

----- Research Interest Statement Example 1 -----

I did a paper on the application of *junzi* leadership in the management of an educational institute in the Ethics and Leadership module in 2015. This topic was a product of the continuous thinking and challenging of assumptions during lessons, and a reflection on the paradoxical dilemmas I have faced while working in that organization. This fuelled my interest to do a comparative research on the definition of ethical leadership and the development of ethical school leaders in Asia. An abridged version of my intended research proposal is presented below.

Globalization and changing socio-political landscapes create a global environment characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA). Cultural diversity gives rise to moral dilemmas founded on different belief systems and cultural values (Shields, 2014). School leaders encounter an increasing number of moral dilemmas with calls for increased accountability. Starrett (1998) puts forth that learning is “intrinsically a moral activity” and that school leaders work in a “morally charged environment” (p.244). This suggests that educational leaders are moral agents and take on the responsibility to make ethical and moral decisions.

Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) define ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (p.120). The definition of “normatively appropriate conduct” has been deliberately left open for interpretation in different industries and cultural contexts. Additionally, Treviño, Hartman and Brown (2000) assert that an ethical leader is both a moral person and a moral manager. This surfaces a “compliance-oriented” and “value-based” ethical perspective for school leaders, where principals are not only moral persons personally and professionally, they also influence their followers to follow a certain set of rules and standards deliberately (Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2014).

Initial literature review reveals that there seems to be an assumption of universality in ethical leadership concepts; most of which have been based in the context of the United States (Mendoca & Kanungo, 2007), with emphasis on normative actions, altruism, social justice and equity (Eisenbeiss, 2012; Gardiner & Tenuto, 2015; Mendoca & Kanungo, 2007; Ciulla, 1995). This suggests that ethical leadership has been presented uni-dimensionally, neglecting possible differences in its definition and understanding across cultures and belief systems, particularly in Asia. Eisenbeiss (2012) posits that there are universal shared values whereby Western moral philosophy (such as Aristotle) overlap with Asian philosophy (such as Confucianism). However, there are elements that differ. For example, the emphasis of *he* (harmony) and human relations in Confucianism could shape how ethical leaders are defined in Asia. The population of Asia makes up 60% of the world population (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2015), it makes research

significance to investigate on how ethical leadership is understood and practiced in Asia, particularly in schools.

Although the moral dimension of ethical school leadership had been discussed in some studies that are situated in the Asian context (see Feng, 2013; Ng, 2013; Walker, Hu, & Qian, 2012), ethical school leadership was not the core focus of their studies, i.e. it was part of a larger research and not discussed in-depth. I intend to contextualize this study on secondary school leaders in Singapore, Hong Kong and Mainland China. This is specifically due to (i) secondary education being part of compulsory education; (ii) superior performance in international tests such as PISA; and (iii) an examination-oriented culture that is possibly influenced by Confucian values. I believe this would shed light on ethical school leadership in an Asian context and reveal adequacies, or the lack of, in the training and development of an ethical school leader.

In face of the continuous need to perform in international tests, ensure the sustainability of schools, safeguard student interest and remain accountable to various stakeholders, how does ethical leadership come into play to juggle the possible paradoxical dilemmas that might arise in the process? How do leaders resolve them ethically?

Some questions to raise include:

(i) Are school leaders trained to be ethical leaders?

If courses on ethical leadership are part of their principal preparation programme, are there also courses available for practicing principals as part of their professional development? The educational landscape is rapidly changing and increasingly complex; principals are likely to come vis-à-vis an array of ethical dilemmas that are brought about by new changes.

(ii) Are principals theoretically and psychologically prepared to handle ethical and moral dilemmas?

Some real-life dilemmas include: whether principals should allow a disruptive student diagnosed with behavioural disorders to be included in the mainstream classroom; or whether teachers should be banned from accepting or making friend requests with their students on social network; or whether it is ethical to band students according to their abilities for “their own good”? These dilemmas continue to evolve and become increasingly prevalent, are principals psychologically prepared and are equipped with the knowledge to resolve these issues with tact and resilience? Ng (2013) mentioned in his studies that even though principals in Hong Kong undergo a module on ethical leadership, they considered themselves less competent in the facilitating ethical leadership in school management.

(iii) Is ethical leadership in Asia similar to that of the West?

