Leadership as Collective Virtuosity

Working Paper 8
October 2001

MARK MAROTTO*
Research Associate

DR BART VICTOR**
Professor

DR JOHAN ROOS*
Director

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to extend the literature on transformational leadership. To this end we introduce the concept of collective virtuosity, the emergent expression of extreme aesthetic skill. The three main properties of collective virtuosity are that it can be invoked by anyone not just the appointed leader, it is a shared process, not an individual trait, and it does not embody intentions for the future. Collective virtuosity has the potential to expand possibilities, deepen sense of self, and create a sense of community. We begin by exploring the current state of transformational leadership within the neo-charismatic leadership paradigm. In doing so, we examine its source, namely Weber (1947). We then propose an alternative source of transformational leadership, that is, collective virtuosity. We do a historical survey of virtuosity, and build up the concept within organizational studies. And we finally apply this concept to explain phenomena such as "hot groups" (Leavitt & Lipman-Blumen, 1995).

Key Words

Virtuosity, emergence, aesthetics, neo-charismatic leadership, transformational leadership

Transformation can be simply beautiful. Take the case of choral singing, and the role of the choral conductor. His/her leadership task is clearly defined: lead an organization to sing beautiful choral music. Anyone who has been part of a choir, or any performing group for that matter, knows that the finished product, that is the performance, is the result of months of challenging and hard work.   Preparing a concert typically consists of coaching vocal technique, teaching notes, indicating textual nuance, correcting pronunciation, indicating dynamics, improving intonation, negotiating egos of "want-to-be" soloists, justifying choir of repertoire, and other such tasks. And this process repeats itself, rehearsal after rehearsal.   One might wonder, where's the art in such leadership? Perhaps the artful leadership is a myth, and conducting is merely just managing the choir by controlling the details.   Yet such a transactional approach seems counterintuitive, if not counterproductive, to the creation of art. Perhaps it's charisma?

The director of a Swiss community choir does not think so. Here's a story from a recent rehearsal, in his words:

We were all extremely tired, and all my efforts to release the mounting tension with a joke were useless. The sopranos simply could not laugh after I made them sing the vocally demanding passage for the 4th time during the last 10 minutes of our intense 2-hour rehearsal. I was not satisfied with the result, nor were they. The other 28 singers sat and listened, at first patiently. But they too, were becoming impatient and discouraged. 'Try supporting the sound more… don't use so much vibrato… raise your soft palette... imagine a darker sound…' so I encouraged and encouraged, time after time.

And I believe it was the 6th time, or perhaps I'm wrong and it was the 10th. Actually it doesn't matter. The 9 sopranos suddenly relinquished their struggle with the passage in question, and sang together as one rich, sublimely beautiful voice. The change was startling to all those who were present. I immediately started the piece from the beginning with the rest of the choir, and I heard them sing as I never heard them sing before. The 37 voices coalesced into one beautifully transparent sound that opened my heart with joy. The choir

had a sense of wholeness that transcended the harmonies they were producing. We all stood motionless, yet the music was dancing in sparkling vitality.

After rehearsal, I spoke with some of the sopranos. Alice was ecstatic and said, "I had no idea that we were capable of such a beautiful sound! Tonight we really surpassed our limits." Anne-Marie echoed this excitement and said, "I really believe tonight showed us not to set such low expectations, or any expectations for that matter. As a group we have transcended then all. I am thoroughly looking forward to next week's rehearsal." Daisy vividly described the actual moment when the choral sound was transformed, "I had just had enough! I kept trying to sing more beautifully, imagining every time what we should sound like. Yet it wouldn't happen, and it was driving me crazy. Finally, I just sang! And there it was. And it was beautiful."

Such dramatic moments do not occur all the time. In fact, according to the director, the following rehearsal resumed with the same routine tasks described above. However the group that was performing these tasks was somehow not the same. During the experience described above, the choir's performance exceeded expectations such that their sense of possibilities expanded. In freeing themselves from their preconceived notions of what their capabilities were, they left such an experience with a deeper appreciation and understanding of who they were, and what there purpose is. And this deeper understanding inevitably led to a stronger sense of community within the group, having all shared in such a powerful and transformative experience.

