

Human Skills and Roman Women. Proposals for Humanistic Education

Competenze umane e donne romane. Proposte per l'educazione umanistica

Valeria Caggiano^a, Antonio Ragusa^{b,1}

^a *Università degli Studi Roma Tre*, valeria.caggiano@uniroma3.it

^b *Rome Business School*, ragusa@romebusinessschool.it

Abstract

Despite societal assumptions, women in ancient Rome actively participated in public discussions and policy-making, taking on leadership roles that contributed to developing educational and employment opportunities for themselves, their families, and their communities. The leadership characteristics of Roman women in civic institutions, which differed from those of Roman men or non-Roman women, have yet to be studied in academic literature. The article explores what we have identified as dialogical traits in the leadership of Roman social and political action. We define these traits as 'dialogical' because they are built upon and have emerged from equal and intersubjective dialogue between Roman women and their communities. These traits involve leadership assumed relationally, seen as a collective responsibility, developed with others. The focus is on shared values and identity, with a profound understanding of the necessity for intergenerational solidarity to drive organisational action.

Key words: leadership; women; education; skills; humanistic management.

Sintesi

A prescindere da ciò che la società tradizionale ritiene, le donne romane sono coinvolte nel dibattito pubblico e nella definizione delle politiche, assumendo un ruolo di leadership nella creazione di opportunità di istruzione e di lavoro per loro stesse, per le loro famiglie e per le loro comunità. I tratti specifici del tipo di leadership sviluppata ed esercitata dalle donne romane nelle istituzioni civiche, rispetto al tipo di leadership esercitata dagli uomini romani o dalle donne non romane, sono ancora poco studiati nella letteratura accademica. L'articolo introduce e discute quelli che abbiamo identificato come tratti dialogici nella leadership delle donne romane quando sono impegnate nell'azione sociale e politica. Definiamo questi tratti "dialogici", in quanto costruiti ed emersi sulla base di un dialogo paritario e intersoggettivo tra le donne romane e le loro comunità. La leadership relazionale, come responsabilità collettiva costruita con gli altri, incentrata sui valori e sull'identità condivisa dei Romani con una forte intuizione della necessità di solidarietà intergenerazionale tra loro come motore dell'azione organizzativa.

Parole chiave: leadership; donne; educazione; competenze; management umanistico.

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1. Introduction

There is a need for more specific literature on leadership in Rome that analyses its functioning in gendered views. Unfortunately, most existing literature on the subject takes a masculine turn. However, recent years have seen a shift towards a more communicative and dialogic approach, which includes the interpretation of the lives of Romans and their social reality. This is an essential step towards creating new evidence to inform potential solutions to improve the living conditions for the Romans and the wider society (Aiello et al., 2019; Flecha et al., 2022).

This piece is pivotal in Roman and women's studies (De Botton, Puigvert, & Sánchez-Aroca, 2005). It also builds upon a body of research on Roman women and societies, which posits that women at the grassroots level are increasingly driving social change within their communities. These women exercise their agency and actively seek ways to enhance their lives and those of their children and communities (Munté-Pascual et al., 2022).

The presence of women from ancient times to the present day has been influenced by political regimes, planned laws and even architecture. A recently restored statuary group from the domus Augusta, now lost, was erected in 15 A.D. in the Circus Flaminius, celebrating the women of Rome. This group of dynastic statues highlights Livia's role in the transmission of power and heralds an increase in the celebration of imperial women with public statues after 15 A.D. The imperial policy of the dynasty gradually allowed women the status of public representation in the most attended and politically significant areas of Rome. The dedication to a family nucleus, and not to an individual, which is already remarkable in itself, also indicates the relevance of this dynastic statue for understanding the concept of the domus Augusta in the initial year of Tiberius' rule. The dynastic statuary group confirms other evidence, which will be discussed below, that the expression domus Augusta was first formulated publicly during the last years of Augustus' rule.

The importance of learning about the history of Rome and women in imperial times allows us to reflect on how female leadership has had to manifest itself throughout the ages. The focus is on the skills of these women and the opportunity to learn from the examples and history of Rome to understand that women's lives have been able to manifest themselves in history since ancient times (Brooks, 2012).

Crucially, it becomes possible to include a module in the higher degree curriculum to understand female leadership in imperial Rome. Pedagogical reflections on the example of Roman women's characteristics, starting with the architecture dedicated to them, make it possible to read contemporary contexts in the logic of historical awareness.

The ultimate goal of teaching Humanistic Education is to develop effective strategies and human technologies to nurture inner strengths, unlike typical school objectives and humanistic education courses (Corbi, 2020).