Ethical leadership in Mainland China carries a political dimension where principals ought to ascribe to, and wholeheartedly serve the interest of the Chinese Communist Party, to be considered an ethical, moral person (Walker, Hu & Qian, 2014). What are some of the overlapping and differing concepts

between ethical leadership in Asia and of the West?

Some issues I would like to examine in this study are: (i) how is ethical leadership defined by secondary school leaders and teachers In Singapore, Hong Kong and China; (ii) whether there are mechanisms or training programmes in place to train or nurture ethical leaders; (iii) how does an ethical leader affect school teachers; (iv) what are the outcomes of ethical leadership, in terms of teacher performance and student achievement.

I would like to conduct this study through a qualitative approach. The study will be done through semi-structured interviews with secondary school teachers and principals based in Singapore, Hong Kong and Mainland China. Participants will be selected based on the premise that they have had at least 5 years of teaching / leadership experience and are based in a public-funded or government subsidized secondary school. This is to ensure that (i) teachers have varied experiences working with different school leaders, and (ii) school leaders had encountered an array of problems that challenges their ethical values. Through narration of specific personal experiences (such as encounters with an ethical leader or how a dilemma was resolved ethically), and personal understanding of “ethical leadership” (for e.g. characteristics of an ethical leader or how a leader should behave), keywords pertaining to ethical leadership are allowed to emerge. The responses will then be transcribed, coded and analyzed.

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I am interested to explore the nexus between teaching and learning, higher arts education and leadership approaches.

My first attempts to review literature about this triptych shows a dearth of scholarship in what effective higher education leadership in the arts looks like. There are some burning questions that have intrigued me, and the larger arts fraternity in Singapore: will inside leadership make a difference to the ways in which arts and culture can enhance value to the local arts community? Or should educational institutions in the arts be best run like a school to enrich and prepare students for options beyond the arts? These, and many other questions, have frequently intrigued our professional community of art educators.

At the heart of these questions lie the tacit recognition that leadership in higher arts education hinges on leadership in teaching and learning. De la Harpe and Mason (2014), Jones (2012) and Marshall (2011) iterate on the importance of this remit for the creative arts in tertiary education. At meso level in the local context, I begin to wonder what is signature about our local artistes, which have made them resilient as leaders in arts and culture over the past century? In what ways do specialists in the arts and design disciplines pass on their passion, belief, knowledge and dispositions meaningfully? How does the artist-educator perform the role as a master tutor, and how does s/he participate in the community of practice to benefit an effective curriculum?

My research investigations on teaching and learning of the arts - through the lens of Organisation A - has led me to appreciate how distinctive practices in leading the learning of craft can define leadership dispositions and practices. Preliminary case studies unravel diverse perceptions of traditional vs contemporary modes of instruction. Out of this critical inquiry, I am hoping to develop a toolkit to enhance creative approaches of managing and leading teaching through the lens of signature pedagogies, and to articulate idiosyncratic teaching and learning practices that define leadership approaches in higher arts education. Interactions between the master pedagogues and students will also unravel knowledge of the embodied artist-leader, the discipline, teaching and learning beliefs and pedagogical approaches.

In the arts, there are several extant ways by which institutions design their leadership models: According to Porter (1998), some institutions have chosen to establish a model of senior management that combines a leading artist in the role of principal with a manager from the world of commerce in the role of managing director. Other models adopted include an attempt to recreate the traditional university model, of a President or Vice-Chancellor who combines academic leadership with an external relations role and a Vice-President who has responsibility for all matters of internal management and resource deployment.

Of course, there are other interesting non-empirical claims that leadership impact in the creative arts can be cultivated by drawing on a range of skills and dispositions developed from within the discipline. Art and design educators thrive on critique, change, instability and ambiguity, which helps them adjust to change adeptly (Journeaux from Drew, 2008).

The ability to think creativity and thrive in a network are virtues extolled in current leadership theory (Knell, 2007). In some ways, these are almost intrinsic dispositions in the arts. The arts thrives on creativity, passion, and communication. They are concerned with authenticity, de-coding and meaning making. Crossick (2006) argues that one of the strengths of the performing and creative arts is that they generate 'networked knowledge' produced through creative conversations between diverse groups of professionals – artists, directors, producers, designers, writers, technicians etc. Yet, we hardly hear of many artists helming successful leadership stories in educational institutions. In fact, more so than often, leadership models are confined to scholarly research, without clear contextual applications to benefit the arts.

