PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY
https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2024.2417980

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The ethical model of orchestra conducting: a psychological and philosophical perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the ethical requirements and features that characterize the professional life of successful contemporary classical orchestras, with particular focus on the leadership style of their conductors. As we will show, the traditional authoritarian approach, marked by the conductor's commanding charisma and strict demand for obedience from orchestra members, has evolved today into a more ethically-based transformational style of leadership. This new approach is rooted in principles of respect, voluntary compliance, and trust. The present paper delves into the interpersonal dynamics within contemporary orchestras, focusing specifically on the character traits required to establish trust and collaboration between the conductor and the orchestra members, as well as among the orchestra members themselves. In particular, drawing from recent research in psychology, we underscore the significance of deference, empathy, and shared commitment toward the common goal of excellence in performance. We conclude that the ethics-centered style of leadership adopted by most contemporary conductors may extend beyond the realm of music, offering insights applicable to leaders in various other fields. By fostering deep connections, shared purpose, and collaboration, this approach has the potential to enhance organizational performance and outcomes in general.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 15 April 2024
Accepted 13 October 2024

KEYWORDS
Music ethics; ethical leadership; ethics of orchestra conducting

1. Introduction

> For decades, I have observed the great orchestras I have been fortunate enough to conduct . . . One must never forget that the true creator of every performance is the orchestra, the harmonious ensemble of all the individual musicians.
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> Riccardo Muti (2019, p. 41)

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Even if the study of leadership can be traced back to Plato's *Republic*—where it was suggested that human prosperity is closely linked to the guidance of knowledgeable leaders (Bauman, 2018) – it has only become a dynamic academic field in recent years. Thus, contemporary research has highlighted the indispensable role of innovation and creativity as key competencies that enable leaders to identify and address emerging challenges and foster a spirit of collaboration as they chart a course through the murky waters of everyday problematic situations (Hughes et al., 2018; Mumford et al., 2014). Furthermore, Weick (2007) suggested that a leader's potential is greatly enhanced when they embrace non-rational but deeply human processes: intuition, emotional insight, improvisation, imagination, active listening, shared awareness, and empathy. Unsurprisingly, these ideas resonate in the world of the arts, particularly in the field of music. Indeed, it has been convincingly argued that the confluence of artistic sensibility and leadership acumen is not a mere happenstance but signifies a deeper, more intrinsic connection (Goryunova & Lehmann, 2023, p. 450). In line with this perspective, leadership scholars have explored how various artistic expressions – whether in visual arts, poetry, or the performing arts – can foster a continuous flow of intuition-driven innovation. Notably, music-making, with symphony orchestras often serving as a prime example, has frequently been invoked as a powerful metaphor for organizational structures and dynamics.[1] Thus musical leadership stands as a sterling exemplar of successful leadership, offering unique insights and inspiring fecund applications (Goryunova & Lehmann, 2023, p. 452).

The aim of the article is not to analyze the historical development of the orchestra conductor's role or provide a musical critique of conducting. Rather, we aim to offer a philosophical reflection, inspired by best practices, on the role that morality plays in effective conducting – that is, in being a good orchestra leader. Our analysis will therefore transcend the aesthetic-functional characteristics required for the role of conductor, such as theoretical and analytical knowledge of music, conducting technique, score interpretation, memorization, musical ear, knowledge of instruments, selection of the instruments, and so on. Instead, we will focus on the ethical commitment that underpins these musical features, as a conductor's role also requires ethical qualities such as devotion, sincerity, presence, and self-mastery. Unlike strictly musical skills, these characteristics stem from one's moral character and demand the integrity of one's values and a high level of empathy (Jansson, 2018).

In Section 1 of this article, we outline the main leadership styles identified in academic discussions over the past decades. Section 2 focuses on the evolution of orchestra conducting styles and the development of professional ethics accompanying this evolution. Section 3 discusses the transition from the authoritarian conducting style typical of the Romantic period to

a more nuanced and inclusive interpretation of the conductor's authority, along with the ethical implications of this shift. Section 4 analyzes the crucial roles of deference and empathy in contemporary orchestras. Section 5 examines the hierarchies of leadership within the orchestra (conductor, first violin, first flute, etc.) and how they converge toward the common goal of a successful performance. In Section 6, we discuss the ethical virtues relevant to music, particularly within well-functioning orchestras. Finally, Section 7 discusses some ethical implications of musical intelligence that, as explored in Section 8 May 2001resonate in interesting ways within non-musical organizational settings.

2. Styles of leadership

In the last decades, a multitude of leadership styles have been identified, each with unique characteristics and methods for guiding and influencing both individuals and groups. The most important among these styles are the authentic, the adaptive, the servant, the transactional, the transformational, and the charismatic.

The *authentic leadership* style is characterized by its focus on transparency, moral integrity, and a deep understanding of people's needs and values. Leaders of this style are known for their genuineness and strong ethical principles, fostering trust and respect among their followers (Northouse, 2022, p. 193).

The *adaptive leadership* is about aiding individuals in managing change and uncertainty, proving crucial in complex and unpredictable environments (Northouse, 2022, p. 237). R. K. Greenleaf (1970, 1972, 1977) shifts the leadership focus to prioritize followers' needs and growth over the leader's self-interest. Initially purely theoretical, this style of leadership has evolved into a practical framework and aligns with moral models, emphasizing service, especially to the less privileged. It involves learnable behaviors and encompasses key characteristics like listening, empathy, healing, and community building (Spears, 2002, 2010). Servant leadership thus emphasizes nurturing and serving followers, fostering community spirit, and adhering to ethical standards.

