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Teaching MBAs Aesthetic Agency Through Dance

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Abstract

Within these pages we offer a theoretical argument for how aesthetic reflexivity and agency in management practice can be developed using dance exercises. We build our argument on Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge and on simulation theories from the area of embodied cognition. In short, we argue that engaging with dance exercises can give managers new bodily experiences they can use as means to develop more skilful knowing and doing in their managerial practice. We further argue that the consequences of employing new bodily experiences as means for achieving skilful knowing and doing cannot be adequately predicted, but must, at least in part, be discovered through use.

Looking at implications for facilitators, using dance exercises in this way, we suggest that conversations during and after dance interventions can focus on identifying what sensory experiences the participating managers are attracted to using as new means for skilful knowing and doing. We also suggest that follow-up interviews could focus on discovering the consequences of using these new means.

This way of using dance exercises in management education is rarely discussed in current literature. Current literature predominantly focuses on using dance exercises to unearthing personal habits, beliefs and exemplifying "good" leadership practice.

Keywords: Aesthetic agency; dance; management education; reflexivity.

Teaching MBAs Aesthetic Agency Through Dance

In this paper, we propose that dance exercises can be used in management education to develop managers aesthetic reflexivity and agency (Springborg and Sutherland, 2014; Sutherland, 2013). We propose that we can get an understanding of how this can happen by drawing on Polanyi's ideas of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1969, 1974) and the way these ideas are supported by simulation theories from the field of Embodied Cognition (Barsalou, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Wilson, 2002). Drawing on these theories we also consider implications for facilitators using dance exercises for the purpose of developing aesthetic reflexivity and agency.

Before we proceed, we overview our use of the concepts "dance", "aesthetic", "aesthetic reflexivity", and "aesthetic agency".

We use the word "dance" to refer to movement exercises used in the teaching of modern dance and couples dances, which are currently being used in management development. These exercises are designed to generate understanding of how the human body moves individually and in connection with other bodies. We are interested in how the experiences of engaging in such exercises may be used by managers to improve their managerial practice. Some of these exercises are also used to teach, for example, yoga, acrobatics, and martial arts. We do not use the word "dance" to refer to a specific social practice. Thus, the topic of this paper is not the impact of the socially constructed meanings of dance as a social (and cultural) practice. While topics, such as, the appropriateness of dance exercises in cultural contexts; the impact on management education of gender implications of dance as social practice; the framing of exercises as dance or movement, etc. are all interesting, they are not the focus of this paper.

Elaborated below, we use the term "aesthetic" to refer to the felt, sensory aspects of experience. This may include, but is not limited to, the felt, sensory aspects of emotions. We do not use "aesthetic" to refer to aesthetic judgement and the placing of experience in various aesthetic categories, such as beautiful, ugly, comical, or dreary. By "aesthetic reflexivity" we refer not only to the ability to be aware of the aesthetics of everyday life and include such awareness into one's knowing. We use it to refer to the process of discovering the consequences of using different sensory experiences as the tacit knowledge upon which we ground our skilful knowing and doing. Thus, this way of defining aesthetic reflexivity naturally includes an aspect of "aesthetic agency", i.e. the skilful doing, which is enabled by using specific aesthetic experiences as tacit knowledge to act in and with the world around us. A crucial prerequisite of developing aesthetic reflexivity and agency is the ability to sense and distinguish sensory states.

In the following, we first review the literature on reflection, reflexivity, and aesthetic reflexivity as these concepts have developed in the field of management education. We do this to substantiate the need for developing managerial aesthetic agency and the lack of methods for doing so. Next we look at the literature on dance and management education. We argue that dance in this literature is mostly used to produce data for reflecting on ones own practice and/or to formulate ideas about good leadership practice.

Next, we link Polanyi's ideas of tacit knowledge with Embodied Cognition's idea of the body as the root of all cognitive processes. We do so to make three propositions. First, that when managers have new bodily experiences, such experiences can support new skilful knowing and doing in relation to a broad range of managerial tasks. Second, that dance offers rare occasions where the body is placed in focal awareness and, thus, a place where new bodily experiences may be obtained. Third, that the consequences of adopting a new bodily

experience as the foundation for skilful knowing and doing in a managerial context cannot be adequately predicted, but has the potential to produce a continuous process of discovery. The process of adopting various sensory experiences as grounds for achieving skilful knowing and doing and discovering the consequences of doing this is what we, in this paper, call aesthetic reflexivity and agency. After putting forth these propositions, we consider the implication of each proposition for facilitators using dance for management education.

To illustrate how the dance may be used in management education, we then offer a brief example from our own practice of using dance to teach aesthetic agency within an executive MBA program delivered at an internationally recognized and accredited European business school.

We acknowledge that there are many other valuable ways of using dance exercises in management education. We round off the paper by considering this particular way of using dance in management education in a broader context.

Reflection, reflexivity, and aesthetics

Within this theoretical overview we clarify, in line with the work of other scholars, what we mean by reflection, reflexivity, and aesthetics with respect to management development and management practice. Furthermore, we argue that when the aesthetic dimension is introduced into reflexivity, it becomes important to develop one's ability to perceive and distinguish between sensory states. This is a prerequisite for engaging in aesthetic reflexivity.

Development practitioners and researchers have increasingly called attention to the need for reflection and reflexivity. This has been argued both in terms of learning and development as well as in managerial practice (Boud, Keogh, and Walker, 1985; Chia, 1996; Cunliffe, 2002, 2004, 2009; Gray, 2007; Keevers and Treleaven, 2011; Reynolds, 1998; Segal, 2010). However, though they are sometimes treated as synonymous, the meanings are quite different.

