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ABSTRACT

The topic of this paper is the relocation of a proven learning mechanism in a real-life working situation to a university setting. The aim is to discuss to what degree the types of learning generated in the original setting can survive the re-contextualisation and what might be done to retain as much value as possible. The original learning situation was an aesthetic experience – choral singing and conducting – that allowed nine senior managers to sense various relational phenomena, such as control and empowerment, multi-voice teamwork, the impact of own body, empathy, and vulnerability. The target learning domain is a university setting. The paper draws on various theories of learning. The re-contextualisation is discussed in the form of five hurdles that must be overcome. For each hurdle, a design hypothesis is proposed. The presence of an aesthetic object – the sounding music – illuminates the crucial linkage between discipline knowledge structures and everyday practices.

Introduction

Educational institutions endeavour to create programmes, curricula, courses, and interventions that are *useful*, which, broadly speaking, means that knowledge acquired in school settings can be transferred to other contexts (Reeves 2011). The topic of this paper is the *opposite*: the export of a work-life learning experience to a university setting. The knowledge domain is leadership and organisational development, specifically the interpersonal dynamics of a management team. The original learning intervention was rather unusual – the executive team of a large professional services firm engaging in group singing and choral conducting on a regular basis for more than a year. The project was analysed five and eight years after, and the impact on the managers proved to be deep as well as durable (Jansson 2018).

There were a number of contextual factors that facilitated knowledge transfer from the intervention itself to the participants' managerial practice (Jansson 2020), which suggests that it cannot easily be replicated. Other research indicates that aesthetics-based leadership development can outperform traditional programs when it comes to pro-social behaviour and stress resilience (Romanowska, Larsson, and Theorell 2013), which is a

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compelling argument to consider the original intervention for more structured settings such as universities. At the outset, this might seem rather difficult, because the effectiveness of the original project was intimately associated with the physicality of the set-up, both in terms of how it was located and how it was embedded into the weekly agenda. In addition, the aesthetic nature of the original learning process does not easily comply with the more rational academic traditions.

The combined success of the original intervention and the apparent futility of redeploying it to a university setting triggered my curiosity, leading to the following research questions:

(1) What difficulties arise when a leadership development concept based on aesthetic experience is relocated from the workplace to a university?
(2) How can such a concept be modified in the new setting to retain its original benefits without too much loss of impact?

The university course is assumed to be on the graduate level, offered to students without prior work experience. The course would then be part of a programme within the leadership and organisation domain, as typically offered by but not restricted to business schools.

Scholars have discussed various aesthetic teaching interventions in academic settings (Mack 2013; Springborg and Sutherland 2016; Taylor and Ladkin 2009; Sutherland and Jelinek 2015; Biehl-Missal and Springborg 2016; Guillet de Monthoux, Gustafsson, and Sjöstrand 2007). However, the significance of the context and the issue of knowledge transfer between contexts are rarely addressed. Despite the positive effects of aesthetic interventions, the nature of its applicability is not well understood or theorised. This may be one of the reasons why such concepts are still marginal and rare within university curricula. This led to an additional question:

(1) How can the relocation of an aesthetic learning concept be investigated systematically and theoretically informed?

Learning *in* the workplace is studied more extensively than knowledge transfer from university to work (Garraway et al. 2011). The transfer of a learning mechanism in the other direction has not been a central research topic at all. The present paper contributes in two ways. First, the learning mechanism can potentially be made applicable for a broader student audience. Second, the analysis might shed new light on theoretical aspects of knowledge contextualisation.

We are considering different types of knowledge transfer, as depicted in Figure 1. The focus of this paper is the transfer of a learning mechanism in a management team – the *source domain* – to a university course – the *target domain*. We are investigating the re-contextualisation from the source to the target domain, a process which encompasses both the transfer of the learning *process* and the nature of the learning *content*. The target domain is a hypothetical teaching process, understood as the overall course design, its various interventions, and potential learning outcomes. The methodology of this paper is therefore a semi-hypothetical case discussion of re-contextualisation, where the source is real, and the target is intended.
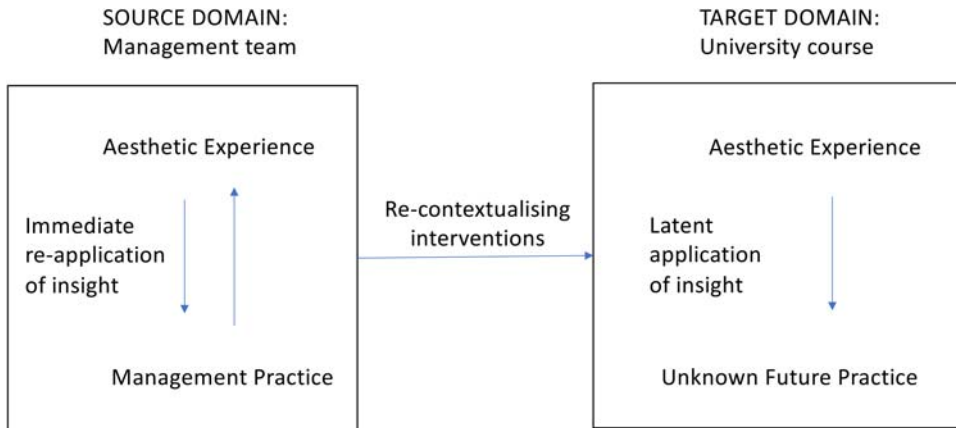
Figure 1. Knowledge domains.