The *transactional leadership* style is marked by a notable absence of a tailored approach to addressing the specific needs and fostering the personal growth of each follower. Instead, it is characterized by the mutual exchange of valuable assets between leaders and their followers, with the aim of promoting the goals of both parties (Kuhnert, 1994; Northouse, 2022, p. 174). The efficacy of transactional leaders lies in the understanding that followers benefit when they align with the leader's objectives, thus creating a foundation for the leader's influence (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; Northouse, 2022, p. 174).

If all these forms of leadership may occasionally play a role regarding the psycho-sociological and moral dynamics of orchestras, as we will see the most relevant in this respect are the transformational and the charismatic. *Transformational leadership* is noted for its powerful ability to motivate and inspire followers beyond common expectations (Northouse, 2022, p. 166). This style goes beyond mere operational management, aiming to raise followers' aspirations, increase their awareness of their tasks' broader implications, and cultivate a collective commitment to organizational goals. Transformational leaders, often seen as visionary, can bring about significant changes in both individuals and organizational structures, focusing on empowerment, inspiration, and personal development. In his *Leadership* (1978), James MacGregor Burns brought transformational leadership to prominence, underscoring the symbiotic relationship between leaders and followers. He distinguished transactional leadership, based on explicit leader-follower exchanges, from transformational leadership, which seeks to deepen connections and uplift moral standards. Moreover, highlighting the interdisciplinary significance of transformational leadership, Gardner et al. (2020) have shown its applicability across various fields, including management, psychology, nursing, and education.

However, transformational leadership may also have downsides. Khoo and Burch (2008) found it associated with individuals displaying high levels of histrionic personality traits, which could lead to manipulative behaviors. Moreover, its inspirational aspect might be exploited for personal agendas (Barling et al., 2007), raising concerns about "pseudo-transformational leadership," which mimics its motivational aspects but lacks ethical foundations.

Parallel to transformational leadership is what Robert House (1976), inspired by Max Weber (1947), called *charismatic leadership*. Weber's ideal politician, endowed not just with rationality and professionalism but also profound charisma, operates within societal constraints yet commands followers' devotion, creating a personal connection that underlies the leader's authority. House's theory posits that charismatic leaders possess distinctive traits and behaviors that significantly affect follower performance and organizational alignment. Subsequent studies have emphasized the role of charismatic leaders in transforming followers' self-concepts, aligning them with the organizational ethos, and fostering a shared sense of purpose. Additionally, Jung and Sosik (2006) found that charismatic leaders often exhibit self-monitoring, active impression management, a strong drive for social power, and a desire for self-actualization. However, this kind of leadership, while effective in management, can be ethically hazardous, leading to catastrophic outcomes, as seen with nefarious figures like

Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, and the self-proclaimed messiah Jim Jones (Goryunova & Lehmann, 2023, p. 378). Without ethical guidance, charismatic leadership can drive followers toward destructive values and unswerving fanaticism.

3. Professional ethics and leadership styles in orchestra conducting

In general, good professionalism presupposes a moral bedrock, which is embodied in the various professional ethics. This is particularly true in the musical field, especially in the context of orchestra conducting, which requires an all-encompassing leadership commitment that cannot be fully understood without considering the related ethical obligations (Palazzolo & Giombini, 2024; Pettigrove, 2020). As argued by Jansson (2018, p. 88),

> A conductor, as musician, artist, and leader, must guide the music in a manner that remains true to oneself. The desire to shape musical sound is a defining aspect of what it means to be an authentic conductor, where authenticity also includes honoring one's core values, beliefs, strengths.

The orchestra is a peculiar kind of social organization, with its members doing the same thing at the same time in precisely the same way, under the direction of a leader (Spitzer & Zaslaw, 2004, p. 507). This complex dynamic is epitomized in the unique relationship that the conductor has with their orchestra, an alliance that becomes foundational for both. "Conducting is inevitably about partnership" (Mauceri, 2017, p. 100): every good conductor is inextricably linked with a professional ensemble, and this symbiotic relationship establishes something that may be uniquely transformative for both sides.

A conductor is exposed to transformative experiences because interacting with the orchestra is an inherently intense experience, which can change one by radically altering their point of view, rather than just slightly modifying their preferences (Paul, 2014). Conducting involves engaging with numerous individuals – often coming from diverse backgrounds and different parts of the world – each bringing their own perspective on the work and their unique way of making and conceiving music.

On stage, as many as a hundred musicians may be seated in front of the conductor, and each of them has devoted their life to perfecting their technique. These artists, willingly or not, subordinate their individuality, contributing to something larger than themselves: the orchestra, with its leader. This process is demanding and sometimes thankless. For those in specialized roles, such as wind players, lead violinists, or brass musicians, the opportunity occasionally arises to perform a solo, allowing them to showcase their individual artistry. However, even in these cases, there are

limits to the expressive freedom of the soloists, as they must conform to the overall interpretation offered by the conductor and the whole orchestra.

The interaction between conductor and orchestra – in which individual talents are woven into a cohesive whole – embodies the essence of musical collaboration. It highlights how the conductor's vision and the musicians' expertise merge to produce something that transcends their individual contributions, culminating in the powerful and emotional experience of a harmonious performance. Conductors are undoubtedly the leaders of the orchestra, those who imprints their signature on the expected outcome. What style of leadership do they exhibit? In our view, in most successful cases, contemporary conductor's leadership style oscillates between the transformational and the charismatic.

