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Published online: 19 Jun 2023.

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ABSTRACT
This article presents a theoretical justification and a proposal that seeks to educate university students in leadership through virtues and personal competencies. A distinction is offered between virtues and competencies without opposing them. Subsequently, a leadership education model based on virtues and personal competencies is offered. This proposal applies the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition of education in virtues considering the contributions of psychology and leadership theory. The leadership model includes eight competencies linked to the cardinal virtues, which are grouped into three domains: understanding reality, relating to others and dedication to the task. Finally, some guidelines for the further development of assessment instruments and for leadership education of university students are offered.

1. Character and leadership education and its place in the university

This paper proposes a model of leadership education for university students within the framework of character education understood 'as a subset of moral education, concerned with the cultivation of positive character traits called virtues' (Arthur et al., 2016, p. 20). Universities are particularly well suited to the education and development of socially responsible student leadership (Dugan & Komives, 2010), although it is not commonly undertaken within the framework of character education (Brooks et al., 2019). Character education for university students has a long tradition, although it has been receiving more attention in recent years (Bok, 2020; Brant et al., 2020, 2022; Brooks, 2021; Brooks et al., 2019; Harrison & Laco, 2022; Lamb et al., 2021, 2022; Lewis, 2007). Universities are important agents in the character education of their students, shaping students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Many university mission statements include virtues and values, as well as socially responsible leadership (Arias-Coello et al., 2020; Breznik & Law, 2019; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Recent studies indicate that most university teachers recognise, as part of their role, helping students in the development of virtues and values (Stolzenberg et al., 2019).

However, there are critical voices about the risks of character education, which in some cases could be promoted as a useful means to achieve good outward behaviour, but

without free decisions based on good moral reasoning and student deliberation (Davis, 2003). Such an education carries the risk of indoctrination: the attempt to get students to acquire or hold certain beliefs uncritically, 'trying to prevent reflection on a belief' (White, 2016, p. 452). The importance of moral education is not questioned, but it is argued that the university should limit itself to what is supposed to be its own competence or mission: teaching and research (which implies the education of intellectual virtues) in the pursuit of truth (Fish, 2004).

Character education is a complex task and, if not done in the right way, can be counterproductive, but should not be dismissed (Arthur, 2020; Brant et al., 2020; Brooks, 2021; Fernández & López, 2023; Kiss & Euben, 2010). Certainly, the university must be particularly attentive to the cultivation of intellectual virtues, but without forgetting that the search for truth is inseparable from the search for the good. The deliberate or explicit promotion of virtues must not 'undermine or inhibit the freedom of choice that is a sine qua non of virtuous action or conduct' (Carr, 2017, p. 112). Today, there is an opportunity for an approach to moral education that integrates findings of various disciplines with an expanded reason towards spirituality. 'It is the realm of religion and spirituality, in its less doctrinaire forms, that engages many students' deepest questions and strongest convictions about how to live an ethical life' (Kiss & Euben, 2010, p. 13). Critical voices should help us to prevent the risks of malpractice in character education. In this article we want to propose a model that responds to these criticisms and serves as a basis for adequate character education at university level.

Moral education and leadership education are two interrelated issues. The development of values-based models of leadership education is important and relevant to prepare students for their future responsibilities, 'to prepare engaged and active citizens' (Brooks, 2021; Bok, 2020, p. 33). This requires education in virtues and competencies, both intellectual and ethical (Colby, 2002; Naval et al., 2022). To this end, a proposed model of leadership education based on personal competencies and virtues is presented. Firstly, we will offer our own definition of leadership from a Thomistic approach that will later serve as a key to the leadership education model. Secondly, we will point out some similarities and differences between virtues and competencies. Thirdly, we will present the theoretical model of leadership education based on virtues and competencies. Fourthly, we will offer some pedagogical strategies for leadership education in line with the model presented.

Our work involves an interdisciplinary exercise in which the philosophical tradition of virtue ethics dialogues with the psycho-educational discourse of competency-based education. Humanities—particularly philosophy—provide a firm foundation for leadership research (Ciulla, 2019).

