

GENERATIVE LEADERS



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NADIA BENABDALLAH



MY STORY

MARIA ROSARIA NATALE:

Now it's Nadia's turn! There are some requirements for being a generative leader. It is also essential for us to consider our family - the family we are born with and the families we are generating. So, please, tell us who you are Nadia! (laugh)

NADIA BENABDALLAH:

Ok. I'd like to say a few things about my life. As I have said before, I am not so eager to go back into the past but I'll try and say the things I think are most important to the conversation. I come from an environment, actually a culture and not an environment,

which is very positive. I am very privileged from that standpoint, from my family standpoint, where gender is not a priority. From my name you can understand I am not from Italy and from the accent I don't think you can tell where I come from, because it's a bit mixed.

I was born in Algeria and everything was "on the up" from the very beginning of my life.

My father was not in the hospital with my mother - he arrived late. And when he arrived he said: "Yes, my wife how is she...And he was told, "We are very sorry."

And he turned white. They continued, "These things happen.

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This is what God wanted, this is the will of God". And my father: "But my wife, is she okay?"

The doctors answered: "Yes, yes your wife is okay. Everything's fine. But....ok, don't worry, you'll have to be careful". And my father, "So, what's happening?" And they answered, "It is a girl!"

For sure, he got very upset because he was so scared (laugh).

So, my privilege was to be born into a family that did not embrace this culture, this thought that women have a different role in society from men.

My father told me the following things: the first thing he told me, as I have two brothers and I am the only girl, was: "Nadia, there is nothing that a boy or a man can do that you cannot. So you can choose what you really want to do". Of course, in such a culture that was very important for me. The other thing he told me was: "Work hard now, don't watch all the kids playing and you will gain a lot more in the future". The third thing he said was: "In life there is not NO. If you are able to build the case and convince me it's okay". So I had to convince him that I could go out to a party - everything was a negotiation. In fact people say I am a very good negotiator, because I started when I was very young.



My father was very strict. He is a military man - a general. So I grew up with a very strong notion of respect, of hierarchy but also with the notion that nobody can say NO just because they are superior from a hierarchical standpoint or because they are your dad or your mum. They can say NO, but if you make a case, they will think again.

So this was also another important principle I was taught by my father. And I have to say that if I look back, this is one of the many things I have applied throughout my life.

I started to travel when I was very young. Before I was ten.

Basically, my dad started a diplomatic career so I lived in many places. I lived in Africa (West Africa, in Black Africa), in Europe (France) and I lived in the US.

MY FATHER TOLD ME: NADIA, THERE IS NOTHING THAT A MAN CAN DO THAT YOU CANNOT

For most of my life I was in the US, I spent 18 years there. So, I was of course exposed to many languages, cultures, religions and geographies from a very early age. And I have to say that this was very much an eye-opener. From a cultural standpoint, it really taught me to understand that differences in wealth is really not anything strange. Even different ways to see life, to approach life, different ways of even living the same religion. I lived in Africa where the religion is Islam and I lived in Algeria where there is also the religion of Islam. But it is a totally different interpretation of the same religion. And I have to say that you do not fully realize the experience when you are living it. It is only later, when you think about your trip, that you realize you are very privileged. And actually I would like to give this privilege to my kids. That would be very nice.

I want to divide my life into two parts: up until I was 30/33 and the period after that.

Until that age I saw life very much as a game, a game of dare. Why a game of dare? Because everywhere I went, I was somehow different. And everywhere I went, I was told that I was different. I was told why there were some things that I could do and some things that I could not do.

And as a young child with the things that my father told me, my game in life was to prove that it was not the case. And many of the decisions I made were not because I really wanted to do those things, but rather I wanted to prove myself. It was not necessarily good, but this was the first part of my life.

Just to give you some examples. When I started school in Africa, I was in a French international school. There were white people and black people. So, they were talking about geography and they were listing all the different races. And then they talked about my own race and so I said: "and me, what am I?" And the answer was: "Mmmhh... you are not black, you are not white. You are *caffelatte!*" I went back home and I told to my father: "What is the colour *caffelatte?*" (laugh)





Then, when I went to university, in the US you have to go to the Dean. And the Dean sends you to the faculty. So you go there and you say: “Yes, I chose to go to scientific school, so I would like to follow a scientific path”. And he says: “Why do you want to do engineering? Why? It is very difficult! Instead you could do this, you could do that”. In other words, there were things which were much more suited to ladies. And for me, of course, after somebody told me something like that, I said: “I want to do engineering!” (laugh).

And when I went to the engineering school the reaction was very funny because there were only two of us ladies. Entering the classroom, this is just one anecdote but it happened regularly in the first two years. I sat down and the teacher was talking. Then he stopped and said: “For those that are in the wrong class this is EE 244 (modular wireless transmitter for temperature), for those that are in the wrong class this is strictly theory” and then he went on. I have many of these comments. I would be in line in the library, then I would sit, there was a computer to look for books and usually I was asked: “you are on the one for engineering!”

Then of course I had to start work and when I started work I decided to do telecommunications but, in the beginning, I chose a company that was doing consulting for operational processes with operators. And so I had to do very operational jobs and when I did the interview I was told: “Are you sure that you want to do this job?” and I said: “Yes, why?” And they answered: “because you have

to climb the towers, you have to go to the water towers, there may be spiders, rats...”. They were trying to convince me it was not the right job for me. And of course, sure enough, as this was before my 30-33 (years), this was what I wanted to do!

So it was a bit of a game. A game which I did with passion, with the idea to prove a point to the others but also, obviously, to prove a point to myself.

When I reached a certain age and certain type of self-confidence, a certain type of security, of course I decided that the game of feminism and this “dare” game was enough. I reached a certain level of self-confidence in myself and I wanted to do something because I wanted to do it and not because somebody told me that I could not do it.

And so, within the company I was working for, I started looking for the path I wanted to take. And from that moment I understood that nobody will give you anything and you have to ask for it. You have to think about what you want to do and basically ask for it. This is what I have done.

Of course, I have faced different situations and different companies as a reaction. Sometimes I had to insist, sometimes I had to go above my boss. But in the end I have found that if you have a very clear idea of what you want to do, and you explain why you want to do it and why you think this is the right thing, usually I think you go the right way.

At that moment, when I was 34-35, I had a manager who had a very strong idea of what leadership was. And leadership was really being the “man on the white horse” leading, taking all the decisions the



team had to carry out.

Of course the team should not to be exposed to the management behind him and so he acted as a bit of a shield. And this was a model that I lived with for 5-6 years.

