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CONDUCTOR IS JUST ANOTHER MUSICIAN: PARTNERSHIP AS LEADER-MEMBER INTERACTION

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This paper focuses on intra-organizational partnership, which is viewed as a communication process between leadership and followership. It uses the analogy of a symphony orchestra to illustrate the process of dynamic interactions and suggests that all organization members are partners. Each of the members simultaneously plays the roles of both leader and follower. Research in listening communication supports the contention that a CEO is just another organizational member, just as a conductor is simply another musician in a symphony orchestra. The partnership from the multi-leader perspective is supported by the leadership communication with regard to gender studies.

INTRODUCTION

Partnership has received substantial attention during the past few decades as a result of increased interest in issues such as (strategic) alliance, collaboration, supply chain management, etc. (e.g., Parker and Anderson, 2002; Sundaramurthy and Lewis, 2003). Most partnership research, consequently, deals with inter-organizational relationships, leaving intra-organizational partnership inadequately recognized and addressed. Partnership studies have centered on issues such as the trust factor, the forms of partnership, etc. (e.g., Gulati 1995; Bruhn 2001; McEvily, et al. 2003; Johnston et al., 2004; Zaheer ; Harris, 2005). Other partnership studies involve the relationships between the human service practitioners and the clients (e.g., Darling, 2000; Bruhn and Rebach, 1996; Crandall and Allen, 1982).

The roles of leadership (and followership, for that matter) have not received much attention in the research of partnership. As we have advanced to the information age, accelerated by computerization and globalization, information-based organizations are progressively becoming a norm. Intra-organizational partnership is thus experiencing drastic changes and merits special attention and re-examination. Leadership, in particular, is experiencing great change due to the advance of technologies (Witherspoon, 1997). This essay addresses the issue of partnership from the leadership point of view. In particular, we explore the interaction between leadership and followership at the level of listening communication -- but not at the technique level -- and suggest an unconventional view of partnership.

In this paper, we define partnership as a totality of dynamic interactions between leadership and followership. Employing a symphony orchestra analogy to illustrate the process of such dynamic interactions, we use the musical listening to generate important managerial implications. Followership is as important as -- and cannot be separated from -- leadership in organizations. Leadership should be addressed as a partnership issue. We can view any organization as a center-less network with multi-leaders. That is, all organizational members are partners; every organizational member is at the center tentatively or alternatively. Furthermore, partnership is not just a role, but also a process, which involves a continuing dialogue among partners.

The rest of the paper will be organized as follows: In the next section, we first raise the question of who the leader of an organization is. We use an analogy of a symphony orchestra to examine the four types of listening a musician (and thus an organization member) would engage in. Such a discourse would lead to the conclusion that any musician in an orchestra would be both a leader and a follower simultaneously. Thus, all organization members are partners. We then discuss the resultant notion of a center-less organization in which every member is a center. We further employ research findings and meta-analysis on gender studies with regard to leadership communication to support our multi-leader thesis. We conclude the paper by suggesting some directions for future research.

Who is the Leader of an Organization?

Drucker (1988) uses an analogy of symphony orchestra for viewing an information-based organization. According to him, the new typical business will be knowledge-based. It will be composed largely of specialists who direct and discipline their own performance through organized feedback from colleagues, customers, and headquarters. He calls this type of organization an information-based organization.

Bringing in the symphony orchestra analogy, Drucker (1988) suggests that each musician of the orchestra is a high-grade specialist, indeed an artist. Every one of the musicians plays directly to the conductor-CEO without an intermediary. This is how Drucker describes the way an information-based organization resembles a symphony orchestra. Because the "players" in an information-based organization are specialists, they cannot be told how to do their work. There are probably few orchestra conductors who could coax even one note out of a French horn, let alone show the horn player how to do it. But the conductor can focus the horn player's skill and knowledge on the musicians' joint performance. And this focus is what the leaders of an information-based business must be able to achieve.

Yet a business has no "score" to play by except the score it writes as it plays. And whereas neither a first-rate performance of a symphony nor a miserable one will change what the composer wrote, the performance of a business continually creates new and different scores against which its performance is assessed. So an information-based business must be

structured around goals that clearly state management's performance expectations for the enterprise and for each part and specialist and around organized feedback that compares results with these performance expectations so that every member can exercise self-control. (Drucker, 1988:45).

