Leadership femminile e soft skills: dalle Matronae alle Augustae. L'esempio di Livia Drusilla

Valeria Caggiano, Antonio Ragusa*

Riassunto

Il contributo esamina la leadership femminile durante l'età imperiale di Augusto, con un focus particolare su Livia Drusilla. La figura di Livia offre l'opportunità di riconoscere e analizzare le soft skills sviluppate nel tempo e funge da esempio utile per la formazione in questo ambito. Un programma efficace di leadership dovrebbe integrare competenze umane, promuovendo un approccio umanistico che arricchisce il dibattito internazionale sulla formazione manageriale. L'analisi della letteratura evidenzia l'impatto innovativo dell'elemento femminile in vari ambiti, come sessualità, religione e vita pubblica, in risposta a differenti livelli di resistenza maschile. L'articolo si concentra su tre aspetti chiave: (i) il potenziamento del management umanistico come teorico e strumentale per l'insegnamento delle soft skills; (ii) l'importanza dell'accesso a un'istruzione secondaria per stimolare attivamente le capacità degli studenti; (iii) la necessità di riformare il curriculum in risposta all'autoritarismo pedagogico tradizionale.

Parole-chiave*: Leadership; Donne; Apprendimento attivo; Management umanistico; Educazione.*

Female Leadership and Soft Skills: From Matronae to Augustae. The Livia Drusilla Exempla

Abstract

The essay examines female leadership during the imperial age of Augustus, with a particular focus on Livia Drusilla. Livia's figure offers the opportunity to recognize and analyze the soft skills developed over time and serves as a useful example for training in this area. An effective leadership program should integrate human competencies, promoting a humanistic approach that enriches the international debate on management training. The literature analysis highlights the innovative impact of the female element in various fields, such as sexuality, religion, and public life, in response to differing levels of male resistance. The article focuses on three key aspects: (i) enhancing humanistic management as a theoretical and

* Università degli Studi Roma Tre (Italy), Rome Business School (Italy).

Civitas educationis, a. XIII, n. 2, dicembre 2024 • Mimesis Edizioni, Milano-Udine
Web: universitypress.unisob.na.it/ojs/index.php/civitaseducationis • ISSN (online): 2281-9568
• ISBN: 9791222317953 • DOI: 10.7413/2281-9568113
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instrumental tool for teaching soft skills; (ii) the importance of access to secondary education to actively stimulate students' abilities; and (iii) the necessity to reform the curriculum in response to traditional pedagogical authoritarianism.

Keywords*: Leadership; Women; Active learning; Humanistic Management; Education.*

1. Introduction[1]

Since their foundation, business and management have evolved not with humanist principles but with a powerful economistic view. Since the beginning, several voices have been heard requesting higher regard for people, both for the sake of human well-being and also because a humanistic approach can contribute to improved performance of the company or organisation (Pinheiro & Costa, 2020).

By definition, humanism is primarily concerned with humanity. It is inspired by thinkers ranging from Aristotle to the twentieth-century Swiss philosopher Hans Kueng, who sought to understand human nature and the fulfilment of human needs. It highlights promoting human dignity and fostering well-being (Chen *et al.*, 2019). The focus is on education that can restore dignity in management education. Since intellectual awareness of human dignity either aids or hinders its practical realisation, a global reorientation of management pedagogy towards qualitative and moral aspects is necessary to implement the ethical turn in management education.

Between the end of the 2nd and the 1st century BC, several women undertook initiatives that made them protagonists of political action: they interfered in matrimonial strategies; they were promoters of mediations of political content; the women acted in court; the women managed the remains of their deceased relatives; acted as intermediaries between distant relatives and the Roman consensus bases of the latter; they were involved in various ways in the political action of their relatives.