We are interested in what the source of this transformation is, particularly from a leadership perspective. And so we turn to the leadership literature, particularly that of the neo-charismatic leadership paradigm (House, 1977; Burns, 1978; Bass 1985). Was the director an *authentic transformational leader* (Bass, 1999)? That is, was he displaying the four components of "charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration" (Bass, 1985)? By definition, authentic transformational leaders "increase awareness of what is right, good, important and beautiful, when they help to elevate followers' needs for achievement

and self-actualization, when they foster in followers higher moral maturity and they move followers to go beyond their self-interests for the good of their group, organization or society" (Bass, 1999). Is that really what happened?

Interestingly enough, if you read and accept the facts of the story, then you see quite clearly that at the moment of transformation, the director, for all intensive purposes, did *nothing.* Yes, he was present, perhaps providing some moral support to his despairing sopranos with a "charismatic" wink and a smile. But the transformation came from the singers. And we cannot even pinpoint a particular soprano who was responsible. The director could not hand out a yearly choral bonus even if he wanted to. Instead, it was their joint aesthetic expression of skill that transformed the organization. We call this collective virtuosity.

The purpose of this paper is to extend the literature on transformational leadership. To this end we introduce the concept of collective virtuosity, the emergent expression of extreme aesthetic skill. The three main properties of collective virtuosity are that it can be invoked by anyone not just the appointed leader, it is a shared process, not an individual trait, and it does not embody intentions for the future. Collective virtuosity has the potential to expand possibilities, deepen sense of self, and create a sense of community. We begin by exploring the current state of transformational leadership within the neo-charismatic leadership paradigm. In doing so, we examine its source, namely Weber (1947). We then propose an alternative source of transformational leadership, that is, collective virtuosity. We do a historical survey of virtuosity, and build up the concept within organizational studies. And we finally apply this concept to explain phenomena such as "hot groups" (Leavitt & Lipman-Blumen, 1995).

Transformational Leadership

Many people would agree that the current normative theory of leadership is transformational leadership (Beyer, 1999; Conger 1999). Transformational leadership is born on the heels of a psychological perspective on Weber's (1947) concept of charismatic authority, that is House's (1977) 1976 Charismatic Theory of Leadership. As a theory, it boasts a 22-year existence since the introduction of the distinction between transformational and transactional

leadership by Burns (1978). Bass (1985) expanded its conceptual framework, and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1993) permitted countless empirical studies to follow. In recent years, the transformational leader has been called the "visionary leader" (Sashkin, 1988) focusing on the inspirational importance of the leader's vision of the future. Throughout the theory's existence, the transformational leader has almost always (to the dismay of some leadership scholars such as Kotter (1990)) been synonymous with the charismatic leader.

While many scholars have contributed to the paradigm by adding different variables, properties, qualities and focusing on different aspects, such as the environment or leader-follower dyads, there remain certain common themes. Conger (1999), in his survey of the paradigm, summarizes them as: (1) vision, or an appealing future that provides direction and meaning (2) inspiration, or what is sometimes referred to as "idealized influence" which is the crux of charisma (3) role modeling, (4) intellectual stimulation, (5) meaning-making, (6) appeals to higher-order needs (in the Maslow (1968) sense), (7) empowerment, (see Conger & Kanungo, 1988) (8) setting of high expectations, and (9) fostering collective identity which helps individuals surrender individual concerns in the name of the group's mission.

In sum, transformational leaders motivate their followers to commit to and to realize performance outcomes that exceed their expectations. Achieving such outcomes entails three principle leadership processes: (1) these leaders heighten followers' awareness about the importance and value of designated goals and the means to achieve them, (2) they induce followers to transcend their self-interests for the good of the organization and its goals; and (3) they stimulate and meet their followers' higher order needs through the leadership process and the mission (Conger, 1999).