Pedagogical reflection focuses on examining the methods and process of teaching. Implementing subjects dedicated to learning human skills within the Humanist Approach framework calls for a model to be presented and implemented in various institutions, including technical and specialised studies.

2. Roman Women: From the House to Domus

The monument, which was voted on by the Senate and which had to be approved by

Tiberius, was an important political message about the concept of power in the decisive transition between the first and second emperors. Initially, the word *domus* indicates the physical dwelling of the *dominus* and might also apply to the family and to the enslaved people who resided in the house and were under the control of the *paterfamilias*, as well as to the physical structure and its possessions. Over time, the term *domus* also came to denote a family group, and the family name was often associated with it – *domus Iunia* or *domus Claudia* – to describe the family founder. The term *domus* was linked to republican usage. However, when Augustus' cognomen, as opposed to his gentilizio, was combined with it, the expression assumed a dynastic element, implying that the princeps had funded a family to continue his name of Augustus. Only members of Augustus's family could continue that name, which Augustus treated as a family asset even though it was initially conferred upon him by the state. The creation of the term *domus Augusta* originated in the policy of conciliation: the will to present a family was linked by birth and blood to Augustus as monolithic and to shade the *gens Iulia* and *gens Claudia*, which were potentially and occasionally actually in conflict with each other.

The new element that should be highlighted is that the *Domus Augusta* is not represented by a single matron, albeit with an exceptional personality, as Livia, Cornelia, or Fulvia might have been in the past. Instead, we face numerous women, not a gynaeocracy but certainly a gynaeceum. Various women with diverse personalities participate, to a degree and in a way that has yet to be fully understood, in the exercise of power. Livia's position is a significant milestone in the historical background of women in dynastic portrayals. It represents the end of the Augustan period's uncertainty concerning the female members of the family's role in public life. Although women appeared in public roles during Augustus's lifetime, they were not explicitly celebrated as mothers of successors. Livia became *Augusta* upon her husband's death and in his will. During the Julio-Claudio period, the meaning of this title was maternal. A woman with a successor was named *Augusta* when Nero awarded it to Poppaea Sabina and her daughter (Tac. Ann. 15.23; Suet. Nero 35.3). Also, one should consider such a predominantly female presence in the context of the demographic data of the time: The low life expectancy meant that 15-year-old girls had a 62% chance of having a father in their lifetime at 20 years of age less than half of them still had a father. The chance of being free of paternal authority before or immediately after the first marriage was relatively high. The *Domus* had to host republican ceremonies reinterpreted in a *monarchic* key, starting with the morning salutations necessary to enjoy the princess's friendship, up to the evening banquet, which in Claudius' time was enlarged to accommodate six hundred guests at a time; it had to accommodate an increasingly numerous and bureaucratic family, composed of servants and freedmen; in later periods several officials of the knightly class also joined the family. At the same time, the *Domus Augusta* was on its way to becoming, in a very long but irreversible process, the sovereign's courtroom. In the beginning, the *gens* played a central role: The Romans, reluctant to accept a king, as Julius Caesar had experienced, were more willing to accept the rule of a *gens*, which also resolved all succession problems. The gentility model, in which a few *gentes* prevailed, was reproduced: now there is only one, and its predominance guarantees the peace desired by the gods of Rome. Tacitus sees the *Domus Augusta* as an expression of the victory of the *gens Iulia*, the *Julianae* parties, and its sole surviving leader, Octavian. The atmosphere was very different in the new residence, which had many names but was never called a royal palace. Up to the years covered in this work, the people who lived there grew older, wealthier, more powerful, and, in some cases, almost deified. At the same time, the *Domus'* atmosphere became increasingly *gloomy and severe*.

During the imperial age, powerful women saw a new facet of their public persona emerge.

Augustus's private domus was transformed into a space where the emperor wielded power, making it a public space. Women in Augustus's household found themselves in a new, delicately defined public dimension that marked them as women *of power*. This was when they walked a fine line between the private and public and between licit and illicit. Their position needed to be more transparent and consistent; a role could only partially rationalise it. It was precariously balanced between the public role that Roman *empresses* were expected to have and the domestic role of the ideal model of the traditional matron that continued to condition their representation.

2.1. Dialogic Women Leadership

Dialogical leadership is an ethical method that respects, values and works towards achieving organisational goals. However, in those situations, there may be conflicts and contradictions between what is ethical and what is in the material interest of individuals and the organisation.

