
Musical Principles for Educational Leadership and Organizational Management toward Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the Music-Inspired Leadership Model (MILM), an innovative conceptual framework that integrates key musical principles “**harmony, rhythm, dynamics, and improvisation**” with contemporary leadership theories and strategic management practices in higher education institutions and modern organizations. In the rapidly changing context of the 21st century, effective leaders must demonstrate vision, adaptability, creativity, and the ability to foster cross-disciplinary collaboration. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted using major academic databases including Web of Science, Scopus, and ERIC to synthesize knowledge from music psychology, music education, leadership studies, and organizational management. The findings indicate that musical principles offer a robust and transferable framework for leadership development: strategic alignment and organizational coherence (harmony), process consistency and workflow momentum (rhythm), adaptive and context-responsive leadership (dynamics), and enhanced resilience and innovation through strategic improvisation (improvisation). Moreover, the MILM model aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, 8, and 16 by promoting collaborative learning cultures, fostering engagement, and strengthening organizational adaptability. The article concludes with policy implications, practical applications, and recommendations for future research to assess the effectiveness of the MILM model in advancing leadership capacities in educational institutions and modern organizations.

KEYWORDS: Music-Inspired Leadership Model, Leadership, Music Psychology, Organizational Management, Collaboration, Innovation, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a critical strategic factor for educational institutions, particularly higher education institutions that face rapid changes in technology, financial structures, and stakeholder pressures. These shifts require leaders to expand their roles beyond administrative management toward vision building, innovation, and interdisciplinary collaboration (Barrett, 2012; Boerner & Gebert, 2012).

Educational challenges also involve human resource management, cultivating a lifelong learning culture, and fostering creativity. Modern leaders must therefore integrate distributed, transformational, and adaptive leadership approaches to effectively navigate uncertainty (Boerner & Gebert, 2012).

Music, as a universal medium and a tool for emotional expression, functions as a form of nonverbal communication that supports group coordination (Cross, 2014). Musical principles such as harmony, rhythm, dynamics, and improvisation can serve as a conceptual framework for designing collaborative leadership. Research in music psychology further indicates that music influences emotion, social cognition, and behavioral synchronization, all of which enhance teamwork and co-creation (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010).

In education, ensemble-based music learning and improvisation have been shown to enhance creativity, metacognition, and communicative competence, offering insights relevant to leadership development such as joint planning, deep listening, and creating experimental learning environments (Biasutti, 2013; Biasutti, 2015). Musical metaphors such as the “conductor” and the “jazz ensemble” are widely used in leadership training to represent structured precision as well as improvisational flexibility and innovation (Koivunen, 2003; Barrett, 2012).



Despite extensive research in music psychology, music education, and musical metaphors, an integrated framework that systematically connects musical principles with leadership theory and educational administration remains lacking (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010; Biasutti, 2013).

Therefore, this article aims to:

1. propose the Music-Inspired Leadership Model (MILM), which applies harmony, rhythm, dynamics, and improvisation as a framework for leadership development;
2. link MILM with leadership theories and collaborative learning management;
3. explain how MILM supports SDGs 4, 8, and 16; and
4. present strategic guidelines, practical applications, and future research directions.

These contributions help bridge theoretical and practical gaps between music and organizational leadership in a systematic manner (Barrett, 2012; Boerner & Gebert, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This article was developed within the framework of the Music-Inspired Leadership Model (MILM) and employs a systematic document analysis approach to construct the conceptual model through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The SLR synthesizes existing research related to music, leadership, organizational studies, and education to establish a theoretical grounding for the four core dimensions of MILM Harmony, Rhythm, Dynamics, and Improvisation.

Data Sources: Major academic databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, and ERIC, were used to identify relevant peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and dissertations that discuss the connection between music or musical principles and organizational leadership or management.

Data Analysis: A content analysis method was applied to categorize and cluster the core concepts extracted from the selected literature. This analytical process led to the development of the Music-Inspired Leadership Model (MILM) Framework diagram.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Psychology of Music and Human Behavior. Music is a complex phenomenon involving emotions, cognition, and brain structures. Research in music psychology demonstrates that listening to and creating music can activate the emotional neural system (the limbic system) and enhance coordination between the left and right hemispheres, influencing decision-making, emotional regulation, and social cognition (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). Moreover, music supports group functioning through activities that require coordination, helping participants develop empathy, social understanding, and more effective communication (Koelsch, 2014; Rabinowitch, Cross, & Burnard, 2013).

