



Leadership Through Creativity

A Phenomenology of Perspective

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Abstract. This paper explores the relationship between aesthetic perception in the visual arts and leadership models from a phenomenological perspective. The analysis highlights the role of perspective – linear and reverse – as a conceptual tool in the construction of visual meaning and in shaping leadership strategies. The study combines the theoretical analysis of relevant artistic movements with an applied approach, demonstrating how the diversity of perspectives contributes to the development of adaptive and innovative leadership.

Keywords: Creative Leadership, Aesthetic perception, Reverse Perspective.

1 Introduction

Phenomenology provides an essential conceptual framework for understanding aesthetic perception, by emphasizing direct experience and the way reality is constituted within consciousness (Husserl, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1964). In the visual arts, perspective represents not only a technical instrument but also a mechanism of mediation between the artwork and the viewer, influencing interpretation and the construction of meaning (Panofsky, 1991). In the context of rapid transformations in education, leadership can no longer be reduced to administrative functions, but involves the development of an adaptive, flexible and creative vision (Northouse, 2021).

This paper investigates how different types of artistic perspective can function as conceptual models applicable to leadership.

2 Theoretical Foundations: Perspective in the Visual Arts

In Byzantine art, reverse perspective constitutes a distinct mode of organizing space, in which the image opens toward the viewer, suggesting a participatory relationship (Florensky, 1994, 1997; 2002). This approach contrasts with the linear perspective developed during the Renaissance, based on geometric and mathematical principles that create the illusion of spatial depth (Panofsky, 1991).

The use of chiaroscuro and light modeling contributes to emphasizing volume and dramatic effect (Gombrich, 1995; 2012). Later, Cubism breaks the conventions of classical perspective through the fragmentation of forms and the simultaneous presentation

of multiple viewpoints (Golding, 1988). Abstract art continues this direction by eliminating references to illusory space and reaffirming the bidimensionality of the support surface (Kandinsky, 1977).

The concept of perspective, fundamental in the visual arts, may be interpreted as a symbolic form of organizing reality (Panofsky, 1991). Linear perspective reflects a structured and predictable approach specific to rational thinking, while alternative perspectives suggest openness toward ambiguity and multiple interpretations (Arnheim, 1974; Arnheim, 1979).

Creativity, a central element of artistic practice, is considered an essential competence in contemporary leadership, facilitating adaptation to complex contexts and innovation (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2011).

3 Methodology: Applied Approach

The research includes an experimental workshop focused on exploring perspective as a metaphor for leadership.

The very concept of ‘perspective’ has multiple meanings. The Cambridge Dictionary mentions e.g. ‘a particular way of considering something’ be it by background or by situatedness in a certain location.[28] However, the meanings can be traced back to two main ones: firstly, perspective as point of view, i.e. the vantage point from which something is seen. Secondly, perspective as outlook, or one’s attitude towards a matter. In any case, perspective leads back to the subject of the experience and brings into play the fact that relationships to things as well as to others cannot be made entirely objective: they always retain a subjective slant. Hence, relationships and actions are situated, they reflect a specific context of experience. (Cioflec, 2012) Ideally, there would be a bird’s-eye view from which any situation could be grasped. If such a view and experience existed for human affairs, objective rules of behavior could be established once and for all. What one actually experiences, however, is always only the personal perspective of the situation, of being related. Strictly speaking, there is no situation that could be grasped entirely as such, as it is constantly emerging anew, generated and co-created through interaction (Tsuyuki & Yamaguchi, 2024). These aspects become particularly relevant in contexts of action, in interpersonal relationships, as the scope for action, the “room of maneuver” (Handlungsspielraum), must first be worked out together. (Rosa, 2026)

Art practices the very act of perceiving and visualizing different perspectives in the first place. This means, for example, that painting brings different perspectives into view. Thus, through art, a first step is sought in the experience of perspective and also in the experience of the reversal of perspectives within the creative gesture. The core idea here is to address perspective as such through the lived experience of shifting perspective by employing different elements in the creation of an image. In a second step, this shift in perspective could be illustrated in interpersonal relationships.

After a brief introduction to our take on creativity and leadership as well as the potential of visual arts and phenomenological approaches, participants in the workshop were invited to create visual compositions starting from predefined graphic elements

and one individually selected element. This method is based on experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and on the use of art as a tool for developing creative thinking (Eisner, 2002).