Discussing orchestral music, Mintzberg (1998) notes that effective conductors transcend mere obedience from the members of the orchestra and tend instead to focus on the nuances of music to create harmony. This has led researchers to explore whether such conductors exhibit inherent transformational leadership qualities (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Boerner and Krause (2002) suggest that transformational leadership in orchestras could enhance job satisfaction and performance. Rowold and Rohmann (2009) found that both transformational and transactional leadership styles positively affect musicians' emotional states and performance. A study on German symphony orchestras (Boerner & Freiherr, 2005) showed that a conductor's transformational leadership's effectiveness depends on the ensemble's cooperative dynamics.

Orchestras have embodied a groundbreaking concept in music performance and organization since their inception. The magnitude and majesty of their sound and the unprecedented force of their performances provided an acoustic experience hitherto unencountered. In addition to their musical impact, orchestras have also represented an innovative form of social organization, characterized by a large assembly of individuals performing actions in a highly coordinated and precise manner.

The history of conducting can be divided into three distinct periods, each characterized by specific leadership styles and roles. From the late 17th century to the last decades of the 18th century, the role of the conductor emerged, emphasizing "servant leadership," where the conductor acted as *primus inter pares*, leading by example rather than command (Spitzer and Zaslaw 2004). The new role of the conductor encompassed three different functions: the time beater, the keyboard director, and the violin leader. The time-beater emerged as the earliest form among these. The method of keeping time, whether by hand, using a rolled-up music paper scroll, or with a short, thick baton, was a common approach for directing choral groups during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In those times, the conductor's leadership did not rely heavily on sheer authority: "To many

people in the eighteenth century, leadership by example seemed far preferable to leadership by command" (Spitzer & Zaslaw, 2004, p. 389).[2] In fact, as observed by the musician and music theorist Johann Mattheson in 1739: "Things always work out better when I both play and sing along than when I merely stand there and beat time. Playing and singing in this way inspires and enlivens the performers" (Spitzer & Zaslaw, 2004, p. 389).

The Romantic Age brought about the second period, defined by "charismatic leadership". Charismatic conductors, often seen as benevolent dictators, embodied inspirational authority. This leadership style, as described by Sternberg (2021), was inspired by figures such as Niccolò Machiavelli (who famously claimed that it was better to be feared than loved), Thomas Hobbes (who viewed the monarch as *legibus solutus*), and Louis XIV (whose famous motto was "*L'État c'est moi*"). Legendary conductor Arturo Toscanini comes to mind as the most iconic representatives of this style of conduction. His exceptional memory enabled him to conduct without scores, allowing for unbroken and intense eye contact with his musicians, leading to a static stance and expansive, majestic rhythms. His rigorous focus and high standards reflected a blend of steadfast dedication to the musical legacy and unchallenged authoritarianism – which are still evident in the surviving recordings of his rehearsals, marked by his ferocious outbursts toward the orchestra. More recently, Herbert von Karajan, famed for his long tenure with the Berliner Philharmoniker, skillfully merged stern authority with a deep reverence for classical traditions.

Finally, in recent decades, orchestra conducting entered a third phase. Today, authoritarian leadership is much less common than it used to be, due to a commonly accepted more "democratic" approach to decision-making in the orchestra, where individual artistic expression is encouraged, and judgment is more widely distributed within the ensemble (Spitzer & Zaslaw, 2004). Consequently, nowadays conductors' transformational leadership – which blends authority with guidance, empathy, and team creativity – is much more relevant than the traditional charismatic conducting. Transformational conductors inspire and motivate musicians beyond common expectations, fostering mutual respect and driving their orchestras to excellence through artistic skill, assertive guidance, and distributed decision-making (Boerner et al., 2005; Rowold & Rohmann, 2009).

4. Orchestra conducting and authority

The collective imagination still tends to see professional orchestras as paradigms of hierarchical organization, akin to a "benevolent dictatorship" characterized by the top-down approach typical of Toscanini-von Karajan era (Goryunova & Lehmann, 2023, p. 455). However, a careful analysis reveals a much more complex structure. Within this framework,

in particular, several levels of leadership coexist (including the leadership of principal musicians in each section), allowing many individuals the opportunity to significantly influence and "shape the music". Therefore, the intricate dynamics and stratified leadership within orchestras transcend the oversimplified view of the singular, authoritative orchestra leadership. Authority without authoritarianism is, one could say, the predominant style among most contemporary conductors. In this regard, Pauline Adenot (2019, p. 6) speaks of the "co-construction of authority," which involves a complex interweaving of various forms of power and legitimacy. Today's conductors tend to operate within a multifaceted spectrum of influence that is far from absolute.

In the humanities and social sciences, authority is acknowledged as both a legitimate form of power, justified by the consensus of the majority, and as a relational construct that allows negotiation among actors, despite unequal resources (Adenot, 2019, p. 6). This relational aspect is essential for understanding the role of the orchestra conductor. While the legitimacy of the conductor fosters adherence to their authority, the nature and degree of this adherence vary based on the individuals involved and the methods of exercising authority of each conductor.

According to Max Weber (1978), authority can be *traditional* (when, like in most monarchies, it is granted to individuals on the basis of custom, regardless of their qualifications), *charismatic* (when it depends on an individual's personal qualities), and *legal-rational* (when it is based on a legitimate application of rules and laws). For orchestra conductors, the latter two types are particularly relevant, and in different contexts a conductor may embody either or both (Adenot, 2019, p. 6). In particular, legal-rational authority, frequently observed in the interactions between a conductor and an orchestra, is predicated upon the formal status of the conductor at the forefront of the orchestra, grounded in official statutes that establish the conductor's leadership position. This constitutive authority grants a basic legitimacy, ensuring a minimum level of compliance from musicians, such as attending rehearsals and following the conductor's direction (Adenot, 2019, p. 8).