2. Defining leadership from an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective

Leadership has been a widely studied phenomenon since the second half of the twentieth century. Considering the most relevant theoretical and empirical research in the field of education, the study of leadership reveals the following characteristics (Bush, 2008; Daft & Lane, 2008; Gumus et al., 2018; Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Robinson et al., 2008):

- It is a social phenomenon that serves social purposes.
- It is intentional and aims at a defined direction and goals, at a particular change.
- It influences people's attitudes, thoughts, and actions. Leadership is a process of reciprocal influence between leader and followers.
- It is related to ethics and values; not only those of the leader, but also those of the group. The values espoused, the culture and the organisational climate are important for organisational performance.
- It goes beyond management positions: it is a 'function' performed by people in various parts of the organisational structure.
- It is contextual and contingent: it is affected by the organisation in which it takes place, the people in it and the characteristics of its leaders.
- It contributes significantly to the improvement of student learning, through curriculum development and in-service teacher training.
- It is exercised primarily by principals, although it may be distributed or shared with teachers.
- Good practice is transferable to almost all educational contexts.

From an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective, we propose a definition of leadership that is in line with the observable characteristics of the phenomenon and includes essential elements of the exercise of leadership: it is 'the act of guiding others towards a common goal or good' (López & Ortiz de Montellano, 2021, p. 2102; López, 2022a). Central to this definition is the human act or action of guiding others, which responds to the etymology of the term 'to lead' which captures the essence of the exercise of leadership better than other verbs as influencing or governing often used in the field of leadership. Influence is an effect of guiding others, not the essence of the exercise of leadership. Leadership is a process but first and foremost a human act; 'it is a relational and intentional act to guide others towards shared goals, towards communion' (López, 2022a, p. 128).

According to Aristotle (1994, pp. 1046b, 1047a), every human act requires a capacity for its exercise. The exercise of leadership requires certain capacities (cognitive, technical, and moral), among which there are stable inner dispositions that enable one to act well and which we call virtues. They correspond to the metaphysical category called quality. The specific difference inherent in every virtue is the inclination towards a moral good (Newstead et al., 2021), in the case of leadership, towards a common moral good. Leadership can be considered a virtue as a human capacity or quality that refers to a human act, as a free exercise of that capacity (Fernández & López, 2022; López, 2022a). They are two sides of the same coin: the exercise or action of leadership is the movement from potency (virtue of leadership) to act (exercise of leadership). Leadership is an act of communication whose own effect is to move another person, and which has its cause in a previous union of wills around a community of goals.

Applying Aristotle's analogy, we can affirm that leadership can be said in different ways, as an act and as a virtue, but also as a competency (López, 2022a). The concept of competency is linked to the Aristotelian concept of *téchne*, which we can translate as 'knowing how to do', while that of *areté* connects with that of 'knowing how to be' (Garcés Giraldo & Giraldo Zuluaga, 2014). In the exercise of leadership, both virtues and competencies are required: 'acting with virtue is acting in a way that is technically and morally good'

(Newstead, 2021, p. 3). Competencies and virtues are different constructs but have common characteristics. It is useful to explain in more detail what competencies and virtues are, as well as their similarities and differences, to justify their inclusion in the model that will be presented.

3. Competency and leadership

Leadership is an important competency for university students to develop. This is clearly expressed in the Tuning Project which has sought to harmonise higher education structures in the European Union and has subsequently been extended to other regions (Bravo Salinas, 2007; González & Wagenaar, 2008). Since the end of the 20th century, competencies have been incorporated into educational legislation in various countries (Fernández & López, 2023).

Education in competencies became relevant with the work of Chomsky (1968) on linguistic competence, and above all with that of McClelland's job-competency studies (McClelland, 1973). Following this line of work, R. E. Boyatzis (1982) defined competency as a set of knowledge, attitude, skills, and abilities that allow for individual excellence in the performance of a certain task or job. According to Boyatzis, competency leads to excellence in any task; competency is an underlying trait or characteristic of an employee that is causally related to stable and effective behaviours, leading to 'success' in the performance of a task. According to R. E. Boyatzis (1982) leadership is a generic competency linked to job performance.

Originally the competency-based approach to leadership was focused on selecting, measuring, and developing the operational skills of organisational members to improve their productivity (Bolden & Gosling, 2006). However, the concept of competency was broadened to include a moral dimension, not only related to learning knowledge or action, but also to learning to live together and learning to be (Gosling & Grodecki, 2020). In the Tuning Project the concept of competency is not limited to the professional domain but also includes the moral dimension (Boni & Lozano, 2007). Leadership is considered a transversal competency applicable to many situations, and that requires other intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. It can be considered a personal competency.

