RESEARCH PAPER - UNDER REVIEW

Universality And Situatedness In Educating Choral Conductors

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate a broad range of choral conductors' views on competences needed in their own practice, and how education and experience have contributed to their current level of mastery. Choral conductors (N=685) in Norway, Sweden, and Germany completed a survey covering 15 competence items that together constitute a holistic view of the choral conducting role. The survey also captured contextual data related to academic education and working situation. The analysis sought to determine the degree of situatedness and universality of the various competency items. The results show that there is a general agreement on the relative importance of competencies across various contexts, with some notable differences. The two key factors that drive self-perceived competence level are leading advanced choirs and years of experience. A degree specifically in choral conducting matters, but primarily for gestural skills. Music degrees in general do not explain variations in the sample. With regard to aural skills, we observe that the retrospective appreciation of education grows with longevity of experience.

1. Introduction

The choir is a label for the multitude of ensemble types and social settings where people engage in group singing. The choral leader role is equally varied, ranging from the amateur pianist who rehearses a community choir and the teacher who teaches a school choir to the music academy laureate who conducts a professional chamber choir. Each setting calls for a different blend and level of competence. At the same time, there is clearly common ground, and when it comes to educating conductors, curricula tend to serve a continuous and open-ended practice field (Jansson, Balsnes, and Bygdéus in press). A recent study of a broad sample of conductors in Norway by (Jansson, Elstad, and Døving in press) revealed that choral conducting competencies both exhibits universal features and is a highly situated practice. The present paper expands the former study by considering additional samples from Sweden and Germany. This enabled us to investigate variation across countries and other contingencies. We use the notion of 'competency' to denote the wide range of skills, abilities, predispositions, and knowledge that come into play when enacting choral leadership (Le Deist and Winterton 2005). We use the notion of 'universality' not as an absolute or precise term, but as the hypothetical end-point on the scale of the more or less situated.

Research on choral conducting is not always explicit with regard to its contingencies. However some research is clearly situated, where US high school and college settings have been prominent (Geisler 2010). The sources reviewed by Gonzo (1973) and Hylton (1983) are a few decades behind us, but this tradition continued to address a variety of pertinent issues (Bell 2002; Campbell et al. 2008; Carvalho 1999; Cofer 1998; Cox 1989; Crowe 1996; Crowe and Hedden 1994; Dunn 1997; Floyd and Bradley 2006; Jacobsen, Martin, and Doerksen 2004; Smith and Bowers 1998; Zielinski 2005; Skadsem 1997; Silvey 2013). The European choral scene is less centred around schools, and research often deals explicitly with amateur choirs (Bonshor 2017; Balsnes 2012; Balsnes and Jansson 2015; Bonshor 2016; Durrant 2005, 2000). Studies of conducting in the context of professional singers are rather scarce (Jansson 2015), while the professional symphony orchestra conductor is a much coveted study object (Faulkner 1973; Koivunen 2003; Mintzberg 1998; Woodbury 1955; Hunt, Stelluto, and Hooijberg 2004; Koivunen and Wennes 2011). On the other hand, research has also explored aspects of choral conducting that lend themselves more easily to generic

approaches, such as leadership styles (Apfelstadt 1997, 2009; Armstrong and Armstrong 1996; Atik 1994; Goodstein 1987; Guise 2001; Koivunen 2003; Mintzberg 1998; Tskhay, Xu, and Rule 2014; Veleckis Nussbaum and Tenkasi 2005; Wells 2011; Wis 2002, 2007) and relational and communicative competencies (Apfelstadt 2009; Decker and Kirk 1988; Durrant 2009; Funk 1982; Patman 1987; Silvey 2013; Tskhay, Xu, and Rule 2014; Wöllner and Auhagen 2008; Morrison et al. 2009).

Across the variety of situated research orientations, what is missing is the investigation of the degree of universality and the nature of contingencies. Expanding knowledge on these issues should enhance the understanding of the interplay between education and practice as well as provide a better basis for shaping choral conductor curricula. We position the study in a Western choral tradition, where we take a holistic view of the conductor role, although keeping extra-musical functions out of scope. Moreover, we base the study on an experiential epistemology, were (1) competency is understood through a hermeneutic-phenomenological lens on choral conducting (van Manen 1990; Jansson 2018), and (2) constituted by how conductors make sense of their own competency in the shaping of their own practice (Jansson, Elstad, and Døving in press; Pye 2005; Weick 1995; Handley et al. 2006).