Such a transformational leader has always been defined in relationship to its alter ego, the transactional leader. The transactional leader is one who motivates through contingent rewards. Rather than inspiring his followers to achieve results beyond expectations like the transformational leader, he negotiates transactions to do so. For example, he will pay his followers to do what he wants, and punish them if they do not. Such mundane leadership became the domain of management, while the art of inspiration was reserved for heroic

6

transformational leaders. Incidentally, the ontology of transactional/transformational emerged at the same time the management/leadership debate was taking form. This culminated in the adage, "Management controls people… leadership motivates them" (Kotter, 1990, p.7). For scholars such as Bass (1985), the transactional leader is not mutually exclusive of the transformational leader. That is to say, in reality leaders are at times transactional, and at other times transformational. What makes them one type depends on the type of leader they are disposed to be the majority of the time.

The latest large-scale distinction to enter the neo-charismatic leadership paradigm was between the pseudotransformational and the authentic transformational leader. Transformational leadership had fallen under sharp criticism for its lack of attention to moral matters. Transformational leaders were accused of narcissism, manipulation and impression management (Conger & Kanungo, 1998a). Thus, building on Confucian virtue theory, Bass build up the notion of the transformational leader that instills virtue in others. This is the essence of what he calls authentic transformational leadership.

Is Transformational Leadership always Transformative?

With all of this in mind, how well does transformational leadership as defined by the neo-charismatic leadership paradigm explain the transformative experience described in the choir anecdote? In terms of the transformative outcomes, quite well. Indeed, their performance exceeded expectations, both the leader's and the choir singer's. Awareness of the importance of the musical "goals" and the means to achieve them was heightened. Self-interests, (which one may speculate were at the worst of moments to simply go home) were transcended for the good of the group. The sense of collective identity was strengthened. Where the transformational leadership theory is lacking is in the explanation of *how.*

First of all, as previously stated, the transformational leadership did not come from the transformational leader. While the director created context, provided emotional/moral support, encouraged vocal technique and tools for improvement, he did not exercise idealized influence, or what is called charisma. This gift of divine grace, in its original meaning, has been made into

an exemplary source of transformational leadership. Charisma manifests itself by changing follower perceptions of the work and thus making it appear more heroic and meaningful. Work becomes an opportunity for self- and collective- expression. The director, to his knowledge, did not magically transform the meaning of the singers' work. If anybody did, the singers did.

Assuming then that the locus of transformative leadership was "somewhere else", and not in the director's charisma, perhaps the story can be interpreted through transformational leadership's process of empowerment. This would suggest that the director had enabled his followers, the singers, to autonomously express their own sense of musical intentions, within a loose organic structure. This was not really the case either. The director actually remained in control of the flow of events within a rather rigid, almost bureaucratic structure. After all, he called the shots, told the singers when to sing, when not to sing and when to sing again. He delegated virtually no power to them. It is not very plausible to interpret the transformational change as empowerment.

Finally, contrary to the claims of transformational leadership, the director did not provide an elaborate musical vision of the future. Even if he could vocally demonstrate what he was looking for from the singers, he could not have possibly demonstrated musically as a solo singer what the collective emergent sound of the group was to be. Moreover, there were no metaphors or spoken language that communicated such a vision, capturing the essence of the beauty that ultimately emerged. Any attempt to do so would have come short and possibly robbed the music of potential emergent beauty. And there was certainly no written action plan, organigram, or T-shirt to communicate vision to the singers. In fact, the whole process was virtually free of reified intentions. Visions of the future and mission statements, the hammer and nails for meaning creation in the transformational leadership toolbox are all manifestations of an individual's or group's intentions for the future. It's more typically, the transformational leader's vision that justifies his charismatic assertions, though in some models such as Bass and Avolio's (1993) this vision is shared and embodied by the group, and brought to the surface by the charismatic leader. No such process took place in the transformative narrative above. We would argue that

at the moment of transformation, the singers actually relinquished their intentions and simply placed all their effort in the moment of aesthetic skillful expression.