Within the source domain, another knowledge transfer was at work – the learning that the managers experienced at the time, during the music sessions with immediate implications for their managerial practice. This also involved a re-contextualisation; however, to avoid confusion, it is here denoted as re-application of insight between two parallel practices. While the original experience relied on two intertwined practices with immediate re-application, a university setting is open-ended, and application of learnings lies in a more or less distant future. The knowledge transfer that a university course may engender is more of a latent re-application – a case of 'far transfer' (Barnett and Ceci 2002), where its manifestation depends on the proximity to an available practice.

When investigating learning culture, Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) distinguished between *authentic* activity (understood as ordinary things people do) and *school* activity, where activity is 'implicitly framed by one culture, but explicitly attributed to another' (34). The management in the choral setting team found themselves in a near-authentic learning activity, even if the intervention itself was not work or task related. Learning is inherently a social practice, where participation is key to knowledge generation (Lave 1988). Moreover, the managers' learning came through sensory and corporeal experience – nurturing aesthetic leadership (Hansen, Ropo, and Sauer 2007; Ropo and Parviainen 2001). Their learning was an iconic example of both dimensions of 'modern' learning theory – that learning is *inextricably social* and *explicitly embodied*.

Theoretical perspectives

Given these premises, I draw eclectically on four learning theory perspectives. First, an aesthetic epistemology is clarified – how humans know and learn from their sensory–interpretive faculty. Furthermore, the sociality of learning is clarified, however, it needs to be complemented by a more explicit view on knowledge structures. Last, some key aspects of knowledge contextualisation are presented.
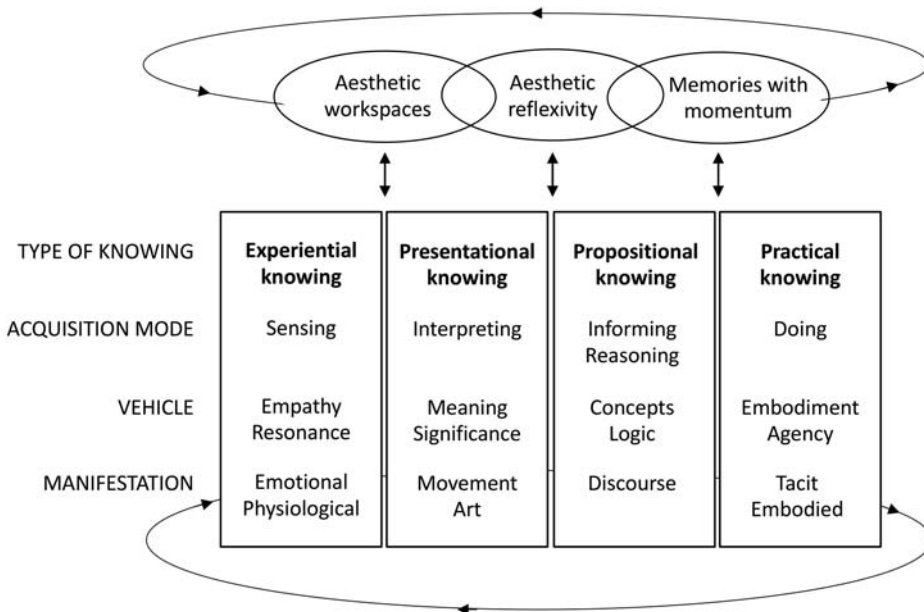
Aesthetic knowing

Ryle (1946) made one seminal distinction between types of knowledge: propositional (knowing that) versus tacit (knowing how). The notion of tacit knowledge takes an integrative view, by capturing the composite nature of being able to *do* something (Polanyi and Brayfield 1968). It includes both sensory and motoric functions. However, sensory and interpretive capacities that precede action and language may be seen as distinct categories of knowing. *Aesthetic knowing* relies on an embodied cognition that involves the combined four ways of knowing that are depicted in Figure 2.

Let us illustrate by a simple example that encompasses all the facets of aesthetic knowing, which include being able to:

- Sensory: Distinguish musical sound from arbitrary noise.
- Interpretive: Realise that the melody is sung by a human voice.
- Propositional: Know that the voice belongs to John Lennon.
- Doing: Sing the melody.