2. Educational Leadership and Musical Pedagogy. Small ensemble learning or collaborative music-making is considered a learning process in which students work together to achieve shared goals, exchange knowledge, and solve problems an approach that enhances teamwork, joint problem-solving, and creative thinking (Biasutti, 2013). Ensemble rehearsals require collective planning, attentive listening, and adjusting one's performance to align with the group, enabling teachers and learners to develop conflict management, experimentation-friendly environments, and constructive feedback practices (Biasutti, 2015).

3. Organizational Management and Musical Metaphors. Music has been used as a tool for shaping organizational culture and as a metaphor for explaining management in different contexts (Koivunen, 2010). Comparing organizations to musical ensembles allows clearer understanding of structural dynamics, communication processes, and flexibility. For example, a classical orchestra

represents a bureaucratic organization with strict rules, formal hierarchy, and high precision (Koivunen, 2010), while a jazz ensemble represents a start-up emphasizing innovation, rapid change, and context-driven decision-making (Barrett, 2012). These musical metaphors help leaders understand how to balance structure and flexibility, communicate effectively, and foster collaboration aligning with transformational and distributed leadership theories (Boerner & Gebert, 2012).

The MILM Concept and Its Application for Sustainable Development

1. Music-Inspired Leadership Model (MILM). The Music-Inspired Leadership Model (MILM) integrates key musical principles “**harmony, rhythm, dynamics, and improvisation**” with established theories of leadership and organizational management (Barrett, 2012; Boerner & Gebert, 2012). The model proposes that each musical element can be translated into essential leadership practices for contemporary educational institutions and modern organizations, enabling leaders to foster collaboration, adaptability, creativity, and system-wide coherence in response to complex and rapidly changing environments.



Figure 1. Conceptual Model of MILM

From the diagram, the framework includes:

1.1 Harmony → Organizational Alignment

In music, harmony refers to the consonance between multiple sounds. In organizational leadership, it represents the alignment of shared vision, organizational culture, and strategic goals (Koivunen, 2010; Barrett, 2012). For example, academic leaders can apply “harmony” to ensure alignment among departments and researchers, promoting coherent efforts toward the institution’s mission and minimizing conflicts or redundancies (Boerner & Gebert, 2012).

Table 1: Examples of Applying Harmony

Music Concept	Organizational Management	Practical Example
All notes harmonized	Alignment of vision and mission	Strategic meetings involving all stakeholders
Chord adjustments	Resource and team management	Integrated curriculum planning workshops

1.2 Rhythm → Process Consistency & Momentum

Rhythm in music refers to timing and continuity. In organizations, it translates to designing consistent workflows, establishing clear procedures, and maintaining momentum (Biasutti, 2013). Examples include weekly project review meetings and regular monitoring of teaching and research quality.

Table 2: Rhythm in Organizational Context

Topic	Description	Example
Rhythm → Process Consistency & Momentum	Rhythm means timing and continuity; in organizations, it involves designing consistent workflows, clear procedures, and maintaining momentum	- Weekly project review meetings - Regular monitoring of teaching and research quality

1.3 Dynamics → Adaptive Leadership Style

Dynamics in music relates to intensity and tonal variation, reflecting a

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leader's flexibility and adaptability to changing situations (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). Leaders with high dynamics adjust their management style according to team needs and context for example, offering creative support in some projects but enforcing strict quality control in critical initiatives.

Table 3: Examples of Dynamics

Situation	Leadership Style	MILM Application
Pilot project	Supportive & open	Allow teams to experiment with new ideas
Quality evaluation	Strict & clear	Set standards and provide feedback

1.4 Improvisation → Innovation & Resilience

Improvisation is immediate, creative problem-solving, enabling leaders to innovate, address emergent challenges, and maintain organizational resilience (Barrett, 2012; Chanda & Levitin, 2013). Examples include rapidly adjusting curricula in response to technological changes or experimenting with new teaching approaches.