In sum, transformational leadership describes the outcome of transformative change quite well. However, its focus on the charismatic individual, the empowerment process and the reified intentions inherent in a vision statement of the future, prevent it from accurately describing some transformative moments, such as the choir anecdote provided above. We thus propose a new concept that can capture transformative leadership that can be invoked by anyone, that is a shared process and that is free is of intentions for the future. It is collective virtuosity, the emergent expression of extreme aesthetic skill. Before elaborating on what we mean by virtuosity, we must clarify what we mean by emergent.

The "Magic" of Transformational Leadership

A true transformative change, that is, a fundamental change in self, group and environment cannot be captured by a closed, linear model of leadership. This is why in the neo-charismatic leadership paradigm, the antithesis of the agent of transformative change, the transformational leader, is the transactional leader. The transactional leader operates in what we call a closed, linear system. In the linear sense, the leader exerts force on the follower, and the follower reacts in direct proportion to the force exerted.

As for transactional leadership existing in a closed system, there are virtually no extraneous factors that are taken into consideration. Such extraneous factors could be the influence of the work environment, the marketplace, the meaning attributed to the work, the rivalry with colleagues, or the humanist desire for self-expression. All of these factors are not entirely ignored, but rather deemed under the control of the transactional leader.

Once transformative change becomes the focus rather than transactional efficiency, then there is a need for an open, non-linear model of leadership. Such is the model proposed by transformational leadership. In this case, the system is open to extraneous factors such as the need for self-expression, for sense of community, and for such ethereal things as "meaning". The transformation leader's task is to create the environment for such factors to flourish and

manifest themselves, since they are seen as the key motivators for such transformational change. And the non-linear force that effects such change is the magic of charisma.

When Weber (1947) laid out his treatise on types of authority, he described the charismatic leader who could emerge in an institutionalized order and start a revolution. In Weber's words, "the term charisma will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary." This gift of divine grace is what calls and obliges followers to fulfill their duty of the charismatic mission.

Weber demonstrates how the term is derived from writings on early Christianity, and he often draws analogies between charismatic leaders and prophets, shamans and Nordic berserkers. The corporate group operating under charismatic authority is bound in an emotional and communal (*Gemeinde)* relationship. There is no hierarchy or administrative agents… "no system of formal rules, of abstract legal principles" (Weber, 1947). Rather there is only the sudden "call" of the charismatic leader. This sets charismatic authority outside the realm of everyday routine and the profane. It is the *Ausseralltaglichkeit,* or emancipation from routine. He theoretically contrasts the sacred and the profane, that is, the charismatic and the every day (*Alltag).*

Sociologists such as Trice & Beyer (1986) continued to conceptualize charisma at the social level, that is, as an emergent structure involving the interaction of several elements. These elements include "(1) an extraordinarily gifted person (2) a social crisis or situation of desperation (3) a set of ideas providing a radical solution to the crisis (4) a set of followers who are attracted to the exceptional person and come to believe that he or she is directly linked to transcendent powers, and (5) the validation of that person's extraordinary gifts and transcendence by repeated successes." (p.118-119) In line with Weber's original conception, charisma is thus a very rare phenomena.

In contrast to this, psychologists such as Bass (1985), Burns (1978), and Shamir (1995) focused on the personal traits of the charismatic leader, and in some cases the relationship in the

leader-follower dyad. They in essence tamed Weber's notion of charisma and created the aforementioned transformational leader. This new version, or neo-charismatic leader, was now domesticated enough to be applicable to a broader set of circumstances, and more importantly, to a broader set of managers. While it no longer carried the religious connotations of *divine* grace or the lunatic aspects of the Nordic berserker, its magic persisted in its ability to create and embody meaning at an individual and group level. It is essentially magic, because those leaders that can do this successfully are charismatic, and those that cannot, are not. And this magic resides at the heart to the non-linear aspect of transformational leadership.