Personal competencies, including leadership, are 'the dynamic set of knowledge (knowing), abilities or skills (knowing how to do), attitudes and values (knowing how to be) that, internalized and embodied in our acts, behaviours, or ways of doing things, take us on the path of our own maturity, excellence, fullness and happiness' (Crespí, 2019, p. 98). This definition links the concept of intrapersonal and interpersonal generic competencies (Crespí & García-Ramos, 2021) with that of virtue as an expression of plenitude and excellence.

4. Virtue and leadership

Virtue has been defined as a stable and well-motivated disposition to act (Fowers et al., 2021) and as a character trait that disposes a person to do intentionally something good (Hackett & Wang, 2012). In these definitions an Aristotelian concept of virtue, as a disposition or inclination towards a moral good, is evident. Aristotle developed a study of human action in which *areté* (virtue) is central to the *eudaimonia* (flourishing)

of the person (Kristjánsson, 2020). He defines virtues as *héxis*, stable inner dispositions that enable one to act well, as previously stated. In a similar way, Aquinas (1990, I–IIae q55) defines virtue as a good operative habit.

Habit is not simply outward 'good' behaviour. When behaviour is the result of automatism or when the person acts without a good intention, his action is not considered virtuous. For Aquinas, intention is the movement of the will that is directed towards the end (Aquinas, 1990, I–II ae q12); a movement that has been initiated affectively attracted by a good and that requires reason to reach that end. It distinguishes from desire because the latter is oriented towards the end directly while the object of intention is a good or a mean ordered to the end and 'includes the search for the way to reach the end' (Pérez-Soba, 2018, p. 289).

Human action is motivated by an intention that is first affective, although it requires the participation of the intellect and will. The projected end (i.e., aim) enters into the structure of desire and becomes the triggering motive for action. The good is perceived, imagined, or remembered, and judged as a value and as an end: 'This appraisal produces a felt tendency to do something, and the possible action is appraised in turn. If this action is deemed appropriate, the felt action tendency (the want) will prompt action' (Arnold, 1971, p. 192). It is not a purely extrinsic movement from the external object, for it presupposes an internal principle that stems from its more or less educated nature (De Finance, 1966).

For a virtuous act four conditions are required: to desire an end or good (affective foundation), to know what one is doing (conscience, not mere spontaneity), to deliberate and choose the best means to achieve the desired end (freedom in action), and to act firmly to achieve it (effectiveness). Desire is an automatic reaction while volition is a free response (Rodríguez Duplá, 2001). A virtuous act is an act in which the faculties of intellect, will and affection are exercised. The will performs the action that the intellect proposes based on an affective desire to achieve an apparently good object. This exercise leads not only to 'doing well' what is done, but also perfects—makes better—the person who acts. The exercise of virtues develops cognitive, volitional, and affective capacities by facilitating new virtuous acts (Titus, 2017). Between the three faculties, the intellect has priority because it serves as a light and guide for will and affectivity. The three faculties maintain a relationship of unitary circularity (Antúnez, 2016). Virtue is educated and developed through its exercise or action, and its execution is, in turn, conditioned by virtue: a greater virtue facilitates its corresponding act, which will never be a mere automatism, as it requires the possibility of responsible freedom. Virtue precedes action and develops through it.

Is leadership a virtue? Peterson and Seligman (2004) include leadership in their VIA (Values in Action) model as a character strength linked to the virtue of justice and define it as the art of encouraging a group of people, of which you are a part, to get things done. Good leadership requires moral virtues, it is based upon virtue (Cameron, 2012; Ciulla, 2004; López et al., 2023; Newstead et al., 2021; Pearce et al., 2006; Seijts et al., 2015), hence the adjectives 'good', 'virtuous' or 'positive action' are applied to leadership (López & Ortiz de Montellano, 2023).

Applying the Thomistic theory of virtues, leadership is a virtue that is ingrained in the will (and perfects it), although the intellect and (the irascible and concupiscible) appetites come into play. It can be considered a virtue annexed to justice (Aquinas, 1990). From

the Thomistic perspective the exercise of virtue—which can be applied to the exercise of leadership as a virtue—has three characteristics: 1) it is act-based or performative: it consists of an execution, not just a desire or deliberation, 2) it is agent-based or perfective: it makes the person better, 3) and it is reason-based or purposeful: it has a value as an intentional goal and motivation (Titus et al., 2020).