Table 4: Improvisation, Innovation & Resilience

Topic	Description	Example
Improvisation	→ Immediate, creative action enabling leaders to innovate, solve emergent problems, and maintain organizational flexibility	- Rapid curriculum adjustments responding to technological changes - Experimenting with new teaching methods

2. Application of MILM in Educational Institutions

the application of MILM can be implemented through the following processes:

2.1 Establishing cross-functional teams Comparable to Harmony

2.2 Setting regular procedures and activities (e.g., checkpoints, workshops) Comparable to Rhythm

2.3 Adapting management approaches according to situations

(Adaptive supervision) Comparable to Dynamics

2.4 Promoting creative thinking and innovation (e.g., innovation labs, pilot programs) Comparable to Improvisation

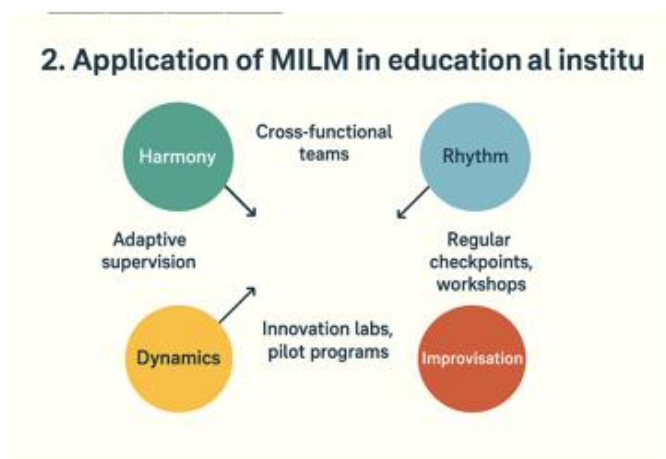


Figure 2: Application of MILM in Educational Institutions

3. Linking MILM with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs Linkage)

MILM is not only a strategic conceptual framework but also a mechanism to help educational institutions achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly:

3.1 SDG 4: Quality Education Applying Rhythm (process continuity)

ensures consistency in lifelong learning management. Improvisation (innovation) allows curricula to be flexible and responsive to a rapidly changing world.

3.2 SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth Using Dynamics

(adaptive leadership) fosters a flexible and creative work environment in educational institutions. The resulting **Resilience** enables organizations to grow and recover sustainably over time.

3.3 SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions Implementing

Harmony (organizational alignment & inclusivity) creates inclusive, transparent, and effective institutions by promoting participation and reducing structural conflicts.

STRATEGIC APPLICATION

The strategic application of the **Music-Inspired Leadership Model (MILM)** emphasizes three key practices:

1. Leadership as Conducting

Theoretical Concept: The metaphor of a leader as a conductor

emphasizes leadership beyond top-down command. It focuses on guiding, structuring, and harmonizing members with diverse expertise similar to a conductor managing rhythm, interpreting the score, and coordinating musicians' performance (Boerner & Gebert, 2012). In this context, leaders must: Set a clear vision (to set the score) Communicate effectively (to cue entries and dynamics) Balance structure with individual autonomy (to allow individual artistry within ensemble coherence)

Case Example: At University A, the president applied the conductor

metaphor by drafting an "Institutional Score" that clearly defined learning outcomes and KPIs. Faculties were allowed to design sub-curricula and assessment methods independently. Scheduled "rehearsal weeks" were implemented to review, synthesize, and adjust outcomes. This conductor-style leadership minimized conflicts over standards while enhancing acceptance of participatory practices.

2. Improvisation and Innovation – Adaptive Change through Improvisation

Theoretical Concept: Improvisation in organizations is not disorderly

work; it is the skill of thinking and collaborating under uncertainty. It involves problem-solving in real time, adapting work structures, and negotiating among members dynamically. Key theories include: Weick (1998): "Improvisation as a mindset" enables organizations to respond creatively to unexpected events. Vera & Crossan (2005): Examined team improvisation and innovation effectiveness, highlighting the integration of practice, communication, and resources to support practical training for innovative teams. Barrett (2012): Drew lessons from jazz, emphasizing acceptance of "mess" (uncertainty), using cues between members, and social norms where mistakes are learning opportunities rather than punishable errors. These principles can be applied concretely in leadership and teacher development programs.

Case Example: Barrett (2012) described organizations adopting jazz-

inspired principles to design leadership development programs using workshops that focus on listening, real-time response, and conversational continuation. This approach trains leaders to make adaptive decisions, reduces reliance on long-term plans alone, and increases team creativity.

3. Harmony in Organizational Culture – Building Alignment and Managing Conflict

Theoretical Concept: In organizational contexts, harmony refers to

creating alignment among values, policies, and behaviors that influence learning and work. Schein (2010) emphasizes the leader's role as the architect of organizational culture. Cultural change begins with designing symbolic systems, practices, and structures that support transformation, such as policies, personnel selection, and evaluation frameworks. The musical metaphor of consonance/dissonance can explain conflicts: some forms of dissonance may foster innovation if managed systematically, whereas emotional conflicts or discriminatory practices can harm the learning environment if left unaddressed (Rahim, 2002).

