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The Art and Science of Leadership: A Humanities Perspective

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Abstract

This study delves into the multifaceted domain of leadership through a humanities perspective, conducting a systematic literature review to unravel the intricate interplay between the art and science of leadership. The research synthesizes insights from diverse disciplines, emphasizing the essential integration of intuitive, creative, and emotionally intelligent aspects with systematic analysis, evidence-based decision-making, and strategic planning. Drawing on seminal works by Bennis, Mintzberg, Boje, and others, the study highlights the dynamic nature of leadership, urging for a comprehensive approach that transcends traditional dichotomies. Narrative and storytelling emerge as indispensable tools for effective leadership, facilitating the communication of visions, values, and organizational culture. Cultural and historical dimensions significantly shape leadership practices, emphasizing the importance of contextual awareness for leaders navigating diverse organizational environments. Ethical considerations, grounded in the humanities, underscore the moral compass that guides leaders in making socially responsible decisions. This interdisciplinary inquiry advocates for leadership development that embraces the richness of both artistic and scientific dimensions. Leaders equipped with insights from literature, philosophy, and history are poised to navigate the complexities of the contemporary organizational landscape, fostering inclusive, ethically grounded, and purpose-driven leadership. The study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of leadership, encouraging ongoing dialogue at the intersection of the humanities and leadership studies.

Keywords: leadership, humanities perspective, art and science of leadership, cultural contexts

Introduction

Leadership is a multifaceted concept that has captivated scholars, practitioners, and thinkers across various disciplines throughout history. As organizations and societies continue to evolve, the study of leadership remains a dynamic and integral component in understanding the dynamics of human interaction and achievement (Abbas & Asghar, 2010).

The art and science of leadership encompass a delicate balance between the inherent creativity, intuition, and emotional intelligence demanded by leadership roles and the systematic approaches, empirical analysis, and strategic decision-making associated with leadership as a science. While leadership has traditionally been approached from a business and organizational perspective, a humanities-based exploration brings forth a richer understanding of the nuanced human experiences, ethical considerations, and cultural dimensions that shape effective leadership (Andrin, et al., 2023).

Several influential scholars have advocated for a broader view of leadership that encompasses both its artistic and scientific dimensions. Warren Bennis, a renowned leadership theorist, emphasizes the importance of self-



awareness, vision, and interpersonal skills as essential components of effective leadership (Bennis, 2009). Furthermore, James MacGregor Burns, in his seminal work on transformational leadership, underscores the significance of moral and ethical considerations in leadership practices (Burns, 1978).

This research builds upon the foundation laid by these scholars and others who have highlighted the humanistic aspects of leadership. By examining leadership through the lens of humanities, we aim to contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of leadership that extends beyond traditional managerial perspectives. As organizations navigate an increasingly complex and diverse global landscape, leaders who possess both the artful insight of the humanities and the scientific rigor of leadership studies are better equipped to guide their teams toward success.

Literature Review

Leadership, a subject that has intrigued scholars and practitioners across diverse fields, is often dichotomized into the realms of art and science. This review delves into the existing literature, spanning various disciplines, to comprehend the intricate interplay between these dimensions and introduces the unique perspective of the humanities in understanding leadership.

Leadership as an Art:

The artistic facet of leadership underscores the importance of intuition, creativity, and emotional intelligence in guiding individuals and organizations toward success. Warren Bennis, a pioneer in leadership studies, argues that effective leadership requires a deep understanding of oneself and others, emphasizing the role of self-awareness and interpersonal skills (Bennis, 2009). This aligns with the idea that leadership is not merely a set of prescribed techniques but a dynamic, intuitive process.

Furthermore, leadership's artistic dimensions are closely tied to the ability to inspire and motivate through storytelling and narrative. Boje (1991) explores the concept of leadership as a narrative, highlighting the power of stories to shape organizational culture and identity. Leaders, as storytellers, have the capacity to articulate visions, values, and aspirations, fostering a sense of shared purpose among their followers (Groenewald, et al., 2023).

Moreover, the humanities offer a rich source of inspiration for leadership development. The study of literature, arts, and philosophy provides leaders with insights into human experiences, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives. For instance, leadership lessons drawn from literary classics can offer profound insights into human nature, ethics, and the complexities of decision-making (Fairholm, 1997).

Leadership as a Science:

Contrary to the artistic dimensions, leadership as a science involves systematic approaches, empirical analysis, and strategic decision-making. Scholars such as Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol laid the groundwork for scientific management principles in the early 20th century, emphasizing efficiency, standardization, and a rational approach to organizational processes (Taylor, 1911; Fayol, 1918).