This consideration of leadership as an exercise oriented towards morally good ends, implies that the act of guiding others is intrinsically moral, as occurs with other human acts (e.g., the medical act or the educational act) in which there is implicitly a responsibility of beneficence in the interpersonal relationship (Pellegrino & Thomasma, 1987). If the exercise of leadership did not seek a common good (intentionally and by appropriate means) or did not do it well (effectively) it would not be good leadership (Ciulla, 2004). In case of abuse in the guidance of others, such an exercise should be called anti-leadership, the opposite of a virtue, i.e., a vice.

5. Similarities and differences between competencies and virtues

There are remarkable similarities between competencies and virtues in line with what we have previously explained. As in the discussion between virtue and skill (Stichter, 2018), the difference or similarity depends on the concept of virtue and competency that is assumed. In both cases, according to R. E. Boyatzis' (1982) definition of competency and our previous definition of moral virtue, they are stable dispositions of character that enable a person to perform with excellence in different contexts. They are educable and are developed through practical, reflective, and continuous exercise. A close relationship between competencies, as between virtues, enables them to be linked to each other in their exercise. Some of them can be considered meta-competencies or, in the case of virtues, master virtues. Finally, both competencies and virtues are capacities that are developed from the innate faculties of each human being (Morales-Sanchez & Cabello-Medina, 2015).

While recognising similarities between competencies and virtues, it is worth pointing out some differences between the two constructs, specifically their different attention to the intention of human action. In the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, virtue is linked to the intention or end of the act, which does not have the same relevance as in the concept of competency. For Aristotle, moral virtue requires that the person intentionally desires and seeks to perform a good or *telos* (Aristotle, 1985, p. 1111b). Intention is prior to action and is what enables action to be understood (Anscombe, 1957). What makes an action virtuous is, first of all, that it is intentionally ordered to a truly good end. Therefore, it is not the execution (performance) that is most important, but the intention because it specifies the action. From Boyatzis' perspective excellence refers to the execution of a task whereas for Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas virtue requires not only a good and competent execution but also a good intention (i.e., oriented towards a moral good) and a right deliberation of the means. Obviously, the execution is also important and must be ordered to the end: since just having a good intention is not enough. Virtues are not mere behavioural dispositions to act, but include desires, values, beliefs, and emotions. Moreover, they require good, right desires for good reasons (Alzola, 2012).

Although some theorists in competency education recognise the importance of motives (R. E. Boyatzis, 2008), sometimes, the significance of intention is overlooked, as there is often a strong emphasis on efficiently carrying out specific tasks from a mechanistic viewpoint. This insufficiency is not present among virtue education theorists who consider, ordinarily, the intentional component (e.g., Morgan et al., 2017). From the theory of virtue, the intention is the cause of the action that the person assumes as a deep motive, as a motivating intention that directs the action (Fernández, 2023). A similar questioning of the insufficient role of motivation in the character virtues and strengths of the VIA model is worth mentioning (Miller, 2019). There are other differences between competencies and virtues: virtue allows for adapting and making better decisions in complex situations, especially in the field of interpersonal relationships, which respond to the specific identity and uniqueness of individuals (Brooks, 2021).

However, if we assume the definition of personal competency as 'the dynamic set of knowledge (knowing), abilities or skills (knowing how to do), attitudes and values (knowing how to be) that, internalised and embodied in our acts, behaviours or ways of doing, make us be on the path to our own maturity, excellence, fulfilment and happiness' (Crespí, 2019, p. 98), we must recognise that personal competency includes a relational moral dimension, and that it is oriented, like virtue, to the flourishing of the person. Certainly, the moral intention of the action is not emphasised, but neither is it rejected, and it is implicitly admitted by assuming the moral dimension.

By including a moral dimension, there is an overlap between the concept of personal competency and virtue, analogous to the overlap between character strengths and virtues in the VIA model (McGrath et al., 2020). Competencies, like character strengths, are not identified with virtues; they are 'stepping stones on the path to achieving a virtue' (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 51). Being open to the moral dimension, competencies are suitable for character education. In fact, there is no shortage of proposals linking competency-based education to character education and the ethical learning of the individual (Boni & Lozano, 2007).