Research aims

This study attempts to elucidate the dichotomy between universal and situated features of choral conductor competencies and education. Clearly, there is common ground across all the various conducting practices, but for which aspects of the role? Conversely, different settings call for skill sets that are relevant to the situation at hand, but to what extent can situations be framed by readily available contextual variables? We are particularly interested in the relative contribution of education and practice in constituting proficiency. We wondered if specific conductor education makes a difference compared to generic music education, as well as whether academic degree (master, bachelor, other) matters. We wanted to see whether three aggregate practice-related descriptors make a difference: tenure as conductor (the number of years of experience), intensity of practice (annual income percentage from conducting), and the artistic level of the choir in question. Specifically, we asked the following questions:

(1) To what extent are conductors' views on various competency items shared across contexts?

(2) How do education and practice blend for various competency items in constituting choral conductors' current level of perceived proficiency?

2. Theory

Taxonomies of competencies

The notion of 'competence', despite its colloquial ease of use, is a highly fuzzy concept, and its scholarly use is inconsistent for different domains, cultures, and countries. Its typologies includes widely different features—cognitive, functional, social, and even meta-competencies, such as adaptability and the ability to learn to learn (Le Deist and Winterton 2005). It may extend as far as to include traits, motives, and values. Having 'competence' refers to the overall capacity to perform, which might be a matter of degree. A 'competency' may also refer to single items of such overall capacity. In the context of choral conducting, we let 'competency' denote an element in the comprehensive set of abilities that the individual may draw on to master the engagement with the ensemble and the music. It comprises different types of knowledge (*savoir*), applied to constitute a doing-skill (*savoir-faire*), behaviours and ways of being *(savoir-être*)(Le Deist and Winterton 2005, 37; Nordhaug 1993; Campion et al. 2011).

Previous research has found that superior performance requires extensive and complex domain specific competency (Ericsson and Lehmann 1996; Goodall, Kahn, and Oswald 2011). While task proficency requires skills related to that particular task, research also indicate that some skills are highly transferable across tasks or domains. For example, interpersonal skills are presumably useful for most jobs, not least related to leadership. Taken together this wide span from the particular to the general are reflected in generic taxonomies such as the widely accepted distinction between technical, interpersonal and conceptual competencies (Campion, Cheraskin, and Stevens 1994; Jeou-Shyan et al. 2011; Sonntag and Schäfer-Rauser 1993; Yukl 2013). While this taxonomy is useful as a point of departure, we need to pay particular attention to how musical leadership differs from other leadership domains. First, the subject matter (music) pervades every competency element, not only the technical. Moreover, the

conceptual (or philosophical) is not constrained to the cerebral—as an aesthetic domain it encompasses the sensory, interpretive and embodied, where meaning is created on multiple levels. Some leadership scholars even argue that this equally applies to leadership in general (Bathurst, Jackson, and Statler 2010; Guillet de Monthoux, Gustafsson, and Sjöstrand 2007; Hansen, Ropo, and Sauer 2007; Ladkin and Taylor 2010). Nonetheless, the role of meaning and meaningfulness makes the existential (as opposed to instrumental) features particularly prominent in the conuctor skill set (Jansson 2015).

The choral conductor competency model

The multi-disciplinary nature of choral conducting implies that the choral conductor competency set includes a broad array of knowledge, skills and predispositions. Several scholars have discussed various taxonomies for different purposes, such as categorising gestures (Gumm 2012), discussing curricula (Varvarigou and Durrant 2011), and describing the 'super model' conductor (Durrant 2003). An amended version of the latter was used for this study (Jansson 2018). Here, conductor competencies comprise (1) the musical-technical, (2) the situational-relational, and (3) the conductor's existential foundation. We used the items of this three-layered model (shown in table 1) as the basis for the present study. The notion of a layered competency model arises from diverse strands of qualitative research (Durrant 2003; Gumm 2012; Jansson 2018; Nielsen 2009; Ladkin 2008; Jansson 2015). It also parallels the generic taxonomy that distinguishes between technical, interpersonal and conceptual competencies (Campion, Cheraskin, & Stevens, 1994; Jeou-Shyan, Hsuan, Chih-Hsing, Lin, & Chang-Yen, 2011; Sonntag & Schäfer-Rauser, 1993; Yukl, 2013). Although the three layers are not central for the research methodology, they are conceptually relevant and provide some order to the taxonomy, and come into play in the discussion.