The internal relationships among musicians within various sections are diverse and variable; moreover, some dynamics generally remain implicit, such as that those sitting behind must conform more to the collective interpretation compared to the first violin. However, the resistance or autonomy of the members of the orchestra can challenge, and even overrule, this authority. As noted by sociologists Crozier and Friedberg (1977), no individual or organization exercise absolute control in stopping actors behaving according to their own rationality – and this is particularly true for orchestras (Adenot, 2019, p. 7). Members of the orchestra are not under mere obedience. They play discretional roles, such as the selection of

substitutes or the interpretation of rules, that can significantly impact the conductor's authority.

5. Deference and empathy in the orchestra

The notion of deference is conceptually linked to that of obedience. Like obedience, deference implies respect for both superiors and established norms; however, it may also refer to the consideration of a person one esteems highly because of their opinions, decisions, or actions. Deference also implies respect, whereas mere obedience requires following instructions or rules but does not necessarily imply respect. Finally, deference may be mutual, whereas mere obedience presupposes an asymmetric relationship (in which there are a superior and an inferior party) and cannot be mutual.

In music, deference is involved in following the directions of the conductor and of the first musicians of the various sections of the orchestra. In this context, deference can be understood as the willingness of the members of the orchestra to embrace the conductor's artistic vision and guidance. More precisely, it presupposes recognizing the conductor as an authority figure and accepting their creative decisions as the basis for interpreting a specific piece of music. However, this attitude is not one of mere obedience, but of sincere and voluntary adherence to the decisions of the conductor. In this respect, Wilhelm Furtwängler, the renowned conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, mentions the role of the "internal authority:" "In art, the principle of authority works in a peculiar way: what I would call external authority is, of course, an important factor, but if it is not connected to the inner authority from which all true artistic ability stems, then in spite of all our efforts, we will wait in vain for the legitimately expected results" (1979, 310). Furtwängler's "internal authority" dictates deference.

In fact, when things work properly, the orchestra members show deference to the conductor by recognizing and respecting their authority, following their guidance, and being receptive to their interpretations and artistic vision. Deference in this context implies acknowledging the conductor's expertise, musical interpretation, and ability to guide the collective performance. It is fundamental to notice, however, that this relationship is not one of blind obedience or submission. A good conductor must also show deference to the orchestra by valuing their individual contributions, listening to their ideas, and collaborating to create a unified and expressive performance. Hence, while in the relationship between the conductor and the orchestra there is an undeniable hierarchical dimension, both parties display respect and regard (that is, deference) for each other's roles and contributions. Recent psychological research has confirmed that the

relationship between orchestra members and the conductor cannot be based solely on obedience and authority, if the artistic outcome of a performance is not to be compromised (Woody & McPherson, 2010).

Empirical studies have shed light on other important aspects of musicians' collaboration. The development of the appropriate emotional connection between co-performers requires time, is not always characterized by positive emotions, and may be psychologically complex. In larger ensembles, conflicts may arise as members compete for status, while smaller groups lacking a hierarchical structure may struggle with addressing issues related to musical coordination (Allsup, 2003). Musicians often form deep connections within their groups, and these personal bonds significantly influence their emotional experiences during collaborative musical endeavors. Particularly during performances, these artists frequently encounter profound collective emotions. Keith Sawyer (2006) describes musicians comparing the "emotional empathy" in group performances to feelings of "intimacy", "heightened sensations", and "ecstasy" (see also Woody & McPherson, 2010, p. 405).

Davidson and Good (2002), King (2006), and Williamon and Davidson (2002), have explored how co-performers interact. Their research highlights a unique phenomenon among ensemble player: the achievement of a shared mental state. Described in various terms like "being in sync" (Berliner, 1994), "group flow" (Sawyer, 2006), or "empathic synchronization" (Seddon, 2005), this collective psychological condition is closely related to empathy. Empathy is increasingly recognized as crucial for facilitating interactions among co-performers and understanding dynamics within small ensembles (Waddington, 2017, p. 230). Myers and White (2012) show that professional musicians acknowledge empathy as crucial for effective joint performance. Elizabeth Haddon and Mark Hutchinson (2015) specifically investigate the role of empathy in piano duo rehearsals, finding it to be a vital tool for developing shared understanding, strengthening partnership, addressing conflicts proactively, and establishing a secure environment. Empathy is a key element in ensemble performances (Waddington, 2017, p. 230).

It is worth noting that musicians primarily communicate with each other through eye contact and bodily gestures, which are fundamental and innate ways for human beings to express emotions (Bastien & Hostager, 1988; Poggi, 2002; Williamon & Davidson, 2002). These characteristics are particularly evident in the role of the conductor (Price & Byo, 2002). For instance, Furtwängler was described as a "remarkable magician" capable of inspiring the ensemble and evoking a state of ecstasy among its members (Eschenbach, no date) (Woody & McPherson, 2010, p. 405). Reports like these emphasize the emotional engagement essential during rehearsals and

performances of high-quality music, as well as the empathic relationships that form among members of professional ensembles.

These observations highlight the emotional engagement of professional musicians, whose careers depend on achieving an exceptional level of excellence and intensity, measured by standards rarely matched in other fields. A good conductor must assume the role of an inspirational, emphatic leader, guiding and shaping the collective interpretation of the music by inspiring deference in the orchestra members, who then respond appropriately to instructions regarding tempo, dynamics, phrasing, and overall coordination of the ensemble. This kind of deference enables effective communication within the orchestra and significantly contributes to successful performances.