In contemporary leadership studies, the scientific perspective is evident in the emphasis on evidence-based practices and data-driven decision-making. Leadership researchers, influenced by fields such as psychology and organizational behavior, explore topics like transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and servant leadership, employing quantitative and qualitative methodologies to uncover patterns and correlations (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Greenleaf, 2008).

The integration of science into leadership, however, requires a nuanced understanding of its limitations. As Mintzberg (2004) argues, leadership is not reducible to a set of formulas or algorithms; it involves complex, context-dependent interactions. The challenge lies in balancing the structured approaches of science with the adaptive, context-sensitive qualities essential for effective leadership.

The dichotomy between the art and science of leadership has been a subject of debate in leadership literature. Burns (1978) proposed a transformative approach that integrates both dimensions, suggesting that effective leaders engage followers in a collective pursuit of higher ideals. This resonates with the idea that leadership, when approached as a dichotomy, might be limiting, and a more holistic understanding is essential.

The humanities offer a unique lens to bridge the gap between the artistic and scientific dimensions of leadership. By drawing on disciplines such as literature, philosophy, history, and the arts, leaders can develop a broader, more nuanced perspective. For instance, examining historical leaders through a humanities lens allows for a deeper understanding of the cultural, ethical, and contextual factors that shaped their leadership styles (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985).

The Role of Ethics in Leadership:



A crucial intersection between the humanities and leadership lies in the ethical considerations that guide leadership decisions. Burns (1978) emphasized the moral dimension of leadership, suggesting that leaders should act in the interest of collective well-being. The humanities provide a rich source of ethical frameworks, allowing leaders to navigate complex moral dilemmas.

Philosophical traditions, such as virtue ethics and deontology, offer perspectives on how leaders can uphold ethical principles in decision-making (Ciulla, 2006). Additionally, exploring literary works that grapple with ethical dilemmas allows leaders to reflect on the consequences of their actions and the moral implications of their choices (Sosik & Megerian, 1999).

Understanding leadership from a humanities perspective necessitates an exploration of cultural and historical contexts. Different cultures and historical periods have shaped distinct leadership norms and practices. By examining leadership through a cultural lens, leaders can develop a sensitivity to diverse perspectives and adapt their approaches accordingly (House et al., 2004).

Historical analysis provides insights into the leadership styles of influential figures, offering valuable lessons for contemporary leaders. For instance, studying leaders during times of crisis can illuminate effective crisis leadership strategies (Boin & 't Hart, 2003). The humanities, with their focus on context and human experience, enrich leadership studies by emphasizing the importance of cultural and historical awareness.

The art and science of leadership, when viewed through the lens of the humanities, reveal a nuanced and holistic understanding of this complex phenomenon. Integrating the artistic dimensions of intuition, creativity, and narrative with the scientific aspects of systematic analysis and strategic decision-making presents a more comprehensive approach to leadership (Martinez, et al., 2023). As organizations face ever-evolving challenges, leaders equipped with insights from the humanities are better positioned to navigate the complexities of human dynamics and guide their teams toward collective success. This interdisciplinary inquiry contributes to the ongoing dialogue on leadership, pushing the boundaries of traditional perspectives and fostering a more inclusive and human-centric approach.

Methodology

A systematic and comprehensive search strategy was devised to identify relevant literature across various databases. Keywords, including "leadership," "art and science of leadership," "humanities perspective," and related terms, were used to conduct searches in databases such as PubMed, PsycINFO, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Boolean operators were employed to refine search queries and ensure the inclusion of relevant articles and publications.

In order to maintain the relevance and rigor of the review, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. Only peer-reviewed articles, books, and conference papers published in the English language were considered. The selected literature focused explicitly on the intersection of leadership, humanities, and the dichotomy of art and science.

The initial screening involved reviewing titles and abstracts to assess their alignment with the research questions and inclusion criteria. Subsequently, full-text articles were retrieved for a more thorough evaluation. The screening process was conducted independently by two researchers, and any discrepancies were resolved through consensus.

A systematic data extraction process was implemented to capture relevant information from the selected literature. This included details such as authorship, publication year, key concepts, methodologies employed in primary studies, and key findings related to the art and science of leadership from a humanities perspective. The extraction process was conducted with a focus on maintaining consistency and accuracy. To ensure the reliability and validity of the selected literature, a quality assessment was carried out. The quality assessment involved evaluating the rigor of research designs, the credibility of sources, and the relevance of the findings to the research questions. This step aimed to identify and acknowledge the strengths and limitations of the existing literature.

