

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores and illustrates how arts based educational experiences facilitate the development of executive students' leadership and consequently influence their professional practice. In this research project empirical interview, observational and questionnaire data is collected at the IEDC Bled School of Management, an institution with particular expertise and experience in using arts-based methods for leadership development. Research participants come from three generations of Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) students and one group of students from an Early Career Managers program, participating in choral conducting masterclasses as part of their leadership development journey. Two individual cases of EMBA students are constructed based on follow-up interview data six and twelve months after their studies, as I follow them back to their work setting.

There is a growing body of research on arts based methodology in business education, but as Meisiek and Barry recently stated in *Scandinavian Journal of Management* "Very few scholars have attempted to study the use of art in the management classroom, its role in change management, or have followed an artist or manager close enough to look at practice." (Meisiek & Barry, 2014a, p. 6). There is a lack of empirical evidence in published studies about arts-based methodology used in management education. This dissertation contributes to this gap following a grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) approach to investigate these lacunae through observation of, and interviews with, participants of choral conducting masterclasses focused on their aesthetic experiences and leadership development. Participants described learning primarily in the organizational aesthetics vein, around the feelings, senses and emotional nature of organizational life, leadership, authenticity and the relational aspects of leadership.

This research project finds empirical support for many of the claims that arts based educational experiences facilitate leadership development in relevant ways. In particular, it provides insights into the conditions of arts-based learning with respect to the concept of climates of exploration. Leadership development and Human Resource (HR) professionals will find relevance in discussion of elements of climate of exploration like trust, role of the facilitator, framing conversations in the arts based class, the importance of community building in the classroom, the fun factor as well as practicing failure and uncertainty through arts based formats. These elements can be important factors in evaluation of offered programmes or when selecting providers of such programmes. This research contributes to the understanding of how learning with and through the arts happens as a process. Finally, it speaks to the broadening of participants' perspectives of leadership, business and organizational life – with respect to the embodied, aesthetic and socially constructed aspects of managing and leading. Research findings from part I of this dissertation, were partly published in *Advances in Developing Human Resources* (Sutherland & Jelinek, 2015).

Keywords: aesthetics, arts, management, leadership, development, education, experiential learning