These words reveal three aspects we wish to highlight: the more significant presence of women in Roman social and political life, the importance and complexity of the roles that some matrons could play, and the understanding that political discrimination against women never ceased. The second aspect is the greater sexual freedom enjoyed by the women of Rome in this era and throughout the 1st century AC (despite Augustus's attempts to moralise), before a period of strictness of customs survived in the Roman world, perhaps in conjunction with the spread of Stoicism, in the late republican age, and, later, of Christianity.

The institutionalisation of Augustus's family as the central organ of the Roman state had meant an increasing public status for his wife Livia as princeps femina, the "first lady" among Roman women. It would be a

1 The authors collaborate: V.C. written the 1, 2, 5 paragraphs; A.R written 3 and 4.

wonder if this new view of the women's leadership in the Roman state – as symbolically organised in an *ordo matronarum*, with a one-woman leadership – did not affect the attitude of the elites in the Roman provinces.

This contribution wants to show an exciting sampling of male clichés about women – clichés that have passed from ancient Rome to the present day, often without undergoing significant variations – sheds light on this crucial socio-anthropological change in Roman society in the Augustan age: matrons leave home and accompany their husbands when they travel to perform their public duties even in distant countries, even when the journey is for military reasons. It was a change of great importance, opposed, as we have seen, by the more traditionalist elements, but the practice spread rapidly and was accepted by the majority of Romans. Moreover, once women had tasted the pleasure of leaving the house, it became impossible to hold them back: "matronae nulla nec auctoritate nec verecundia nec imperio virorum contineri limine poterant".

"The figure of Livia reflects a fact: important political decisions were made within the imperial domus, in which Livia could participate, crossing the boundary between private and public, and thus inaugurating a new female condition" (Bauman, 2002: 62).

2. The leadership of Roman women: from Matronae to Augustae

Historical references on women are relatively few, and interest is limited to matrons; women of other social status appear only in passing or, more often, do not exist. In addition, few women of the ancients wrote. No one in any case considered their writings worthy of being handed down for the sake of posterity, not even when it was Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, whose collection of letters circulated in antiquity, or when it was an imperial princess who wrote her memoirs, as Agrippina Minor seems to have done (Evans, 2014). The exception is Sulpicia, the only female voice in classical literature; better still, the only woman of the classical age whose works have come down to us. She is the only one who speaks to us about herself without male intermediaries; an exception in a certain sense it is not, not only because it is still debated whether it was Sulpicia or Tibullus who composed those verses, and because it would be a trivial matter in any case, but above all because those poems have come down to us as included in the Tibullus Corpus. Whoever copied them thought they were copying the writings of a man.

Nikos Kokkinos observes that Roman history is an almost exclusively male story, and women play no visible role in its main events. Even in less critical episodes, they are scarcely involved. Indeed, history, biography, poetry and satire were all written by men, but this only shows that women were not encouraged to write. If some did, their work, unfortunately, did not survive. Gillian Clark agrees: Almost all the literature of the ancient

world was written by men; all the surviving artefacts, as far as we know, were made by men; women's lives are presented, if at all, from a male point of view; the tiny percentage of works that are or could be, by women does not tell us enough about women's lives. Very few women are known. As if that were not enough, the information we have is, like all information from the ancient world, relates mostly to elites (Clark, 1989: 23). Of Roman women, we only know what men thought and wrote about them: "The study of women in ancient literature is the study of men's views on women and cannot become anything else." In many of the works that are dedicated to these themes, one observes the search, sometimes exasperated, for signs of emancipation, a category that Roman women of the time perhaps held in low esteem: not interested instead in the woman who keeps silent, obeys, spins wool within the confines of the domestic walls, according to a commonplace image that has spanned the centuries: tacitast melior mulier semper quam loquens" (Herbert-Brown, 1998: 383).