As Cunliffe (2002) succinctly puts it, whereas "... reflection is often seen as a systematic thought process concerned with simplifying experience ... reflexivity means complexifying thinking or experience by exposing contradictions, doubts, dilemmas, and possibilities" (Cunliffe, 2002: 38). Reflexivity is a means of "... reassessing the way one has posed problems and one's orientation to perceiving, believing and acting", which may encourage more transformational development outcomes (Gray, 2007: 497). What we discuss in this paper is reflexivity, the complexifying of thinking to better sense, understand and act upon contradictions, doubts, dilemmas and possibilities. The specific realm of reflexivity, and ultimately agency, we are interested in is the aesthetic – the felt, sensory aspects of experience, which include the felt, sensory aspects of emotion (as opposed to the meanings often associated with specific emotions).

Aesthetic reflexivity exists at two levels. Aesthetic reflexivity relating to the sensory aspects of our experience – external as well as internal, and aesthetic reflexivity relating to how we use sensory experience to achieve skilful knowing and doing in management practice. Our main focus in this paper is on the second level.

On the first level, managers may include aesthetic experiences triggered by a specific situation in their reflexivity relating to that situation. For example, in relating to planning a meeting or organizing departmental workflow, managers may include observations on sounds, temperature, rhythm of movement, types of movements, and so on.

Extending reflexivity to include the aesthetic realm is important because the felt, sensory and emotional aspects of everyday life have grown in importance with respect to how we configure ourselves in the world and how we act in the world. Discussed by eminent social thinkers as heightened perspectival and circumstantial incongruity, these act as increased pressures on individual selves, as well as on groups, requiring us to frequently adapt and reconfigure ourselves and our actions with relation to the world around us (Giddens, 1991, 2003; Lash and Urry, 1994). This is particularly the case for managers working across markets and international borders. Managers working in such areas are confronted with more differing perspectives and circumstances than ever before. They continuously experience different views of the world, organizations, business practice and more. They find themselves in widely differing situations populated by different individuals and groups that hold differing values, beliefs and in general ways of acting in the world. The international business trip – for example a European working with a manufacturer in central China – is a simple, yet evocative example of the type of perspectival and circumstantial incongruity to which we refer.

The concept of aesthetic reflexivity explains a primary means of sensemaking in the contemporary world. It is how we mobilise the aesthetic nature of our experiences to make sense and act within the increasing complexities of daily life and work. The information used for this sensemaking comes predominantly from the body. We use our bodies for sensing, perceiving and meaning making with what is going on around us. The body affords us the ability to collect information about a situation (our feelings, emotions and perceptions of what is occurring at any given moment) which we then use to consciously and unconsciously configure our agency in attempts to better align our actions with our intended purposes and outcomes.

This leads us to the second level of aesthetic reflexivity – the main focus of this paper. In the field of embodied cognition there is mounting empirical evidence that our cognition in general is in fact, grounded in bodily, sensory experience (Barsalou and Wiemer-Hastings, 2005; Barsalou, 2010). In other words, sensory experience is not merely the data we may be reflexive about, but also the tool we use when we are reflexive (Springborg and Ladkin, 2014; Springborg, 2015). Thus, managers may familiarize themselves with bodily movement patterns, postures, and interactions in order to develop their ability to use such sensory knowledge to probe more in depth the abstract concepts of relevance to their managerial practice. For example, many leaders think about “leading” in terms of the physical interaction of one body dragging another body in a specific direction. This will enable certain ways of achieving skilful knowing and doing as a leader. However, through dance exercises, managers may experience leading as a matter of using body postures to open a space for the follower to step into, or as a matter of using the combined structure of two bodies to give a small but clear direction, allowing the follower to be the one supplying energy for his own movement (in opposition to the situation where the leader drags the follower and, hence, uses his own energy to move the follower). Thus, through dance exercises, managers may become familiar with a broader range of bodily, sensory experiences, which he can use to achieve skilful knowing and doing in management practice. A similar argument could be made for other abstract concepts relevant to managers, such as problem solving or relationship building.

A prerequisite for engaging in both types of aesthetic reflexivity is the development of the ability to perceive and distinguish between sensory states. Without this ability, a manager could not include subtle differences in the tone of a colleague’s voice or in the body postures of employees or customers in her reflexivity (level one). Without this ability, a manager could not use experiences of subtle differences in interactions between two bodies in motion to achieve skilful knowing and doing in management of his practice (level two).

In contemporary management discourse, the principal focus in our development agendas and methodologies is still upon analytical rationalism, despite the recognition of its limits. Here we come to the heart of our agenda. We seek a way of strengthening our development and practice abilities through foregrounding aesthetic reflexivity and agency in management practice. Methods that are commonly used in management education – largely centred on case studies and self-assessment tools – are not adequate for developing these abilities. Though they are very valuable in many respects, they prove inadequate in developing managers' sensory capacities and, thus, their aesthetic reflexivity and agency.

By contrast, in art education a great deal of attention is given to development of sensory capacities, i.e. to developing the ability to sense and distinguish between different sensory states. Painters learn to perceive and distinguish subtle changes in colour and texture; dancers learn to distinguish between subtle changes in body posture, musicians between timbres and chord structures, etc. Here sensory capacities are developed through activities specifically devoted to this. We suggest that developing sensory capacity in management education, as in art education, can be achieved through activities specifically designed for this purpose. This is the potential we see for the use of dance exercises in management education. Such exercises offer a means to develop the ability to perceive and distinguish between sensory states, such as physical positions and movements of interacting bodies, which are particularly useful for achieving skilful knowing and doing related to leading and following.