Case Example (Practical Application): An educational district aiming to

enhance harmony may start with an equity audit to identify structural gaps, followed by intergroup dialogue training, and establish a monitoring committee with diverse representation. Expected outcomes include reduced bias complaints, improved retention of vulnerable student groups, and enhanced quality of classroom discussions.

COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

The **Music-Inspired Leadership Model (MILM)** can be better understood through comparative case studies across different organizational contexts by examining parallels between types of musical ensembles and leadership practices.

1. Classical Orchestra – Hierarchy and Precision in Academic Bureaucracy

A classical orchestra exemplifies a hierarchical leadership model, with the conductor at the center of authority, responsible for ensuring precision, coordination, and strict adherence to the score. Each musician has a clearly defined role, emphasizing discipline and technical proficiency. This model mirrors academic bureaucracies, such as a University Senate, which operates with

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a clear governance structure, formal procedures, and decision-making that follows hierarchical protocols (Boerner & Gebert, 2012).

Case Study – University Senate: The University Senate resembles a classical orchestra in its reliance on structured rules and precise coordination, whether in policy formulation, curriculum approval, or issuance of academic regulations. The chairperson or university president functions like the conductor, directing the institution's course and maintaining organizational coherence. Studies indicate that such systems enhance stability and credibility but may become rigid when facing rapid changes (Mintzberg, 2013).

2. Jazz Ensemble – Improvisation and Organizational Innovation Flexibility

In contrast, a jazz ensemble reflects flexible and distributed leadership, relying on improvisation, adaptability, and real-time interaction. Jazz musicians negotiate roles collaboratively and continuously co-create new performances. This model aligns with innovative organizational cultures and start-ups, which require high agility and creative problem-solving (Barrett, 2012).

Case Study – Start-ups and Organizational Innovation Projects: Start-ups

thrive by creating a jazz-like environment. Agile teams can iteratively develop products, experiment with new approaches, and rapidly adjust strategies. For example, IBM applied the concept of Jazz Improvisation in leadership development programs to train executives to embrace uncertainty, foster collaboration, and drive innovation (Barrett, 2012). This approach highlights the importance of trust, communication, and psychological safety, which are central to jazz-style organizational functioning.

3. Choir – Collective Harmony in Community-Based Leadership. A choir exemplifies the principle of collective harmony, where the strength of the ensemble lies not in individual voices, but in the blending of diverse voices into a unified sound. Leadership in this context is not top-down control, but the cultivation of participation, equity, and mutual support. This model aligns with community-based leadership, particularly in school networks or educational collectives.

Case Study – School Networks: School networks, whether formal or

informal, often operate on principles of collaborative leadership, such as joint curriculum development, resource sharing, and exchange of teaching practices. Such collaboration enhances equity and educational sustainability, especially in resource-constrained contexts. This approach reflects the concepts of distributed leadership and collective efficacy, widely recognized in educational reform initiatives (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

Comparative Synthesis of the Three Case Studies. The three musical ensembles Classical Orchestra, Jazz Ensemble, and Choir offer complementary perspectives on music-inspired leadership. The orchestra emphasizes structure and precision, the jazz ensemble emphasizes flexibility and improvisation, and the choir emphasizes participation and the blending of diverse voices. Effective leadership in practice often requires a combination of these models, adapted to the context, objectives, and challenges faced by the organization.

Table 5. Comparison of Music-Inspired Leadership Models in Organizational Contexts

Model	Music Principle	Organizational Context	Example
Classical Orchestra	Hierarchy & Precision	Academic Bureaucracy	University Senate
Jazz Ensemble	Improvisation & Flexibility	Corporate Innovation & Start-ups	Agile teams in start-ups / IBM Leadership Program
Choir	Collective Harmony	Community-Based Leadership	School Networks

This table clearly illustrates the contrasting emphases: the orchestra focuses on well-defined structures, jazz emphasizes flexibility and improvisation, and the choir prioritizes participation and collective harmony. Together, they provide a holistic framework for understanding and applying leadership inspired by music.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study synthesized the concept of using music as an aesthetic leadership metaphor to understand the dynamics of leadership in contemporary organizations. Leadership is likened to a musical performance that requires effectiveness, creativity, and collaboration. The discussion analyzes the benefits, potential, and challenges of music-inspired leadership while linking it to contemporary leadership frameworks and relevant case studies.