On the other hand, we have leading cultural medallion artists in Singapore who have a track record of documented performance, productions and exhibitions that tell us something about the disposition of a fine and talented artist-leader: Musicians play and listen (often at the same time), and are attuned to feelings (Gillies, 2012) – all of which are useful skills for today’s leaders. Generally all artists have the ability to think creatively and thrive in a professional community of practice (Knell, 2007), but the evidence that such dispositions can bring about quality outcomes for the arts in higher education remains an open question.

So what is the real question: is leadership from the inside the essence to a successful Singapore model? Or does the administrative and business excellence condition the ways by which art institutions should be run?

I do not have definitive answers, in spite of visiting several partner institutions in the arts and working in higher arts education since 2003. Each question seems to lead to another set of problems that do not have definite resolutions. So here, I am scoping a specific problem for my practice.

I would like to posit these questions as the start of my research inquiry:

1. What are the essential teaching and learning traits of artist-leaders that make them leaders in the field of arts?
2. How can these be foregrounded to bring about cultural and creative shifts in leadership approaches for higher arts education?

My preliminary investigation shows that there is very little literature on the structure and organisation of conservatoires and art colleges (Porter, 1998). While this is a telling indicator, Freedman (2011) encourages me in this pursuit: “Creative leadership provides a vision for the future and ... can encourage school and community program transformation, promoting growth in the field and new learning opportunities for students“. Goodman and Elgin (1988 in Fhrich and English 2013) further emphasises on an urgent need to utilise insights from the arts to expand our understanding of what is meant by leadership: “The arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of advancement of the understanding.” Creative leadership therefore goes beyond what has traditionally been done (Katz-Buonincontro, 2008), and this is what drives me on the pursuit of teaching and learning excellence for the arts, and cultural leadership.

I am proposing a mixed-method approach to facilitate this research. Presently, my research study adopts a case study approach to interviews specific artists who have contributed to the local arts and cultural scene. Qualitative data emanates through observations of conducting, choreography and atelier practices, interviews of artists, focus-group discussions with students, alumni and staff. A design of a quantitative survey instrument will further help to refine perceptions of teaching and learning leadership among professional and student professionals in the arts. I am hoping that the literature review and empirical analysis of data will lead to fresh conclusions on the impact of creative leadership in local higher arts education, and new pedagogical content knowledge that can prepare us for VUCA challenges in times ahead.

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It has been suggested that leadership is among the most notable factors affecting innovation. This might be through leaders' effect on organizational characteristics such as culture, strategy, structure, reward systems, resources, or through a direct effect of their behaviour on employees' creativity. Leaders can help their followers exhibit higher levels of creativity (that promotes innovation) at work, can establish a work environment supportive of creativity, and can create an organizational climate serving as a guiding principle for more creative and innovative work processes.

There is a growing trend for rationalizing educational services in accordance with expert opinion. This trend is set to continue in order to achieve better value for money and an all rounded efficient service. Many institutions have been continuously evolving over the ages without a specific purpose; driven by the need to stay afloat amongst the densely growing competition in their field and/or business. They were often developed in response to local needs or owe their origins to history rather than to clear national or regional priorities. This has resulted in inefficiencies, duplication and a system that is often designed around political and administrative concerns rather than those of students.

Institutes of higher learning today are faced with a dynamic environment characterized by rapid technological advancement, globalization, and continuous improvements caused by ever changing demands. In Singapore, polytechnics and universities are commonly referred to as institutes of higher learning. As mentioned by Mumford and Gustafson (1988), an increasing premium is to be placed on creativity and innovation in today's world to drive economies in the 21st century. Innovation that helps to add value and render obsolete non-value-added works is needed for institutes operating in a challenging and dynamic environment. They need to be more creative and innovative in order to learn, grow, and gain competitive advantage amidst an already dense market.

To create a creative and innovative culture among employees, management (leadership) needs to be open to suggestions and feedback; implementing change in tandem with the employees. Jung (2001) found there is direct and positive link between a style of leadership that has been labeled as "transformational" and organizational innovation. Transformational leadership that believes in striving for innovative excellence is vital to successfully bring about improvements in administrative works within any organization since there is significant impact on staff morale, motivation, productivity, and the overall performance of the organization itself. Transformational leadership is extremely important in many areas other than merely improving administrative services and providing innovative solutions.