Finally, according to Zagzebski (1996), the difference is that the motivational component of a virtue defines it more than its external effectiveness, whereas the opposite is true for competencies or practical skills. This limitation should be taken into account, but it does not prevent competencies (technical and ethical) from being integrated into a character formation model. In conclusion, it is possible to educate in leadership, considered as a virtue—or virtue-based—through the practice of personal competencies intentionally oriented towards a morally good end.

6. A leadership education model for university students

There are numerous leadership models, each of which has its own language and mode of leadership education (Allen & Shehane, 2016; Sanders & Davey, 2011). In general, they are proposals oriented towards the exercise of leadership in the professional sphere, including the educational, but not oriented towards leadership education for students. Below we present a proposal for leadership education for university students based on virtues and competencies. Our proposal is based on a Thomist-inspired definition of leadership, which we have

justified above, and which will now serve to anchor a proposal for leadership education through personal competencies.

6.1. Conceptualisation of leadership

We have formulated the definition of leadership as follows: 'leadership is the act of guiding others towards a common goal' (López & Ortiz de Montellano, 2021). From an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective, leadership is first and foremost a human act, more specifically, the action of guiding others towards a shared objective or goal. As an act, it is linked to certain capacities or potentialities, qualities of the person that are developed and perfected through its exercise. Leadership is something morally good, a perfection (in Thomistic terms). However, guiding others is not an exceptional act of a few, but an action that we all carry out in certain circumstances. It is important to learn when and how to lead others, just as it is important to learn how to be led by others, depending on the circumstances. Indeed, these two learning processes go hand in hand. In both cases a common good is sought: a service to others, a movement or mobilisation of resources towards a common goal.

This conceptualisation of the act of leadership has four fundamental characteristics. First, since leadership is an act, it is assumed to be a movement or a process in which people put their capacities into action to achieve a goal. Second, since leadership is relational, it occurs between two or more people. Third, leadership is exercised between individuals, although we may improperly attribute it to a collective. Fourth, it is a free and intentional human act moved by, at least, an apparent good, or, in Aristotelian terms, a *telos* (Aristotle, 1985, p. 1098b33, 1994, pp. 1048b18). This definition corresponds to an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective of human action, and is sufficiently broad to embrace various contemporary leadership proposals.

6.2. Leadership education model

To inform our definition of leadership, we have reviewed the leadership proposals of Hershey and Blanchard (1969); Blanchard (2019); Greenleaf (1977); Sonnenfeld (2012); George (2003); Walumbwa et al. (2008); Barsh et al. (2009, 2010); Burns (1978); Kouzes and Posner (2017) and Cabezas Guerra's (2016) review. The models analysed are not all the existing models but only a representative sample of various leadership paradigms (López, 2022b).

The definition of leadership that we offered according to the Thomistic perspective shares certain features with the models presented above (López & Ortiz de Montellano, 2021): 1) the importance of understanding reality with a view towards a goal, 2) the way in which the leader must relate to theirs followers (and vice versa), 3) and the dedication to the task in the exercise of leadership. This analysis has led us to define three domains of leadership: understanding reality, relating to others and dedication to the task. These three domains are consistent with our concept of leadership (previously discussed) as an intentional, relational, and performative act involving reason, will and affections.

Subsequently, we have tried to identify the link between leadership in these three domains and the most relevant virtues. For this purpose, we have taken up

the tradition of the cardinal virtues as consistent with our theoretical model and with recent literature on leadership. The cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) are recognised as relevant virtues in different cultural and religious contexts, and linked to the exercise of leadership (Hackett & Wang, 2012; Riggio et al., 2010). Our approach to each of the cardinal virtues is based on Aquinas (1990) and Pieper (2017), as well as on a previous work on competences and cardinal virtues (Crespí et al., 2021).

Prudence involves the ability to discern and order appropriate actions to achieve a specific purpose or good. This intellectual and moral virtue not only characterizes but also guides other virtues. Justice, on the other hand, is concerned with giving each person what is due to them according to their rights or dignity. It emphasizes the importance of relationships with others (in Latin, *iustitia est ad alterum*). Temperance involves controlling our desires and utilizing material possessions in moderation. Fortitude empowers individuals to endure life's challenges and remain steadfast in the pursuit of what is good.