Understanding variation

Competence can be acquired through different routes (Le Deist and Winterton 2005; Nordhaug 1993), where professional or vocational education may or may not be the entry point. Research shows that competencies are developed as much through work

and life experience (Felstead et al. 2005). This is certainly the case for choral conducting, where formal education is a fairly recent phenomenon and has not been widely available. We realise that variations found in our sample may need explanations outside the immediate realm of choral leadership theory and research, for example, related to gender and cultural difference. The scope of this article is not to do justice to every finding, in some cases, we can only point at the issues and call for others to join the academic debate and pursue further research.

3. Method

Questionnaire

A questionnaire covering the 15 competency items shown in Table 1 were distributed to a wide population of choral conductors in Norway, Sweden, and Germany[1]. We posed the questions with the conductor's experience in mind. The perspective on competency is therefore subjective and situated. Self-perceived mastery of own conducting practice resembles what has been conceptualised as self-efficacy in leadership theory, which includes both mastering specific tasks as well as the overall role with its inherent ambiguities (Wang and Hsu 2014).

Table 1: Competency elements and corresponding survey items.

	COMPETENCY ELEMENT	SURVEY ITEM
1.1	Repertoire knowledge	Repertoire overview and knowledge of music styles/genres
1.2	Score proficiency	Score overview and score understanding
1.3	Error detection/aural skills	Error detection/aural skills
1.4	Gestural skills	Gestural skills
1.5	Vocal technique	Vocal technique
1.6	Language skills	Language skills
2.1	Rehearsal organisation	Organise and manage the rehearsing process
2.2	Rehearsal interventions	Provide an effective learning approach for a given piece of music
2.3	Mentorship	Be able to give singers specific feedback and guidance
2.4	Control/empowerment	Know when to stop/correct and when to let the singers self-improve
3.1	Presence	Presence and concentration in the face of the ensemble
3.2	Sincerity	Face the ensemble with sincerity and honesty
3.3	Devotion	Approach the music and the ensemble with devotion and passion
3.4	Aesthetic will	Have a clear idea of the how the music should sound
3.5	Authority	Act with authority and self-confidence

For each of the competency items, the survey asked the following questions:

Q1: How important is this competency in your own conducting practice?

Q2: Indicate to what degree you agree with the following statement: 'I am comfortable with my own competency level'.

Q3: Indicate to what degree you agree with the following statement: 'My conductor education prepared me well for what I need in my conducting jobs'.

For Q1, respondents rated each item from 1 (less important) to 5 (indispensable). For Q2 and Q3 a five-point Likert scale from 'fully disagree' (1) to 'fully agree' (5) was used. The various competency items were presented in arbitrary order, without any numbering or grouping. The survey opened for qualitative commentaries as well as short narratives about their own conducting education and practice.

Sampling

The study expanded the empirical basis of Jansson et al (in press), which covered conductors in Norway[2]. Data from two additional sub-samples were included, a broad sample from Sweden and a narrow sample of choral conductors in Berlin (Germany). These three countries have the advantage of being different with regard to educational systems and music education (not least longevity of tradition), while at the same time having a widely shared musical culture. We therefore obtained both a larger sample overall by including Sweden, but equally importantly, sufficiently large sub-samples, such as leaders of professional choirs and conductors with degrees specifically in conducting, by also including Berlin—one of the prominent 'choir capitals'.

Translations of the survey text into Swedish and German were done by native-speaking scholars who also were experienced choral singers. The Berlin-survey was partly paper-based, in connection with the Fifth Berlin Choral Leader Convention (*5. Berliner Chorleitertag*[3]), and a subsequent web-based survey. Survey invitations to Swedish and Norwegian choral conductors were sent by e-mail from the various choral associations and the Federation of Choral Conductors in each country[4]. The respondents provided background data related to education, experience and working situation. It should be noted that education enters the data in two ways; (1) education's contribution to current level of proficiency (Q3 above), and (2) type of education, as a context variable. The former is a retrospective percpetion of the *impact* of education, and the latter is the historic *fact* with regard to degree. An overview of the sample data for the three country populations are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Sample overview.