Therefore, if deference lays the foundation for the exercise of a conductor's authority, empathy strengthens it in virtue of the relationships established between the conductor and musicians, and among the musicians themselves. Psychologists have shown that the personal connections musicians feel with one another can enhance the music-induced emotions experienced in their group activities (see Bakker, 2005, for a study on how flow experiences are transferred from music teachers to their students). Group emotional experiences can be more intense during performance moments. As we have noted, musicians communicate with each other during performances primarily through eye contact and bodily gestures, which are natural ways for human beings to express emotions (Bastien & Hostager, 1988; Poggi, 2002; Williamon & Davidson, 2002). These traits are particularly evident in the role of conductor, especially the best ones (Price & Byo, 2002).[3]

Moreover, various theories on music-induced emotions propose that empathy plays a role in the emotional responses elicited by music (Juslin, 2013; Livingstone & Thompson, 2009). The human ability to create embodied representations enables individuals to connect with music on a personal level, and empathy allows the powerful emotional effects of music to be shared and amplified at the group level. Consequently, music can function as a universal language of empathy, enabling a sequence of abstract sounds to convey emotions among individuals who do not speak the same language or share the same culture (Clarke et al., 2015). The empathy/perspective-taking code is evident when practitioners demonstrate an understanding of diverse perspectives or sensitivity to others' experiences. Musicians recognize both retrospective and prospective aspects of perspective-taking and empathy. Retrospective aspects involve considering the history or tradition of the practice, including language, theories, and historical works. Prospective aspects aim to extend tradition through new expressions, considering the audience's capacities and interests.

Interestingly, musicians refer to perspective-taking and empathy more frequently than scientists (Reilly et al., 2022, p. 95).

In this section we have stressed two important essential factors for success in musical conducting. First, music studies have shown that, to achieve excellent artistic results, a conductor should embody authority through assertive guidance and profound musical insight, while orchestra members must exhibit deference toward the conductor (and vice versa). Second, research in psychology has revealed that emotional empathy is a crucial component of a good conductor's personality since it enables harmonious and expressive executions. The dynamic interplay of these elements not only shapes the musical outcome but also affects the interpersonal dynamics within the orchestra. In this context, the distinctive style of the conductor's leadership can be characterized as oscillating between transformational and charismatic leadership.

6. Shared goals and multiple leaderships in the orchestra

The conductor's role is a multifaceted endeavor, delicately balancing the creative imperatives of the performance with the nuanced challenges of leading a diverse assemblage of musicians and navigating through varied repertoires that present novel complexities. This role transcends mere musical direction, encompassing a deep empathy toward the members of the orchestra and a reverent respect for the traditions of musical artistry.

It is important to notice that orchestral leadership significantly differs from conventional hierarchical and directive models, such as those in the military because of its more fluid and interactive dynamic of distributed influence. In this context, the first musicians of the orchestra sections, manifest leadership within their distinct spheres in the orchestral structure. For instance, the first violin and the first flute manifest leadership in their respective section of the orchestra. The leadership of the first violin, in particular, is only subordinated to that of the conductor.

In the symphony orchestra, the violin section is divided into first and second violins. Typically, the first violins are tasked with the higher, more melodically prominent parts, while the second violins undertake countermelodies and provide substantial harmonic support. However, not a few composers have crafted significant parts for the second violins, assigning harmonic support and countermelody roles to the first violins. Thus, in this context there is no absolute hierarchy, and it would be wrong to presume that one section supersedes the other in importance. First violins and second violins tend to hold equivalent significance. This distribution of responsibilities within the sections invites contemplation on the pivotal role of the first violin. Over the 18th century, the role of violin leadership gained greater significance.

Referred to as the leader in England, *primo violino* or *capo d'orchestra* in Italy, *Anführer* or *Konzertmeister* in Germany, and *premier violon* in France, this position was distinguished by directing through the vigor and volume of the performance of the first violin part (Spitzer & Zaslaw, 2004, p. 391). It serves as a vibrant exemplar of leadership within the orchestra, complementing the conductor's leadership within the orchestral hierarchy, albeit in a subordinate capacity. "If an opera goes well," stated Francesco Galeazzi (1797/1796), "it is the first violin who will receive the praise, and if it goes poorly, it is he who will be blamed". And "a mediocre orchestra with an excellent director," claimed Giuseppe Scaramelli (1811), "plays much better than an excellent orchestra led by an incompetent first violinist" (Spitzer & Zaslaw, 2004, p. 393).

The role of the first violin is still crucial and undertakes numerous essential roles: it symbolizes the entire orchestra, tuning in response to the oboe's A, and establishes a reference for pitch. For the string section, it is the first violin that dictates the bowings, determining the direction of the strokes. Except for solo violin concertos, typically rendered by a guest violinist, the concertmaster performs every solo violin part. Beyond their musical and technical proficiency, the concertmaster assumes a crucial diplomatic role, acting as the principal intermediary between the members of the orchestra and the conductor.[4] Therefore, hierarchy functions as an orchestrating principle, harmonizing a multitude of distinct voices into a cohesive and unified ensemble. Each musical element, ranging from the dominant themes to the subtle nuances, and including the fundamental accompaniments, is given a unique space and opportunity to contribute creatively to the overarching narrative. The leadership exemplified by the principal voice or instrument does not serve to suppress but rather to invigorate and amplify the creative potential of the secondary voices and instrumental accompaniments. In the musical context, therefore, authority and creativity should not be seen as antagonistic values but as intricately interlaced within the tapestry of orchestral harmony.