Another perspective emerges

We would like to suggest an alternative source of non-linear change, namely emergence. Drawing on complexity theory and complex adaptive systems theory in particular (Holland, 1995), we define emergence as the unpredictable effect resulting from non-linear interactions among agents. That is, when several or more agents are connected in a complex way, little changes in the system can create either little or large effects. This is in contrast to the linear model where the effect is proportional to the cause, and thus predictable. Complexity science elaborates on this tremendously, but for our purposes we will be content to sum up emergence as the whole being greater than the sum of the parts, in the Gestalt psychology sense (Wertheimer, 1924). That is, calculus cannot account for local level change aggregated at a higher level. Instead, we argue that in such an open, complex system, change at the aggregated higher level is an emergent property of the lower level changes.

A clear illustration of this is in explaining consciousness. In the brain, there are millions of neurons all connected in a complex (that is, interwoven) manner. No linear mathematical aggregation can account for the constitution of consciousness. Instead, scientists have proposed that through the complex interactions of these countless neurons, consciousness emerges. Said more specifically, consciousness is an emergent property of the interactions of neurons. Likewise, in the case of the choir anecdote, one can argue that choral beauty is an emergent property of the interaction of individual voices.

Interestingly enough, this property of emergence was implicit in Trice & Beyer's (1986) theory of charismatic leadership. Taking a sociological rather than psychological perspective, they defined charisma as "an emergent structure involving the interaction of several elements." Among these elements, of course, was charisma. This is where our proposed theory departs from theirs. For at the heart of our open, non-linear theory of emergent transformative leadership is the notion of virtuosity.

Virtuosity

Virtuosity has almost a five-century old history. And during these five hundred plus years, while much has evolved in the notion, it still retains the spirit with which is it was conceived. If we return to 16th century Renaissance Italy and the rise of humanism, we witness the birth of the *virtuoso*. Humanists were of course fighting to liberate themselves from the Church ideologies that had defined human excellence in terms of such things as Aquinas' cardinal virtues and moral subservience. These virtues were derived from ancient Greek philosophy, particularly the work of Aristotle and his writings in Nicomachean Ethics. Virtue (from the Greek *arête*) originally referred to moral excellence before it was adopted by theologists such as Aquinas.

The humanists, more concerned with the human excellence and power not necessarily derived from God and the Church, championed the Italian idea of virtù. This word also meant excellence, but with an accent on man-derived excellence, as the Latin root *vir-* means "man". Thus we have Latin-derived English words such virility and virulent. Virtù embodied an individual's deftness, energy, efficacy, life-force, and even heroism (Palmer, 1998).

The seminal writings on virtù were by Machiavelli, particularly in his famous book *The Prince.* In his advice to the princes (that is, the Medici's) on how to secure political power, he urges them to take their destiny into their own hands with the infinite capacity inherent in virtù. This dynamic force could enable them to achieve their ends, overcoming any obstacles in their way, through whatever means necessary, even if deemed immoral. Thus, the ends justified the

means, and virtù was the vehicle to seize the ends. Those who were able to achieve such competence and brilliance of execution were *virtuosi*.

Thus the Italian terms became *virtuoso* and *virtudioso,* both encompassing the life-force notion of *virtù-osity.* This period in history was also marked by breakthroughs in art, architecture, music and humanist scholarship. These disciplines immediately absorbed the term virtuoso into their discourse.   Thus a virtuoso could refer to any distinguished person who had cultivated exceptional knowledge and skill in any intellectual or artistic field (Jander 1980, qtd in Palmer 1997).

The 17th century was marked by advancement in science, thus virtuoso was a term attributed to famous scientists and intellectuals across Europe. Eventually, they were caricatured as curious people who went out of their way to collect the rare and unique as well as engage in solving impractical puzzles and mathematical problems. It was not until the 18th century that the term truly became adopted by music and had a usage that resembles our contemporary usage.