Through my research, I aim to study and investigate the effects of transformational leadership on innovations in institutes of higher learning. This study shall prove that transformational leadership is an important determinant of innovation and enhancements in administrative services across institutes of higher learning.

Globalization has created many changes in institutes of higher learning; in terms of operations, day to day activities, type of structure, and staffing requirements. Administration is the key backbone and pillar to any successful organization. A good organization is one that focuses on value creation for its shareholders, partners, suppliers, employees, society and the community by satisfying the customer needs (Kluyver, Cornelis A. De & Hillman, John A. Pearce, 2009).

The current business environment proves to be much more tedious and challenging as compared decades ago. Population trends, urbanization, spread of infectious diseases, environmental degradation, economic integration, knowledge dissemination; information technology, conflict, and governance are some of the significant challenges employees face in the current business climate.

Both Bernard M. Bass and Dong I. Jung have studied transformational leadership in depths. They define transformational leaders as those who transform followers' personal values and self-concepts, move them to higher levels of needs and aspirations (Jung, 2001), and raise the performance expectations of their followers (Bass, 1995). Transformational leaders are those who can articulate an exciting vision of the future, and can continue to follow through by achieving intellectual stimulation that encourages employees to think about old problems in new ways. Although they are often capable of achieving intellectual stimulation, are they able to bring on much innovation to existing work processes and empower their staff to implement innovation to positively encourage them? Are transformational leaders worthy of improving the work culture by innovating work procedures?

A leader who empowers the individual by providing a sense of ownership and accountability is able to foster and motivate the individual to be part of the organization. I will be looking to build onto such theories that examine and strongly connects transformational leaders and their ability to empower individuals to innovate and vastly contribute towards improving work processes and practices. As far as institutes of higher learning are concerned, innovative work practices are important as they directly affect and determine the organization culture. Organizational culture is a powerful tool to improve performance. The pervasive nature of organizational culture affects the

progress of an organization in the industry that it chooses to be in. Geert Hofstede (1983) had studied on how culture relates to values in the workplace. A good organizational culture and structure with innovative administrative practices allows top decisions to be made effectively and efficiently.

Some questions I would be looking to ask in my course of study are:

1. How do staff perceive empowerment?
2. Does transformational leadership influence empowerment of staff?
3. Does the working climate support innovation?
4. What is staff perception on an innovative support culture?
5. What is students' perception on the delivery of innovative services?

The aforementioned questions are helpful in deciding the impact good transformational leadership has in directly empowering employees to innovate, and the direct relationship between the leader, an innovative mind-set, and innovative work practices.

The research study will be conducted in at least two Universities in Singapore. Correlation design will be the primary design adopted for this quantitative study. The sampling size will be above at least 30. The target population will be the management, middle managers, and other executives. The population sample will be chosen randomly in order to attain diversity and fair representation. The main criteria is that (s)he needs to be closely working with his/her superior (must be management staff) and/or have people reporting to them. Data collection procedures would involve selected staff completing a survey questionnaire. The questions in the survey will evaluate his/her superior's transformational leadership behaviours. The same person will be administered another survey to evaluate the magnitude of empowerment and innovative supportive culture.

Research Interest and Background

I am interested in learning and conducting extensive research on how Technology-assisted learning could be a multi-sensory experience as well as a teaching-and-learning characteristic of the 21st century classroom. It appears that higher learning institutions are increasingly applying the “learning-beyond-the-classroom” philosophy by converting or designing curriculums to function as online lessons. This observation is in-tuned with the ICEF Monitor’s observation that the number of applicants for Massive-Open-Online-Courses (MOOCs) has doubled in 2015¹. This seems to suggest that 100% remote learning might be the norm in terms of curriculum development and learning style in the coming decade or less.

However, I found from personal experiences that three common assumptions are made when delivering lessons on an online platform. Firstly, it assumes that students of the millennial generation are well versed with technology. Secondly, “technology-assisted learning” is mostly interpreted as just a transfer of content and knowledge from the white board or book to the Internet. Finally, it seems that the role of the tutor and real one-to-one interaction or communication amongst tutors and co-learners are no longer necessary.