	Norway	Sweden	Berlin	Total
N	294	344	47	685
Gender (% of sample)				
Male	42.2	34.2	51.1	38.8
Female	57.8	65.8	48.9	61.2
Degree in music (% of sample)				
Master's	38.4	35.8	66.0	39.0
Bacehlor's	35.4	19.8	8.5	25.7
No academic degree	26.2	44.5	25.5	35.3
Degree in conducting (% of sample)				
Master [a)]	16.3	32.8	55.3	27.3
Bachelor [b) c)]	19.4	11.9	4.3	14.6
No academic degree	64.3	55.2	40.4	58.1
Level of choir(s) (% of sample)				
Professional/Advanced amateur	49.0 %	58.7 %	72.3 %	55.5 %
Amateur	51.0 %	41.3 %	27.7 %	44.5 %
Tenure as conductor (years)				
Range	1 to 57	1 to 65	3 to 50	1 to 65
Median	22	25	20	25
Role of conducting (% of annual income)				
Range	0-100	0-100	0-100	0-100
Median	20	30	40	25

a) Berlin: including magister. diplom. promotion. b) Norway: including 'hovedfag i korledelse'
c) Sweden: including 'hovudämne i körledning'. d) Share of income 71-100%. e) Share of income 25-70%.
f) Share of income 0-24%

4. Results

Importance of competency items

Table 3 shows the scores for the competency items by country and total. We observe that the ranking of items is fairly uniform, with a few noteworthy features. All the existential items (level 3) score at the top of the list, where the Berlin score for *authority*[5] stands out as a deviation. In contrast, the musical-technical items (level 1) score at the bottom of the list, with the exception of *error detection/aural skills*, which

score at the mid-level in Norway and Sweden. The most striking observation is the low importance score for *gestural skills*, given the distinguishing function and emblematic appearance of conducting gestures. The top two situational-relational items are *rehearsal organisation* and *mentorship*. Variance accounted for across countries (eta[2]) is mostly small (although most are significant at .05) except for *authority* and *error detection/aural skills,* where variance across countries is substantial. The rankings in Norway and Sweden correlate at 0.9, and the ranking for Berlin correlates at 0.5 with Norway and Sweden.

Table 3: Assessment of importance for competency items; ranked by total mean; means, SD and ranks within subsamples.

	Norway			Sweden			Berlin			Total		Eta-squared	p
COMPETENCY ELEMENT	M	SD	Rank	M	SD	Rank	M	SD	Rank	M	SD		
3.1 Presence	4.8	.49	1	4.6	.66	1	4.6	.68	1	4.7	.60	.01	.013
3.3 Devotion	4.4	.74	7	4.6	.69	2	4.5	.75	4	4.5	.72	.02	<.001
3.5 Authority	4.7	.55	2	4.5	.71	3	3.3	.70	11	4.5	.72	.20	<.001
3.2 Sincerity	4.6	.63	3	4.4	.82	5	4.6	.61	2	4.5	.74	.02	<.001
3.4 Aesthetic will	4.5	.65	6	4.4	.77	4	4.3	.59	6	4.4	.71	.00	.256
2.1 Rehearsal organisation	4.5	.66	5	4.3	.77	8	4.2	.76	9	4.3	.74	.02	<.001
2.3 Mentorship	4.2	.83	8	4.3	.80	6	4.4	.77	5	4.3	.81	.01	.138
1.3 Error detection/aural skills	4.5	.67	4	4.3	.80	7	2.7	.50	14	4.3	.84	.26	<.001
2.4 Control/empowerment	4.2	.73	9	4.0	.85	9	4.2	.67	8	4.1	.79	.01	.014
2.2 Rehearsal interventions	4.1	.80	11	4.0	.87	10	4.5	.66	3	4.1	.84	.03	<.001
1.5 Vocal technique	4.1	.84	10	3.9	.92	11	3.3	.77	12	4.0	.90	.05	<.001
1.2 Score proficiency	4.0	.98	12	3.8	1.06	13	4.3	.67	7	3.9	1.01	.02	.001
1.1 Repertoire knowledge	3.9	.88	13	3.8	.87	12	3.7	.96	10	3.9	.88	.01	.166
1.4 Gestural skills	3.6	.98	14	3.6	1.01	14	2.9	.93	13	3.5	1.01	.03	<.001
1.6 Language skills	3.6	.99	15	3.3	.93	15	2.7	.87	15	3.4	.98	.06	<.001
N	294			344			47			685			

[a]Eta-squared (η^2) is a measure of variance accounted for and corresponds to R^2 in regressions analysis.
p-values based on F-test (analysis of variance)
M=mean SD=standard deviation

Rankings in Norway and Sweden correlate at 0.9 indicating a strong agreement about the relative importance of these competence elements. Rankings by conductors in Norway and Sweden correlates at around 0.5 with rankings by conductors in Berlin suggesting a general agreement about the relative importance of elements – the sample from Berlin is however much smaller and estimates have a correspondingly wider margin of error.