How humans engage with music is a particularly striking example of embodied cognition (Brown, Collins, and Duguid 1989; Leman 2008; Perlovsky 2015; Taipale 2015). Aesthetic knowing arises from our senses and does principally not depend on articulation of statements. Even a new-born baby can hear a melody, recognise its mother's voice and find it pleasing, and even be able to express some sort of vocal response (Malloch and Trevarthen 2009; Stern 1998). Our appreciation of art does not rely on propositional knowledge, although it might be enhanced by it. Humans are very quick to generate

Figure 2. Four ways of aesthetic knowing. Based on Jansson (2018), inspired by Heron (1992), Heron and Reason (2001), Sutherland (2013), Taylor and Hansen (2005).

propositions based on aesthetic knowing – 'I think that is John Lennon, isn't it?'. What's worse, we are so good at it that we tend to quickly escape a purely sensing/interpretive mode. We have difficulty with staying with our senses, postponing hypotheses, delaying prejudices, and abstain from action. Our inclination to leave the sensing/interpretive mode may preclude us from insight. According to Springborg (2010), leaders should linger with their senses, in order be more effective. This requires a culture, or at least situations, for nurturing each stand-alone mode of knowing.

Some learning opportunities are unavailable by reasoning alone. For example, Sutherland, Gosling, and Jelinek (2015), when referring to their research on musical ensemble relationships, underline that the understanding of power is incomplete without having *sensed* it. Hibbert and Cunliffe (2015, 180) argue that ethically sound management requires reflexivity on how 'we always act within, and simultaneously shape, the context', which often involves passing through threshold concepts. Threshold concepts are gateways to understanding that are irreversible, transforms the individual, and integrates fragments of prior knowledge (Meyer and Land 2005). Leadership knowledge is inherently aesthetic, that is, embodied and relational (Hansen, Ropo, and Sauer 2007). Some threshold concepts are therefore primarily accessible through experience. A number of common music-making phenomena are ready-made candidates for threshold concepts, such as balance, synchronisation, and multi-voice team. The key point is these are more learnable through sensory experience than reading about it or being talked about. Once it is sensed, it is impossible to revert to a state of not knowing.

Situatedness of learning

The practice turn in twentieth century philosophy had far-reaching impact on learning theory (Lave 2012). Participation is seen as the crux of learning, and humans participate in a number of more or less overlapping communities of practice (CoP) (Omidvar and Kislov 2014; Wenger 1998). The three main indicators of a CoP are mutual engagement, around a joint enterprise, with a shared repertoire of thought and action. CoP has been widely used in business and organisation studies (Murillo 2011; Gherardi and Nicolini 2002), also with a specific focus on education (Monaghan 2011; Smith, Kempster, and Wenger-Trayner 2019).

A choir as well as a management team are easily recognisable CoPs by the three indicators, while the characteristics of a university class do not automatically satisfy the criteria. More generally for a university class, according to Fox (1997), there is an intricate relationship between theory and practice and the applicability of social learning theory is less obvious. However, CoP theory has been used not only as a research framework in management education, but even to literally *implement* a community of practice in a business school course as a learning strategy (Monaghan 2011) and programmed leadership development for leaders of small businesses (Smith, Kempster, and Wenger-Trayner 2019). In any case, a management team and a university class are two very different communities, with different learning goals and learning mechanisms in play (Garraway et al. 2011), to the degree that we speak of different epistemic cultures – labelled developmentalism and schooling (Eraut 2010; Reeves 2011; Eraut 2004).

A CoP relies on four mutually supporting pillars; community, learning, identity, and meaning. This means for example that when managerial competencies are developed in

the context of a management team, the process cannot be dissociated from the evolution of communality within the peer group and the organisation at large. Likewise, the identity of a manager affects how various competencies move to the foreground and others to the background, for example, listening skills and situational judgement.

Knowledge structures

When learning is situated, it means that context matters. At the same time, CoP theory is critiqued for its knowledge bias – that knowledge predominantly arises through social interaction rather than having an independent existence (Garraway et al. 2011). The theory does not explicitly accommodate a knowledge structure, that is, how a discipline matter (such as music, medicine and finance) shapes the context. In ensemble music-making, for example, the music object almost assumes 'individual' agency in how it guides and draws its participants to a concerted effort (Jansson 2018). The concept of developmental transfer (Konkola et al. 2007), based on activity theory, gives a position for the knowledge object as part of interacting activity systems. However, the case discussion needs attending to the underlying knowledge structure, retaining a role for the cognitive view.

The degree to which knowledge can have an independent existence depends on the knowledge structure. A pervasive dichotomy is a distinction between the sacred or principled and the profane or mundane knowledge classes (Bernstein 1999). This is also referred to as vertical versus horizontal knowledge, where verticality is located in disciplines, whereas horizontal discourse relates to the knowledge of everyday. The principled character of (vertical) discipline knowledge may be re-contextualised across meanings and practices (Lilliedahl 2015). However, the notion of verticality becomes problematic for scholarly disciplines that deal with everyday phenomena; for example, the field of management studies is a form of vertical discourse with a horizontal knowledge structure (Hordern 2014). Hence, there is a soft boundary between the disciplined nature of the field and its practice.