Finally, it is important to note another way in which conductors' authority is not unlimited. When interpreting a work written by other composers, they must consider how it has been previously performed, while also exploring aspects that have yet to be uncovered. Tradition in classical music serves as the authoritative guide that enables conductors and their orchestras to offer new interpretations that build upon previous ones.[5]

7. Ethical virtues in music

Reilly et al. (2022) recently conducted intensive multidisciplinary research to examine the relationship between virtues and practices from the perspectives of practitioners, particularly in the fields of science and music. Excellent practitioners are developed in such a way that they can achieve the most important values (ends) of their practice. However, this study shows that musicians are also

naturally morally grounded, to varying degrees, and possess both a general moral sense along with specific ethical values, Let's analyze this issue by considering some examples of moral values and virtues that are relevant from a musical perspective.

Integrity underscores the significance of adhering to one's commitments or actualizing one's values and its epitome is achieved when one embodies and enacts positive values in a harmonious manner (Herdt, 2020; Reilly et al., 2022, p. 39). Applied to professional music, the concept of artistic integrity is characterized by a profound commitment to the essence of the performed works, marked by earnest sincerity and unwavering dedication to both the art form and the collaborative relationships with fellow musicians.

In the musicians' narratives, three dimensions of integrity have been identified: (1) alignment with the composer's intent, (2) adherence to the meaningful objectives of music, such as expressing aspects of the human experience, and (3) maintaining authenticity as a musician (Reilly et al., 2022, p. 54). Integrity for musicians often involves pursuing legitimate motivational sources. This includes staying true to the composer's intentions for a musical piece and seeking suitable musical objectives like creating aesthetic beauty, advancing the field of music, and dedicating oneself to music as an art form (Reilly et al., 2022, p. 54). From this perspective, a conductor must embody all forms of integrity and a strong character to exhibit authoritative leadership.

The symbiotic artistic relationship between the conductor and the professional orchestra can only work when the conductor is perceived by the ensemble as able to transcend the merely technical functionalities of the podium. In orchestras of high caliber – where musicians may have more experience performing a piece than the conductor has in directing it –, the conductor's role often transition from unidirectional leadership to a form of collaborative leadership. This involves facilitating and nurturing the intricate interplay among the musicians, which mirror the dynamics observed in knowledge-intensive organizations. In such contexts, good leaders adeptly balance power dynamics to foster collaboration and innovation among highly skilled professionals, a principle that is notably pronounced in orchestral settings (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1998; Bolman & Deal, 2003 et al. 2004).

In sum, in orchestral settings, a dynamic culture of collaboration – characterized by attentive listening, responsive interactions, and adaptive practices – prevails. Musicians do not just play their parts; they engage in the common practice, where each contribution weaves into a harmonious collective, enriching the overall performance. This approach, where the ensemble's voice is integrated and valued, exemplifies the essence of orchestral music-making, which transcends the sum of its individual parts.

Contrastingly, in most knowledge-based organizations like technology companies and consulting firms, the focus often shifts toward individual expertise and specialized knowledge. Teamwork, though valued, does not permeate the fabric of these organizations as it does in orchestras since collaboration does not typically define operations from start to finish (Goryunova & Lehmann, 2023). In orchestral performances, on the contrary, the success hinges on continuous real-time collaboration, making each musician's role indispensable for the collective harmony. In orchestras, the ethos of collaboration fosters a sense of collective ownership and serves as a motivational force, also acting as a robust system of quality assurance. In such a context, leadership is less about directing individual performances and more about harmonizing the collective needs of the ensemble, so enhancing the effectiveness of the performance. This approach shifts the focus from individual achievement to collective excellence (Goryunova & Lehmann, 2023; Morgeson et al., 2010).

> Collaboration is at the heart of the orchestral process, while the essence of orchestra leadership is in community building. Thus, conductors must above all be willing to listen, support, react, grow, and if appropriate alter their artistic concept in light of the response from the orchestra. At the same time, professional musicians join in the community of sound, and while performing, they also must listen, react, grow, and blend with other members. (Goryunova & Lehmann, 2023, pp. 460–461)

This is accomplished through a harmonious balance of authoritative guidance and respectful collaboration, nurturing a foundation of trust built upon empathy and recognition of the musicians' commitment and their often-exemplary level of skill. According to Gritten (2017, p. 253), trust is identified as a transferable skill and entails several significant consequences: firstly, trust engenders a lasting emotional impact in the lives of performers beyond their performances; secondly, performers learn not only during interactions but also from them; and thirdly, regardless of how trust is defined (be it as an attitude, a characteristic, a temperament, a mind-set, an ideology, a perspective, a style, a disposition, a habitual behavior, or a virtue), it provides performers with opportunities for creative transformations in substance, thought, music, and perhaps even in ethical values through group interactions.

Creativity is often perceived as "extra-moral", as existing outside the realm of moral virtues; it has been convincingly argued, however, that creativity is also connected to ethics. Many scholars consider creativity as an intrinsically valuable character trait or virtue (Kieran, 2014; Swanton, 2022; Zagzebski, 1996); others (Reilly et al., 2022, Qin Li and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) emphasize the moral foundation of creativity in fields such as science and art. They argue that good professional ethics, related to one's role, demonstrate how creativity significantly impacts

society, by shaping behavior, thought, and cultural development. Creative professionals possess a sense of goodness that is not only confined to their specific domain (such as orchestras in the case of music) but also extends to the community they serve, reflecting a responsibility to their present and future audiences (Reilly et al., 2022). In this light, creativity can be said to possess ethical value.