We selected the five competency items commented above for more detailed analysis. In addition, we included *aesthetic will* from the group of existential items because it together with *authority* most clearly provides the impetus for enacting choral leadership in the first place.

Education and practice in constituting competence

Table 4 shows regression analyses of self-perceived competency level for the six chosen items (dependent variables) with the available contextual (independent) variables. Two contextual variables explain variation for all but one of the competency items—level of choir being conducted and years of experience. In addition, intensity of practice, as measured by percentage of income, to some extent contributes to *gestural skills*,

rehearsal organisation, and *authority*. In combination, these three capture the 'weight' of exposure to the conducting practice. We observe that they overall explain more of the variation than academic degree. Academic degrees in conducting explain a higher self-perceived competence level for *gestural skills*, but not for any of the other items.

Table 4: Regression analyses with regard to respondent self-assessed competency level for selected competency items, standardized coefficients (*b*).

	1.3 Error Detection/ Aural Skills		1.4 Gestural Skills		2.1 Rehearsal Organisation		2.3 Mentorship		3.4 Aesthetic Will		3.5 Authority	
	b	*p*	*b*	*p*	*b*	*p*	*b*	*p*	*b*	*p*	*b*	*p*
Practice												
Professional/advanced (reference category is amateur choirs)[d]	.10	.023	.09	.026	.13	.003	.13	.003	.14	.001	.08	.051
Income from conducting (% of total)	.03	.392	.08	.049	.09	.021	.08	.053	.06	.111	.08	.040
Tenure as conductor (years)	.10	.012	.20	<.001	.12	.003	.06	.104	.13	.001	.19	<.001
Education												
Bachelor's degree in conducting[a]	.01	.819	.10	.019	.02	.644	.05	.296	.04	.370	.01	.769
Master's degree in conducting[a]	.01	.804	.19	<.001	.01	.795	.01	.825	.03	.459	-.05	.256
Bachelor's degree in music[c]	.02	.624	.06	.205	-.02	.628	-.02	.637	.03	.565	.01	.781
Master's degree in music[c]	.07	.146	.06	.201	.03	.510	.03	.491	-.02	.686	.03	.588
Location												
Sweden[e]	-.16	.000	-.05	.187	-.06	.178	-.01	.869	-.06	.156	-.09	.026
Berlin[e]	-.08	.037	-.03	.394	-.07	.090	.00	.940	-.12	.004	-.19	<.001
Male (reference is female)[d]	.06	.105	-.04	.222	-.07	.060	-.09	.022	.03	.400	-.09	.012
R^2	.06		.15		.06		.05		.07		.09	

[a]Dummy variables, reference category is respondents without an academic degree in conducting.
[c]Dummy variables, reference category is respondents without an academic degree in music.
[d]Dummy variables.
[e]Dummy variables, reference category is Norway.
b=standardized regression coefficient
N=680

Some variation is explained by country, notably, by how competency scores are lower in Sweden and Berlin than in Norway. The effect is particularly salient for Berlin conductors with regard to *authority* and *aesthetic will*, and to some degree for *error detection/aural skills*.

Education's contribution to current competencies

Table 5 shows regression analyses of conductor education's contribution to current competencies. The most striking observation is that a degree in conducting—but *not* in music in general—explains variation for all six competency items. This is not the self-fulfilling prophecy as it appears at first sight. While a specific degree in conducting should be expected to contribute to current competence levels, choral conducting

embedded in a more generic music degree could easily have created significant variation. The level of conductor education matters; a bachelor degree contributes, and a master degree contributes more.

Table 5: Regression analyses with regard to education's contribution for selected competency items, standardized coefficients (*b*).