4 Results and Interpretations

The results highlighted the diversity of interpretations and visual solutions. Participants demonstrated the ability to reconfigure the initial elements, assigning them new meanings and integrating them into original structures. By doing so, it turned out that in most cases the original structure changed in different ways for each participant, depending on their personal approach.

These differences reflect the variability of cognitive and creative processes, supporting the idea that perception is a constructive act (Arnheim, 1974; Arnheim, 1979). At the same time, the results may be correlated with different leadership styles characterized by flexibility and adaptability (Robinson & Stern, 1997).

The fact that perception is simultaneously generative and that reality only comes into its own through it is a much-discussed aspect in phenomenological approaches. (Merleau-Ponty, 2004) One way to illustrate this is through one's own experience in the creative act, i.e., more precisely, in painting a landscape. By introducing an element foreign to the image, one's own perspective can be disrupted and reversed, which should be understood as an exercise. Well-known in phenomenology is the shift in perspective brought about by the phenomenological reduction or epoché (Husserl, 1983), namely the bracketing of assumptions about reality. This phenomenological bracketing likewise leads to a different viewpoint, anchoring experience in subjective consciousness. (Mitchell 1990) Although not as radical as the mentioned Husserlian epoché, the shift in perspective in the proposed exercise is initially merely a shift in the focal point of the image. However, with the reversed perspective in painting, the focal point of the image changes from out there to this side of the viewer. Therefore, the proposed exercise also triggers a turning inward, toward oneself. The shift between perspectives, on the other hand, illustrates the plurality of possible interpretations embedded in perception. Hence, perception proves to be interpretative, whereas the shift in interpretations proved to be observable in the proposed exercise.

The foreign element, which is to be incorporated into the given template, does not remain merely another element in the image, but breaks through the compositional structure and disrupts the arrangement. This, too, could be read in parallel with Husserl, if this arrangement is understood as analogous to the 'natural attitude'. (Husserl, 1983) While this path does not necessarily lead to pure consciousness, the natural attitude is shaken, for it is not merely the image of something – such as a landscape – that changes, but the landscape, the perceived itself is transformed. (Merleau-Ponty, 2004).

In a figurative or metaphoric sense, these aspects can also be applied to groups of people: every new person who joins a group not only brings something new to it, but also alters the group's dynamics. Successful leadership involves being adaptable and creative enough to recognize and respond to the overall shifts in group dynamics. In the context of action, the relational space of interpersonal interaction plays a decisive role,

shaped, for instance, by care (Souba, 2014, 91f.) and negotiated through dialogue (Tsuyuki & Yamaguchi, 2024). A good leader certainly does not merely observe the group, let alone depicts its structures. Rather, a leader is part of what is happening within the group. However, insight into the shift in perspective and the practice of creatively allowing and developing perspectives, as well as the practice of recognizing guiding principles or themes, can certainly foster and reinforce co-creative approaches. New developments alter the situation in a given context, something that is often impossible to recognize from a rigid perspective.

There is another reason why these aspects should be explored through practice: what participants experience during the exercise is that the image takes over. The author realizes once again, just as when writing, that the creation of the image takes over and one is drawn into a process where one does not know exactly what the outcome will be. Rather, this is where responsiveness comes into play (Waldenfels, 2011, 35f.), a response to the challenge of the given, which, precisely because of its alien nature, can never be fully grasped. Providing direction through response, whereby it is not entirely clear where leadership is anchored – in the agent or in the event itself. (Mitchell, 1990, 25f.) Leadership also involves listening, allowing oneself to be guided, being able to cope with uncertainty and yet still shaping the course of events, i.e. experiencing the interface of knowing, doing, being, and context – key aspects of the concept of leadership. (Jensen 2012). Only in this way can a decision be made as to which form of leadership is appropriate in given contexts, considering for example, the three leadership models – the hierarchy-, the network-, or the market-model. (Meuleman, 2008, 2018)

5 Discussions: Perspective as a Leadership Model

Linear perspective may be associated with a leadership model oriented toward order, control, and efficiency, characteristic of traditional paradigms (Northouse, 2021). In contrast, reverse perspective stimulates innovative thinking, anticipation, and the reinterpretation of contexts.