Let us, therefore, begin the study of Livia's character, which will also allow us to deepen our knowledge of the domus Augusta, the new imperial court, the new centre of power, alternative or superimposed on the Curia, as well as that of women grappling with politics. Of course, it was mainly family politics, made up above all of relationships to weave, friendships to cultivate, husbands to facilitate in their careers, sons to educate and push to the top, and daughters to be married off as best they could; but also of estates to administer, slaves to manage, alliances to make or maintain, enemies to flatter and appease, relatives and adversaries to eliminate, perhaps with poison, in a context in which tradition entrusted women with the science and management of natural medicine. We could not expect, because the conditions of the time did not yet allow it, a woman capable of expressing (if she had even formulated one) a genuine, great political vision, such as that pursued by Sulla, Caesar and Augustus: only Livia comes close to this model if we believe the accounts of Cassius Dione, who in his work transcribes her nocturnal discussions with Augustus on the advisability of pardoning opponents rather than persecuting them.

The woman described by Cassius Dio in a well-known passage then came back into fashion: without going as far as the excesses of Statius, who delineates a woman, ideal as much as impossible, endowed with casitas and pudicitia, who is a subservient and docile spouse, and beautiful, simple, urban, rich, of good birth, seductive, elegant. More generally, female emancipation in Rome coincides with the apogee of the empire. With the advent of the Augustan principate, the role of the matrons became even more complicated. Those same ambiguities that characterise the rule of the prince are also present, without a shadow of a doubt, in the representation of the female condition in the early imperial age, starting with the women of the Domus of the princeps, who are deeply involved, first and foremost, by the need to ensure a legitimate heir to the emperor himself. This new power structure, the domus Augusta, at once public and private, is formed by marriages (and divorces), adoptions, friendships,

personal promotions, additions and removals. It is a new sphere of mediation between princeps and society that sees, over time, the progressive extinction of the traditional noble element that had generated it and its social turnover; that is, it passes from the gens to the domus. These "new" women are called upon to represent, on the one hand, the traditional ideal female model, hinging on the procreation of legitimate heirs and dedication to the family, but, at the same time, they are called upon to be an integral part of the civic community, through financial support for works of public utility. The emperor promoted renovating and constructing two buildings named after his sister and wife: the Porticus Octaviae and the Porticus Liviae, respectively.

There was a real pact between the sexes. Women identified themselves above all with the role of mother and co-educator of their adolescent children, "a role that required women to have freedom of movement, access to culture and participation in social life". "If they conformed to the model, they were rewarded with respect, public and private admiration, and tributes" In this way, they accepted "the male construction of their image and role, and as permanent educators of their children, they transmitted to them the values of their fathers, and thus the ingrained conviction that the division of sexual roles could not be questioned, as if it were inscribed in the law of nature." (Evans, 2014: 67).

3. Female leadership: Human skills from the Livia Lesson

The leader is an individual who directs others towards a common goal so that everyone feels involved in the whole process. Bennis and Thomas consider leadership "one of the most observed phenomena on Earth and one of the least understood". As time passes, the heroic conception of leadership has been challenged by the social dynamism in which human beings develop due to the prevailing challenges in organisations and societies. Leadership is made; it is built in everyone through personal excellence.

Building leadership has become an arduous and tenacious task in these post-modern times. However, education needs many school leaders to transform outdated, outmoded reality and adapt it to society's new challenges. Finally, the theoretical approach to female leadership from the perspective of humanistic pedagogy offers an alternative for higher education in the search for new ways of educating an integral, ethical, conscious and committed citizen about their social reality.