In what follows we review existing work on dance, leadership and management education. We claim that much of the dance in management literature, and consequently the development activities leveraging dance, focuses primarily on using dance to provide input for reflective conversations revealing "bad habits" in the managers own practice or to formulate ideas about good management practice in general. In so doing, we risk going too quickly to conclusions about learning outcomes and, thus, missing out on the possibility of developing managers' aesthetic reflexivity as described above.

Dance and leadership

In this section, we'll review the literature on the use of dance in management education. We argue that there is an underlying concern with either revealing "bad habits" of participating managers or formulating ideas about good leadership practice. The creation of experiences, which can be used as tacit knowledge to achieve skilful knowing and doing is largely absent.

As a starting point, dance has been used to highlight that skills must be learned with and through practice: "An individual cannot learn to dance just by reading about dance, just as a person cannot learn to be an effective manager only by reading books" (Stumpf and Dutton, 1990: 7). However, this argument hardly justifies the use of dance in particular. Any craft, from wood carving to pottery to welding, could be used to make the same point – as could riding a bike.

Secondly, dance as a social practice has been used as metaphor, highlighting various aspects of leadership (Ehrich and English, 2013; Ropo and Sauer, 2008). For example, Ropo and Sauer (2008) explore how they can use their contrasting ideas about two dance forms (waltz vs. dancing at techno raves) as metaphors for different approaches to leadership. This type of metaphorical use of dance is more particular to dance. It builds on dance's natural relations to issues of leading and following and as such offers a good metaphorical source domain for understanding leadership and followership. However, the use of dance as metaphor is problematic, primarily because metaphors are the use of a *more familiar* domain to create understanding of a *less familiar* domain (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), and for most managers

(and scholars studying management education) it is reasonable to assume that leadership is a more familiar domain than dance. The use of dance as metaphor may at first glance seem to be inspirational, but it runs the risk of misusing dance as a screen onto which one may project pre-conceived ideas about leadership. Without having substantial, physical experience with actual dance, our ideas about various dance forms are not a good source domain for metaphors of leadership.

Thirdly, some scholars and practitioners in the field of management education have taken the use of dance beyond the immediate metaphor. They have created and researched teaching sessions involving direct experience of dance – either through watching dancers work (Kerr and Lloyd, 2008), using dance exercises to frame discussions of topics relevant to leaders (Ludevig, this issue; Matzdorf and Sen, this issue; Powell and Gifford, this issue) participating in dance classes (Peterson and Williams, 2004) or even through asking students to create their own choreography and, thus, learn about principles of facilitating work commonly used by choreographers (Bozic and Olsson, 2013). In such sessions, dance is often still used as metaphor, in the sense that concrete experiences with dancing and learning dance are used to facilitate reflective conversations about leadership. But the source domain of the metaphor is made more familiar through giving the students concrete and common experiences with dance within the teaching sessions.

Such sessions may well generate surprising and important new insights. For example, Kerr and Lloyd (2008: 494–495) state that participants, after having watched a choreographer develop a dance piece together with a group of dancers, were reminded of various important aspects of their work as leaders. This led to discussions about how leaders and their team have shared ownership of the products and about what degree the directiveness of the leader/choreographer is enabling or inhibiting creative work. Peterson and Williams (2004) mention how participating in a dance class taught students about how visible you are as a leader and that it is important to admit your mistakes to avoid setting bad examples, that leaders teach by example, and that leaders sometimes must encourage others to lead and teach them. Bozic and Olsson (2013) studied the creative process of contemporary dancers and choreographers and formulated “five key elements that support their creative process from idea to performance. These elements or categories are improvisation, reflection, personal involvement, diversity, and emergent structures” (Bozic and Olsson, 2013: 59). In turn, Bozic and Olsson facilitate workshops where these five elements are explored by leading participants through a process of creating their own choreography.

All of these examples show how various dance exercises are used to facilitate conversations with the goal of formulating ideas about good leadership practice.

Springborg and Sutherland (2014) used simple dance exercises from contact improvisation and tango to facilitate conversations, which were not directly oriented towards formulating ideas about good leadership, but rather towards increasing “participants’ awareness of their (often unconscious) patterns relating to leading and following in their own work life.” (Springborg and Sutherland, 2014: 43). This way of using dance exercises made visible “that lack of trust and anticipation of aggression and judgment seem to permeate leadership and followership in action for many of the participants ... [and] made them reluctant to spend time on sensing.” (Springborg and Sutherland, 2014: 43).

Using dance in management education to facilitate increased self-awareness may be valuable in revealing managers’ “bad habits” and make visible the negative impact on their managerial practice. However, this may or may not facilitate the adoption of new bodily, sensory experiences as the ground for skilful knowing and doing in managerial practice, i.e. development of aesthetic agency.

Within the fields of dance therapy and cognitive science a number of studies have been conducted linking dance with more general learning. Hervey (2007) reviews studies linking dance to development of ethical decision-making; Sevdalis and Keller (2011) review the main findings of empirical studies linking dance and the development of social cognition; and Ribeiro and Fonseca (2011) provide a systematic review of linking dance to the development of shared decision-making. There is ample evidence that engaging with dance does promote learning in areas of relevance to managers, particularly with respect to the work emerging from the field of embodied cognition.

In the rest of the paper, we explore how the concept of tacit knowledge and embodied cognition can provide insight into how dance exercises can be used to develop managers' aesthetic reflexivity and agency. We begin by making some clear definitions of concepts often used in the field of dance and management education.

Aesthetic, embodied, or tacit knowledge?