At a certain moment in life I was given the opportunity to grow in the company and this was my first really big job. I moved from a team of about thirty people (30) to a team of three hundred people (300). Moving from a strategic role to a more operational role, I was accountable for the delivery of important projects that had an impact on the results of the company. And when I was hunted over this job, I tried to be the manager I told you about and who was indeed my role model at that time.

And I found myself with the team of 300 people where the managers of the single functions were much more senior than I was and much older than I was. Obviously they were not happy, they were not happy at all. Obviously they were very vocal. We discussed it on an outing and it was very funny. Not happy, very vocal. Vocal to the Head of HR, vocal to my boss, vocal to the suppliers.

So I had to think about how to manage the situation because they knew more than

me, they were in the comfort zone and they were very specialized. Because this was the first moment that we put together many specialized functions under one roof. Each of them was a true specialist in their area of work.

I could not be an authority on all those areas, I could not be the traditional leader that takes decisions on each of those areas. So, I had to find a way to lead.

And this was when I think I found my way of leadership that was more comfortable for myself.





I thought It was more reasonable to adapt to the moment, but I think I have maintained the same approach even today. And I am happy about that because I feel comfortable with that. So I explained to each and every one of them, that it was obvious that in that area of specialization I did not know more than them. So I was not going to take decisions for them. But if we all put our minds in each area of specialization together, we would be a very powerful function and be able to do things much better. We would be able to achieve the objectives in a faster way because we were together, instead of handling over one function to the other. And I explained that I was counting on all their opinions, their authority, their experiences in

order to do that. And this is what I did, in the medium term, to show that I was really serious about it. Engineering functions always complain that they do not have access to the EXCO (Executive Committee). In the EXCO only marketing functions were used to making marketing decisions about the new products, time plans, and so on, but people did not understand technology. They did not feel comfortable receiving technological slides and looking at them. So, I launched a project which was very important and it was like a turning point for us - the project "VINCI". And I thought, that if I could introduce an initiative that lasted four or five sessions, where for each of them I would organize a meeting



with the EXCO and I could show a 5-year vision of what we wanted to do, and let them explain that to the EXCO, I could give them for the first time that type of visibility and satisfaction by showing them what they were doing. And showing not in a nerdy way but in a more marketing-like way in order to say: "this is where we are and this is where we are going to get to". If they are proud to see that we are very innovative and that we are going in a certain direction, they would understand. And I did not want to do this for them, I did not want to present it all in their place. Actually, they had access to the EXCO, and were able to give their own presentations themselves. They would present the plan, implement the plan and report the results on a regular basis. And this of course would have a positive impact on Technology because we would secure the budget. Because when the EXCO knows what you are doing, it is willing to invest in what you are doing. If they have no clue about what you are doing, because they see big names and a large amount of money, of course it is more difficult.

And I have to say that this initiative was very successful and it was incredible to go into the EXCO meetings for others discussions and everybody knew the name "VINCI". We had budget discussions or gate approval authorizations and they started to ask: "Is this part of VINCI?". And we answered: "Yes! This is part of VINCI".

MARIO VOLONTERIO:

It was a 12-million budget which came from a budget cut. So from zero budget to 12 million euros.

NADIA BENABDALLAH:

Incredible! On one hand the team was very happy because finally it was able to express itself in a way that it had not done in the past and in a way that made the team feel appreciated by the company. On the other hand, the project had a very positive impact on the department. In the end it contributed to the building of very collaborative, respectful and trusting relationships between myself and those managers. Because they were very worried and they

thought: "Ok, she is the young lady that wants to show off, she will put shadow on what we are doing and so on". But this was not what I wanted to do.

And this is exactly the same way I have continued to relate to the people I work with because I do not know more than my team about what they are doing and also I do not intend to know more. Instead, I want to facilitate things by putting them together, discussing and having ideas, working together, helping each other to implement those ideas. And this model has worked well up to the present day. Of course, this requires that when you choose the team, you choose in such a way that you are surrounded by people that are not necessarily like you. Because there's no point having a load "Nadias"! You have to choose people with totally different experiences, background, expertise. Because you need to complement each other.

Now, if I look at what we are doing, this type of relationship is very important for the activities we are doing today. Because we have moved the team from being an Italian team to a more international team. We started in Italy, then we expanded to Southern Europe, then to South-Western Europe, the whole of Europe and finally global.



We cannot be in every single place. The team is very big, more than 2000 people now distributed over more than 20 countries. And if you want to achieve results in that type of distributed organization, you cannot be based on the typical, traditional managerial way of leading people. It has to be a very truly collaborative leadership, as we discussed two weeks ago. You need to delegate, you need to trust, you need to choose people well, you need to recognize them for what they achieve, you need to make them proud of what they do. You will never be able to micro-manage them and tell them what to do. They come from different cultures, different experiences, different geographies, different way of working, different ways of interpreting what you are asking them and the way you communicate. So you need to be very careful on all those dimensions. In the end, I do believe that parts of the experiences I have had in my personal life have been translated into what I do in my professional life. Having to interact with a very diverse group of people and being open to very diverse opinions and ways of working. This is probably because I enjoy it. And I have to say that up to now I feel extremely privileged to work with that team, very happy with the achievements that we have made.

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And I always say to my management, to HR that I cannot achieve that type of success in the activities we have done without the team. That is very clear. I think I have talked too much!

TOM MAES:
I have a question, absolutely personal. When your eldest child was born were you still in this phase of your life?

NADIA BENABDALLAH:
That was a turning point. More or less at the age I became pregnant with my first son, I realized I needed to do things because I wanted to and not because somebody thinks I cannot do it. It is a different phase in your life when you feel that you have achieved what you wanted to achieve, that you have proved what you wanted to prove and you do not have to prove anything to anybody else. You do it for yourself. If I think of my career, I have reached what we call in Vodafone the SLT Level, which is senior leadership. What I have achieved today, I should have achieved five years before. But I did not do it because I did not like the job. I really need to like what I do to be able to give 100%. And I was even called once by Colao (Vodafone's CEO), who said: "how many jobs do we have to propose before we have you in the SLT level?!" But I think it is very important not to take a job just because it is a higher level of responsibility, because somebody expects you to do it. On the contrary, because you want to do it, because this is what you think is the right thing for you and you can give the right contribution and make a difference in that job. And this is the advice I give anybody who asks: "Don't take a job that is proposed just because it is one level up. It makes no sense. It has to be what you have decided, because it is what you think you will like doing and you are happy when you get up in the morning and you go to the office".

LIVIO COLASANTO:
How you know whether the job that is proposed is something you will like?

NADIA BENABDALLAH:
It has to be stimulating intellectually.

LIVIO COLASANTO:
You can judge from outside but you only know whether you like it or not by doing it.