Considering sexual freedom – the spread of free and open sexual mores – as an indication of female emancipation may be a mistake, caused by the spontaneous analogy that the historian is led to make, since in our era, the two phenomena, female emancipation and the liberalisation of mores, have proceeded hand in hand, or almost. However, such an indicator is misleading, and it is not difficult to identify other epochs

and other civilisations in which nonchalant sexual mores characterised social structures in which the position of women was entirely subordinate to the male element (Broccoli, 2022). However, characteristics of female leadership can be highlighted. Plinio mentions that the law forbids women from spinning in the open countryside because the act could cast an evil eye on crops: the only place designated for women's work is the domestic sphere. Valerius Maximus reports the case of Quintus Antistius Vetere, who repudiated his wife for having seen her talking publicly with a freedwoman of Publius Sempronius Sophronius, who repudiated his wife because, unbeknownst to her husband, she had gone to watch the games (Hemelrijk, 2015). While it is true that the virtuous Roman woman is, in some cases, allowed to leave the house – to make visits or purchases, for religious practices, some of which are reserved for women only, or to accompany her husband to a banquet – it is only from the end of the republic, when we are dealing with Roman men travelling along the imperial roads to distant locations, that we can observe how women began to accompany them.

It was a change of great importance, opposed, as we have seen, by the more traditionalist elements, but rapidly spreading and accepted by the majority of Romans. Furthermore, once women had tasted the pleasure of leaving the house, it became impossible to hold them back: "matronae nulla nec auctoritate nec verecundia nec imperio virorum contineri limine poterant" (Freisenbruch, 2011: 67).

In outlining the traits linked to Livia's female leadership, it would take much work to add anything to the numerous and recent studies dedicated to her. We propose highlighting those aspects of her life that help us understand Livia and enable us to accurately describe our character through Livia (Gardner, 1986). The figure of Livia reflects a fact: within the imperial domus, critical political decisions were made in which Livia could participate, crossing the boundary between private and public, thus inaugurating a new female condition (Hillard, 2013). At the centre of the network, some described Livia as a virtuous inspirer of balance and moderation; other historians saw her as the source of intrigue and the dispenser of poison. Livia had a true passion for botany, and being health-conscious, she made using herbs one of the pillars on which her claim to good health rested. She was a follower of the theories of Asclepiades of Prusa, a physician who proposed therapies that were, if not effective, at least pleasant: massages, baths, diets, and even beds.

In conclusion, it cannot be denied that if Livia did not retreat from anything to achieve and maintain power, she succeeded fully. If she was a poisoner, she was not punished like her granddaughter Livilla but managed to die in her bed, old and honoured. The anonymous author of the Consolatio and Liviam writes: "ac melius carte virtutem exempla pet emus / cum tu Romanae principis edis opus" (Ginsburg, 2006: 165).

4. Humanistic Management and Human Skill Training

Si consiglia di ricorrere ai sottoparagrafi solo se strettamente necessario e di evitare,The Humanistic Management Network, a panel of academics focused on impacting managerial education, policy leaders in a variety of skills and levels, and the broad public, has defined a vision: Our vision is of a world economy that protects human dignity and promotes human well-being in an economic system where all stakeholders are respected equally so that the mechanisms of the market are applied to maximise society's benefits rather than individual profits; an economy where economic rationality is implemented as a means rather than an end in itself (www.humanistmanagementnetwork.org/index.php/en/about-us/mission-vision).

To achieve this, the Humanistic Management Network has designed a concise "manifesto" on its website, which claims that "market economies have substantial potential for human development" but that their activities must be pro-life and include respect for human dignity and freedom and collective decision-making within companies and governments. The focus is on cooperation and collaboration and considering people as ends rather than means to an economic or market end. This section argues for the humanistic approach to management training. Livia's example and ability to outline traits of contemporary female leadership are tools for teaching soft skills. Soft skills, outlined as human skills, need to be included within the curriculum dedicated to higher education, especially in training future leaders.

Defining the need for a Humanist approach in management means recognising that its purpose is expressed in training analytical, functional and technical skills and in soft skills education, i.e., skills expressed in managing interpersonal relations. Following this identification, business schools – but more generally, all institutions involved in management education – could adopt more humanistic leadership training approaches. This training could be proposed for technical experts and people with experience working in human resources. Leadership skills require human and social competencies, i.e., humanistic competencies associated with well-being, such as intellectual honesty, moral correctness, systems understanding, and emotionality.