As the solo performance gained legitimacy and popularity in the 17th century thanks to the concerto grosso and the bel canto aria, so did the solo performer. This performer-focused attitude culminated in the 19th century during the height of Romanticism. This was, of course, the epoch of the tortured artist hero who was a genius at times believed to be possessed by the devil (Brookner, 2000). The Romantic virtuoso was characterized as one who "created art to celebrate existence, unleash the imagination, break down conventional distinctions, and provide the rhetorical possibility… of emergent innovation and radical creativity." (Peckham, 1995, qtd in Palmer, 1997). The historical figure that epitomizes the Romantic virtuoso was Nicolo Paganini, an Italian violin player who, according to accounts, stunned his audience with his resplendent talent.

Rhetorical Forces of Virtuosity

David Palmer, in his dissertation (1997) on "A Theory of Virtuosic Performance" demonstrates how Paginini's Vienna concerts of 1828 interpolated the Romantic spirit with the rhetorical power of virtuosity. He sums up this rhetorical power of virtuosity in the following three

transformations: (1) Virtuosity as the transfiguration of cultural ideals concerning human agency, (2) virtuosity as expressive-vision, and (3) virtuoso performance as communitas.

In the first transformation, the presence of phenomenal skill forces people to reconsider their standards of human excellence, that is the cultural ideals concerning human agency. The virtuoso pushes the conventional limits of expression, and everyone present is forever transformed. New ideals and expectations for expressive ability are created, and possibilities are expanded.

The second transformation resembles the first in that the virtuoso performance enables the audience to see and envision what they had not envisioned before, but this extends the rhetorical power to include a transformation at the aesthetic level. Thus the "art of skill" enables those present to broaden their horizons through the aesthetic experience. This experience was in contrast to the positivistic reductionism of Enlightenment and instead focused on the sublime coming together of self and world. In Kantian terms, it was a force more powerful than the imagination, and for Schopenhauer it was salvation from the blind force of the will (Collinson, 1994). Thus, such an aesthetic experience deepened one's sense of meaning of his or her world as well as his or her purpose and identity. This rhetorical force of expressive-vision redeemed people from the routine and transported them to a heightened sense of awareness.

Such an aesthetic experience has the potential to unify those present at a very deep level. Thus the third rhetorical force creates a sense of communitas, in the Turner (1974) sense of the word. He defines it as "a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level." He furthermore refers to "intersubjective illumination" which is a heightened sense of shared values. Essentially, the redemption from the quotidian and routine humdrum that virtuosity affords is so compelling that all those that experience it are bonded on an existential level.

In sum, virtuosity grew out of a Italian Renaissance discourse and culminated in Romantic artist hero of the 19th century, particularly the solo musician. Studies of prominent virtuoso figures such as Paganini have revealed three rhetorical transformations due to the display of aesthetically resplendent skill. These include the expanding of possibilities for the

human agent, the deepened sense of self and world, and a creation of community and shared understanding.

Collective Virtuosity

Returning to contemporary organizational studies, and particularly the open, non-linear model of transformative leadership, we now have a concept to suggest as a source of non-linear change. Virtuosity in such a context is no longer a property of the aesthetically skillful individual, but the emergent property of the interaction of many aesthetically skillful individuals in an organization. Thus the rhetorical forces described do not reside in the individuals, but in the relationship and interactions among the individuals. And finally, the outcomes of collective virtuosity – expanded possibilities, deepened sense of self and creation of community – are not the result of any reified intentions on the behalf of the individuals. It is instead an unintentional and unpredictable emergent property at a higher level.

The choir anecdote is the perfect illustration of these three properties. When we propose that collective virtuosity is not an individual trait but a social process (and emergent property thereof) we diminish the importance of the appointed leader. His role as source of transformative change is diminished. Likewise, the director's role was peripheral to the actual moment of transformative change. It was not due to any magical charisma. Instead, the transformative moment was an emergent property of the blending of all the voices, and the interactions among them. It was collective virtuosity.