We have chosen to use the concept of *tacit knowledge* to explore how dance exercises may support the development of managers' aesthetic reflexivity and agency. For the sake of clarity, we proceed by distinguishing tacit knowledge, that which is our focus, from two similar concepts often used in the literature on dance in management education: Embodied knowledge and aesthetic knowledge. All three, aesthetic, embodied, and tacit knowledge, have grown out of different discussions around the process of knowing. Each concept, consequently, brings focus to different aspects of the effects the use of dance exercises can have in management education.

The discussion of aesthetic knowledge (Taylor and Hansen, 2005) focuses on *producing* and *expressing* knowledge about "aesthetic issues", such as, "the direct sensory experience of day-to-day reality in organizations" (Taylor and Hansen, 2005: 1217) or what a specific workplace feels like to employees (Warren, 2002). In the work of Baumgarten and Vico aesthetic knowledge is defined as knowledge arising directly from lived sensory experience (Taylor and Carboni, 2008). For example, once you have eaten an apple, you know what that apple tasted like; knowledge arising directly from your sensory experience of tasting the apple. Because aesthetic knowledge arises directly from sensory experience, expressing it becomes a significant challenge. How could I communicate the knowledge I have gained about the taste of an apple, the feeling of my workplace, or the sensory experience of day-to-day reality in my organization? Based on Langer's work (Langer, 1951, 1953), it is often argued that to express knowledge about aesthetic issues, it is necessary to use artistic forms rather than discursive forms. Simply put, a photograph, a painting, a piece of music, or a gesture is better suited to express knowledge about aesthetic issues than discursive forms, such as, rational language. One could say that a picture is worth a thousand words – in particular when it comes to aesthetic topics. Thus, drawing on the concept of aesthetic knowledge brings focus to how the aesthetic form of dance (the arrangement of bodily movements) is able to express knowledge about aesthetic issues. Though this is very interesting, it is not our topic of interest in this paper.

The concept of embodied knowledge is used differently by different authors. In relation to dance and management education specifically, and the literature on arts/aesthetics and organization more generally, embodied knowledge is often used to refer to knowledge "in the body" as opposed to knowledge "in the head" or more precisely knowing *how* to do something with the body as opposed to knowing about something (e.g. the discussion on workers feeling the roof they work on, Strati, 1999). An individual may know all about bicycles, yet be unable to ride a bike. An individual may know all about leadership theory, yet be unable to lead.

Authors using the concept of embodied knowledge in this way often equate it with tacit knowledge (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009), and further aligning it with aesthetic knowledge as it is derived from direct sensory experience (e.g. Taylor, 2008). Atkinson (2008) proposed a distinction between embodied knowledge and aesthetic knowledge by stating that “[a] state of presence is embodied knowledge. In this respect, knowledge arising from the sense of presence is in the same category, and inextricably linked to, the ‘aesthetic knowledge’ arising from the other sense faculties” (Atkinson, 2008: 1082). Atkinson (2008) using this distinction, also sees embodied knowledge as a know how, but specifically “concerning our place in the order of things that constitutes our sense of reality and our place in the world” (Atkinson, 2008: 1082). Using the concept of embodied knowledge (in the sense knowing how to do something) to look at dance in management education brings into focus learning how to do things. This also beckons questions, such as, what skills can be learned in dance, which are useful to managers? Can skills learned in the context of dance be transferred to the context of management work in organizations? Whereas these are interesting questions, the topic of this paper is specifically on teaching aesthetic reflexivity and agency. For this specific inquiry, the concept of embodied knowledge as described above has little to offer.

However, the concept of embodied knowledge is closely related to the concept of embodied cognition. This offers the opportunity for a different way of speaking about embodied knowing. There are many different views on what it means for cognition to be embodied (Wilson, 2002). According to Wilson (2002) the most radical and interesting view on the embodied nature of cognition is that all concepts – including abstract concepts – are grounded in reactivations in the sensory-motor centres in the brain. For example, the sensory experience of moving towards or away from an object is used to ground our concepts of “liking” or “disliking” something. Both something one could actually move towards or away from, for example a specific product; and something which has no definite physical presence, such as liking or disliking an idea or a proposed organizational strategy. This means that all knowledge is embodied, in the sense that all knowledge is grounded in reactivations of sensory experience. This way of speaking about embodied knowing brings focus on questioning what sensory experiences various types of knowledge are grounded in. This is highly relevant when speaking about aesthetic reflexivity and agency. We return to this question in the following section.

The concept of tacit knowledge is also used differently by different authors. It is sometimes used simply to refer to unconscious knowledge, i.e. knowledge, which has not yet been formulated. For example, a manager may know how to make a new employee feel welcome, but he may be unaware of how he uses his body language to achieve this. However, this manager could in principle be made aware of this – possibly through the use of artistic media – as discussed in relation to aesthetic knowledge. Tacit knowledge is sometimes used to refer to unconscious knowledge, which *cannot* be made conscious. For example, you may know how to ride a bicycle, but you cannot become fully aware of the complex processes of using body weight, the angle of the handlebar, and the speed of pedalling to keep balance and determine direction and velocity.

However, according to Polanyi, the concept of tacit knowledge expresses much more than the fact that in achieving skilful doing we use knowledge that we cannot become fully aware of. Tacit knowledge also emphasizes that

1. In achieving skilful knowing and doing, we commit to using specific experiences as tools for this knowing and doing. For example, to achieve the skill of riding a bicycle, we use our (aesthetic) knowledge of centrifugal force, gravity, and the relationship between pedalling and forward velocity.