The Humanistic Management Network claims that a large part of management training today is strongly influenced by a model of management of economic institutions and businesses that is distant from the value of human dignity, the value of the living environment and human well-being. However, forward-looking management scholars believe that leadership education can, and should be, reoriented towards a more humanistic management model (Raelin, 2014),

The concept is based on the idea that humanistic management education requires prospective leaders to be more than technicians and analysts when

engaging with internal and external stakeholders, businesses and other organisations in a complex and demanding world. In today's world, leaders are confronting climate change, terrorism, conflict, and inequality; numerous other human-made problems are increasingly necessitating new forms of leadership and management that embrace more humanistic and ecological issues (Ragusa *et al.*, 2022). We need values beyond profit maximisation to incorporate more humanistic and environmental concerns. Such issues demand significant change, what McIntosh *et al.* (2021) have called a needed transformation. Moreover, changing involves dealing with people, social and ecological questions, and a holistic perspective. As opposed to formulas and simply analytic solutions, these leaders must consider the changed context in which organisations operate globally today and move their businesses in new orientations. Waddock (2020) defined welfare as the "ability to see or think through the consequences of one's decisions". These implications include human and ecological impact, how decisions and actions affect various stakeholders, and the long-term consequences of business decisions today. None of these elements are easily accommodated in formulae, problem-solving and closely understood functional competence. Instead, they require the attributes of wisdom described above – moral imagination, systems thinking and aesthetic sensitivity – to serve a better world.

In addition, technological innovations are changing our understanding of what organisations, even companies, are and how they will likely be structured (Pirson, 2020), not to mention how capitalism will evolve. The future may hold very different organisational forms and expectations of business, probably networked, than those on which twenty-first-century management theory is based (Davis, 2020; Rifkin, 2021). As Davis (2020) argues, future companies will likely be more temporary and less stable, employ fewer highly skilled people, and be more connected, networked and decentralised in decision-making than in the past.

The humanistic approach to leadership development requires a new perspective. This new perspective could include new models of lifelong learning, in which trainees – persons in, or about to take up, leadership and managerial roles – would participate in programmes that are scheduled and evolving throughout their careers to achieve a new degree. Such programmes might employ work-based, active learning strategies (Raelin, 2014, 2021) in formats that get leaders periodically to address a set of subjects and then send them back to their organisations where they can practice what they have learnt and reflect, both individually and in groups, on what they have learnt. Various training programmes could be designed with different content, depending on the institution and the needs and interests of the leaders (see Caggiano, 2020, 2022). The core, however, should focus on the development of human skills.

Leadership is not something to be learnt or "mastered"; instead, it is a lifelong learning process. Courses of a practical and in-depth nature could be designed, e.g., with several-day meetings for between one and

ten weeks. Such designs, which each business school would supposedly develop uniquely, would recognise that leadership learning is a long-term process rather than a "once-and-for-all" approach and requires practice and reflection.

Some initiatives focus on leadership development. One example is Rome Business School, an international business school with students from 150 countries. At Rome Business School, hard science is complemented by holistic training in human skills. Rome Business School has introduced a module dedicated to soft skills such as emotional intelligence, communication, leadership, teamwork, mindfulness, negotiation and conflict management, analytical thinking and complex problem-solving within all its controllers and MBA programmes for the past five years. Students follow the cross-curricular course, and at the beginning and end, a soft skills assessment test is carried out, in addition to verifying the impact and implementation of the module. In addition to the soft skills training, Rome Business School has structurally included in the value proposition of all its master's programmes a module dedicated to corporate social responsibility, innovation and responsible leadership. Humanistic management training stresses 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. Humanising the organisation, incorporating ethics and responsibility as a part of the whole and not independently, and introducing the human sciences into management training is crucial for future leaders.