1. Potential and Benefits of Music-Inspired Leadership

1.1 Enhancing Resilience.

Music naturally reflects processes of recovery and resilience. In a classical orchestra, mistakes may occur during a performance, but musicians' ability to return to the main melody mirrors organizational adaptability in times of crisis. From a management perspective, Luthans, Vogelgesang, and Lester

(2006) explain that “psychological capital of resiliency” is a crucial factor enabling organizations to recover from challenges such as policy changes or market uncertainties.

This resilience allows leaders and teams to adapt quickly, maintain continuity, and sustain performance under pressure, demonstrating how music-inspired metaphors can guide leadership practices in uncertain environments.

1.2 Fostering Innovation. Music, particularly jazz, demonstrates that creativity emerges through improvisation, which relies on skills, trust, and flexibility among ensemble members. Crossan (1998) explains that “organizational improvisation” is a key mechanism driving innovation in constantly changing environments.

1.3 Promoting Inclusivity and Participation. Choir exemplifies inclusive leadership, where every member has a meaningful role and voice. Despite differences, the harmonious blending of voices creates a beautiful collective outcome. This aligns with Nemhard and Edmondson (2006), who note that psychological safety arises when leaders foster inclusivity and provide opportunities for all members to participate.

1.4 Linking Music Principles to Sustainability (The Music–SDGs Nexus). The MILM framework integrates practical musical dimensions into leadership to advance sustainable development. Harmony establishes value alignment essential for SDG 16, fostering strong institutions and good governance. Rhythm supports consistent implementation of plans to achieve learning outcomes, aligning with SDG 4. The combination of Dynamics and Improvisation underpins sustainable adaptability, a key mechanism for responding to economic and social challenges, in line with SDG 8.

2. Challenges in Applying MILM. Although the music-inspired leadership concept adds value, several challenges exist:

2.1 Organizational Familiarity. Organizations that adhere strictly to hierarchical structures may perceive musical metaphors as too abstract. It is necessary to translate these concepts into tangible strategies that can be implemented in practice (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

2.2 Cultural and Structural Constraints. In certain contexts, such as highly bureaucratic organizations or universities, applying improvisation may conflict with strict regulations and formal procedures (Boerner & Gebert, 2012).

3. Linkage with Contemporary Leadership Theories

3.1 Transformational Leadership. Music supports inspiring and motivating change, enhancing the ability of leaders to drive organizational transformation (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

3.2 Servant Leadership. Similar to a choir, leaders create a space where every member feels valued and can contribute meaningfully (Greenleaf, 2002).

3.3 Distributed Leadership. Reflected in a jazz ensemble, where each member has the freedom to create while being accountable for the collective performance (Spillane, 2006).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis and conceptual framework of the Music-Inspired Leadership Model (MILM) highlight that music is not merely a metaphor or symbolic tool for explaining leadership, but can be applied as a practical framework in organizational and educational contexts. MILM demonstrates potential as a strategic mechanism for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4, 8, and 16). Key musical dimensions Harmony, Rhythm, Dynamics, and Improvisation provide clarity in team management, maintaining work momentum, adapting to change, and fostering creativity within organizations. Thus, MILM can serve as a tool for developing leadership skills and strategic management capabilities that respond effectively to the complexities and challenges of modern educational contexts (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013).

1. Policy and Practical Implications. From the summary above, the policy implication is that MILM can be incorporated into training and leadership development programs for educational administrators. Such programs aim to enhance team management, strategic planning, and organizational culture that is flexible and creative, laying the foundation for sustainable institutions. Designing experiential training programs based on musical principles can include activities such as collaborative workshops, improvisation exercises for problem-solving, and reflective simulations of decision-making impacts. These interventions help leaders cultivate emotional resilience, an innovative mindset, and inclusive leadership (Biasutti & Concina, 2013; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Boyatzis, 2018).

2. Future Directions. Future research should focus on the empirical evaluation of MILM through the implementation of workshops and training interventions in real educational institutions. Studies should measure the impact on leadership behaviors and organizational outcomes, as well as on SDG-related performance indicators. Additionally, the use of psychometric assessment

tools such as measurements of emotional intelligence, resilience, and leadership adaptability can provide scientific evidence supporting the effectiveness of this framework (Boyatzis, 2018).

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