The above analogy highlights the notion that information-based organizations are to be structured around goals, rather than around leaders, and members are expected to exercise self-control, instead of taking orders. These passages clearly explicate a similarity and difference between an orchestra conductor and an information-based organizational leader. An even more essential similarity between the two, however, is the listening behavior of a conductor and an informational-based organizational leader. This similarity in listening behavior is essential because listening behaviors can answer the question: Who is the leader of an orchestra conductor or an organizational leader? The intuitive answer to this question may be "the conductor or the CEO." Exploring "the art of listening" should provide a counterintuitive argument.

Listening and Leading

Exploring the relationship between musical listening and leadership merits a definition of leadership and the relevance of listening to leading. As Hackman and Johnson (2004) point out, there are three themes common to many proposed definitions of leadership: the exercise of influence, group contexts (including small group and organization contexts), and collaboration. Therefore, leadership can be defined as communication for influencing others to collaborate in order to reach a system goal. At a relatively practical level, leadership involves: 1) modifying changing attitudes and behavior (called regulating), 2) linking (or networking), and 3) envisioning, which is like drawing a roadmap (Barge, 1994) or describing a mental model (Nanus, 1992).

The three primary leading functions stated above, coincidentally or not, correspond with the three ways of listening which Purdy (2000) identifies. The most predominant type of listening, according to Purdy, is rational listening, focusing on listening as thinking. Listening this way is critical for leaders to reason, to explain, and to persuade -- all "regulating" (influencing) functions of leadership. The second type of listening involves relational listening or listening to understand how others feel. This is essential to the leadership function of connecting or networking, because the leader can manage the socio-emotional needs to forge relationships rallying organizational members behind the organizational goals. The third type of listening in Purdy's category is conscious listening, which is being "in tune with the world around you so that you can understand yourself and society" (Alberts, Nakayama, and Martin, 2007: 131). This type of listening is looking beyond the obvious viewing the world and at a larger framework -- a prerequisite to the third leadership function -- envisioning.

The criticality of listening to leading can also be seen in the participative leadership or "trickle-up leadership." This leadership style is considered the most ideal in leadership studies and has been practiced widely for years by the

contemporary industry, including Bill Gates' Microsoft Corporation (Dubrin, 2004). This style is to share decision making with members. There are three subtypes: consultative leadership (consulting members before making decision), consensus leadership (encourage discussions before reaching consensus), and democratic leadership (conferring final authority on members). All three subtypes apparently require intensive listening both by leaders and members.

Listening is favored by the International Listening Association members as being "the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages" (Brownell, 2002: 48). Listening "shapes the course of our relationships" (Verderber, Verderber, and Beryman-Fink, 2007:174). People listen and create reality based on what "they hear in each moment." (Ellinor & Gerald, 1988: 99). Thus, listening is critical to leaders for creating new alternatives and initiating changes--both are primary functions of leadership.

Four Types of Listening

With the relationship between listening and leadership as the backdrop, and following the vein of Drucker's orchestra metaphor, an investigation of listening in music is in order. In music, we can identify at least four types of listening that an instrument, player or a musician can and should do: listening to others, listening to each other, listening to one's own self, and listening to the Nature.

The first type of listening, listening to others, also called "appreciative listening" (Purdy, 1996), refers to the case in which a musician or a music student (particularly a beginner) listens to a piece of music played by someone else. Risking the tendency of "copying" others' works in lieu of developing one's own ideas and styles, this fundamental way of learning, may be treasured more by novices than by advanced students. It goes without saying, however, that a mature musician may listen to other musicians' performances for enjoyment or for continuing self-education. And we believe that copying can pave the way for creation. Dorothy DeLay, the world renowned violin teacher, believes that the usefulness of listening to recordings of what students are studying would depend on the students themselves. She affirmed the value of listening to other performances if the musician "has an independent mind and strong confidence in his own judgment" (Eisler, 1995: 46).

The second type of listening also relates to listening to other person's playing, but it refers to listening in the situation where one is playing together with other musicians. Be it a duet, a trio, a quartet, a quintet, or any kind of chamber music, ensemble, orchestra, etc., when you play together, you have to play together-- by listening to each other. Unlike the first type, this second type of listening is a must, rather than an option.

The third type of listening is to listen to oneself and to one's own "self." DeLay sends a strong message when she remarks, "If you're not listening to yourself, you're wasting time" (Salerno-Sonnenberg, 1989: 36). But how many people can really take heed to such advice is a difficult question due to individual and communicational problems such as lack of focus, information overload, inadequate self-confidence, or

overconfidence, etc. There is yet another important aspect of listening to oneself -- or, to be exact, listening to one's own self. We need to listen to our own "selves," our inner voices, or values which include our beliefs, values, desires, needs, etc. When playing and interpreting a piece of music, a musician tries to express not only the composer's messages but also the musician's own ideas. Listening to oneself or one's self is thus a prerequisite to knowing whether one is self-expressing ideally.