Reilly et al. (2022, p. 60) found that trust among ensemble members – a necessary condition of successful performances – is acquired through reputation, based on consistent behavior and association with prestigious institutions, though it can be broken by repeated mistakes or unreliability. Trust is so deeply embedded in the musical profession that many conductors acknowledge that a professional orchestra could even perform most classical symphonic works autonomously, without a conductor. While such performances might lack the distinctive tone or personality imbued by a skilled conductor's interpretation, their technical execution could still reach a very good level.[6]

In general, conductors cannot fulfill their role effectively without striving to achieve a a shared vision with the members of the orchestra through mutual trust and respect. The conductor's role transcends mere conducting, as it involves empowering musicians to reach their full potential, honoring their individual contributions, and skillfully guiding them toward a cohesive interpretation. This approach fosters a dynamic interplay of leadership roles during performances, resulting in a synergistic outcome that can resonate profoundly with both the performers and the audience.

Another fundamental virtue of good conductors is humility: they must recognize that their primary role is to serve the music, acting as a conduit through which the artistic essence of the work is unveiled and expressed (Schuller, 1997, p. 7). It is humility that fosters a deep commitment to understanding and adhering to every facet of the musical piece, enabling them to explore its structural, expressive, and emotional layers, in attempt to approach its core value. Another important source of humility for the conductor (and for the entire orchestra) lies in the understanding that, while they must strive for perfection in their execution, this will always remain an elusive goal (Schuller, 1997, p. 7).

According to Reilly et al. (2022, p. 51), for musicians, humility is often manifested as an understanding of their own abilities and limitations, as well as the necessity for continual practice. It involves acknowledging the skills of others, owning up to errors, being ready to receive advice from colleagues, and realizing when one no longer meets the standards of a group.

There is and even more important reason why conductors and orchestras should practice humility. Their purpose is to interpret someone else's

compositions. In embracing the responsibility of interpreting these works, conductors must recognize the profound duty they undertake in contributing to what geniuses like Beethoven and Wagner have described as "the sacred art" (Schuller, 1997, p. 7). In this sense, conductors and orchestras must humbly serve as the link between the composers, musicians and the audience.

8. Musical intelligence and transformational leadership

Excellent orchestra conducting is characterized by the unique leadership style of each individual conductor. Each of them, with their distinct approach, is an exemplar of leadership, instilling a sense of professionalism and motivation within their orchestras. For example, Leonard Bernstein was celebrated for his balanced approach to musical leadership, seamlessly blending charisma and emotional depth with authoritative respect for each musician's contribution.

Claudio Abbado was renowned for his collaborative and democratic style. He firmly believed in valuing the individual contributions of each musician within the orchestra, fostering an environment where artistic ideas and interpretations were freely shared and discussed. His exceptional listening skills and empathetic approach enabled him to elicit deep and engaging musical responses from his performers. His transformational leadership style stood in stark contrast to the stereotypical image of the authoritarian conductor.

Today Daniel Barenboim's leadership style is distinguished by intellectual depth and empathy, harmonizing authority with creativity and deep humanism. His famous "East-West Divan Orchestra", composed by Israeli and Arab musicians and inspired by Goethe's humanism, exemplifies Barenboim's insight that a morally inspired orchestra can serve as a transformative model for the whole world (Barenboim, 2016).

Research conducted by Strubler and Evangelista (2009) and Boerner and von Streit (2007) delves into the evolution of orchestra conductors from authoritative figures to transformational leaders. This body of work underscores the significance of qualities such as charisma, inspirational ability, and intellectual stimulation for orchestra conducting. Conducting necessitates a profound comprehension of group dynamics, requiring a delicate equilibrium between exerting authority and bearing role-responsibility.

Role-responsibility assigns specific duties to individuals in certain professions, such as college lecturers, doctors, and lawyers, structuring the "professional ethics" of each of these fields. In this context, the term "role" implies that an individual occupies a socially recognized position characterized by specific functions (Pettigrove, 2020, p. 12). In the realm of musical professionalism, role-responsibility entails fulfilling the constituent duties

of conductors and musicians. These include participating in rehearsals, making high-quality executive decisions, thoroughly studying musical works, and being respectful toward the other musicians.

Boerner and Krause (2002) and Kammerhoff et al. (2019) illuminate the intricate interplay of interdependence and potential conflict within an orchestral ensemble. These studies advocate for a leadership approach that is both multifaceted and subtly nuanced, recognizing the complexity of managing groups of specialized musicians. Further (Novicevic et al., 2011), emphasizes the importance of balancing responsibility with reliability, adaptation and harmonization of individual and collective identities within the orchestral context by implementing "musical intelligence (Sternberg, 2021).

Sternberg elucidates the multifaceted nature of musical intelligence, encompassing creative, analytical, practical, and wisdom-based dimensions. Specifically, he addresses the practical intelligence of musicians and orchestra conductors. In general, practical intelligence is employed in the execution, action, and practical application of a plan, as well as in persuading others of an idea; moreover, it is utilized to adapt, shape, and select environments. Adaptation involves self-modification to better fit an environment; shaping entails altering the environment to better suit oneself or one's values; selection occurs when one recognizes the suboptimality of the current environment and seeks a more suitable one. In illustrating high levels of practical intelligence, certain musicians have been to connect with audiences in ways unattainable by others. For instance,

> conductors Leonard Bernstein and Arturo Toscanini; cellists Jacqueline Du Pré, Yo-Yo Ma, and Sheku Kanneh-Mason; violinists Joshua Bell, Hilary Hahn, and Anne-Sophie Mutter; and pianists Arthur Rubinstein and Lola Astanova, have all established empathetic connections with audiences extending beyond typical classical music listeners. (Sternberg, 2021, 1782)[7]

Thus, practical musical intelligence may facilitate an enhanced empathetic connection among musicians and between musicians and audiences, adeptly addressing the multifaceted complexity of the musical dimension. Moreover, the practice of orchestra conducting is increasingly aligning with an inherent human propensity to establish empathetic connections that can be, and often are, transformative for the group. As stressed by Sternberg (2021), this approach perceives the ensemble not as a domain for authoritarian leadership, but as a forum for reciprocal exchanges aimed at collective improvement through collaboration, humility, and trust. This shift marks a significant evolution in the role and approach of orchestral leadership, emphasizing flexibility and mutual interpretation within the group

dynamic, rendering it a paradigmatic model for leadership across various domains.