	1.3 Error Detection/ Aural Skills		1.4 Gestural Skills		2.1 Rehearsal Organisation		2.3 Mentorship		3.4 Aesthetic Will		3.5 Authority	
	b	*p*	*b*	*p*	*b*	*p*	*b*	*p*	*b*	*p*	*b*	*p*
Practice												
Professional/advanced (reference category is amateur choirs)[d]	.03	.515	.05	.271	-.01	.864	.02	.694	.03	.466	-.01	.789
Income from conducting (% of total)	.04	.338	.05	.193	-.03	.398	-.02	.545	.00	.940	-.08	.053
Tenure as conductor (years)	.16	<.001	.03	.437	.06	.124	.10	.015	.09	.026	.05	.184
Education												
Bachelor's degree in conducting[a]	.12	.006	.13	.003	.10	.017	.18	<.001	.10	.018	.11	.012
Master's degree in conducting[a]	.17	<.001	.20	<.001	.21	<.000	.14	.003	.16	<.001	.14	.003
Bachelor's degree in music[c]	.03	.575	.07	.157	.02	.686	-.03	.515	.03	.572	-.01	.878
Master's degree in music[c]	-.01	.864	.08	.089	-.04	.465	-.02	.710	.04	.474	.00	.926
Location												
Sweden[e]	-.15	<.001	.01	.803	-.09	.037	-.02	.621	-.14	<.001	-.08	.048
Berlin[e]	-.04	.358	-.08	.048	-.02	.577	-.03	.421	-.08	.059	-.10	.018
Male (reference is female)[d]	-.01	.800	-.06	.105	-.11	.004	-.09	.015	-.10	.007	-.12	.002
R^2	.09		.09		.06		.06		.07		.05	

[a]Dummy variables, reference category is respondents without an academic degree in conducting.
[c]Dummy variables, reference category is respondents without an academic degree in music.
[d]Dummy variables.
[e]Dummy variables, reference category is Norway.
b=standardized regression coefficient
N=680

Conductor education contributes more to current competencies in Norway—for *authority,* and for *error detection/aural skills, rehearsal organisation,* and *aesthetic will* (compared to Sweden).

Gender was captured as a control variable, and we would have needed data on the combinaton of conductors' and singers' gender allow further analysis. We only note

that male conductors rated their non-technical competencies somewhat lower than female did, and education contributed less to their current level.

5. Discussion

The construction of capability

Choral conductor education, as dedicated programmes or imbedded in generic music education, prepares for an unlimited variety of settings, within and outside institutions and more or less associated with a professional work-life. Such variety clearly calls for a situated approach to competency and education, determined by who the learners are and where they operate (Varvarigou and Durrant 2011). At the same time, research and education presuppose a high degree of universality of the choral conducting phenomenon (Jansson, Balsnes, and Bygdéus in press).

The 'super model conductor' is expected to master a comprehensive skill set that few are able to meet (Durrant 2003, 99). Conductors may experience that some skills are wanting and that others are superfluous in a given ensemble situation. Assessing the importance of a particular competency item is therefore a situational issue. The respondents ranked existential and situational-relational competencies as more important than musical-technical competencies. The assessments were made in the context of each respondent's own practice. There is a general agreement on the relative importance of the competencies across the three countries. The prominence of existential features concurs with how choral singers view choral leadership at its best (Jansson 2015). The role seems to call for *authentic leadership* (Gardner et al. 2011), a concept which involves a sincere and aware self, acting on one's true drives, with a relational orientation to others.

The conspicuously low importance ranking of *conducting gesture* is puzzling, but not unexpected. Although gestures are an emblematic feature of the role, few gestures can be seen as emblems with universal meanings (Benge & Zorn 1996; Luck & Nte 2008; Luck & Sloboda 2008; Scott 1996; Wöllner & Auhagen 2008), and conducting gestures may not be crucial for a conductor's effectiveness (Durrant 1994). The notion of importance is elusive because it blurs with the function a particular skill is *allowed* to play in an individual's practice. Conductors make use of what they have and avoid what

they lack, indicated by the close correspondence that has been found between the importance and the proficiency of a competency (Jansson, Elstad, and Døving in press). With regard to conducting gestures, they are *made* important when they matter and can be mastered. Conductors *shape* their practice through quanity of exposure, and all three practice factors in Table 4 explain a higher comfort level with own gestural competencies. This is not in conflict with the significance of having a degree in conducting.