Leaders must be fully integrated human beings. "It would be a mistake to think that this human dimension is so important that we can forget the professional dimension… So, the real goal is to facilitate the training of professionals with good technical training and integrated human beings. We must fight against the schizophrenia that we sometimes create, as in business schools, in the sense that professional life is one way and personal life is another" (Allen, 2022: 16).

5. Conclusions

The importance of leadership in the conduct of human affairs is universally accepted. An organisation or society can only survive for a short time without leaders. A leader influences other people; a leader is an individual who guides others towards a common goal so that all feel involved in the whole process. Authorities such as Bennis and Namus (2014) consider that leadership "is one of the most observed phenomena on Earth and one of the least understood" (p. 4). As time passes, the heroic conception of leadership has been challenged by the social dynamism in which human beings develop due to the prevailing challenges in organisations and societies.

Leadership happens between people; that is, it is not something that one party does to another. Because leadership is about people, there must nec-

essarily be followers. Daft (2011) argues that "good leaders know how to follow and, thus, set an example for others" (67). The question of intention or will means that the leader and their followers actively pursue change that will lead to a desired future. Each person is responsible for reaching that desired future and achieving the objectives set. In the face of so much evidence to the contrary, it is challenging to establish how and how much the condition of Roman women changed during the years of transition from the republic to the empire. We can only observe that when the processes of emancipation began, provoked by socio-economic drives and by crises in the traditionalist components of society (for example, those linked to a predominantly agricultural economy), the innovative pressure of the female element exerted itself in different ways and with varying outcomes in other spheres – sexuality, religion, public life, marriage, money and more – encountering varying degrees of resistance from the opposing male element. The result is a composite picture in which conservation factors and important innovations coexist; the asymmetry makes the historian's interpretation of the phenomenon even more difficult.

In proto-imperial Rome, we witness events of contrasting signs, and a composite panorama emerges that is difficult to decipher. It has been said that if one wants to decide whether and how much the female condition has changed compared to the past, Some have focused on purely economic factors, such as the possibility of inheriting and managing assets; others on cultural elements, such as the fact that women were able to access the same levels of education and literacy as men, in the expanding empire, which was equipped with an increasingly vast, efficient and secure road network, not only legionaries and merchants moved, but also women (Callegari, 2021). In Livia, two cohabiting souls had never before —come to such a tragic and disruptive inner conflict: the protective soul of the mother and the devoted soul of the wife, as well as companion and confidante of an exceptional life. A third prevails between the two sentiments of being, which is also innate to the intelligence of the domina: the spirit of the political woman who, after a plot woven over more than half a century, cannot retreat in the face of the unexpected. Subordinated to the gendered norms peculiar to Rome, the emperor's wives, mothers, sisters, daughters and other persons strictly connected to the Emperor – individuals collectively grouped under the term "imperial women" – had no legitimate power of their own either singularly or socially.

Nevertheless, they were crucial to the new and evolving patterns of leadership. They were present, even if only marginally, in Rome's highest circles and perhaps participated in momentous decisions but certainly in the empire's best. Studying these women clarifies the image and functioning of Rome's ruling principality and gender roles. At the same time, the paper clarifies notable characters overlooked or downplayed in ancient and modern accounts of Rome. The expression "imperial women" designates those who shared marriage or immediate family with the emperor. The term has

no equivalent in Latin or Greek. The honorific title Augusta (Sebaste, in Greek) was used for many women.

We need to introduce, for a better word, the "soul" of things into education and leadership skills training. Why do you argue? That is the question. What do people strive for? Decisions are not made in the absence of values. Our task is to teach learners to critically evaluate the decisions they have to make within their set of values. So, we must coach learners to critically assess their decision-making strategies within a set of values. Furthermore, a humanistic approach to leadership development can help fill what we might call a "contextual gap" and a lack of moral imagination. This contextual gap occurs when a business is presented without sufficient historical, social or ecological context, resulting in a lack of understanding of the business's moral, historical and social foundations.

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