2. The experiences we use as tools in acts of skilful knowing and doing must necessarily reside from our focal awareness. When we ride a bicycle, we are only aware of centrifugal and gravitational forces, through our awareness of riding the bike.
3. The consequences of committing to the use of particular experiences as tools are, at least in part, a journey of discovery, and cannot be predicted at the outset.

The first of these points is consistent with, and even expanded by, the concept of embodied knowledge when used to underscore that all knowledge is grounded in sensory experience. However, the two following points are not highlighted by either the concepts of aesthetic or embodied knowledge. In the following, we will discuss what these three points can contribute to our understanding of the use of dance exercises in management education.

Tacit knowledge and the body

Having differentiated the concepts of embodied, aesthetic and tacit knowledge, here attention is placed on using the concept of tacit knowledge to explore how dance exercises can be used in management education to facilitate the development of aesthetic reflexivity and agency. We draw both on Polanyi's original description of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1969, 1974) and on the way empirical research in the field of embodied cognition (Barsalou, 2008; Johnson, 2007) extends our understanding of tacit knowledge.

We develop three propositions about the mechanisms through which dance exercises may contribute to the development of aesthetic reflexivity and agency. Each proposition has implications for facilitators who use dance exercises for this purpose:

Proposition 1: If all skilful knowing and doing is ultimately grounded in bodily experiences, then having new bodily experiences may well support new forms of knowing and doing across a broad range of contexts – including the context of managerial work.

Proposition 2: The concept of tacit knowledge implies that experiences of the body are employed in virtually all acts of knowing and doing. Therefore, the body (at least as long as it is healthy) resides in peripheral awareness. We propose that dance exercises offer a unique opportunity for managers to place their own bodies in focal awareness and thus may get more detailed experiences of the body, which they in turn can use to develop their acts of skilful knowing and doing. Therefore, it is crucial for facilitators to focus on giving managers *time* to have such sensory experience, building the bodily, sensory knowledge. Going too quickly to reflecting on what can be learned from the experience may limit the learning potential.

Proposition 3: Polanyi claims that it is not possible to predict the consequences of employing particular bodily experiences in our acts of skilful knowing and doing. Such consequences must be discovered over time as one uses these bodily experiences. We propose that the benefits of using the bodily experiences gained through dance exercises to achieve skilful knowing and doing as a manager cannot be adequately predicted, but must also be discovered over time in the workplace. Therefore, it is important for facilitators to support such a process of discovery. In particular, it is important to avoid instilling in participants limiting, preconceived ideas about learning outcomes. Formulating fixed ideas about the effects of a dance exercise on a manager's work life, may prevent the on-going process of discovery.

We now look in detail at these propositions and their practical implications for facilitators.

Body as tool in skilful knowing and doing: Polanyi claimed that we explore the world by probing it with systems we know well and that these systems when used in this way necessarily have to recede to a peripheral awareness. We are only aware of them through our awareness of the thing we are using them to probe, which we hold in our focal awareness. For example, the carpenter may hold the nail in his focal awareness and only be aware of the hammer (and his own hand and arm holding the hammer) as something providing him with information about the nail. He may use this information to direct his next blow driving the nail straight into the wood. Polanyi writes:

I regard knowing as an active comprehension of the things known, an action that requires skill. Skilful knowing and doing is performed by subordinating a set of particulars, as clues or tools, to the shaping of a skilful achievement, whether practical or theoretical. We may then be said to become "subsidiarily aware" of these particulars within our "focal awareness" of the coherent entity that we achieve. Clues and tools are things used as such and not observed in themselves. (Polanyi, 1974: vii)

It is an important point that the elements used as clues and tools are something not observed in them selves. Polanyi furthermore points out that this is particularly true for our bodies:

Our body is the only assembly of things known almost exclusively by relying on our awareness of them for attending to something else ... Every time we make sense of the world, we rely on our tacit knowledge of impacts made by the world on our body and the complex responses of our body to these impacts. (Polanyi, 1969, pp. 147–148)

The above quote suggests that Polanyi is thinking about the body serving the function of tool mainly during physical interaction with the world. This claim has been empirically confirmed through studies in the field of embodied cognition. For example, Kosslyn *et al.* (2001) asked participants to determine whether one picture of a 3D model was a rotated or a rotated mirror image of another picture of the same 3D model. They showed that the participants used their experience of physically grabbing and turning the model as tool to answer this question. For reviews of similar experiments exploring embodied cognition relating to physical interactions see Wilson (2002), Barsalou (2008), and Bergen (2012).

Interestingly enough, the empirical studies done on embodied cognition suggest we use bodily, sensory experiences, not only in acts of knowing and doing related to physical interactions (as in the above case with the 3D model), but also in acts of knowing and doing relating to purely abstract concepts (Barsalou, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Wilson, 2002). One source of evidence for this comes from the systematic analysis of metaphors commonly used in natural languages (Grady, 2007; Johnson, 2007; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 1999). For example, when we speak or think about a challenge as something *we just have to get through*, we use the bodily experience of moving through something to understand how we can act in relationship to the challenge. When speaking of a future meeting as *approaching too fast*, we use the bodily experience of a physical object moving towards us with a particular velocity to understand our relationship to both time and the meeting. Similarly, when we speak about the abstract concept of "learning" as an act of either *grasping* something or *seeing* something, we use bodily experiences of physically grasping objects or visually noticing them to understand what 'learning' is. Numerous experiments in neuroscience support the claim that the appearance of such metaphors in language indeed is a sign that we use bodily, sensory experiences in our skilful knowing and doing related to both concrete and abstract concepts. For further examples of this literature see Barsalou (2010) and Lakoff (2012).