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NADIA BENABDALLAH:

I have to say that all the jobs I am talking about are within the same company, not outside. So this gives me a privileged window because I know the company very well. So when they proposed the job to me I knew what the job was. Of course, if it was a job outside the company it would be more difficult to understand what it's really about.

I need to think that I can learn something new and, at the same time, I can give something to the job. It has to be intellectually stimulating. Once they offered me a job that was very repetitive.

Actually, it was a very important job but it is a job in which you do the same thing over and over again and you have to deliver certain volumes. I think that my profile could add nothing to it; it required a very methodical, procedure-oriented or process-oriented person.

LIVIO COLASANTO:

This is your personal point of view because they offered you this job as they thought you could provide added value. Otherwise they would have offered it to someone else.

NADIA BENABDALLAH:

Absolutely, you are correct. It is a very personal perspective. The person who offered me this job was the only manager in my life that I would never have wanted to work for! I had always thought while

people were talking about work contamination, gender diversity, that stuff, that it was something I really did not encounter in my life.

Then this manager came along and I understood what it all meant. And so I told this manager: "There are three jobs available in the company, I think it is time for me to change, to move to another job. I like two of them, while I don't like the third one because I do not think it is intellectually stimulating". And after two weeks the manager offered me the third job.



TOM MAES:

I have another question for you. So you had that rich experience during your childhood.... How do you give that to other people you work with right now?

NADIA BENABDALLAH:

I believe that having led in such different environments has taught me to accept all sorts of geography, religion, etc. I really do not care. I mean I care about the people, I do not care where they come from, what religion they belong to. And this is what I teach my children, wholeheartedly.

And in the workplace I do not care where the individuals come from, I do not care what level they are in the organization.

I treat everybody exactly in the same way. The relationships that I have with people are very informal - I do not like formal relationships and I also treat my boss in a non-formal way. Of course with a profound respect for hierarchy. I will always discuss, argue, negotiate but once the decision is made I respect the decision. But the way I talk to my first lines, or the people below that or my boss have always been very informal and independent.

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MARIO VOLONTERIO:
She does not care where you are coming from.
The important is that you are working! (Laugh)

TOM MAES:
Our daughter is also a great feminist, so we have lots of discussions. The nice thing is that it is very difficult to really lead by example, to stimulate people also to forget about it and accept that everybody is the same.

NADIA BENABDALLAH:
It takes maturity. I have to say I was a feminist when I was young. Because certain things make you live that way. As I said you always want to prove something. It takes a certain level of maturity and self-confidence. I am not saying that feminists are not confident but there is the element of having to prove something when you are a feminist. When I was young I was used to saying: “Oh my goodness! Married? No way! Why? Is there a boss telling me to do that? No no! I can get on better without that!”. Clearly this is a level of immaturity. You are twenty, you feel on the top of the world.



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But then you realize that there is no need for this as you are not in a competition. If you try to remove it from your daughter you are not going to be able to...

TOM MAES:
No no, I did not say remove. She opened my eyes. Prejudices are invisible for those that have them. It is easy to say that I am a feminist as a man. But it is very difficult to let people say: “Hey guys, this is not acceptable”. How do you live like that? How do you set examples? So a lot of people say: “Oh, it’s true, we should follow that example because it is the right way to go”. It is an engineering environment with, I think, more men than women. It is a very difficult task.

NADIA BENABDALLAH:
Yes. However, people need to make choices because they want to. And not because of gender. I am happy with my choices, but at that time I didn’t make them for the right reasons. It is just a bit exasperating with certain cultures. I had a father booming out: “Do whatever you want!” But the culture I was living in was completely different. I did judo and karate for fifteen years and I played soccer with the boys instead of doing other games. And I chose engineering as well.
So it was like I was trying to prove that there was no difference. Is this a good thing? No. Because you should be in a society where you don’t have to prove anything to anybody. And I think the society where we live today, if I look at the society where my kids live today, it is not the case. I do not see people having that need. But if people say to you over and over again that girls need to do this, girls need to do that. You should not go to that school because it is a mixed school, you should not take that type of scientific field because it is better if you take languages, etc. then it is a formal rebellion.

LIVIO COLASANTO:
One question about opportunities. At one point you said: “how many jobs do we have to offer to promote you to that level?”. Did you ever think that if you didn’t take the opportunity you might not be offered any others to help you move up the career ladder?



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NADIA BENABDALLAH:
I did. And every time I said “no” it was not said lightly. But I am a bit stubborn and if I do not like something, I cannot pretend to like it. I thought about it a lot, about the consequences. And I concluded: “If I am not given any other opportunity I will leave”. But at that point I could not take something just because they expected me to take it. Or because I would have been another woman in the company that does the right thing. I am okay with statistics, but my statistics in life are more important! This is still happening today. And when they get fed up with me I will leave.

ENRICO RIMOLDI:
You are a unique person. I really love the way

you are so enthusiastic about everything. You are a globetrotter, like your team. But at the same time you are so present with your family. What is your secret?

NADIA BENABDALLAH:
Yes, of course it is a delicate balance. For me my family, my kids are very important. For me it is very important that they do well in life. I do not show them that but it is very important because I do understand that the life they will live will be even more difficult than mine, and if you don’t have something different to offer, then it will be a very difficult life. So, every moment I have outside my working life is dedicated to them. I understand this is a period of my life where I have very little time for myself.



But I had a lot of time in the past for me, I had kids later on than may be considered usual. Now it is the moment where I have to work and devote myself to my family and the kids. The part of “me and myself” is on hold for a bit. I travel a lot, but I follow them. I know everything they need to do, I know every single piece of homework they have to do, I even send them a picture showing what they still need to do at that moment! So I orchestrate everything at a distance by making sure they do not feel the distance when I travel. Is it simple? No, not always. But for me work is very important, family is very important and I have to make them coexist. They have to coexist.

ENRICO RIMOLDI:
Are there analogies between being a leader in a company and in your job and, let me say, being a leader in your family?

NADIA BENABDALLAH:
Very much so! With today’s kids you cannot boss them around! (Laugh). You cannot collaborate (laugh). The other day I was talking to one of my kids and telling him: “You need to do this, you need to do that”. And he told me: “Take it easy, mum!”. It was a period where (in fact my husband was a bit shocked) he was wondering why being parent gave me the right to give orders. Why? Why can he (the kid) not give orders to me too? (laugh). So I looked at my husband and I said: “How am I going to explain this to them?” And I said: “you know, life is difficult and if you do that well then you will have a certain type of job. You will need to work harder” and so on.

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You have to go through a much more “give & take” approach! It was a bit of shocking moment.