The integration of these perspectives reflects the principles of creative leadership, which values cognitive diversity and encourages experimentation (Puccio, Mance & Murdock, 2011). Thus, effective leaders combine analytical rigor with openness toward new modes of interpretation.

6 Leadership Exercise – Exploring Perspectives and Decision-Making. How do you see?

Within LEADK12, during the workshop “Leadership Through Creativity: A Phenomenology of Perspective”, each participant received a sheet containing differently colored graphic elements suggesting a landscape constructed in linear perspective, together with pastels and a cut-out element. The participants were advised to freely choose the colors (Figure 1). The task was for each participant to integrate the cut-out element into their own composition, according to their personal perspective and the

way they assume their creative decision-making process (Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Participant no. 1 selected a floral element, which they reinterpreted and assigned a new meaning. Its integration into the composition reflects an exploratory approach, suggesting a process of searching and adaptation, similar to a learning journey in leadership (Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8).

Participant no. 2 chose a wheel, which they positioned in the foreground of the composition. The choice highlights a clear orientation toward action and visibility, assuming a central role in structuring the final outcome (Figure 9, Figure 10, Figure 11).

Participant no. 3 opted for a landscape fragment (a truncated tree and house), which they integrated through graphic continuity and chromatic harmonization. This approach demonstrates the ability to build upon existing elements and to create coherence within an incomplete context (Figure 12, Figure 13, Figure 14).

Participant no. 4 selected a fragment in shades of blue and red, which they integrated into the crown of the tree located in the left section of the composition. This option, together with the manner of insertion into the overall visual structure, formed the basis for chromatic harmonization, contributing to the configuration of a unified and balanced composition (Figure 15, Figure 16).

Although the starting point was similar for all participants, the final results were significantly different. The exercise highlighted the way each participant assumed decisions, valued their own perspective, and found adapted solutions. Regardless of the choices made, the participants demonstrated openness toward new approaches and flexibility in thinking – essential competences in leadership.

The participants' shift in perspective was evident in the choices they made. The color choices, including shades of green, red, purple, yellow, white, and accents of dark brown, indicated positioning, while the external element integrated into the composition prompted a departure from the comfort zone. Blue, the color of balance and depth, is predominant in the four visual compositions (Figure 2).

The diverse color palette used by the participants reflects the complexity of the process of becoming aware of a shift in perspective and the willingness to explore beyond the limits of personal comfort or, phenomenologically, the 'natural attitude' (Husserl, 1983).



Fig. 1. Cut-out elements. Participants were invited to choose an element for their piece of work. They also indicated where the element should be placed in the picture.



Fig. 2. Pastels. The soft texture of the pastels allows contouring as well as blending in. They are optimal for designing visual art on paper in short time. Every participant chose several colors.



Fig. 3. Reflective moments during work in progress.



Fig. 4. Creating or changing perspective by actively engaging in the flow of making.



Fig. 5. Predefined sketch of a linear perspective before working on the visual composition.



Fig. 6. Aspects after the completion of the visual composition by workshop participant no 1.



Fig. 7. Freely chosen and embedded detail (see right side of fig.6)



Fig. 8. Predefined sketch of a linear perspective before working on the visual composition.



Fig. 9. Aspect after the completion of the visual composition by workshop participant no. 2.



Fig. 10. Freely chosen and embedded detail (see right side of fig.9)



Fig. 11. Predefined sketch of a linear perspective before working on the visual composition.



Fig. 12. Aspect after the completion of the visual composition by workshop participant no. 3.



Fig. 13. Freely chosen and embedded detail (see left side of fig.12)



Fig. 14. Predefined sketch of a linear perspective before working on the visual composition.



Fig. 15. Aspects after the completion of the visual composition by workshop participant no. 4.



Fig. 16. Freely chosen and embedded detail (see left side of fig.15)

7 Conclusions

The development of effective leadership involves the integration of multiple perspectives, analogous to the way artists explore different forms of representation. Cognitive flexibility and the capacity for reinterpretation become essential competences in complex contexts.

In education, combining traditional methods with creative approaches contributes to the development of critical thinking and innovation. Art thus proves to be a valuable resource for shaping transformational leadership models.

In the context of leadership, this transversal vision suggests the necessity of combining the rational and the creative dimensions, valuing diverse perspectives for effective and innovative leadership.

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