A special feature of aesthetic experiences is that they often involve an aesthetic object, such as a piece of music or a painting, which is charged with meaning. Notably, intra-musical meaning has a vertical structure (Koelsch 2011; Koopman and Davies 2001; Nielsen 2011), whereas our engagement with music has a mundane, horizontal structure (Cook 2001; Green 2005; DeNora 2013). The sensory–interpretive features that are experienced through a musical object include an array of phenomena such as background-foreground, tension-release, boredom-surprise, synchronisation-collapse, and unification-individuality. These are the study objects of music cognition – a highly verticalised discipline (Godøy and Leman 2010; Leman 2008; Snyder 2000). At the same time, these features belong to human everyday experience. A musical object – or more generally, an aesthetic object (Barry and Meisiek 2010; Rowe 2008) – is therefore a mediator between situated and 'universal' knowledge, a transfer catalyst, so to speak. This notion seems to be key to the transferability of aesthetic learning.

Knowledge contextualisation

The issue of transfer of knowledge across contexts is partly about whether knowledge can exist independently of context (*de*-contextualised) and partly about what goes on when

knowledge is 'moved' from one context to another (*re*-contextualised). Humans appear to have the capacity to transfer learning and knowledge across space and time, for example in the rapid spread of new technologies and their associated practices (Reeves 2011). The position that knowledge can be *abstracted* from a situation – which means literally *lifted out* – is intuitively appealing. Having learnt to speak a foreign language in school enables some level of communicative ability in that country. Given that human beings operate fluidly across multiple contexts as one gestalt, we clearly apply our skills and competencies beyond the context where they arose. Even language is constructed by the pervasive use of metaphors, which means that one phenomenon is labelled as a simile with another phenomenon. In fact, the hierarchical structure of metaphors is a basic construction principle of knowledge (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) and resembles the notion of vertical discipline knowledge. Also, education operates under the assumption that competencies can be acquired even if we do not know where and when they will be put to use.

However, this apparent ease with which humans move between contexts does not necessarily mean that knowledge can exist free of any context – *de*-contextualised. According to Fox (1997), traditional cognitive learning theory is problematic, as it

> regards context as the container of decontextualized knowledge; the latter is the pearl in the oyster. The oyster itself, its position on the sea bed, and the difficult work of its discovery are like so many irrelevancies or impurities surrounding the pearl. (734)

van Oers (1998) argues that the notion of de-contextualisation is not very informative, because it is qualified by something *not* occurring. Even when there is no apparent context, in the sense of not currently being 'used', knowledge is not something we can possess completely disconnected from our lived life: 'as soon as it is de-contextualised, knowledge is immediately positioned by universal library classification systems like an exhibit in a museum or archive' (Fox 1997, 738). When attempting to abstract knowledge, what happens is a continuous, progressive process of re-contextualising (van Oers 1998).

Although social learning theory incorporates the situatedness of learning, it does not easily solve the re-contextualisation issue. Its application in a school setting is not straight-forward, because school activity relates to multiple contexts and context is both given and emergent (Fox 1997). For example, I might choose to only speak a foreign language when I am in a superior power situation, thereby *shaping* the context in which abstract knowledge is deployed. My knowledge is therefore both content and container and the separation is somewhat deceptive. The middle position between the cognitive and the social view seems to be the most fruitful: knowledge is always provisional, being hosted by continuous weave of contexts (van Oers 1998). Tying back to the section on knowledge structures, the interplay between vertical and horizontal knowledge impacts how easily re-contextualisation happens. With specific reference to the aesthetic experience of the management team, the music object seems to offer qualities that 'lubricate' this interplay, between its embodied vertical knowledge structure (Koopman and Davies 2001) and the abundance of horizontal practices (DeNora 2013).

Case: source and target domains

The original learning context is known, whereas the target context is imagined. The description of the target domain, therefore, highlights those features that follow from

the *change* of context. The source domain is thoroughly reported elsewhere, both in terms of set-up, process, and learning content (Jansson 2018, 2020). A semi-hypothetical case analysis is a method that allows a prospective design view as opposed to post-fact evaluation of already implemented learning concepts. It offers structured exploration through a blend of solid ground and conjecturing about the new design.

Source learning context

The original context was both trivial and unique. The uniqueness arose because senior managers rarely engage in a joint artistic activity on a regular basis for a longer period of time. It was trivial in the sense that there is nothing unusual about group singing facilitated by some kind of 'conductor', taking place in an ordinary space with no other technology than sheet music and a tuning fork. Simply put, the project imported one very common activity into another very common activity, thereby creating an unusual situation.

The team was the senior management group in the national subsidiary of a global firm. The nine managers headed up their corresponding functions or departments, such as sales and marketing, operations, finance, and legal. The five males and four females were in their late thirties and early forties. The project consisted of one-hour singing sessions, back-to-back with regular management meetings. The rehearsal space was an inconspicuous storage room in the basement of the office building. The structure of each session was consistent and very simple, going from concentration and breathing exercises, through voice technique to rehearsing three-part songs, arranged specifically for this group, which included three sopranos, three tenors (one of which was actually a very deep alto) and three basses. In my capacity as teacher and facilitator, I had full control of the agenda and the priorities. The pedagogical approach involved serious engagement with music, voice, and aural skills, but also plenty of joking and having fun with it. The project had no specific external goal beyond the opportunity for the team to do something different offsite, although they ended up performing their songs publicly at two company events and one external event. In addition to regular choir sessions, the group engaged in four sessions of choral conducting, a few months apart. Here, they were put in front of a semi-professional choir and asked to conduct simple songs, for which they were neither trained nor prepared. The purpose was not to act as skilled conductors, but to use the choir as a 'mirror' for their own demeanour, will, engagement, and emotions – not least coping with a subject matter they did not master. The experience presented immediate sensing of power, lack of power, security and vulnerability, and the opportunity to test variants of own stage appearance.