Research Focus and Questions

As such, I have two main research aims. The first aim deals with the way technology is designed to enhance the learning experience. Marshall McLuhan (1964) once argued that when the “medium is the message”², the impact of an advertisement is not only heard but both understood and internalised by the consumer. I found this thought equally relevant to content development and learners’ experience. This is so because I have observed in the modules I teach, develop and facilitate that technology may not enhance understanding if it is applied only as a ‘random process’. Most often this occurs when technology, for instance the laptop or even You-Tube, is part of the classroom infrastructure and is a readily available physical asset. As such, it just adds to the variety of hardware which one could choose from as a matter of teaching or learning preference. This is instead of considering how technology and its various associated platforms may create a different sensory approach to understanding the concept that is being taught. **How then could technology be the medium of knowledge transfer and the message (a full part of the lesson or the content being taught) itself? This is a question I would like to pursue and fully research on.**

The closest experience I had so far on technology being both a data transfer medium and the learning process itself is when I had to develop and teach a basic sociology elective module. This was taught through the medium of film and to classes of graduating year 3 students from various faculties. A combination of tools were adopted to create different settings and, more importantly, for students to

experience and understand the emotions, the embedded social themes and events embodied by a specific film. The film, the streaming application and the online survey were combined to give students a very hands-on experience of the lesson taught – the medium (from the film to the chosen streaming device and assessment mode) is therefore the message (e.g. social empowerment) itself. The second aim of reading the EdD programme is to fulfill a professional desire to contribute to the existing body of research work on education and technology-assisted learning. In particular, I am inspired by the way architects prepare and sit for their Professional Practising Examination (PPE). They contribute to theories governing design and project management by creating a log book of their existing projects and having established architects reviewed their design and building blue print.

As such, my research motivation is also to create a log book of my **existing modules** as way to archive and curate best teaching practices. It is a form of **literature review** with an added professional dimension that is at once theory based and directly work-related. This constant exchange and debate over what technology-assisted learning is will come in the form of comparing and reviewing what I have hoped to achieve in my lesson and the actual classroom experience. **The gap between lesson plan (conceptual) and eventual learning outcomes (actual experiences) would be areas I hope research on what technology-assisted learning truly embodies will provide more in-depth and carefully thought out solutions for.**

Key Ideological Framework and Design

The structural basis of my research would consist of 1) ideology, 2) resources and 3) institutions. These are the key components of Antonio Gramsci's Power Hegemony theory³. Originally an international relations and constructivist concept, this theory explains how individuals or countries conserve, project and accumulate power through their control over ideas, wealth and key state organisations. However, I found it a useful way to plan and design my research. In fact, I have also adapted the Power Hegemon Theory as a way to teach students basic socio-political ideologies.

Ideology

The key Ideologies I will be adapting for my research on technology assisted learning are ***Social Constructivism*** and ***Cognitivism***. The former sees learning as not only learners' centric but also a process in which both tutors and students build on the experiences of one another to jointly create or uncover new areas of learning and social responsibility.⁴ This is consistent with my research question on "**how could technology be the medium of knowledge transfer and the message (or a full part of the lesson or the content being taught) itself**". In particular, it put forth and questions if specific technological tool and how they are applied or used in class, affects the way learning is achieved and experiences are built. Likewise, ***Cognitivism*** is useful to understand how technological assisted learning could provide students of various learning needs with a **sequenced and structured way of learning and gaining knowledge.**⁵

Resources

The resources I will be examining in my research could be understood from two perspectives. They are 1) lesson delivery and 2) assessment design. The purpose and effectiveness of technology in

teaching and learning would depend on its intended purpose (e.g Social Media, Learning Aids and Assessment Tools) and needs of the students (audience). This is linked to the concepts of Constructivism and Cognitivism as well as Marshal McLuhan's original idea of the medium of instruction being the message itself. In other words, as a 'resource question', it causes one to examine and compare the functions of technology as a component of lesson and not as a decision based on personal preference or style. In other words, how does technology contributes to the one conducting and experiencing the learning process.

Institutions

Finally, the last component of the research questions the definition of the 21st century classroom and the role of the tutor. Should the school and the classroom, as an institution of learning, totally redefine itself as a virtual campus and totally electronic experience? I am of the opinion, even at this early stage of research, that when we re-consider how tutors can construct how technologies could be used and how it could be a part of a holistic learning experience, the educators' role can only be enhanced and made more important. In other words, tutors are a key feature of the 21st century classroom. This is also a claim I hope to further explore in the broader research on technology-assisted learning.