9. General implications for contemporary organizations

The exploration of orchestral leadership reveals intriguing insights that resonate beyond the realm of music, extending into the broader landscape of knowledge-ased organizations. The conductor's role, once rooted in an authoritarian style of leadership, has evolved to encompass guidance, inspiration, empathy, and the fostering of a collaborative ethos. Today's conductors blend authority with respect for collective creativity, orchestrating highly specialized individuals with a more nuanced and supportive approach.

As said, prior to the emergence of the Romantic grand orchestra – when the figure of the conductor-as-dictator became dominant—, conductors (or their equivalents) were cooperative rather than dictatorial. Recently, however, there has been a return to the earlier practices, and now authority is more equitably balanced with collaboration and the other ethical values that we have observed. The leadership styles of great artists like Leonard Bernstein, Claudio Abbado, Daniel Barenboim, and Xian Zhang exemplify a virtuous balance between guidance and collaboration, reflecting leadership principles that are also applicable in other organizational settings.

This ethically rich leadership approach significantly influences both group dynamics and the overall quality of orchestral performances. Boerner and Gebert (2012) have demonstrated how, in an orchestral context, transformational leadership enhances the value of artistic performance. This is achieved by valuing the diversity of the members of the ensemble and integrating a variety of perspectives and ideas that they bring. Then P. Cook and Howitt (2012) highlight the necessity of maintaining a balance between structural integrity and artistic liberty within an orchestra. This balance requires a reciprocal process of evaluation, support, and inspiration between the conductor and the musicians, ensuring both adherence to musical best standards and the flourishing of creative expression.

In this context, the orchestra provides unique insights into the dynamics of the leader-follower relationship, offering valuable lessons for mainstream knowledge-based organizations (Goryunova & Lehmann, 2023, p. 462). In environments with multiple levels of leadership and fluid, interchangeable roles of leaders and followers, maintaining a power balance may depend on a meaningful combination of structured organization and flexibility. This approach channels individual creative expressions toward a common objective. Collaboration becomes the primary modus operandi and is effective only when rooted in mutual trust, respect, and role responsibility between leaders and

members. This dynamic is well exemplified in the relationships within a functional orchestra.

This paper has emphasized the importance of mutual respect and trust in cultivating an environment within the orchestra where the conductor's transformational leadership ideally aligns individual freedoms with collective goals, resulting in artistic success. In this context, balancing individual expression with ensemble coherence is crucial for achieving performances that are both harmonious and impactful, reaching what Nicholas N. Cook (2004) called to as the "sound of community." Viewing the work of the orchestra as a collective, ethically-based effort in making music together provides a lens for better understanding leadership dynamics in various professional contexts. Specifically, exploring the applicability of orchestral leadership principles in non-musical organizational settings could enrich our understanding of effective leadership across a broad spectrum of organizational management.

Notes

1. See, for example, Allmendinger et al. (1996); Ippolito (2015); Kammerhoff et al. (2019); Koivunen and Wennes (2011); Ladkin and Taylor (2010); Sutherland (2013).
2. This conducting style continued to be prevalent in church music until the end of the eighteenth century (Spitzer & Zaslaw, 2004, p. 387).
3. Here we use the term "natural" not as opposed to something that is achieved through study or technique, but as something common for emotions, in the sense that it is natural for emotions to be conveyed in that specific manner and not in another (Molnar-Szakacs et al., 2011; Yalun; Xu, 2023).
4. A reviewer of this article noted that, in music, the concept of hierarchy should not be only applied to the orchestral structure, as it also inherently manifests within the realm of the musical composition. Indeed, the fabric of professional classical music is intricately woven with hierarchical textures, as Aristotle himself noted in *Politics* (III 13-n. 1), where he observed that in all musical modes – specifically, the Dorian, the Phrygian, and the Lydian – there is a key ruling note. Although we cannot expand on this point here, it is worth noting that the hierarchies within musical compositions are not absolute but contextual, as they change when the mode or tonality is modified.
5. The significant debates sparked by the "Historically Informed Performance" movement – which advocates for performances that adhere as faithfully as possible to the standards of the composition's period, including the use of period instruments – have greatly enriched discussion on the constraints that musicians must respect in their interpretations. We cannot expand here on this important point; however, see Butt (2002); Harnoncourt (1988); Kivy (1995); Palazzolo (2024); Philip 1992; Taruskin (1995).
6. The musical genre of opera is unique because the absence of a skilled conductor who directs the entire production process is unthinkable. Opera conducting is perceived by many orchestral musicians as a more challenging endeavor than symphonic performances. Furthermore, in opera, the conductor's leadership role often intersects and sometimes conflicts with the roles of the singers and the stage director, especially when producers assume comprehensive control over the design, staging, and occasionally even over the musical elements. However, regardless of their relative

standing, it is imperative the stage director and the musical director collaborate harmoniously (Mackerras, 2003, p. 76).

7. Robert Sternberg cites Toscanini as an exemplar of practical intelligence and effective audience engagement. However, today Toscanini's authoritarian model of leadership would be unacceptable because of the notable improvements in relational dynamics in the orchestra. It should be noted, however, that contemporary orchestras are, on average, much more professional than those of Toscanini's period, which often included amateur musicians.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The work was supported by the PRIN 2017 "Nuove sfide per l'etica applicata" [20175YZ855].

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