Two contextual factors explain variations in perceived competence (Table 4) for five of the six items—artistic level of choir in question and years of experience. This is in contrast with the educational factors, where variation is only explained for one item—*gestural skills*—and only by a degree specifically in conucting. This observation concurres with previous research, which indicates that musical-technical skills have priority in curricula (Jansson, Balsnes, and Bygdéus in press), possibly leading to inter-personal skills that are wanting in the encounter with real working situations.

Conductors in Norway are more comfortable with their competence level, observed across several competency items, as well as specifically for the self-rating of *authority*. Irrespective of objective differences (of which we have no data), the perceptive differences suggest a higher level of self-efficacy for Norwegian conductors. Self-efficacy relies on the belief that one can perform well within the expectations given (Bandura 1977). It is a leadership competency that is crucial for individual growh as well as for empowering others (Caldwell and Hayes 2016). It is not only related to mastering specific tasks, but also the ability to cope with ambiguity and situational judgement inherent in the role (Wang and Hsu 2014). Given the continuous balancing acts that conductors face (Jansson 2015; Hunt, Stelluto, and Hooijberg 2004), we need more research into what self-efficacy means for overall conductor effectiveness.

Education and practice

Unsurprisingly, choral conducting education significantly contributes to current competence level, and a master degree contributes more than a bachelor degree. It is somewhat surprising that other types of music education do not seem to contribute, taking into account that these programmes may have choral conducting topics embedded in them, including topics such as score study and aural skills. The focus and goal of a choral conducting degree seems to be qualitatively different from other types of

music education. Belonging to a practice community and the building of a professional identity are crucial elements in the learning process (Lave and Wenger 1991; Omidvar and Kislov 2014; Wenger 1998). Self-perceived capability may go beyond mastery of the situation, it encompasses the stature that comes from entering a 'guild of the select few'—being awarded a degree in conducting.

Tenure (years of experience) explains variation in *error detection/aural skills* (Table 4), and, notably, how education has contributed (Table 5). This means that experience grows the retrospective appreciation of aural education—many years after. This is not the case for conducting gestures: Tenure explains variations in competence level, but the retrospective view on education's contribution is not impacted by time passed. As a default assumption, we could suspect that competencies acquired through education fade as time passes by. In particular, proficiency gained through long-time practice may eventually overshadow education (Ericsson, Prietula, and Cokely 2007; Lehmann, Ericsson, and Taylor 1997; Ng and Feldman 2010). Previous research has found that for complex tasks, such as playing the violin or playing chess, at least ten years of practice is needed to reach peak performance, often much more (Ericsson 2008; Ericsson and Lehmann 1996; Krampe and Ericsson 1995). While most of the comptencies mature over time (Table 4), respondents with a degree in conducting clearly recognise the 'kick-start' that education gave them (Table 5). The retrospectice appreciation of *error detection/aural skills* appears particularly salient, suggesting that it constitutes a fundamental skill set that is particularly suited for an academy setting and difficult to just learn on the job.

For conducting gestures, practice overshadows education as experience is accumulated. The same applies to rehearsal organisation, which is intuitively easier to interpret—rehearsing is inherently practice, and mastery comes from longevity of training. The overall importance of tenure also concurrs with how conductors as well as academy professors consider conductor 'education' as a life-long project, where there is no sharp transition from education to practice and a degree is no final closure of education (Jansson, Balsnes, and Bygdéus in press).

Norway stands out with regard to self-percieved *auhority*. Its importance is rated higher, as well as the level, and conductor education has contributed more to it. Our study was too limited in scope to allow for a detailed discussion on cross-cultural differences. One line of inquiry that might be pursued in future research concerns the

expectations put a choral leader. Research has shown that that Germany differs form Norway and Sweden with regard to what Geert Hofstede labels as the 'masculinity - femininity' dimension (Hofstede 1991, 500). One finding is that managers in Germany are expected to be more decisive, assertive, and competetive, and that status differences are more visibly shown. Such pressure could potentially induce higher tension and thereby lower self-confidence and sense of own authority. A related issue is the competency item *aesthetic will*, which ranks high in terms of importance in all three countries, but where Norway stands out with a higher competence level and a stronger contribution from education. The will power aspect of *aesthetic will* possibly induces a certain confidence in own ideas, so that the same reasoning as for *authority* would apply.