This body of research, both with respect to concrete and abstract concepts, holds that we employ experiences of our bodies in all our acts of knowing and doing. This has two consequences of importance to management education. First, if we use bodily experiences in all our acts of knowing and doing – including knowing and doing relating to managerial work – then having new bodily experiences may well support new forms of knowing and doing across a broad range of contexts – including the contexts of managerial work. Second, because we use the body in all acts of knowing and doing, the body almost always recedes to peripheral awareness. Dance exercises are events where we place our body in focal awareness and, thus, get the opportunity to develop our ability to sense and distinguish between more bodily states – i.e. “upgrade” our main tool for knowing and acting.

Our knowledge of our body will affect how well we can know and act. If the carpenter has limited knowledge about how the system of his arm, hand, and hammer works, it limits his ability to drive the nail home. Similarly, a manager’s ability to engage with managerial tasks may well be limited by what bodily experiences she has had and thus can employ in her acts of knowing and acting relating to such tasks. To illustrate this, consider a manager’s ability to lead others, i.e. her skilful knowing and doing related to leadership and followership. If managers use bodily experiences of pulling or pushing objects or of being pulled or pushed by something or someone this may offer a specific range of possible acts of knowing and doing. The dance exercises offer a place where managers can have many other experiences, which could be used to ground skilful knowing and doing related to leading others. For example, managers can experience how to indicate direction through small but clear impulses or how to indicate movement by using their bodies to create spaces for followers to move into while simultaneously using their bodies to block other directions. Such experiences may well support a different range of skilful knowing and doing related to leading. In particular, using the experience of pushing and pulling helps managers find ways of leading in which they draw upon their own energy to overcome perceived inertia or resistance. In contrast, experiencing the use of the body to create spaces for followers to enter into affords managers ways of leading where they use the energy of followers, rather than their own.

This proposition implies that facilitators using dance in management education should make sure that managers take time to have bodily experiences. Having experiences takes time. If managers too quickly begin drawing conclusions and thinking about what they can learn they may miss immersing themselves in the actual experience. This danger has been pointed out by authors in the field of art-based methods in management education (e.g. Seeley and Reason, 2008).

Additionally, because we use the body as the base of understanding our world, it recedes into the background and we no longer explore it – i.e. we no longer develop our knowledge of the tool we use to achieve skilful knowing and doing. This receding of the body into the background poses a great challenge to the task of developing aesthetic reflexivity and agency, as it prevents the development of increased ability to sense and distinguish between bodily states – the main prerequisite for developing aesthetic reflexivity and agency. Johnson (2007) has argued that the (in)famous body-mind split is, in fact, an effect of (and evidence of) our use of the body as tool to achieve skilful knowing and doing in virtually all contexts – from the most concrete and physical to the most abstract.

This implies that facilitators must make sure managers for a time forget about their managerial issues and place their own bodies in focal awareness. As long as managers hold specific managerial issues in focal awareness, the experience of the body will, at least in part, recede to peripheral awareness – to the degree it is reserved for sustaining awareness of the

organisational issue. Again, the implication is that it is important to give managers time to simply have the experience.

Discovering true implications of increased bodily knowledge: Also prominent in Polanyi's work is the premise that once one commits to using a particular element as a tool for skilful knowing and doing, the truth that arises from this commitment is something one discovers over time:

... the personal participation of the knower in all acts of understanding [...] does not make our understanding subjective. Comprehension is neither an arbitrary act nor a passive experience, but a responsible act claiming universal validity. Such knowing is indeed objective in the sense of establishing contact with a hidden reality; a contact that is defined as the condition for anticipating an *indeterminate range of yet unknown (and perhaps yet inconceivable) true implications*. It seems reasonable to describe this fusion of the personal and the objective as Personal Knowledge. (Polanyi, 1974, pp. vii–viii, italics added)

Polanyi relates several examples from the evolution of science where new theories are proposed and accepted because they seem to hold a *promise* of being able to generate new knowledge. In these examples, the implications of committing to a new theory of reality are not predictable – not even by the creators of these theories. The true implications are discovered sometimes centuries after committing to the theory.

In a similar way, a manager can have new bodily experiences through dance exercises, which he in turn uses to understand a particular managerial challenge faced. Instead of thinking about implementation of a new workflow as a matter of dragging employees to a new place, he may think about it as a task of opening spaces the employees can move into, or a task of identifying and eliminating friction in the new workflow. Referring to Polanyi, it may be difficult to adequately predict, straight after the exercises, the consequences of committing to such a different set of bodily experiences as tools for skilful knowing and doing in relationship to this particular managerial task or challenge. The full range of consequences would be something for the manager to discover over time back at the workplace.

For facilitators, this implies that having the expectation that learning can be fully formulated immediately after the exercises may lead to the manager formulating trivial insights. And even if relevant and profound insights are formulated immediately after the workshop, the manager may get the sense that what could be learned has been learned. This may then stop the manager from committing to using the new sensory experiences as tool and, thus, from discovering what benefits he may get from such a commitment over time. In short, this may impede the development of aesthetic reflexivity and agency.

Teaching aesthetic agency through dance at an Executive MBA program

To help elucidate these theoretical considerations, this penultimate section describes the first day of a two-day workshop, lead by the authors, on an Executive MBA (EMBA) program at an internationally recognized and accredited business school in Europe. The workshop mobilized dance, music, and choral conducting as means of developing participants' aesthetic agency.