BARBARA GIANNELLI:
How old is he?

NADIA BENABDALLAH:
Now he is ten, but he had this problem when he was eight. He said: “Calm down! Why do you have the right to tell me what to do! Why can you watch TV until late and I cannot. I could tell you to go to bed!” (laugh)

PIERLUIGI PARMEGGIANI:
One of my daughters did the same, but she was four! (laugh)
When I went to university I started engineering and I had a similar experience as yours. There were two girls and five hundred men and in a few months I changed faculty! (laugh)

I have a question for Nadia. How do you compare the pros and cons for a child of having a diverse experience in life moving from place to place, to being stable in one place and having your roots there and long time friendships?

NADIA BENABDALLAH:
There are a lot of cons, don’t get me wrong. Because maintaining friendships is very difficult.





Of course, if you change every three, four, five years you cannot cultivate them. I haven't got a clue where some of my friends are. I mean they are all over the world. Because my school was an international school of people coming from different places and different backgrounds.

PIERLUIGI PARMEGGIANI:
But you can find them on Facebook! (laugh)

NADIA BENABDALLAH:
I found a few! And they found me.
But there are also three important pros.
1) Thanks to this experience I speak five languages. I think that the wealth of knowing a language, which I am trying to explain to my kids, is very important. Because it gives you a lot of flexibility from a social standpoint both in understanding people and also from a professional standpoint.
2) I believe I am an open, receptive person. Encountering different people on a regular basis, nothing surprises me.
3) Never knowing if I will be here or not the following year I always do things immediately. My father always said: "You are here today but you could be somewhere else in three months' time". So, I try to do the things I want to do and not wait until next year, the next months. Because I do not know if I will be here. The culture of enthusiasm, of wanting to do what you want to do. Now.

I think these are very positive things that have marked my personality and the way to face both life and work in the future.
And then there is the sadness of leaving a house, the sadness of leaving a city, the sadness of leaving a friend.
But if I weigh up all these things, I would do it again, no doubt. And I would love to do it with my kids.

LIVIO COLASANTO:
But now, from this point of view, your kids are living a different life. They have roots.



NADIA BENABDALLAH:
Yes they have roots. But I would like them to experience, not the same experience I had, but open up their lives a bit to other realities. Yes, at a certain moment I would love that to happen. I think it is important.

TOM MAES:
Talking about your roots, if they ask you what your roots are, what do you answer?

NADIA BENABDALLAH:
People ask me if I feel Algerian, no. If I feel American, no. If I feel French, no.
I feel where I am at that moment.
Really. I felt Algerian and I feel Italian today. So my heart is where I am. If I live long enough. Of course I cannot say I felt Italian when I came to Italy in the first years.

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I started feeling Italian after six, seven, eight years here. It takes a long time to forget your previous places.
If you ask me what I feel today, I feel Italian. Even though some people look at me, look at my name, listen to my accent and they first thing they ask me is: "Where are you from?" (laugh). That's always the first question!





LIVIO COLASANTO:

Once I heard a sentence, I think it was a Pope who said it. “You have to have dialogue with everybody, but in order to have dialogue with everybody, you need to know who you are”. And the question is: “Who are you? Do you feel different from others?”

NADIA BENABDALLAH:

People think I am different, but I do not feel different. For me, this could be a form of intolerance but if you live in a country you need to embrace that culture, the way of living, the language. I think it is very important when you go to a country to learn the language immediately because it is a form of inclusion and acceptance of the culture where you are living. If you decide to

live in a country, you shouldn’t necessarily try to hold on to the previous cultures or languages because it is a form of exclusion. Or a form of not accepting the values and the cultures of the place you have chosen to live in. Personally, I do not think it is the right way to behave.

LIVIO COLASANTO:

Acceptance is one thing, let me say, assimilating is another thing. You can accept another culture, value that culture but not be assimilated. You still feel you are somewhat different. I don’t know whether I have conveyed the idea.

NADIA BENABDALLAH:

Do I feel different?



I feel different as regards some things but if I look at my values I have found a lot more affinity with the Italian culture than the American culture.

So, I feel that the way of living, the way of thinking on certain values is much closer to the ones I have been building over the years.

So if you ask me today if I feel different from the Italian people who I frequently talk to, I would say: no.

If you ask me if I feel different even though I lived almost twenty years in the US from the people I was living with, I would say: yes. I did feel different. I did not feel I had the same type of values.

BARBARA GIANNELLI:

I think it is obvious that you feel Italian. I feel you are Italian! (laugh)

NADIA BENABDALLAH:

Great! Yes, it is funny because when I came to Italy I built a very big network of friends. I lived in the US for so long - more than other places, but all my friends in the US were foreigners. Because I did not assimilate, even though I had nothing against the culture or the population, it is just that the values were different.

So if you had asked me that question when I was leaving there, I would probably not have said that I felt American.

LUPE DE LA VALLINA:

I was thinking that when people don’t assimilate the culture they are living in, when they come from a very different one, maybe it might be a reaction of the fear you see in yourself, how you see your identity.

And I wanted to ask you: since your identity

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LIFE

does not lie in the country you come from, where do you feel your identity lies? I do not refer to countries, but for example your friends, your values, your work?

NADIA BENABDALLAH:

I cannot say. It’s a mixture. The way you are, your identity, your personality, your person is a consequence of everything you have experienced in your life. So I cannot be one specific thing, rather than another.

For sure, it was very clear to me from the beginning that I would not feel rewarded only with work, or only with family. In order to live well, for me it was very important to have both. And I did not want to have to choose. So the decision that I made was to be able to maintain the balance between both.

MARIA ROSARIA NATALE:

Thank you, I really enjoyed talking to you - it is always very energetic. And in the end I got the answer to the question I always have any time I meet you: why you are so present?

Every time we have worked together, or I have worked with your company. Every time. Also listening to you in the taxi speaking with your children, you are always very present. You are always there. And at the end of the day, exactly as you said before, we do not know if we will still be here next year.

So we have to be present now.

I think this is one of the secrets I want to learn from you as a leader.



Because being present is what we need all the time.

I am not going to summarize what you have said because that is impossible but I would like to share why we ask our participants to share their own lives. Because as we said before in the small teams, we can have deep, thorough discussions and listen to everyone's own stories. For me it has been wonderful to listen to her story and the way she told her story. And another thing I would like to underline - you said three times "I am a privileged". And you said that referring to your family (the privilege to be born into your family) and then you used exactly the same word with them (you are privileged to work with them, your team) and then you said the same thing about your job. And it's nice that you use the same word in different situations. But at the end of the day it is quite something that you recognize that you have some privileges - very interesting.