Finally, we have identified the personal competencies in line with these cardinal virtues and domains. To this end, we have selected competencies that 1) are in line with our concept of leadership, 2) are mentioned in some of the leadership models previously studied, and 3) allow us to operationalise the exercise of leadership in terms of its measurement and as learning objectives. This has led us to a set of competencies—which we have called educable axes—which describe the exercise of leadership and allow it to be educated. Thus, in the domain of understanding of reality, we placed insight of the end, deliberation, and action for change. In the domain of relating with others we placed inspiration, harmonisation, and accompaniment, and in dedication to the task, the focus is on resilience, self-mastery, and commitment.

As a result of this work, an outline of a leadership education model has been configured and is presented in Table 1.

These educational axes included in the leadership education model are defined below:

Table 1. Leadership education model.

Educational domain	Cardinal Virtue	Main faculty	Educational axis	Description
Understanding of reality	Prudence	Intellect	Insight	Looking at reality without distortion
			Deliberation	Weighing up and deciding the best alternatives
			Visioning	Imagining and articulating future scenarios
Relationship with others	Justice	Will	Inspiration	Inspiring others to do good
			Harmonisation	Integrating the participation of others
			Accompaniment	Illuminating and sustaining others on the path
Dedication to the task	Fortitude and Temperance	Affectivity	Commitment	Engaging and sustaining commitments
			Resilience	Maintaining stability in the face of difficulty
			Self-Mastery	Responding adequately to emotional stimuli

- **Insight** consists of observing reality from different perspectives and identifying its development possibilities to achieve its goal.
- **Deliberation** consists of integrating multiple criteria of analysis to decide which are the best means and arranging them for action in function of the established end.
- **Visioning** consists of imagining possible scenarios for a better future, planning with flexibility in the face of possible contingencies.
- **Inspiration** consists of elaborating and communicating a vision in a motivating way to achieve the shared objectives.
- **Harmonisation** consists of facilitating the relevant, timely and proportional collaboration of the members of the group, for their personal flourishing and the achievement of the common objectives.
- **Accompaniment** consists in helping others to know their personal situation, to make decisions to their vocation and to have emotional support in its realisation.
- **Commitment** consists in the effort and continued dedication to a task, with a view to the future realisation of a good for the community, to which one is perceived to have a responsibility.
- **Resilience** consists of facing and resisting adverse situations with serenity, taking risks if necessary.
- **Self-Mastery** consists of mastery in the face of stimuli of physical or emotional gratification for personal or community good.

Based on the model presented in Table 1, a leadership questionnaire based on virtues and competencies has been designed and is now in the process of being validated, which, as a hypothesis, measures the leadership construct based on virtues. This measurement tool seeks to help students to know themselves better and to develop their leadership. It is an educational, formative assessment tool. The operationalisation and empirical measurement of virtues through observable behaviours and self-perception reports has important limitations (Bright et al., 2014; Curren & Kotzee, 2014; Snow et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020). To overcome these objections we have followed, as far as possible, the following recommendations: 1) gather, contrast and triangulate evidence, 2) use a variety of methodological approaches, 3) conduct a series of different and mutually reinforcing research projects over time, and 4) measure 'constellations' of virtues (Fowers, 2014; Wright et al., 2020).

Our proposal considers the use of quantitative and qualitative instruments for the measurement of virtues and competencies at the beginning, middle, and end of undergraduate studies. We considered using both self-assessment questionnaires and "performance tasks" test. The result of the assessment would allow the student to know their competency profile and reflect on how he is currently developing his leadership to serve his community or group. Through an interview with a professional mentor, feedback would be given to students.

6.3. Competencies and virtues in leadership dynamics

In our leadership education model, we have proposed a set of personal competencies associated with cardinal virtues. It is not enough to mention which dimensions,

virtues, faculties, and competencies are part of the model. It is also necessary to explain their interaction in the exercise of leadership and their relationship with leadership education. When educating students for leadership it is necessary, rather than 'making them competent' in each competency, to lead them to reflect and seek a moral good, so that each competency is a web of virtues that support their leadership. These virtues are what give vigour and meaning to leadership competencies (Serrano, 2017).