Norway stands out with regard to *error detection/aural skills*. This item is viewed as more important than in Sweden and Berlin, the competence level is perceived to be higher, and conductor education contributes more to that mastery (compared to Sweden). It is difficult to explain why the item is ranked in the top end in Norway and in the bottom end in Berlin. An hypothesis is that *error detection/aural skills* have been emphasized in Norwegian curricula, but the results cannot determine the direction of cause and effect. Does importance come from emphasis, or the other way around, or possibly a mutual confirmation over time?

There is apparently a partial mismatch between (1) the importance of academic degrees in statistically *explaining* current competence levels (Table 4) and (2) the respondents *assessment* of education's contribution to those levels (Table 5). The former shows a weak *objective* link between academic degree and perceived competency – only for gestural skills. The latter shows a strong *subjective* contribution from conductor education – across all six items. The weak objective link suggests that practice eventually rules over education, as experience grows, it literally moves the point of departure to the background. When respondents were asked to reflect on their education, they moved it back into the foreground in a process of *sensemaking* (Pye 2005; Weick 1995; Maitlis and Christianson 2014; Humphreys, Ucbasaran, and Lockett 2012). Most of the seven properties of sensemaking seem to be in play here; it is cued, retrospective, enactive, ongoing, and rooted in identity. When asked, respondents are trigged to look back and 'rewrite'. their competence story, which includes the identity associated with being a laureate. Moreover, similar processes are going on all the time, as conductors act on their comptencies in their evolving practice and continuously

update their narratives to the present moment. It is therefore plausible that their original education is given new meaning when prompted, over and beyond significant variations in competence levels. Simply put, conductor educaton matters, but practice rules.

Conclusions

Our study has confirmed the prominence of existential factors, such as aesthetic will and devotion, which have been highlighted in previous qualitative research. In addition, our study revealed that situational-relational skills are deemed more important than musical-technical skills. The notion that conducting gestures are central but not crucial in constituting the role is also supported. Within our sample, these findings vary little across contexts—they exhibit a certain degree of universality. Despite the variety of choral situations, choral conducting nevertheless appears as a continuous practice field. With regard to the situatedness of the role, having an advanced choir and many years of experience are those two factors that most significantly impact level of competence. A degree specifically in choral conducting matters (master more than bachelor), but primarily for gestural skills. With regard to aural skills, we make the notable observation that the retrospective appreciation of education grows with longevity of experience. Music degrees in general (master and bachelor) do not explain variations in the sample.

Limitations of study

The three countries covered are geographically and culturally close—in a global context—which was deliberate. However, we would probably have achieved greater variety by moving beyond Europe, and thereby including settings and genres further away from a classical centre of gravity. At the same time, choral conducting is a product of 19th century romanticism, which is inherently Europe-centric. Even within Europe, a wider geographic outlook would have been necessary to go deeper into issues related to power, authority, and gender.

The taxonomy of education level is in principle straight-forward, however, many conductors have a blend of degrees where it is difficult assess precisely the scope of the degree. What is considered a master degree in conducting by one respondent could be

interpreted by another as a music educator master degree with specialisation in conducting. This categorisation problem is made even more unsolvable by the extensive topical overlap between generic and specialised curricula. To this point, it is interesting to note that a degree in conducting specifically explains as much variation as it actually does.

The use of perceptual data to investigate competencies clearly misses out on what it means for outwardly achievement and impact on singers. It is highly probable that at times there will be a discrepancy between a conductor's and the ensemble's assessment of capability and effectiveness. However, over time, and with multiple choirs, a conductor's own perceptions should be expected to become increasingly 'realistic', if not objective. Research has indeed shown that self-assessments are valid measures as indicated by a general correspondence with job performance measures (Mabe and West 1982). Even when people overestimate their true skills and thus bias the mean (Dunning 2011), statistical associations are as such not affected by a biased mean. More importantly though, as conductors shape their practice, belief in own capability is in itself conducive to overall mastery.

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[1] The survey form included two additional items that are not reported in this article—*choir acoustics* and *staging/spacing*. Based on an earlier version of the competency model, these items were not included in the initial data collection in Berlin, but added later. We deemed that a coherent data set was more important for the research aims than the partial inclusion of non-crucial competency items.
[2] Norway data collected late 2017.
[3] 23 September 2017.
[4] Sweden data collected mid-2018.
[5] Note that *authority* is not used in the Weberian sense or as a phenomenon attributed by followers, but denotes the conductor's self-perceived ability to confidently face the ensemble and the music at hand.