And another thing I would like to add is about identity. We always think that identity is a status. But it is not a status, it is dynamic. All things considered, I am shaping my identity in relationships with others (on the basis of how I am speaking, working, serving, what I am reading, etc.). A lot of things contribute to creating, myself and my decisions, my own

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identity. And this carries on continuously. It is very interesting. We are tempted to block the identity in something we can describe, but in the end it is more interesting to see and to shape this identity.

PIERLUIGI PARMEGGIANI:
I think that a sense of identity that is too strong usually fights with other identities, so it can also be very dangerous.

MARIA ROSARIA NATALE:
Yes, sure. It is so important to observe and to listen to others and be in true relationships with others. I completely agree.

CAMILLO REGALIA:
I was very impressed by her history and I think the idea of identity is a process. It is also a source of hope. Because it means that everywhere, at any time, you can change. In my work, too, I have to deal with people who are stuck with problems and they say: "I cannot change because this is my identity, my story." The idea that identity is not fixed by a process is very helpful for people that want to change. And I think, Nadia, that your story, your experience, is wonderful for this reason. Very interesting, thank you so much.



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GENERATIVE LEADERS

BARBARA GIANNELLI



MY STORY

I was born in Milan to an Italian father and a half-German, half-Italian mother; my grandmother, whom unfortunately I never knew, was from Berlin. She had gone to art school in Paris, was a painter and then, after moving to Italy when she got married, designed children's clothes. Unfortunately my mother, whose mother tongue was German, was unable to speak German to me or my brother, who is a year younger than me, nor did she send us to the German school. I can't tell you whether this was a good thing or not, I can only say that I definitely grew up going to all the best Italian schools but my mother definitely passed on to us an international spirit, or at least a highly critical and self-critical spirit. I can't say whether this was good or not either, because perhaps it is better to be superficial. Actually no, I can tell you from a professional point of view that it was definitely a good thing. Our mother certainly passed on to us the value that different cultures and points of view exist, as well as the inclination to reason with lateral thinking.

My mother, who had gone to the Catholic German school in Milan with the richest and highly educated German families, hitch-hiked around Great Britain in the 1950s and played

the guitar...she was brilliant, extremely well-read and quite out of the ordinary.

All this was in contrast (perhaps only apparently so) with my father, a psychiatrist from a very strict family - my paternal grandfather was a general in the army with the Engineers, so not only with a military background, but he was also an engineer...

All this to say that I consider myself very lucky to have had an imprinting which was half strict and half easy-going, between study and improvisation, between "sacred and profane" as I said earlier, which has no doubt helped me in my career.



I was very good at school and my parents of course backed me all the way.

My mother admired me for my scholastic abilities, which she had not had and I always considered and still consider my father a person who has great esteem for me and whom I can trust.

After my mother died when I was only seventeen, my father always trusted me and gave me considerable freedom; I was, however, always very much in awe of him.

I have to say that I nevertheless learned something of the art of diplomacy (not to be confused with hypocrisy) at home (my father was a head physician at only 40 and gave orders not only in the hospital but at home as well).

Because I was good at maths, I decided to study macro-economics at the Bocconi University, with the intention of continuing to work with numbers but at the same time having the certainty of finding a job (which on leaving the Bocconi in those days was guaranteed!). I haven't told you yet that I had wanted to be independent ever since I was 17 and already worked part-time as a swimming instructor. So on the one hand, there was a desire to work with numbers which are completely rational and on the other hand there was my passion for everything that was artistic, which perhaps came

from my German grandmother, and which led me to the world of fashion, to my true very great school, Giorgio Armani, after working for a year for a market research company.

Working with Mr Armani was a wonderful experience. I spent 5 years alongside one of the greatest geniuses of our time. He is not only brilliant from the creative and stylistic point of view, but he is a person with a superior intelligence, who can understand and anticipate phenomena, revolutionize the way millions of people look but



perhaps also the way they are.

I remember the first year of the agreement with Luxottica for glasses. One million pairs of glasses sold, mostly spectacles. At long last they were simple and beautiful, no longer “prostheses” for people who could not see well. At the same time they were classic, elegant like his favourite colour, “greige”. In Armani, as in my family, there is a good mixture between the sacred and the profane, with the great rigour of Mr Armani, bordering on obsession on the one hand, and the beauty and lightness of the world full of glamour and meetings. It was not unusual to bump into Tom Cruise or Michelle Pfeiffer, Lee Radziwill, Jackie Kennedy’s sister, or Lauren Bacall smoking (even a little tipsy) in the corridors. Although Mr Armani might have had to stay up until the early hours of the morning because of dinners or parties or for the meticulous preparation of all the fashion shows, he was in the office the next morning at nine on the dot, respectful of the work of the licensees and even the last dressmakers and pattern-

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makers. Giorgio Armani, the business, cannot be said to have been organized hierarchically according to the rules of the latest models of work organization, but Giorgio Armani the man can be said to be a democratic dictator, like the Julius Caesar described in the excellent book by Luciano Canfora that Maria Rosaria knows well. At Armani, I learned that attention to detail is everything, if associated with a strategic decision and the determination to pursue it. I would say that Giorgio Armani did not have and perhaps still does not have a hierarchical pyramid structure today, with all its virtues and vices; in my day there were more virtues as we all reported to Mr Armani, an enlightened boss, assisted by Mr Giuseppe Volonterio who I have already been able to describe to you as a person embodying all the values described by Kevin Kaiser, an exceptional person.

I owe the development of my career as an entrepreneur- consultant after I left Giorgio Armani to Giuseppe. I took the great leap to leave the company when a head-hunter persuaded me to go and work for Krizia as Licensing Director (at Armani I was the assistant to the Licensing Director). After 3 years with Krizia, a figure who was somewhat questionable and on whom I will not dwell, I opened my consulting office once I had acquired my first client in fashion, which gave me the basis to open my business, as it had always been my dream to work for myself.

At the time, Giuseppe had also left Giorgio Armani because he had been asked by the Agnelli family to support Giovannino at the head of Piaggio. He was the one who called me for the licensing project on the Vespa brand and who believed in me, as he knew how determined I was and also all about my lateral thinking so, instead of calling major, well-known consulting firms behind which he could have sheltered, Giuseppe “risked” his stakes on me, who, at only 35, could unravel the intricacies of the Vespa licences and he was not wrong.

Together, we were able to solve the existing problems and create a pool of licensees of great impact and professionalism. He also introduced me to the Pucci family, for whom I designed the brand development strategy, looked for the designer and licensee and looked



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after distribution until the successful sale of the Emilio Pucci brand to the LVMH group, which gave 70 per cent of the Pucci brand a value equal to a hundred times the turnover it was making at that time.