Findings and Discussion

Integration of Art and Science in Leadership Practices:

The synthesis of diverse scholarly perspectives through a systematic literature review illuminates a compelling theme—the integral integration of the art and science of leadership. Drawing on insights from Bennis (2009) and Mintzberg (2004), the study portrays effective leaders as individuals who skillfully navigate a delicate equilibrium between intuitive, creative, and emotionally intelligent dimensions (artistic elements) and the systematic application of analysis, evidence-based decision-making, and strategic planning (scientific elements). This



harmonious coexistence underscores the understanding that leadership is a dynamic and complex process, requiring a holistic approach that transcends the conventional dichotomy between artistic and scientific aspects. The artistic elements of leadership, encompassing intuition and emotional intelligence, were recurrently highlighted across the literature. Bennis (2009) contends that self-awareness and interpersonal skills are pivotal components of effective leadership. Leaders, as depicted in the literature, leverage their intuitive capabilities to navigate uncertainties, inspire innovation, and foster a positive organizational culture. This resonates with the idea that leadership extends beyond rigid managerial approaches and incorporates the fluid, intuitive aspects associated with the arts.

Conversely, the scientific dimensions of leadership underscored the importance of evidence based decision-making and systematic analysis. Mintzberg (2004) cautions against reducing leadership to rigid formulas, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive and adaptive approaches. The literature consistently highlights the significance of empirical methodologies in guiding strategic planning, organizational effectiveness, and informed decision-making. This suggests that effective leaders not only rely on their artistic intuition but also employ systematic processes to navigate complexities (Uy, et al., 2023).

The synthesis of these perspectives contributes to a nuanced understanding of leadership as a dynamic interplay between art and science. The literature suggests that leaders who successfully integrate these dimensions are better equipped to navigate the multifaceted challenges of contemporary organizational environments (Kilag, et al., 2023). This finding reinforces the idea that a holistic approach, embracing both intuitive and structured elements, is paramount for effective leadership in diverse and dynamic contexts.

The integration of the art and science of leadership, as derived from the literature, positions leadership as a multifaceted phenomenon. This holistic perspective provides a valuable framework for leadership development, emphasizing the need for leaders to cultivate both intuitive, humanistic insights and empirical, systematic methodologies to thrive in the ever evolving landscape of organizational leadership.

Narrative and Storytelling as Essential Leadership Tools:

A prominent revelation arising from this study underscores the pivotal role of narrative and storytelling as indispensable tools in effective leadership. Informed by a humanities perspective, leaders strategically harness the power of stories to articulate compelling visions, convey core values, and establish a shared sense of purpose among followers. This acknowledgment is consistent with the insights of Boje (1991), who delves into the concept of leadership as a narrative, emphasizing the potency of storytelling in shaping organizational culture and identity. Leaders, as portrayed in the literature, transcend the traditional role of information conveyors; they become storytellers who intricately weave narratives to foster a deeper understanding of organizational dynamics. The act of storytelling, according to Sosik and Megerian (1999), serves as a mechanism for leaders to imbue their messages with meaning, eliciting emotional responses and creating resonance with their audience. This emotional connection cultivates a shared ethos within the organizational community, contributing to a cohesive and purpose driven work environment.

The emphasis on narrative and storytelling in leadership practices accentuates the indispensable role of the humanities in shaping leadership skills. Literary insights, philosophical perspectives, and historical narratives provide leaders with a repertoire of storytelling techniques that transcend conventional managerial approaches (Kilag, et al., 2023). By integrating humanities-based storytelling into leadership practices, leaders can humanize their communication, making it more relatable, engaging, and conducive to building a shared organizational identity.

The recognition of narrative and storytelling as essential leadership tools extends the conventional understanding of leadership beyond the realms of traditional managerial techniques. Informed by humanities perspectives, leaders who master the art of storytelling cultivate a richer organizational culture, establish a cohesive identity, and inspire collective commitment to shared goals. This finding reinforces the value of incorporating humanities based approaches into leadership development, acknowledging the profound impact that storytelling can have on fostering effective and meaningful leadership practices.

Cultural and Historical Contexts Shape Leadership Dynamics:

The in-depth examination of cultural and historical dimensions in leadership literature elucidates a pivotal finding: leadership practices are intricately and profoundly influenced by specific cultural and historical contexts. Drawing on insights from House et al. (2004), this study emphasizes that different cultures and historical periods contribute to the formation of distinct leadership norms and preferences. The recognition of these contextual nuances is crucial for leaders aiming to navigate the complexities of diverse organizational environments successfully. Leaders who demonstrate attunement to cultural and historical intricacies exhibit a heightened capacity to adapt their leadership approaches. By acknowledging and incorporating cultural diversity, leaders can foster cross-cultural understanding, mitigate potential conflicts, and cultivate an inclusive organizational culture. This aligns



with the assertion made by Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich (1985), who argue that an awareness of historical and cultural factors is fundamental for leaders seeking to establish effective communication and collaboration within multicultural teams.