Dialogical leadership assumes an alignment with others (peers, subordinates, superiors). The goal is not the well-being of the individual but a neutral and constrained optimisation of organisational goals. Dialogical leadership is founded on the Theory Y precondition that people have an intrinsic drive to do the right thing. A second assumption is that it is easier to know (epistemology) the right way to do and act (praxis) in a mutually supportive, reciprocal, social process of research and investigation, i.e., where there is a dialogue about the correct thing to do. The method is a leader-led dialogue between the leader and others (peers, subordinates, superiors) on possible changes in the conduct of means and ends. Dialogical leadership is both a mode of knowing/learning (epistemology) and a way of acting (praxis). Tillich (1950) considers dialogical leadership to be intangible, i.e. a way of being that is beyond the self and its immediate others; it can also extend outside the institutions and the communities of which one is a member. Gadamer (1975) and Lawrence (1985) both interpret the dialogical method in a very similar perspective. For Gadamer and Lawrence, in this case, a transcendent being participating in the dialogical and leadership conversation process is *to subordinate oneself*.

Furthermore, leadership is "to subordinate oneself to the teaching, guidance, and conduct of the object to which the conversation partners are oriented". Ganz interprets leadership in a relationship-based way, defined as "accepting personal leadership responsibility to empower others to realise a common purpose under conditions of uncertainty" (Brooks, 2012, p.10).

Ganz explains that doing this requires a strategy and an ability to explain what values leaders have that drive their *calling* to lead and how their values can be shared with others, setting the foundation for a shared goal. Both Ganz (2018) and Morris and Stagerborn (2007) emphasise how the leader's previous life experience is crucial in shaping their call to dare to take the lead and, thus, to take responsibility.

The concept of Domus indicated a wider sphere of kinship than the agnatic one of gens and Familia: it was therefore suited to the construction of Augustus' household, where male descendants were lacking, and women were of decisive importance (Barrett, 2002). The matrons of the domus principis were promoters, therefore, of a crucial evergreen activity and exercised the kind of female patronage that has been called *matronage*; they also interfered in public life by assuming marriages and divorces, which matured particularly within the imperial family and were often connected to the demands of the succession to the purple (Beck, 2009). In the absence of male heirs, girls were the object of particular

attention, as they were vital pawns in transmitting the legitimacy of power and forming a dense network of new alliances (Bauman, 1992). The blossoming of gender studies in the Roman era, and above all, research on the Augusta has highlighted the centrality of the latter, emphasising, on the one hand, the exemplary role attributed to them and, on the other, their role as educators, connected with that of mothers, or at any rate, members of the imperial family (Hemelrijk, 2005). For example, Livia and Antonia Minor were in charge of what could be described as a rather crowded *Kindergarten* (Levick, 1999).

3. Humanistic Education and Curriculum Design

In recent decades, the examination of leadership in social and collective action has emerged as a distinct area of focus in both political and social organisational literature and literature on social movements and institutions. This field has expanded to encompass leadership's impact on social movements' outcomes and how it contributes to broader social change (Porter et al., 2014). These studies explore a range of factors, including the leader's storytelling, personal narrative, strategic acumen, and ability to engage individuals in collective and community action (Broccoli, 2020).

Humanistic management education is a view that departs from an organization-centric approach to a human-centred vision for both business and management to generate a profit as a way for positive welfare (Nielsen, 1993). To provide humanistic management education, we present three strands of approach: problematising the dominant economist model, integrating humanistic management theory into the curriculum, and inspiring students to explore the humanistic dimension and be linked to reality. To provide humanistic education, every actor and every process in the university must be coherent with and an example of humanistic principles (Meyer & Norman, 2020). The broad range of human interests and their changing dynamics should be moved (again) to the focus of management education (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). In the view of Alschuler, the range of humanistic education courses includes training in achievement, motivation, mindfulness and excitement, creative thinking, interpersonal sensitivity, affiliation motivation, joy, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-evaluation, self-realisation, self-understanding, strength training, development of moral reasoning, value clarification, body awareness, meditative processes and other aspects of ideal adult functioning. Curriculum design refers to choosing priorities and defining the importance of developing the curriculum components. It involves creating a study plan aligned with the institution's mission and vision. A curriculum is a set of standards and regulations, content and materials, and methods to guide teaching activities (Alyahya, 2019).

Humanistic education is a broad set of disciplines that originated in humanism. It is connected to understanding society as the foundation of human knowledge. A curriculum is a tool used to address the goals of national education and international criteria, taking into account students' developmental stages and their ability to adapt to the environment (Ogunyemi, 2014). It considers the need for national development, the advancement of science and technology, the expansion of the arts, and various forms of humanities education.

According to Deis et al. (2020), curriculum design and development is a complex process that involves exploring curriculum formulation in higher education institutions, accompanied by an intense evaluation and improvements of curriculum elements, including target elements. Several views regulate curriculum development and create diversity in

curriculum organisations. Existing curriculum designs include the following: firstly, discipline-based curriculum design. This form of curriculum development creates diversity in curriculum organisations, with different forms such as subject-centred, related, and integrated curricula (Della Lucia et al., 2021).