Finally, the fourth type of listening is to listen to the music of Nature. We need to use our heart to listen carefully to the voices of Nature and/or the voices of life. Musicians understand that there is no music more beautiful than that of Nature. Many music professionals and lovers would like to listen to the music of Nature and learn from Nature no matter how many professional recordings or live performances they have listened to. While we are pursuing this ceaseless renovation of ourselves, we may as well enjoy the beauty of Nature's music along the journey. The more our inner music is in tune with the music of Nature, the happier our lives will be. After all, life is simply a piece of beautiful music.

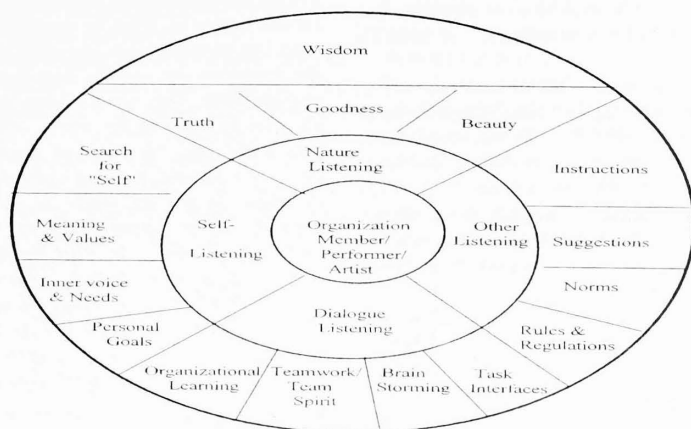
Analyzing music listening facilitates the understanding that musicians in a group performance are equally important and shoulder equal listening responsibility. Including the conductor, they should listen to one another. Worded differently, all should

be both a leader and a follower simultaneously. We now return to the question asked earlier: Who is the leader of a symphony orchestra? With the above music listening analysis, we have a clearer view that the conductor is a leader of an orchestra as well as a fellow performer. The conductor is just another musician, artist, or specialist. The conductor specializes in conducting no more than a violinist, a cellist, a bassoonist, or a harpist, etc. specializes in his own instrument. The task of any musician is no less important than that of any other member of the orchestra.

Wheel of Listening

The four types of listening in music explicate Drucker's (1988) analogy to the information-based organization. With the above analogy of music listening, an organizational listening model emerges. Figure 1 summarizes and integrates the four types of listening into a wheel of listening behaviors in the organizational setting. In the innermost core can be any member of the organization. In the surrounding layer are the four types of listening, while the outermost layer illustrates the contents of the listening activities. Every organizational member constantly and simultaneously engages in all four types of listening: One-way listening, dialogue listening, self-listening, and nature listening.

Figure 1. The Wheel of Listening



First is other listening. In an organizational context, members constantly take instructions, advice, or suggestions given by other organizational members. Members also learn the norms, decipher rules, and receive regulations. This behavior of one-way listening to others is the first type of listening -- other listening. Second is dialogue-listening. Most organizational task or socio-emotional functions require interactions with colleagues. The two-way (i.e., dyadic) or multiple-way (e.g., group and public) communications has a hidden complexity. When a certain member does not actively express herself, for example, other communication partners may have listened but do not get the message. In an orchestra, this is called a "weak" partner in duet, trio, quartet, etc. This unbalanced

communication causes members to "drag" each other in different manners. The weak one loses his or her identity and contribution. The performance becomes a meaningless exercise.

The above two types of listening involves upward, downward, and horizontal communication flows. Upward communication includes messages such as job status and problems, information about coworkers, perceptions of organizational policies and practices, and ideas and suggestions. (Athanasziades, 1973). System theorists Katz and Kahn (1978) list the following categories of downward messages: job instructions, job rationales, information on procedures and practices, feedback on performance of subordinates, and indoctrination messages (to convey the organization's cultural

assumptions and build employee identification). The rest of messages are generally considered horizontal messages, including messages internal to and from the organization. As Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, and Ganesh (2004: 151) point out, "Listening to people from various levels in the organization plus people outside the organization, such as suppliers, contributed to effective communication--and to a successful organization."