Moreover, if we return to the moment of transformative change among the sopranos, there was an abandoning of intentions for the future. Up until the moment of transformative change, the sopranos were set on preconceived notions of how they wanted their group to sound. Their failure to realize such a sound produced the profound disappointment and frustration. When they abandoned these intentions and simply *sang,* concentrating on their skillful and aesthetic production of sound in the present moment, they were able to let collective virtuosity emerge. Not only do intentions for the future potentially distract from an aesthetic display of skill, but emergent phenomena are unpredictable and can a priori not be described at lower levels of

aggregation, that is, the individual level (Holland, 1995). Thus an individual is essentially powerless to *alone* realize and describe emergent collective virtuosity.

This may be a frightening prospect for some. But it does not have to mean that all is left to chance. To the contrary, it is in the relinquishing of intentions and allowing of individual virtuosities to intermingle and co-create that we open the door for the most potentially beautiful, and thus most transformative change. Such a deeply transformative change may not only result in the creation of something beautiful, but also has the potential to expand our possibilities, deepen our sense of self and the meaning of the world around us, and create a often desired but rarely created sense of heightened community. Such is the potential of collective virtuosity, a phenomenon that can exist in any organization that allows it flourish.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to extend the literature on transformational leadership by introducing the concept of collective virtuosity. The leadership literature, particularly the neo-charismatic leadership paradigm has been struggling for some time with its use of charisma at its core. Even within the paradigm, there is disagreement concerning its role in the theory, and scholars on the margins such as Beyer (1999) have questioned the paradigm because of its distortion and misuse of charisma. Transformational leadership is indeed part of an open, non-linear system. However, when the source of that non-linearity is ultimately divine grace, or charisma, however much it is domesticated, it is a difficult argument to sustain.

All efforts to do so have led us to such distinctions as the authentic transformational leader versus the pseudotransformational leader vs the transactional leader, and so forth. One wonders with the quantity of qualifiers that are now required to precede the word "leadership" if we have not outlived the usefulness of the term. (See Shamir, 1999). In this spirit, we have set out to explore alternative sources of transformative change. In looking at our personal experiences with choirs, we, the authors, have experienced transformative change that was at an aesthetic level. The source of it was neither due to charisma, empowerment nor vision on the behalf of an appointed leader, but rather the unintentional social process of the group. The

beauty created was an emergent property of the interactions of the aesthetically skillful members of the choir, and we call this phenomenon collective virtuosity.

While still a highly abstract theory, it can shed light on interesting contemporary phenomena such as "hot groups" (Leavitt and Lipman-Blumen, 1995). They define hot groups as a "taskobsessed, impassioned group state of mind". (Leavitt and Lipman-Blumen, 1995). The organizing force behind a hot group is not an individual, but rather an engrossing and challenging task. This task captivates the members' hearts and minds. This highly passionate state of mind typically leads to the creation of something great, fast. They find much meaning in their work, and the meaning is defined on a group level, not individual. And their work "flows from their extraordinary ability which attracts the best and brightest young minds to their projects" (Leavitt and Lipman-Blumen, 1995 p.115).

There are some obvious similarities between a hot group and a group performing with collective virtuosity. They both do not rely on a charismatic leader, but rather are ruled by the interactions among individuals who are highly passionate and uniquely talented. Where the two differ most dramatically is with regard to the task. In a hot group, there is often a clear and highly challenging task that must be dealt with, thus the intentions of the group are always clear. However, in a group performing with collective virtuosity, the product is transcendental, or emergent, and thus not a result of preconceived intentions. Further studies on both hot groups and collective virtuosity may continue to complement one another.

Further study on collective virtuosity could more deeply explore the very rich phenomena of emergence, virtuosity and the aesthetic experience. These three concepts are vital to collective virtuosity, and we have broad brushed each of them in order to give an overall sense of the theory. Emergence draws on complexity theory, virtuosity on rhetoric and the aesthetic experience on the philosophy of art. Each of these three disciplines has a long and rich history that could provide a much deeper understanding of collective virtuosity. Other avenues not explored at all in this study include the reconciling of virtù with virtue, that is developing the idea of morally virtuous virtuosity. Researchers could look further into the actual process of the creation of collective virtuosity and how one person's or group's collective virtuosity sparks and

inspires the collective virtuosity of others. This is what one may call the virtuous circle of virtuosity.