LVMH certainly did not consider the EBITDA of the brand, but its historical and artistic value, as well as the excellent positioning we had succeeded in giving it on the market when it was re-launched, in the late 1990s. I have had my consulting business since 1996, continuing to the present day to provide consulting on licensing and brand development strategies, both in fashion and design, working for brands such as Dolce e Gabbana but also Martini e Rossi or Olivetti.

In 2001, I wrote the book on licensing in the fashion system, along with Stefania Saviolo who teaches Strategy at Bocconi University and I lecture on licensing at Bocconi, the IULM and some fashion schools such as IED and Domus.

I have not told you that the real reason that made me set up on my own was the arrival of another “fan” of mine, Carlo, who then became my husband. He certainly encouraged me

and realized how important it was for me to emerge in my work and he understood my great desire to be effective for my clients, more than appearing in a company career which in Italy is often, unfortunately, denoted by games which have little to do with merit...

I can say that I acquired a passion for serious work and a profound belief in the value of work from Giorgio Armani and Giuseppe Volonterio. As a woman, I have been helped by a family that was not biased towards males and by a husband who has understood me and who is strong enough not to be afraid of female success.

Working on my own has also helped me a great deal in managing a family and bringing up the most beautiful thing I have made, my daughter, who is now 16.

The world of fashion is complex because of its relations and the great rigour it requires, if you think that every six months or even more frequently there are new collections, which have to satisfy the irrational whims of clientele, but also meet criteria of quality, delivery, prices, sizes, colours and a saturated

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market on the one hand and, on the other, the collections have to forcefully show only the frivolous and light-hearted part, glamour and “immortal” beauty. It is of course a sector where you can learn a great deal, where the value of beauty counts as much as the intrinsic value of the product. It is a lesson that I would dare say Steve Jobs learnt very well when he created Apple. I am convinced that the complexity and open-mindedness, the attention to detail by those who have been successful in recent decades in the world of fashion exists in very few sectors. There is a lot to learn from the great names of fashion, on condition that there is something that can be taught.





LEONARDO'S ANALOGICAL METHOD

With ALESSANDRO ROVETTA
at Casa Atellani, Milan

ALESSANDRO ROVETTA:

Good evening. So, to start off with, thank you very much for inviting me here. Maria Rosaria always manages to stimulate my interest, in this case to try to convert the artistic, architectonic experience of the past into terms which are useful to business leadership. On this occasion it means getting into Leonardo's mindset in order to decode his creative method. Leonardo, who was often a guest in the Atellani residence, was a genius that most scholars have no hesitation in defining as "terrible" and indeed he is very difficult to decipher! Quite recently he had me flummoxed!

I went back to have a look at the drawings and writings that he left on numerous sheets of paper packed with figures and words just like the collage that Enrico has prepared for us. What is it that strikes me about Leonardo? I have always been amazed by his curiosity and I have always asked myself what method he used to observe reality, to understand it.

Helped also by several studies that posed the same question, I have understood that the method he chose and applied was the analogical method.

As Maria Rosaria well knows, this is an ancient method. It is of Greek origin, dating from Plato and Aristotle and it got lucky in the Middle Ages. I'm only saying this just to let you know that it wasn't Leonardo's invention. He was, however, able to draw on tradition and use what he needed for the present.

How does Leonardo apply the analogical method? He applies it on what he sees. For him, the eye is the most important mean that we have to confront reality. In his day, there was heated debate as to whether painting and the figurative arts were sciences or not. Leonardo said in his writings: "Science is what is born in the mind and ends up in the mind". But "painting", which was his favourite activity, "is born in the mind and ends up in the hand", so it is not science, or rather he defines it

"semi-mechanical science". But then he says that in any case the things that are generated in the mind and that end up in the mind are abstract. Abstract things lead to discussion and when one shouts in order to be right, one never gets at the truth in the end. So, Leonardo closes the question by saying that in order to get at the truth he follows experience, right up to the point where he describes himself as "a child of experience". I observe reality, I make hypotheses that are evoked by reality, I verify them as far as it is possible and in this way I get closer to the truth. Painting, or rather drawing, is the form of knowledge that is based most on experience.

This is why he uses the analogical method so much. He observes reality and finds analogies to create his inventions in painting just as much as in hydraulics. He observes birds and he invents flying machines!

This is what we are not used to doing today; in order to learn things we tend to use only logic, above all, but rationalistic logic, of the $1 + 1 = 2$ kind and so it is true. If we don't use this type of procedure, we feel insecure and a long way from the truth. But this type of logic doesn't explain everything and above all it does not enable us to make new hypotheses. On the other hand, the analogical method chosen by Leonardo is much more interesting and open. The first step for him in understanding reality is to observe form. He claims that it is the shape of things that gives him the first impression of what he has in front of him. So he observes the form of things, the form of reality. He is interested in questioning the obvious, what can be seen. And so looking at reality is the

THE FIRST STEP FOR LEONARDO IN UNDERSTANDING REALITY IS TO OBSERVE. HE IS INTERESTED IN QUESTIONING THE OBVIOUS

first step towards knowledge and discovery. You have talked a lot about photography and images. It's extremely interesting that in the work of a photographer, even in a portrait of yourself, you have found something that you did not expect to find. Paradoxically it contradicts the idea that photography creates objectivity, both what makes it such and what we actually have in front of our eyes. And $1+1=2$. Instead it goes beyond this - it is much more than that, much more than a mere objective figure. It adds something that leads to knowledge, leads to greater intuition, creates a link between what is being photographed and our experience, our sensitivity.

In the same way, by observing reality and nature in all its facets, Leonardo is searching for something more, he is searching for relations, the key word in your work this year.

They are relations that he senses, recognises and elaborates starting from form.



So to understand better, let's start from the first three pictures.

Leonardo uses analogy in at least three ways. The first is in a literal way; it is quite simple really of the “microcosm and macrocosm” type, “the body of man and the body of the earth” or rather “what happens on a small scale can also be found on a large scale”.

The second is in an intuitive way. So, let's look at **figure 1**. Among the things that most enthralled Leonardo in nature is water, the dynamic nature of water so that he studies the vortexes, the currents, the flows and falls of water. For him, studying does not mean going and finding a theorem, learning it well and going off to see if it works in reality. For him, knowing literally means looking and allowing the object to reveal itself gradually, letting it help us to understand it through its unique characteristics. In this method he looks at the vortexes of water, he observes them and draws them until he understands them.

This method is, among other things, one which

has the advantage of joining people together. It is of great use in creating a group because it is a method of observation and is completely unrestricted. He observes and draws because that is the role of painting. He says that “painting is extremely fine, philosophical speculation of all the qualities that nature poses regarding form”.