The simplicity of the original set-up (in addition to the longevity) proved to be the most valuable aspect of the project. This is not to say that it is easy to find a group of managers ready to undertake such an endeavour, but rather that when such occasions arise, a key success factor is simple design. Simplicity comes from the combined agenda fit and location. The time–space set-up allowed the *superimposing* of two communities of practice for the same group of people. Moreover, distinct spatial separation of the two practices created a link between the two practices – a transfer space where aesthetic reflection could happen, in silence or as dialogue, of sensory/interpretive nature or

action-oriented. The staircase became both a physical in-between space and a *conduit* for knowledge transfer between the two practices, as depicted in Figure 3.

Apart from some arbitrary musical learning (which was not the learning objective), the learning content of the singing intervention was of a relational and existential nature. Examples include expanding comfort zones, awakening to new capabilities, smoothing out differences in the group, moderating dominant behaviour, and re-dis-covering self and others. In the conducting sessions, one experience was salient for all participants – the balance of controlling and empowering the singers, not least what happened when controlling excessively. Because of the tight coupling of the two superimposed communities of practice, the choral experience translated into modified group dynamics in the managerial practice, often immediately, or emerging over time.

The process generated insight that involved passing through irreversible gateways that seem to qualify as threshold concepts (Meyer and Land 2005). Coming back to the theory of aesthetic knowing and the example that was given may be elaborated as follows:

- Doing: You sing a melody while I sing another.
- Sensory: I can hear that they are different, but in harmony.
- Interpretive: I find that it sounds better by re-balancing our sounds.
- Propositional: Difference is a source of quality; we are both needed.

This was one of the insights that a participant drew from the project. It may seem trivial, but for a rather pushy executive (an 'alpha-male', in the words of his colleagues) who thought his value came from constantly being in the foreground, the aesthetic experience of multi-voice music was pivotal in changing his leader behaviour. Very importantly, he only acquired the insight after *hearing* it – not being told or reasoned with (Jansson 2018). There were also propositional implications, such as stating that 'the team is more effective if I am not always in the foreground in meetings'. However, a purely interpretive insight may remain unarticulated and still be impactful. In fact, articulation may never come into play, possibly only when prompted, by casual conversation or research.
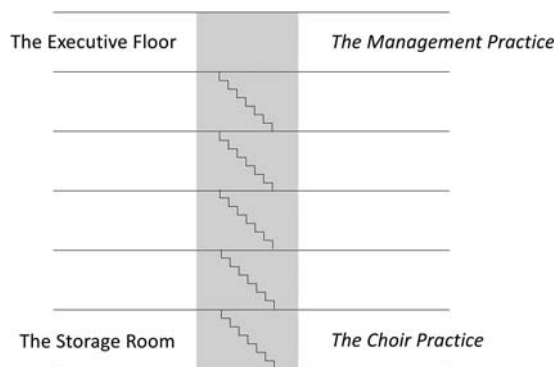
Figure 3. The transfer space between two communities of practice (Jansson 2020).

Target learning context

The most obvious characteristic of a university setting is that learning is disconnected from practice in time. For most programmes, unless real-life practice is systematically embedded, application of acquired skills and competences may be delayed for several years. In addition, the precise application domain is often unknown throughout the learning process. The significance of the disconnection varies considerably with the nature of the subject matter and profession. Even curricula with practice elements are not *authentic* practices (Brown, Collins, and Duguid 1989) in a pure sense. The superimposing of two communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) that was key in the source domain is difficult to replicate in the target domain. The process of continuous re-contextualisation, as noted by van Oers (1998) and Fox (1997), is in the target domain somewhat arbitrarily broken up as some knowledge may never find a new context.

Some curricula and courses are more generic than others, that is, they cater for a wide and often unspecified array of applications. With changing markets and environments, 'portable' competencies become more attractive. Universities have traditionally been developers and custodians of portable knowledge, more so than master-apprentice schooling. Portability is the ease with which a certain skill or insight can be made useful in a different context, which means that mental schemas easily fit both contexts (Konkola et al. 2007). At the same time, specialisation in scholarly disciplines cultivates the vertical aspect of knowledge, with variable or unclear linkages to horizontal practices. Management studies are rooted in organisational practices but attempt to create vertical knowledge structures. The applicability of these knowledge structures is largely taken for granted but also subject to critique (Mintzberg 2004).