At this point it is worth mentioning that both authors, as the facilitators of this workshop, have considerable professional credentials and experience in music, choral conducting, dance and dance education. We are also experienced leadership development professionals and researchers. However, none of the EMBA students were professionally trained in these disciplines, nor was the workshop intended to help the students become dancers or

conductors. The goal was to provide a learning experience in which students could develop their aesthetic reflexivity and agency. The compliment of EMBA students, all of whom were practicing managers, was thirty-nine. They ranged in age from late twenties to early forties. The workshop occurred during the last module of their degree and as such they knew each other well, having been in class with each other for approximately 18 months. To support and encourage the experiential learning we as facilitators ensured the workshop was understood as a safe learning environment where all activities were completely voluntary.

The first workshop day was focused on dance – the second on choral conducting. Here we focus only on the first day, that of dance. During this day we took students through a number of exercises used for teaching tango and contact improvisation. These exercises were intended to afford the opportunity for participants to experience and work with the physical sensations of leading and following and to emerge their own innate reactions to leading, following, and in general interacting with others. Throughout, the aesthetics of these experiences, how individuals felt, sensed and emotionally reacted were brought to the fore. This was a complexifying of the relational dynamics of management and leadership by attending to the aesthetics of leading and following. Debate and discussion were used to unpack these experiences and to encourage awareness in the students of unconscious patterns relating to leading and following in their own work life – how they experience, from the standpoint of emotions, feelings and senses, what they do as practicing managers. At the same time the workshop was designed to allow the managers to immerse themselves in bodily experiences, providing them with as rich a sensory experience as possible, which they could engage and use.

In the following, we describe two of the exercises used and relate some of the ensuing conversations. The two exercises and the following conversations illustrate how dance exercises on one hand can be used to reveal “negative” habits of managers and how dance on the other hand can be used to create experiences which may serve as tacit knowledge in future acts of skilful knowing and doing in managerial practice.

One small step

The first exercise, which was introduced at the beginning of the day, was an exercise typically used in teaching tango. The goal was to explore physically how to give and receive clear directions. Participants were asked to go together in pairs and take a symmetrical dance embrace. The leader would then shift weight back and forth between right and left foot. The follower would follow these weight shifts. At some point the leader would stop on one foot and when they felt the follower had their weight on the same foot, they would lead one step. This step could either be straight back, straight forward or straight to the side.

Many participants struggled with this exercise. In particular, the leaders did not wait until they sensed that the follower was with them on the same foot before leading the step. The “impatience” the leaders exhibited in this exercise lead on to a conversation about a similar impatience the managers exhibited at their workplace – both when they gave tasks to employees and when they received tasks from their own bosses. At first this impatience was explained away by referring to time constraints. However, as the conversation continued other reasons came to the surface. Several articulated the belief that the longer they spent in their boss’ office when receiving a task, the greater the risk that this boss would give them instructions which would be hopeless and make their work unnecessarily difficult. Similarly, it revealed the belief that if they as managers spent too much time speaking to an employee about a task they wanted them to carry out, they would run the risk of the employee seeing them as an incompetent and condescending manager. In short, the conversation about the exercise made visible the mistrust and fear of judgment, which pervaded the managers’

experience of both relationship to bosses and to employees. This is an example of how simple dance exercises can reveal negative habits and make these available for critical questioning, e.g. are the beliefs true and are they helpful? However, the physical experience of the ease with which a step can be lead, if one leads it at the right time, when both parties are on the same foot, can also serve as an experience, which can be used to achieve skilful knowing and doing related to giving and receiving clear directions. This is the way of using dance exercises, which we in particular advocate in this paper.

Communicating with hands

The second exercise was the very last exercise introduced. It is an exercise useful when sufficient trust and safety has been built in the group, as it may feel quite unusual to most managers. In pairs, participants would stand in front of each other with their hands in front of them. One would notice his inner atmosphere (calm, agitated, happy, restless, etc.) and move his hands in a way congruent with this inner atmosphere. The movement would last for 10-15 seconds. The other partner would watch these hand movements and notice what kind of atmosphere they would evoke in him. Then he would move his hands in a manner congruent with this inner atmosphere. As part of the instruction for the exercise it was emphasised that the movements did not need to be miming or in any way carrying specific messages beyond the quality of the movement itself. Similarly, it was emphasised that the exercise was not meant as a therapeutic exercise and that the participants did not have to express anything they did not feel comfortable expressing. The goal of this exercise is to explore communication where there is congruency between inner atmosphere and outer expression, the ability to pay attention to emerging patterns, and allowing not knowing.

After the exercise one participant expressed how the exercise had given him a profound experience. He had experienced how a story with a clear red thread had emerged in the "conversation". He was struck by how coherently the story had evolved even though there had been no plan and even though he had never been able to guess how the exercise would evolve. He had simply known what to do each time his partner had stopped moving. He expressed that this experience had been unlike anything he had ever experienced before. It is reasonable to assume that such an experience has the potential to alter the way this participant achieves skilful knowing and doing in his management practice. Given the novelty and profoundness of the experience, it is, however, unlikely that the manager would be able to formulate the full range of consequences he will experience in the future when using this experience as the basis for achieving skilful knowing and doing in his managerial practice. We propose that facilitators can focus on encouraging emersion in such experiences combined with encouragement to discover the impact on managerial practice of having had such experiences over time.

Conclusion

As we have progressed through this work, we have used Polanyi's research on tacit knowledge and relevant empirical research from embodied cognition to make three propositions about how dance exercises can be used in management education to support the development of aesthetic reflexivity and agency. Furthermore, we have considered implications these propositions may have for facilitators who use dance exercises in management education.