So, it is when he draws what he sees that he knows. This is an extraordinary step. Are there any of us that think of looking in greater depth at something by drawing it?

But why does he do it like this? Precisely because it is his eye that guides him and it is the form that interests him as a first approach to reality. And so painting, which expresses form, is what helps us in this.

Let's come back to **figure 1** - there are two vortexes, two currents of water. One is a linear current, the one above, and the other is a current made by a spurt of water that falls onto a mirror of water.



Here Leonardo observes that when the water flows on the flat it proceeds in a linear fashion while when it moves because it is moved by the waterfall, it tends to rotate. And in order to be sure of this, he puts an object in the water and sees that the object in the linear flow goes straight ahead while in the other one it turns around. And in the meantime he writes, jotting down all his observations and tries to connect them by explaining them verbally. This is yet another significant fact because he is well aware that as long as you have no name for a thing you haven't got to know it very well. So the process is this: observe, draw and name.

Let's have a look at **figure 2** now.

He has to paint a female figure. He takes a model and begins to work on it, looking at a woman's hair being blown by the wind and he notices that the hair blown by the wind moves the same way. This is an analogical step. Just as water moves in particular situations and moves the things with which it comes into collision, so a woman's hair takes on the form of a vortex when buffeted by the air. Is that enough for him? No.

Turning to **figure 3** we can see that he studies plants. He lingers over a posy of anemones. Nothing is stationary for Leonardo because in reality nothing is stationary - everything moves. Everything is given life by a life. And so you can see that even this bunch of anemones has the same dynamics.



Observe how even with a different quality of drawing and different attention paid, three different aspects of nature behave in the same way. This is an analogical method that follows intuition. It is at this point that he really starts to work by asking “why”. And he keeps on asking it of reality.

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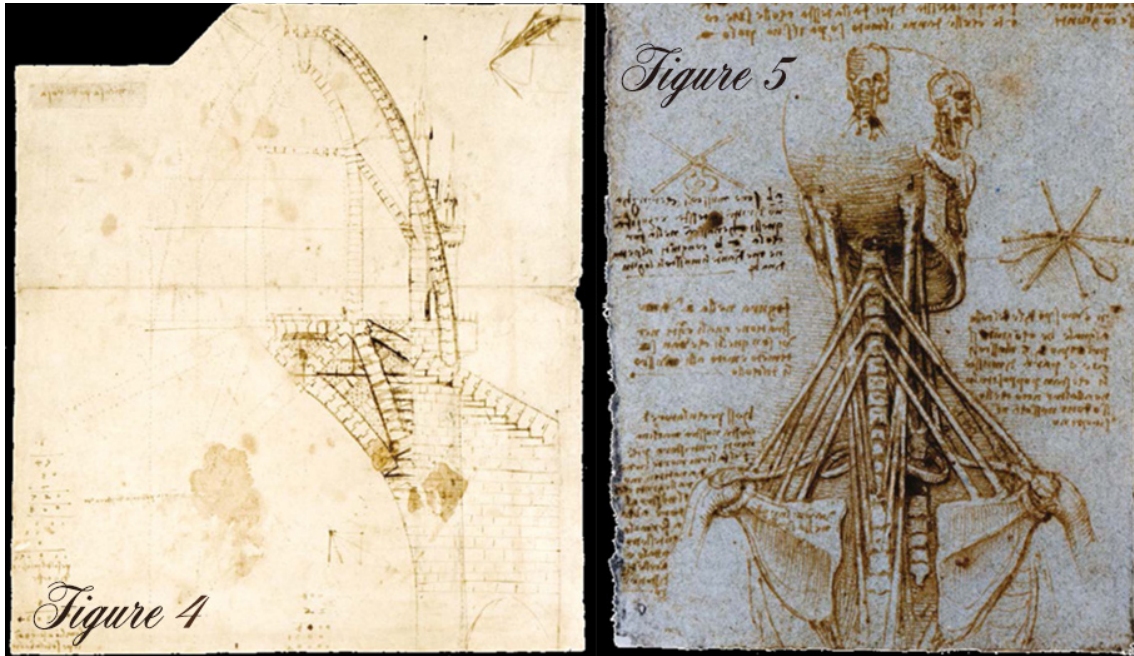


Figure 4. Third type of analogy. This can be defined as metaphorical.

I'd like to give an example. There was a big problem in Milan - the Cathedral. In Leonardo's day, the "tiburio" on the Cathedral, the structure that supports the Madonnina and covers the intersection of the wings still needed to be built. There was great debate as to how to cover this part of the cathedral which would have to support the biggest spire. It was obviously both an economic and a structural issue, because the fear was that the underlying columns would not be able to withstand the weight as they were not strong enough. There was a risk that the whole project would be ruined. So Leonardo wrote to the heads of the Cathedral, the so-called Fabbricieri (those people who were responsible for decisions made in the building of the cathedral), explaining that the architect that has to work on the Cathedral is like a doctor who has to work on a human being. This is analogical but it is clearly metaphorical: "Our cathedral is sick and needs a doctor to cure it". How does he do it?

Figure 4 and Figure 5. Anatomical sketches. Besides water, Leonardo was also fascinated with the human body. He is always stimulated by the microcosmic-macrocosmic analogy, so that the body of man works like the body of the earth. Leonardo knew some people who worked in the hospitals' morgues and as soon as someone died who was interesting from a physical point of view, he tried to acquire the body to study its anatomy. He was an anatomist. This drawing here is a study of the connection of the head to the neck and shoulders. But what does Leonardo write beside it? That this articulation reminds him of the structure of a ship. Indeed, if you look carefully, it looks like a vessel with a mast and stays. And so here is an analogy that he actually writes down.