One of the classical taxonomies of leadership competences distinguish between technical, interpersonal, and conceptional skills (Campion, Cheraskin, and Stevens 1994; Sonntag and Schäfer-Rauser 1993; Yukl 2013). Especially interpersonal skills tend to be portable, although they naturally will play out differently in different contexts. The choral project attended primarily to interpersonal skills, to some degree to conceptual skills, with some incidental musical-technical learnings. The source domain seemed to enable the experiencing of what must be considered as threshold concepts (Meyer and Land 2005) with regard to team dynamics, such as playing in the foreground or background and strength through diversity. In principle, similar learnings should be aimed for in the target domain and it is the aesthetic object that is the key enabler. When aiming to develop interpersonal skills through an artistic approach, we are in fact exploiting 'the vertical knowledge ladder', thereby abstracting and porting the insight from one practice to another.

The abstracted insight does not need to surface as articulated propositions; however, in the university context, we do in fact depend on a certain level of conscious reflexion and articulation to create a repository of knowledge for future use. The source domain enabled a certain immediacy of application and therefore could circumvent articulation. In the university setting, on the other hand, the latency of knowledge application probably requires more thorough processing that involves articulation in order to stick. The value then lies not in the experience alone, but in reflexive space that it offers and its ability to create memories with momentum (Sutherland 2013; Sutherland and Jelinek 2015).

Reflective transfer in the source domain involved abstracting both the workplace situation and the choir (Garraway et al. 2011) – and the immediate blending process. A major challenge in the target domain is that there is no substitute for a real workplace community and alternative communities are weaker or lie in the future.

Management education has for half a century had an affinity with social learning theory, by the use of field studies and the design of MBA programmes. 'Management learning has never presumed that management education's content and form were the most appropriate way managers should learn', according to Fox (1997, 742). There is no question that the elements of the original intervention in principle can be re-deployed in a university setting. Even the didactic approach within each of the interventions can be used. The original project consisted of two types of interventions – singing and conducting. If reconstructed in a university setting, a course could include other types of aesthetic experiences as well, such as theatre, dance, story-telling, and visual arts. These are not in any way mutually exclusive, beyond the fact that they would compete for time. With multiple type of interventions, it is possible that there will be fewer recurring experiences. On the other hand, we could also envisage that different aesthetic expressions support each other and that learning themes will elucidate each other.

The key concern is to what extent the learning opportunities afforded by the workplace setting can survive the relocation. Reviewing differences between the source and target domain, several problems and a couple of opportunities emerge. These are structured as five hurdles in the university setting and what can be done to overcome them:

- Hurdle 1: The alienation of aesthetic knowing in academia
- Hurdle 2: The significance of managerial experience
- Hurdle 3: The power of team learning
- Hurdle 4: The non-conspicuity of a trivial working week
- Hurdle 5: Catering for different people and different needs

Discussion: re-contextualising a learning opportunity

Hurdle 1: the alienation of aesthetic knowing in academia

Academic programmes and curricula are largely oriented towards the cerebral and rational. The obvious exceptions are studies specifically aiming at artistic professions, but even here aesthetics may not be seen as an epistemological avenue to knowledge in general. Articulation, logic and reason rule over 'the vaguely sensed, felt, or intuited' (Bowman 2004, 30). It is quite remarkable, given the context that he operated in, that an early management scholar named Chester Barnard argued already in 1938 that leadership transcended the purview of merely intellectual methods:

> The terms pertinent to it are 'feeling', 'judgement', 'sense', 'proportion', 'balance', 'appropriateness'. It is a matter of art rather than science, and is aesthetic rather than logical. For this reason it is recognized rather than described and is known by its effects rather than by analysis. (Barnard 1938, 233)

What Barnard is literally describing is exactly the type of knowledge that we acquire through artistic practices. Despite his insight, academia (including education) has not

embraced a wider conception of knowledge, one that comfortably includes aesthetic knowing in non-aesthetic disciplines. The same problem, although in a different guise, appears in the debate over 'academisation' of vocational education, whether attention has indeed shifted from embodied practice to cerebral theory (Tight 2015). With regard to leadership education, the key point is not to denounce the value of theories of leadership and organisational behaviour but the fact that the *immersion* into intra-personal experiences for the purpose of *sensing* them adds to behavioural and organisational proficiency in a way that is otherwise difficult to attain. On a related note, business schools build knowledge beyond the technical in terms of belonging to an elite and 'political' impact Hordern (2014). Implicit knowledge comes from *being there* – immersion into an experience that is of an aesthetic nature, albeit not necessarily with the overt ethical reflection that characterised the management project and also must be embedded in a university course version.

Once we get such a course into the curriculum, we face a challenge with regard to specification of learning outcomes – making them explicit without over-promising what are fundamentally individual, uncertain, and ambiguous experiences. Learning outcomes are often expected in terms of knowledge of theories and problem solving in light of theories. The nature of aesthetic learning is that it lends itself even less to instrumental prescriptions than verbal/propositional learning. Aesthetic experiences remain rather existential and transformational for the participant, more so than instrumental interventions governed by cause and effect. Making learning outcomes too instrumental may force-fit or preclude new insights. Griggs et al. (2018) have given the same warning for reflexive learning in general, arguing that formalisation 'may encourage simplistic explanation of reflection resulting in impoverished, prescriptive outcomes' (1173).