We began by considering the use of the words "dance", "aesthetic", "aesthetic reflexivity", and "aesthetic agency". We used the word "dance" to refer to exercises used in dance teaching as a means to gain experience with how the body can move on its own and in connection with other bodies. Our focus, thus, is on exploration of movement, not on the

social practices of dance or on composing something beautiful or interesting in terms of art-performance. We used the word "aesthetic" to refer to sensory experience, not for example to aesthetic judgement – i.e. what is placed in aesthetic categories, such as, beautiful, ugly, comical, or dreary. We used "aesthetic reflexivity" to refer to complexifying of thought – as opposed to the simplification of reflection. By "aesthetic reflexivity" and "aesthetic agency" we referred to the exploration of bodily experiences as grounds for our skilful knowing and doing in the context of management practice.

The literature on the use of dance in management education was explored. We summarised this work as dominated by the use of dance exercises to either make managers habits visible so they can be critically reflected upon or to formulate ideas about good leadership practice. Thus, the use of dance exercises to develop aesthetic reflexivity and agency in the manner we define this, has not been explored.

We then argued that the concept of tacit knowledge, more than aesthetic or embodied knowledge, can throw light upon how dance exercises can be used to facilitate the development of aesthetic reflexivity and agency. In particular, we made three propositions and considered the implications for facilitators, who wish to use dance exercises in this way.

These propositions suggest that dance exercises are fertile occasions in which managers place their own bodies in focal awareness and thus may get more detailed experiences of the body, which they may use to develop their acts of knowing and doing. It is crucial for facilitators to focus on giving participants *time* to have such sensory experience, building the bodily, sensory knowledge. Going too quickly to reflecting on what can be learned from the experience may limit the learning potential. Furthermore, we proposed that it is not possible to fully predict the consequences of adopting particular bodily experiences to achieve skilful knowing and doing in our management practice. It is important for facilitators to support such discovery. In particular, we have made some critical remarks about the common practice of using reflective conversations as a means to extract learning from the experience of the dance exercises. Whereas, such conversations may serve the purpose of clarifying some of what has been learned, they also involve the risk of limiting the learning potential, either by downplaying the importance of simply having the bodily experiences and/or by instilling in managers fixed, predetermined ideas about learning outcomes. This may discourage managers from engaging in the process of discovering the consequences of committing to new bodily sensations as foundation for acts of knowing and doing.

At the same time, it is worth mentioning that for leadership developers it is of key importance to convince their clients of the value of their educational service. For example, using dance as an inspirational metaphor may achieve this by creating intellectually stimulating insights or by giving managers new, colourful vocabulary (to describe old convictions?). Similarly, using dance exercises to reveal managers' bad habits and make the consequences of such habits plainly visible is also something clients may readily perceive as valuable. The process we are suggesting necessitates a larger commitment from the managers both in terms of time and in terms of "faith", as the benefits emerge over time. Thus, this may be a harder sell for a leadership development professional.

A related topic worth considering is the topic of transferability of learning. Can something learned in the context of dance exercises be transferred to the context of management practice? As mentioned earlier in the paper, this question is very pertinent when dance exercises are used to learn specific skills, which supposedly are relevant to managerial practice. It may be easy to argue that using dance to learn about what one communicates through bodily posture is transferable to the organizational context. However, such argumentation may limit the scope for the use of dance to learning about specific skills, which

are already recognized as important to managers. Similarly, if one formulates ideas about good management practice (including the giving up of particular bad habits) at the end of the workshop, it can be argued that the managers leave the workshop with a clear idea about what to do differently, and that this facilitates the transfer of learning from the workshop context to the context of the organization. However, even if the manager has a clear understanding of what to do differently and is convinced of the rightness of making certain behavioural changes in their managerial practice, there is no guarantee that they have had the bodily experiences needed to engage in this new skilful knowing and doing.

The argument in embodied cognition withstanding, that experiences of the body are used in all acts of skilful knowing and doing, it is reasonable to assume that bodily experiences learned in the context of dance can indeed be used in the context of management practice, i.e. that such learning is transferable.

In embodied cognition it is claimed that sensory experiences of the body are used as tacit knowledge to achieve skilful knowing and doing across a broad range of contexts. For example, the experience of the vertical dimensions up-down, are used to organize knowing and doing in contexts as different as:

- Emotional life – where good emotions are up and bad ones down
- Levels of abstraction – abstract is up and concrete is down
- Profundity – deep is profound and up is superficial
- Organizational hierarchies – CEO's are at the top and entry level positions at the bottom

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that sensory body experiences learned in the context of dance exercises can be used to achieve skilful knowing and doing in the context of management practice. However, it may well involve an ongoing process of discovery to become aware of the effects.

In conclusion let us move to broaden these considerations to the use of art in general. Aviv (2014) writes that: "abstract art frees our brain from the dominance of reality, enabling it to flow within its inner states, create new emotional and cognitive associations, and activate brain-states that are otherwise harder to access". These effects are effects of experiencing abstract art – not analysing it or talking about it. Springborg and Ladkin also emphasize this point when they write: "making art which explores new sensory-motor activation patterns can be seen as a process through which the individual discovers and familiarizes himself with these possible patterns" (Springborg and Ladkin, 2014: 1). Thus, whereas dance exercises may offer an opportunity to familiarize oneself with bodily experiences related to movement, other forms of abstract art may facilitate the familiarization with bodily states, which are not necessarily related to movement. Thus, engaging with abstract art beyond dance may provide us with an even broader range of sensory experiences we can use to achieve skilful knowing and doing. If such sensory experiences truly are the foundation of even our most abstract concepts, the artist is indeed a pioneer of human cognition.

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