by Boerner, S. (2002), Nonprofit Mangement and Leadership

integration of all sub elements of a piece of music to form a whole (See Table 1).

In the next stage Boerner introduces the *fit* criterion for performance quality of the opera that determines only the congruity of music dimension and stage dimension within a given performance and not the agreement between a given performance and standard or ideal performance. The *fit* is, therefore characterized on three levels in a hierarchical model. Again, I adopted the model to the needs of performance quality of the orchestra introducing sub elements such as atmosphere and sound (first order fit: conceptual –abstract), tempo and music genre (first order fit: technical –concrete), dynamics (second order fit: technical - concrete), tuning and intonation of individual instruments (third order fit: technical – concrete) (See Table 2).

First *fit* determines the congruity between the interpretational and compositional dimension (fit of dimensions). For example, the tonal image that the interpretational dimension produces should match the atmosphere that the compositional dimension conveys. Secondly, the orchestra must achieve *fit* within each dimension (fit of potential factors). For example, within the interpretational dimension; potential factors (sections in the orchestra, individual instruments in each section) must be synchronized with outcome factors (for example, rhythm or articulation). Finally, the third fit (fit of sub factors), presents the synchronization within the potential factors of a dimension (for example, sections within the orchestra).

As a whole, congruity presents the outcome factor describing the interaction of sub factors, potential

factors, and dimensions, constituting a sort of meta-criterion of performance quality (Boerner, 2002). Decisive for a performance fit (or congruity of the performance) of the orchestra is the guiding idea of the conductor. Consequently it is very important to establish the role of the conductor as the leader who provides a clear vision in the process of music making, that the members of the orchestra can align with. The acquired data of the first set of interviews in this paper, that indicated elements such as “the conductor as the power figure in the act of music making” and “the conductor as both charismatic and directive leader with a strong vision towards the artistic goals” provides the basis for further research on the effects of the conductor’s leadership style towards the artistic quality of the orchestra.

6. Conclusion

For the practice of performance quality and leadership in the orchestra, the following issues are relevant. The more performance quality as the essential part of the artistic quality needs improvement, the more important are the findings of the practice of leadership in the orchestra. Respondents took a largely positive view of the performance quality of their orchestra when the conductor was perceived as the directive-charismatic figure that provided them with a clear musical vision that could be aligned with or supported by the musicians in the orchestra. In other words, if the

musicians perceived their conductor as charismatic and could identify with him, the performance quality of the orchestra improved. Therefore, it would be beneficial to implement an appropriate employment selection process. When choosing a conductor one should look not only for musical skills but social and leadership skills as well. Nevertheless, this does not imply the standard competencies such as communication abilities, but to identify constructs relevant for leadership success, such as charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. If a conductor with such abilities, both musical and leadership abilities, was deliberately selected, the result could be a contribution to the improvement of the artistic quality and successful increase of leadership competence within the orchestra. The results of this research aim to offer a curriculum design for majors in conducting, music education and art management at undergraduate as well as graduate levels.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

One of the main limitations in this research was the size of the sample. Because all the information was collected from the same respondents, the level of the ascertained connections could be related to overestimation of the connections between predictor and criterion. For this reason, future studies should collect data on leadership style and the artistic quality of the group from the dependent sources such as: conductors and sectional leaders in the orchestra. The second limitation of this study is the use of single-item measures; future research should develop a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) for leadership role of the conductor and the artistic quality as the leadership success. Despite these limitations, the results of the present investigation have theoretical and practical implications for the improvement of the performance quality as the leadership success in the orchestra.

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