Design hypothesis 1: Instead of assuming knowledge of aesthetics and arguing fervently in favour of aesthetic approaches to knowing, it is probably more productive to articulate learning outcomes and course content by using more familiar and conventional terms. For example, a course title could be 'Power, cooperation, and ethics', and the course content could include elements such as 'team synchronisation', 'sensing power', 'stage appearance' and 'balance of control and letting go'. Articulation of such content elements is not merely a matter of labelling, but also recognises that abstract systematised knowledge within horizonal knowledge domains is key to developing the 'epistemic self' (Vernon 2019, 1).

Hurdle 2: the significance of managerial experience

There can be no development without failure. Having hit the wall or experienced what does not work inevitably engenders reflection – a certain yearning for more effective behaviour or different approaches. Unsurprisingly, leadership programmes for experienced managers are cornerstones of business schools. Participants then come with their own repository of 'cases', which are given new meaning and structure through the programmes. In Barnett and Ceci's (2002) taxonomy, an otherwise 'far knowledge transfer' is then made nearer by reducing the distance between the two contexts – temporally, functionally, and socially. Non-experience-based management education attempts to provide proxies for experience by the extensive use of case material. Business schools have become so good at it that real-life tasks in subsequent practice may even be

talked about as 'cases' (for example, in consulting firms). Analytical competencies seem to be quite portable between a university setting and some professional practices. However, this may be more so on the technical level than on the managerial level. Success and failure play out in the relational domain ('negotiation breakdown') rather than the technical ('erroneous calculation'). Becoming a better leader is inextricably linked to practicing. This is particularly obvious for a musical conductor – learning fundamentally requires the presence of an ensemble. How might we overcome the 'youngness' of inexperienced university students? The answer lies in the constituent elements of leadership experience – the 'micro level'. Most people have been exposed to power (excessive or absent), coordination (perfect or wanting), influencing others (successfully or in vain), and various identities and positions in a group. Such experiences can be mobilised in a university course, even when managerial experience is wanting.

Design hypothesis 2: Provide learning opportunities from a variety of relational aspects ('nuggets') of aesthetic experience, rather than from how organisations operate as such. The use of knowledge 'boundary objects', that is, shared knowledge between the university setting and work-life enhances knowledge transfer (Hordern 2014). Parallels with other types of teams may also be drawn, such as the sports team and the debating club.

Hurdle 3: the power of team learning

When the management team engaged in their joint development activity, they learnt through the combination of their own individual sensations as well as observing their colleagues. Not least, observing colleagues who exposed vulnerability induced a high degree of empathy among the participants – in itself a major learning outcome. Observing peers in the management team was found to be as impactful as experiencing oneself, and feedback is more generally a powerful learning tool (Hattie and Timperley 2007). The student peer group is more open-ended and less mutually dependent than a well-defined management team. However, student teams may be construed more or less tightly by how a programme and a course are organised. Belonging to an elite of a select few (a 'super-team') is by Hordern (2014) even considered a distinct knowledge category that is nurtured in management education and assumed to enhance workplace effectiveness.

Design hypothesis 3: Participants should be organised as one or several teams that emulate a tight management team as much as possible. Design elements that create mutual dependency, in the activity itself or in terms of expected results, would contribute to this end. Having the same teams throughout the course would be a requirement. Ideally, team composition could be identical for courses beyond this particular course, to promote recurrences of learning themes.

Hurdle 4: the non-conspicuity of a trivial working week

The original intervention was embedded into the participants' regular agenda. Initial resistance to the project and the weekly sessions were minimised because it required modest investment in time and was barely observable from the outside. Once it was in motion, the positive experience more than compensated for the weekly hour spent. Reflexivity had immediate implications for performance, for example, improved team

dynamics in the subsequent management meeting. Griggs et al. (2018) also mostly found a performance-driven approach to individuals' reflective practice, although there is much variation and transformative effects are in play. The original intervention did in fact transform the participants, however, when they retrospectively make sense of the experience, it is not possible to separate an insight at the time and the subsequent re-writing of narratives in the face of their current practices. Smith, Kempster, and Wenger-Trayner (2019), in their effort to create a 'programme community of practice' for leadership development, point at the problem with shorter durations and 'boot camp' type modules for social learning to occur. While it usually is difficult to embed non-business and non-instrumental activities into a managerial agenda, a combination of commitment and set-up overcame the problem. This is one of the few aspects where a university setting might be more favourable, because a curriculum and course plans are in their very nature trivial working weeks with a variety of scheduled interventions. One problem might be the fixed and limited duration of a semester. It could be possible to extend a course over multiple semesters, but it would compete with other needs in a programme. In any case, creating a workspace for recurring experience and new levels of insight on a given topic was paramount in the original setting, and it is difficult to assess what would happen with a more limited project.

Design hypothesis 4: Regularity of interventions should be aimed for. One-off events should probably be avoided, unless part of systematic follow-up, where experiences are revisited and reflected upon. Some interventions may require offsite location (visiting an art institution, for example), but we should bear in mind the 'power of the boring home' when hosting a shattering experience. Ideally, the interventions could be back-to-back with other courses or activities that involve the same group of students. This could potentially evoke some immediacy of knowledge transfer that the management team experienced.