3.1. Rome Business School and Soft Skills Training

Universities are making efforts to improve higher education performance and outcomes systematically. Researchers applied several concepts and methods from the business world to improve higher education institutions, such as total quality management, quality assurances (Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018), the employment of quality roles (Aytac & Deniz, 2005), the *balanced scorecard* (Sudirman, 2012), *kaizen* (Emiliani, 2005) and lean thinking. These methods are rooted in the field of manufacturing. Over the last decade, though, they have diffused beyond the industrial sector and become an improvement discipline in various sectors, including higher education.

With the rapidly evolving labour market, curricula must be re-evaluated and re-assessed continuously. Many studies and documents from the European Commission and The World Economic Forum highlight the constant evolution of labour market demands. In the past decades, *technical skills* were the primary skills required by the job description. Today, the labour market suggests that technical skills may not be the primary skills demanded by employers. Accordingly, the Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Access Retention and Employability report, published in 2018, identifies new graduates' employability as a critical priority in higher education policies and policy debates (Eurydice, 2015). A common consensus between the training and professions fields highlights the relevance of training in transversal skills, also known as soft skills. Soft skills are perceived to impact career success, and their attributes and characteristics are underlined in "An Agenda for New Skills and New Jobs", which has been the focus of the recently launched strategy for rethinking education to achieve better socio-economic outcomes.

The business school is an institution of higher education that grants degrees in business management or business administration. It is the primary provider of educational resources, fostering individual aspirations, promoting a quest for learning, and advocating for gender equality and social flexibility. The business school plays a dual role. It equips them with knowledge and contributes to society's growth by training the workforce with the skills, competencies and capabilities required by the business environment (Bowen, 2018). It equips learners with professional knowledge, professionalism, and skills for employment in various management fields, including Marketing, Supply Chain, Accounting, Finance, Leadership and Human Resource Management. Some initiatives focus on leadership development.

Rome Business School is an international business school with students from over 150 countries, focusing on management education topics ranging from human resources to space economics and new technologies applied to medical contexts. Hard science is complemented by holistic training in human skills. Over the past five years, Rome Business School has introduced a skills module aimed at Leadership for Women and, more broadly, at soft skills such as critical thinking, ethics, moral education, and global citizenship within the curriculum of its Masters and MBAs. Students participate in a cross-curricular course, and a soft skills assessment test is conducted at the beginning and end of the program. In addition to verifying the impact of the module and the dedicated workshops, the implementation and impact of the module dedicated to the training of soft skills are

assessed. This program focuses on critical thinking and mindset learning as part of leadership development, has five modules, and is aimed at managers from various international organisations. It is geared towards enabling managers to learn from their experiences in practice.

In conclusion, far fewer training courses should be exclusively dedicated to training people for analytical jobs such as marketing research. Instead, there is a need for many programmes for practice managers (Mintzberg, 1989). Humanistic management training emphasises soft skills topics such as human behaviour, ethics, culture, business in society, responsibility, sustainability and stakeholder relations (among others) as crucial complements to analytical and technical knowledge.

4. Conclusion

While there has been some recognition among authors of the role of Roman women in driving new social changes within their community, much research is still needed to understand better the specific ways in which mainstream Roman women are working towards their empowerment and that of their collective. Achieving this greater understanding would result in a more inclusive feminism that values the voices of all women equally. Rather than being passive observers of their social reality, Roman women have become active agents of empowerment. This is because private and public life were closely intertwined in Rome, with the public sphere broadly defining the individual's subjectivity.

“In Rome, religion, law and politics are always in a strongly contiguous position and supported by widespread and continuous education – what we would call lifelong learning today - which served as both its instrument and expression” (Hemelrijk, 2005, p. 315).

Examining women's dialogic leadership can play a pivotal role in this discourse by delving into the primary female pedagogical models, the societal position of women, and notable examples of positive and negative female experiences (Fiorucci, 2017). To conduct such an analysis, it is necessary to revisit the transformations in women's history in Rome, particularly during the shift from the Republican era to the Empire. During this critical period, Livia emerges as the quintessential female icon whose life story represents a journey towards liberation.

The proposed model of dialogic leadership among Roman women invites us to reflect on its implications. Using the metaphor of the city's construction, particularly the building of the Domus Aurea, we can visualise the dialogical role of Roman women. We can draw valuable insights and impart essential skills to future leaders by exploring this historical dimension. It is recommended that those involved in training and curriculum design pay careful attention to the method, utilising historical examples to provide practical and adaptable guidance across various higher education contexts.

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