Furthermore, the literature highlights the practical implications of this finding for leadership development programs. Integrating cultural and historical awareness into leadership training equips aspiring leaders with the competencies needed to navigate the complexities of the globalized workplace (Kilag, et al., 2023). By immersing leaders in diverse cultural perspectives, they develop the skills to adapt their leadership styles, fostering an inclusive and culturally sensitive organizational ethos.

The understanding that cultural and historical contexts shape leadership dynamics underscores the critical need for leaders to embrace cultural intelligence. This finding, drawn from insights provided by House et al. (2004) and Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich (1985), emphasizes the importance of incorporating cultural and historical awareness into leadership development initiatives. Leaders who possess this contextual awareness are better positioned to foster inclusive, adaptive, and culturally sensitive organizational environments, ensuring success in today's diverse and dynamic workplaces.

Ethical Considerations as Integral to Leadership Decision-Making: This study illuminates a persistent emphasis on the ethical dimensions inherent in leadership decision-making. Leaders, particularly those adopting a humanities perspective, navigate moral dilemmas by engaging with ethical frameworks derived from philosophy and literature. Drawing on insights from Ciulla (1998) and other scholars, the literature consistently underscores the significance of leaders considering not only the immediate organizational implications but also the broader societal impact of their decisions.

Leaders informed by a humanities perspective approach decision-making with a nuanced understanding of ethical principles, utilizing insights from literature and philosophy to guide their actions. This ethical compass, grounded in humanistic values, enables leaders to navigate the complexities of decision-making in a morally responsible manner. As Ciulla (1998) posits, the humanities provide leaders with a rich source of moral philosophy, fostering a deeper appreciation for the ethical implications of their choices.

The literature stresses that ethical leadership extends beyond mere adherence to rules; it involves a genuine commitment to ethical principles that contribute positively to both the organizational and societal realms (Kilag, et al., 2023). This finding accentuates the critical role of a humanities-informed ethical compass in ensuring that leaders make decisions aligned with broader ethical considerations. In essence, leaders equipped with a deep understanding of ethics from the humanities contribute to the cultivation of ethical organizational cultures and play a pivotal role in fostering a socially responsible approach to decision-making.

Conclusion

In the pursuit of unraveling the intricacies of leadership through the lens of the humanities, this study has illuminated several critical insights that contribute to a holistic understanding of the art and science of leadership. By synthesizing findings from a systematic literature review, our exploration has transcended conventional boundaries and enriched the discourse on leadership.

The integration of the art and science of leadership emerged as a fundamental theme, emphasizing the necessity for leaders to navigate a delicate balance between intuition, creativity, and emotional intelligence, alongside systematic analysis, evidence-based decision-making, and strategic planning. This synthesis, supported by the works of Bennis (2009) and Mintzberg (2004), underscores the dynamic nature of leadership, calling for a comprehensive and harmonious integration of both intuitive and structured approaches.

The recognition of narrative and storytelling as essential leadership tools, as informed by the insights of Boje (1991) and Sosik and Megerian (1999), showcases the transformative power of humanistic elements in communication. Leaders, acting as storytellers, have the capacity to shape organizational culture, convey values, and foster a collective sense of purpose, thereby transcending traditional managerial techniques.

The exploration of cultural and historical contexts in shaping leadership dynamics, drawing on the perspectives of House et al. (2004) and Meindl, Ehrlich, and Dukerich (1985), highlights the importance of contextual awareness. Leaders who grasp the nuances of diverse cultures and historical periods can adapt their approaches, fostering cross-cultural understanding and navigating the complexities of diverse organizational environments.

Ethical considerations emerged as integral to leadership decision-making, with a humanities perspective offering leaders a moral compass derived from philosophy and literature. This ethical foundation, advocated by Ciulla (1998), guides leaders to consider not only the immediate organizational implications but also the broader societal impact of their decisions, fostering a morally responsible approach to decision-making.



The infusion of humanities perspectives into leadership studies enriches our understanding of leadership as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. This study advocates for leadership that embraces both artistic and scientific dimensions, leverages the power of narrative, appreciates cultural and historical contexts, and upholds ethical principles. Leaders equipped with these insights are better positioned to navigate the evolving challenges of the contemporary organizational landscape, fostering inclusive, ethically grounded, and purpose driven leadership. The interdisciplinary inquiry undertaken here encourages further exploration and dialogue at the intersection of the humanities and leadership studies, paving the way for a more enlightened and human-centric approach to leadership.

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