In addition, just as the conductor of a symphony orchestra listens to various instrument groups of performers, the leader of an organization also listens to various functional departments and the board of directors. They also listen to advisor network that they themselves have built. The network of advisors may include the strategy expert, the operation expert, the political expert, the personal expert, etc. (Ciampa, 2006). As an Asian saying goes, "double listening makes brightness."

Like "the weak partner" in the symphony orchestra performance, a "weak partner" in the organizational setting may also exist. That is due to the lack of self-confidence, assertiveness, or appearance of "significance" due to lower status, poor performance, introverted personality, cultural differences, or overwhelming agenda pressure etc. The voice might be externally suppressed, self-suppressed, or ignored. While the musically weak ones may render the performance meaningless, the organizationally weak ones may wreak havoc. Ignoring the weak voice triggers disasters. The two renowned historical failures in America -- the Bay of Pig invasion debacle and the Challenger space shuttle explosion -- illustrate how ignored weak voices can rewrite world political and scientific histories.

The actual practice of listening-to-each-other is not only an art but also an endless learning process. Organizational members need what Purdy (1997) calls "comprehensive listening," or understanding, learning, remembering, and being able to recall information." In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (1990) emphasizes the importance of dialogue. Senge defines dialogue as "flow of meaning." It is a process by which meaning comes through. Listening to each other helps meanings come through and is basic to effective dialogue.

Organizational members also engage in the third type of listening -- self listening: listening to ourselves and listening to our selves. "Listening to ourselves" refers to paying attention to our communication with others, but listening to our "selves" is engaging in intrapersonal communication, namely, communication with our selves. This involves listening to our own beliefs, self-concepts, and values at the core of our identities, etc. For example, do our motivations fall into so-called Theory X or Theory Y view of leadership? At which level are we in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (physiological, safety, inclusion, self esteem, or self-actualization)? We have to listen to ourselves to improve our works. As a cliché goes, we do not just work to live, we also live to work. More importantly, we need to listen to our own selves to make our work in tune with our selves to improve the quality of our lives. We need to express our selves, assert the meaning and value of our "existence." Listening to our inner voices can then bring out our creativity and potential. One's inner voice, therefore, is the most powerful motivation for one's work.

Finally, we need to listen to Nature. As Klopp (1991: 91)

puts it, "Nature seems to be almost a temple to perfection. Quality is certainly the feeling given off by nature at her grandest." Organizations are man-made systems, and artifacts are never perfect. Nature listening facilitates refining organizations by modeling more closely Nature -- including the pure and innocent human nature, rendering the organizations "closer" to "perfection." Listening to Nature is a must for continuous improvement or ceaseless renovation.

Simultaneous Roles of Leaders and Followers

Just as every musician in an orchestra (including the conductor) is simultaneously a leader and a follower, every member of an organization is a leader and a follower. Like an orchestral musician, everyone in the organization will simultaneously engage in all four types of listening activities. Despite the differences in role, status, title, the position in the organizational structure, and the direction of information flow, every member in the organization is a performer, a musician, and an artist. If we envisage the nested listening hierarchy as a wheel, then as the wheel of listening turns, we will hear a sound management -- a piece of beautiful music.

Although the analogy of a symphony orchestra is plausible for the case of information-based organizations, we perceive the symphony orchestra in a way slightly different from what Drucker (1988) sees. Drucker contends that the conductor is the CEO or the leader of the organization. We see the conductor just another musician, artist, or specialist. The task of any musician is no less important than any other member of the orchestra. All the musicians are equally important and have equal listening responsibility. They should listen to each other. The conductor also has to listen to the whole orchestra. Schuller (1992: 20) puts it this way: "A musician should think of himself (sic) as being two persons, two musicians in one: one produces a series of actions in playing, while the other sits outside and listens critically to the sounds produced. One produces the required musical result, while the other listens and appraises that result". Any organizational member, like a musician in an orchestra, is both a leader and a follower simultaneously. They work as partners, with the aforementioned four types of listening behaviors. They produce, communicate, influence, and, meanwhile, appraise and appreciate the results.

Multi-Leader Organization:

From the listening perspective we argue that a leader is simultaneously a follower. To be exact, every member is at the center at a certain point in time. All members are equal partners.