Finally, there is still hope for the well-intentioned, appointed leader in an organization thriving on collective virtuosity. The role of such a leader, however, is transformed dramatically. Rather than continuing as the source of transformative change for the future, we propose that he/she is yet another actor in the collective with a special role, that of creating context. And his/her intentions are not the future wishes for the organization or the organization's environment. Instead, his/her only intention is to best express the virtuosity inherent in him or her, and hope that those around him or her do the same.

References

Aristotle (1987) "Nicomachean Ethics," in *A New Aristotle Reader*, ed. J.L. Ackrill. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bass, B.M. (1985) *Leadership and performance beyond expectations.* New York: Free press.

Bass, B.M. and B. Avolio (1993) "Transformational leadership: a response to critiques," in *Leadership theory and research: Perspectives and directions* M.M. Chemers & R. Ayman eds. New York: Academic Press.

Bass, B.M. and P. Steidlmeier (1999) "Ethics, character and authentic transformational leadership behavior," *Leadership Quarterly,* Summer Vol. 10 No. 2.

Beyer, J.M. (1999) "Taming and promoting charisma to change organizations," *Leadership Quarterly* Summer Vol. 10 No.2.

Brookner, A. (2000) *Romanticism and its Discontents*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Burns, J.M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row.

Collinson, D. (1994) "Aesthetic Experience," *Philosophical Aesthetics: An introduction,* Milton Keynes: The Open University.

Conger, J.A. and R.N. Kanungo (1988) "The Empowerment Process: Integrating Theory and Practice," *Academy of Management Review* Vol. 13, No.3.

Conger, J.A. and R.N. Kanungo (1988a) *Charismatic leadership in Organizations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Conger, J.A. (1999) "Charismatic and transformational leadership in organizations: An insider's perspective on these developing streams of research," *Leadership Quarterly*, Summer Vol. 10 No. 2.

Holland, J. (1995). *Hidden Order: How Adaptation Builds Complexity,* Reading: Addison-Wesley.

House, R.R. (1977). "A 1976 Theory of Charismatic Leadership," in J.G. Hunt & L.L. Larson (eds). *Leadership: The Cutting Edge* (pp. 189-207). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Jander, O. (1980) "Virtuoso," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* Vol 15. Ed. Stanley Sadie. London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

Kotter, J.P. (1990) "What Leaders Really Do," *Harvard Business Review*, May-June.

Leavitt H.J. and J. Lipman-Blumen (1995) "Hot Groups" *Harvard Business Review,* July-August.

Machiavelli, N. (1988) *The Prince*, ed. Q. Skinner and R. Price, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Maslow, A.H. (1968) *Towards a psychology of being,* (2nd ed). Princeton: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Palmer, D.L. (1997) "A theory of virtuosic performance: Exploring the suasory dimensions in Paganini's mastery of the violin," Dissertation to Graduate College of Bowling Green.

Palmer, D.L. (1998) "Virtuosity as rhetoric: Agency and transformation in Paganini's mastery of the violin," *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 84.

Peckam, M. (1995) *The Romantic Virtuoso.* Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.

Sashkin, M. (1988) "The Visionary Leader," in J.A. Conger and R.N. Kanungo, *Charismatic Leadership: The Elusive Factor in Organizational Effectiveness.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Shamir, B. (1995) "Social distance and charisma: Theoretical notes and an exploratory study," *Leadership Quarterly,* Vol. 6 No. 1.

Shamir, B. (1999) "An evaluation of conceptual weaknesses in transformational and charismatic leadership theories," *Leadership Quarterly*, Summer Vol. 10 No. 2.

Trice H.M. and J.M. Beyer (1986) "Charisma and its routinization in two social movement organizations," *Research in Organizational Behavior,* 8.

Turner, V. (1974) *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society,* Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press.

Weber, M. (1947) *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, New York: The Free Press.

Wertheimer, M. (1924) "Gestalt Theory," translated in *Source Book of Gestalt Psychology,* ed. W.D. Ellis, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1938.