As an example, harmonising a work team is often presented as a competency that can be taught through a didactic exercise aimed at participation in a common effort. Those working in a team collaborate, listen, and act to work effectively. Harmonisation, according to the model we present, is a competency in the domain of 'relating to others' linked to the virtue of justice, but it also requires the exercise of prudence, fortitude, and temperance according to the circumstances. Harmonising a team is much more than making its task effective, it requires the intentional desire and pursuit of the good for others. Harmonisation is the result of an intentional action to achieve a relational good. In the design of the questionnaire measuring harmonisation we have included the good intention as a component of the action.

Moreover, as already mentioned, virtues and competencies are intertwined. Good teamwork harmonisation is directly linked to the virtue of justice but requires prudence to decide what to do in each specific circumstance, 'here and now'. But it also requires fortitude to withstand the difficulties and undertake the arduous actions—even risks—involved in harmonising a team. It requires temperance to be self-possessed and to master sensitive tendencies (e.g., to laziness and to postpone unpleasant tasks). Our concept of competency is close to the concept of annexed virtue that Aquinas uses in the Summa Theologiae (Aquinas, 1990).

As we have said, whoever exercises leadership does not so much seek to be a leader as a good for the group (family, friends, nation, organisation . . .). The ultimate end that the student must seek is not to develop his leadership, or even his virtues, but a moral common good for the group in which he performs his leadership action. Virtues and competencies —indeed all education—are an indirect result, an effect of this search (Spaemann, 2003). This does not preclude that virtues can also be direct goals of education; intermediate goals that are necessary to reach the ultimate goals and that must be educated for.

Our proposal for leadership education responds to a particular anthropology of human action that we have previously described (cf., Aquinas, 1990; De Finance, 1966). According to this Thomistic anthropology, the virtues of prudence and charity direct and inform human action in which the other virtues and competencies come into play. Charity, as a theological virtue, not only impels us to act freely together with God, but also provides vigor and guidance to the other virtues, enabling them to flourish. Prudence, in particular, directs each specific action by helping us discern what is best in the practice of each virtue in any given circumstance (Pinckaers, 2015). Without charity, true virtues may be present, but they cannot attain their full potential (Aquinas, 1990, I–IIae q65). By integrating both moral and theological virtues, individuals can attain greater personal dynamism and excellence in their actions. Despite its importance, our current model does not yet include charity, which is a limitation we hope to address in future research. Fortunately, the study of charity (*agape*) from a Thomistic perspective in the field of psychology is promising (Enright et al., 2022; Vitz et al., 2019).

7. Conclusions

We have presented a leadership education model based on competencies and virtues. It proposes that education in virtues entails education in competencies, because the virtuous person is not satisfied with desiring or wanting the good but will seek to execute it with competency.

Competencies and virtues are necessary for good leadership. To educate in leadership, it is necessary to educate the whole person (intelligence, will, affectivity) and to make competencies and virtues flourish. Virtue can be considered a broader construct than competency: it includes the will to act well with good intention. Leadership is not only a competency but a virtue, based on the intention to seek the common good and that, understanding the context well, seeks and executes the best actions to achieve it. It requires seeing, thinking, and acting well.

The paper explores the concept of leadership as the act of guiding others towards a common moral good. It offers a dialogue with various authors who have studied leadership, reviewing some of their findings and proposals, particularly in the field of education.

Leadership as a capacity can be educated and, through its practice, can become a habit or disposition (*héxis*) in the person who exercises it. When an individual is said to be a leader, it means that they have the disposition to perform acts of leadership, and that this disposition not only enables him or her to perform them (with good effects on those he or she leads) but also to perfect himself or herself in the process. Conceiving leadership as the exercise or actualisation of a personal competency or virtue is the basis for designing an effective educational model of leadership. It is also useful for designing and evaluating educational strategies. Further research on this topic is desirable.

As Aquinas (1990, I–IIae q1) pointed out, the end, although it is the last thing in the execution, is the first thing in the agent's intention. Good intention commands and moves one to competent action. Applied to our case, good intention leads to a competent exercise of leadership. Indeed, virtuous action implies not only good intention but also good execution. The competencies are exercised, not as a previous step, but together with the virtues. In this way, a web of virtues is developed to support and reinforce the competencies.

We have presented the general outlines of a model of leadership education. It is necessary to validate this leadership construct in different cultural contexts and to develop instruments to measure it. Finally, it is necessary to develop, apply and validate methodologies that favour the development of these virtues and competencies in university students.

Disclosure statement

Funding

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