Evidence from Gender Research in Leadership Communication

It is commonly believed that a leader is at the top or at the center of an organization. Our vision of leadership, albeit deviating from the traditional view, is by no means far-fetched. Evidences in leadership communication research have challenged such a belief with findings in gender difference (Shimanoff & Jenkins, 1996). For example, women are more likely to rotate leadership, and men are more prone to hierarchical leadership, according to studies by Helgesen

(1990), Aries, and Wyatt (as cited in Shimanoff and Jenkins, 1996). Women see themselves as "being in the middle of things. Not at the top, but in the center; not reaching down, but reaching out (Helgesen, 1990: 45-46).

Women leaders tend to describe their roles as organizing and facilitating the group to reach its goal," according to Nelson's study (as cited in Shimanoff & Jenkins, 1996). Shimanoff & Jenkins (1996) observes that women seem more willing than men to embrace the idea of shared leadership. From these evidences, we suspect that traditional views of leadership might result from sexism (leaders are predominantly male) or authoritarianism (leaders were predominantly dictators) rather than from the nature of leadership.

With their meta-analysis of leadership related to gender difference, Shimanoff and Jenkins (1996: 327) favor a view of leadership deviating from the traditional "one-person at the center" view of leadership. They recommend that leadership "is best understood as the behaviors that help a group to achieve its goals". They maintain that "Previous researchers have associated the following behaviors with leadership: appropriate procedural suggestions, sound opinions, relevant information, frequent participation, active listening, supporting group members, and asking for the opinions of other group members. When one focuses on who is called the leader, leadership is seen as belonging to one person, but when one concentrates on behaviors, leadership can be performed by multiple members and can be the responsibility of the group as a whole rather than a single person." (Shimanoff and Jenkins, 1996: 327)

This is a very significant observation to the central thesis of this article, because worded metaphorically, people may perceive a particular musician as the conductor, others musician in a symphony orchestra are doing the conducting as well. Helgesen (1990) draws a group of metaphors from women executives, including "a leader as a teacher," "as a magician" (making changes while serving others and maintaining one's personal identity), "as a gardener" (watering the flowers, helping them to flourish and grow), and "as a transmitter" (picking up signals from every where, then beeping them out to where need to go. These metaphoric roles are played by both leaders and followers in contemporary organizations, particularly in information-based organizations. As Shimanoff and Jenkins (1996) point out, these metaphors reflect a much more participative view of leadership than the more traditional concepts of power and dominance.

This body of research on leadership with regard to gender has clearly revealed the tendency of female leadership leaning toward the ideal of leadership as partnership. The number of women entering the workforce has swelled in the past decades, and so has the number of women leaders, slowly but surely. We believe that once women no longer feel it necessary to model

men's leadership behavior socially or pragmatically, organizational leadership as partnership -- especially that of information-based organizations -- will gain much more ground than, if not prevail over, the traditional bureaucratic style.

As Rorty (1979) asserts, when touting his principles of edification, the aim of edification is at continuing a conversation -- conversation with oneself and with others -- rather than at discovering truth. The purpose of continuing conversation is to enhance understanding, consciousness and awareness, rather than just "knowingness." Traditional perspectives of leadership constrain themselves in a one-way "transfer model" of organization and education. The edification philosophy should enlighten us -- and echo Peter Drucker -- to recognize that leadership is not a one-way street of giving orders or transporting knowledge. Rather, it is a conversation process in which leaders and followers mutually enlighten each other toward an understanding, conscious, and sensitive partnership.

Conclusion

As we are advancing to the concept of information-based organizations, teamwork and technology intertwine with each other. Partnership and its exercising leadership are rapidly changing and becoming increasingly challenging. In this paper we define partnership as a dynamic interaction between leadership and followership. We employ an enlightening metaphor of symphony orchestra furnished by Drucker to illustrate the process of such a dynamic interaction, and suggest that all organization members are partners. Each of them simultaneously plays the roles of both leader and follower. We use research findings on listening behaviors to demonstrate how leadership can and has to be shared, particularly in the information-based societies or organizations. Research in gender communication suggests that female styles of leadership lean toward our partnership view of multi-leader organization or shared leadership.

The model of partnership presented in this paper also opens up a brave new world for both leadership and organization research. This notion of partnership presents not only a model of partnership, but also a framework for organizational studies. Our discussion on partnership has focused on the roles and the process of partnership in the context of "intra-organizational" activities. Although intuitively these concepts should be applicable to inter-organizational partnership (e.g., alliances in supply chains, etc.), further investigation is necessary and will be fruitful for looking into the unique characteristics in such environments. Further empirical studies will also shed light on the more detailed and subtle processes in various types of partnership.

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