Hurdle 5: catering for different people and different needs

Smith, Kempster, and Wenger-Trayner (2019) observed that their programme did not impact all participants, nor in the same way. Variable outcomes naturally follow 'member disposition, openness, and commitment' (82). Although team learning is a powerful vehicle, reflexivity remains an individual realm. Teaching reflexivity is difficult and there is little evidence that it can be learnt in an academic setting (Griggs et al. 2018). However, the problem may not so much be the academic setting as such but rather that reflection does not draw on the full range of aesthetic knowing. Engaging students in a musical experience is both a hurdle, because individual predispositions vary greatly, and a remedy, because all humans are breathing bodies, have a voice, and can distinguish tones from noise.

The choral/management team was quite heterogeneous with regard to background and personality, but nonetheless coherent in terms of how they filled distinct functions and were mutually dependent on each other. They also had in common that the chief executive had single-handedly decided that they collectively would engage in the music project. Hence, the risk of the intervention falling apart was under control through the combination of the chief executive's commitment and my 'bilingual' competence in business and music, This made it easy to 'trust the process' through phases of

resistance, a challenge that was also noted by Smith, Kempster, and Wenger-Trayner (2019).

Students are less dependent on each other and do not readily surrender to such forced engagement by the mere presence of a teacher. Therefore, it is probably necessary to spread the risk by including more variety in the type of interventions, that is, different types of aesthetic expression. Risk can also be reduced by engaging with a particular experience in multiple ways, such as peer observation and feedback, small group discussions, and writing up reflection papers after each intervention.

Design hypothesis 5: Select a small number (3–5) of intervention types, which allow both some recurring experiences and some variety in the case that certain interventions prove less engaging than expected. It is crucial that most of these provide *immersion* into the experience (acting, conducting, singing, for example) as opposed to mere observation, such as attending a public concert or intellectually reviewing a theatre play.

Explicating aesthetic impact – the meta-hurdle?

This paper deals with a series of problems with re-contextualising the original learning mechanism. At first sight, it seems counter-productive to leave the fruitful learning format of a *real* practice. However, it is not easy to replicate such a project in business organisations and it would broaden the impact to serve young leaders-to-be while they are still in school and they take courses in leadership and organisation. A university setting also allows repetition and continuously improving the approach. A successful set-up within a university course depends on how valid the design hypotheses are and how they will materialise when implemented. Because aesthetic experiences tend to be rather precious, even a moderate success might still be judged by the participants as unprecedented and unexpected – not easily accessed by traditional approaches. Although prominent scholars have argued for expanded use (Taylor and Ladkin 2009), expansion is not getting the traction it deserves. One plausible reason is the lack of ways to theorise impact, that is, explain how aesthetic experience transforms into workplace proficiency.

One challenge in explicating the impact of aesthetic experiences, which is reflected in hurdle 1, is related to language. Aesthetic knowing goes by definition beyond articulation but nonetheless acknowledges the vaguely felt, ambiguously perceived, and imperfectly understood – in other words, how humans get by and real organisations evolve. As a consequence, an additional challenge is to conceptualise what goes on when an aesthetic insight is reflected upon and is made applicable in other settings. Two avenues for further research might help to face the challenges:

(1) Exploit the fact that the music object presents a tight linkage between vertical and horizontal knowledge. The musical object hosts vertical knowledge structures that inevitably manifest themselves in mundane practices – in other words, it is a knowledge mediator. For example, the situated experience of sounding harmony provides an immediate link to the vertical knowledge of multiple voices and balanced team. Such linkage therefore seems to be a pertinent response to Vernon's (2019) call for abstract, systematised knowledge within horizontal knowledge domains. The choir project seemed to take the participants through several threshold concepts related to their managerial practice. Reflectiveness within a horizontal domain

came directly from the experiencing of the vertical knowledge structure of music. When Hibbert and Cunliffe (2015) point at the centrality of threshold concepts for nurturing a moral reflexive management practice, a further theorising of the impact of an aesthetic object seems useful to this end. On a more speculative note, the catalytic knowledge function of music may explain the privileged position of choral education in ancient Greece, where for Plato the educated man is 'he who has received a choral education' (Calame 2013, 90).

(2) The notion of continuous re-contextualisation (Fox 1997) suggests that aesthetic reflexivity will be more actionable if multiple, parallel, and subsequent contexts envelop the aesthetic experience. Continuous re-contextualisation is not only a theoretical concept, it can be seen as a *method* – a way for nuggets of aesthetic knowing to always find new 'hosts' where it can be used, tested, articulated, and moulded. The participants' reflections during and after the choir project were at the outset individual, corporeal, and articulation was partial and delayed. Fuller articulation, shared discussion, and deliberately changed managerial practice emerged gradually and in parallel. Hence, the impact cannot be understood in purely cognitive terms or as social learning alone. The experience clearly aligns with a hybrid learning view and is best understood via an interplay between constructivist and situational learning theory (Eraut 2010). The conduit for such interplay is enhanced by the presence of an aesthetic object.

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