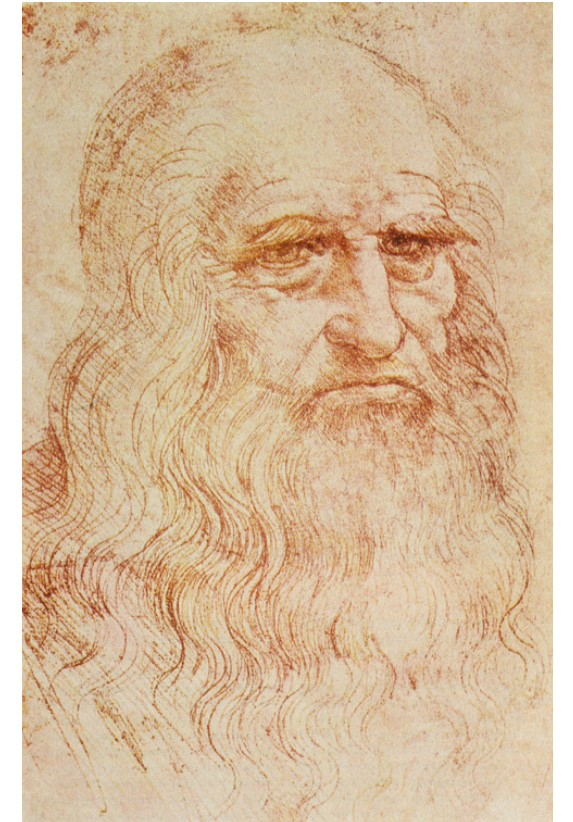
Figure 4 is his proposal to build a "tiburio" that doesn't ruin the Cathedral and that covers the part that had been left uncovered. If you look carefully the whole structure is made of dovetailing stones just like the vertebrae that fit together in the spinal column one on top of the other as in the sketch of the human body that we have just seen. Another analogy:

man/building. Can you see how crazy he is? As crazy as the horses he drew!

However, what was it that fascinated me about this method? It was the fact that this method is wide open - a method that continues to throw out questions, to put forward hypotheses, to question reality. It doesn't close itself into a formula limiting itself to what that formula says without exploring new hypotheses. It is truly a method of continual openness.

Figure 6. It is no coincidence that a large number of his anatomical drawings were drawn on light blue paper. Why was this? It is not just a whim. Light blue is the colour of water and water, the liquid, the fluid is the essence of life. So, a large number of his anatomical sketches are drawn on light blue paper. Drawing 6 is of the heart and its relative cardiovascular system. What he writes is an attempt to tie it in to how water moves in nature and he wonders: "How does the blood flow up to the head and not just flow right down to the lower parts of the body?". He looks at the water cycle in nature and observes that the system from the mountains to the rivers to the sea to the air to the clouds and back again to the earth, returning again to its original sources is the same as the circulatory blood system in the human body; it rises and falls and rises again thanks to the particular function of the heart and the special quality of blood.

And he never stops observing reality, asking questions and connecting things.





There is another element that makes this method important: Leonardo is keen to understand the process of things, what actually happens. He's not so much interested in reaching a final, precise, undisputed, unique result. He does not worry about reaching the conclusion of the works but rather he derives greatest satisfaction from gleaning information, finding out all there is to know by gaining experience by continually probing reality and further exploring new ways of doing things; and he continually teaches his pupils this.

This explains how so many of his works are unfinished, but it would be better to say that they are works in progress. And not just that... they leave considerable scope for questions, for a relative awareness, and this too is open, from the particular to the general. Let's take the example of the Mona Lisa.

Mona Lisa. Who is this woman? Is she just Mona Lisa? Leonardo is not much interested in the recognisability of the people he painted. He is interested in how this figure relates to the surrounding nature. Because the key players in this painting are the person depicted and the

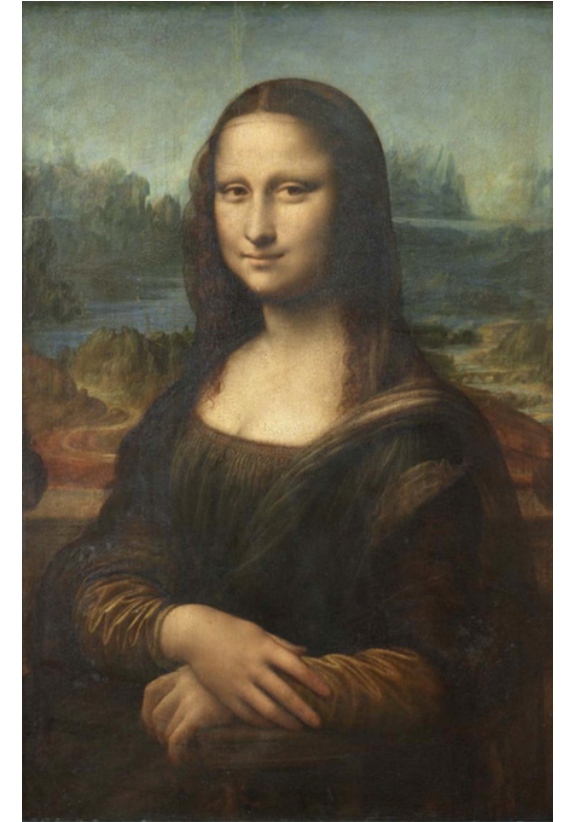
countryside, which is quite a particular one. It has been recognised as being an area in Italy between Pisa and Florence. There are two lakes and a river; there seem to be two similar valleys to the left and right of the figure. One valley, the one on the right, is crossed by a river that flows from the lakes. The other one, on the contrary, is crossed by a road that would seem to have been traced where previously a river had flowed, as if a barrier upriver had blocked it. We know that Leonardo was studying a way of building a channel, by constructing a rocky barrier, in order to make merchandise reach Florence by down the Arno without forcing the ships to stop at Pisa, which obliged the Florentines to pay duty to the Pisans. They did not manage to do it but the countryside in the Mona Lisa would seem to show Leonardo's studies on this issue.

Basically, Leonardo is not at all interested that Mona Lisa or the Arno valley are recognised. He is keen that this woman, this body and this valley are looked at and observed over and over again as two realities that work in the same way.

This is Leonardo's analogical method. So I would like to conclude by saying one more thing and this is amazing even in his way of working.

Let's take a look at the Last Supper here in front of you. You know that the Last Supper is a victim of disaster - it is really weak, badly destroyed. The reason for this is that he used a technique that enabled him to paint on a wall but painting little by little and letting him correct and improve things.

He was obsessed by the fact that he had to paint something that he would not be able to improve over time. But not so much because he might make mistakes as the fact that he could change the work due to his non-stop learning. He is terrified of finishing something, of staring at it and then finishing it to then discover something he could have done in a different way. In many of Leonardo's paintings, we can see that he has cancelled things that he had done only to redo them. We know that in order to produce a pictorial work of art, tradition had it in the artisans' workshops that it was necessary to start from a series of preparatory studies in order to arrive at the final drawing, which would then be transferred to the board onto which the painting would faithfully be done. Even Leonardo starts off with these principles in mind but he subsequently modifies them radically.





When he goes to the board, he transforms what should be an accurate rendering of the preparatory drawing into another work experience by changing many things that had been decided beforehand. He sketches, then he changes, enlarges the strokes, makes shadows under the coats of painting. Technically it is extremely complicated but he doesn't lose heart. In this way he never finishes the work. It's like reality, which is continually changes. Planning is something that goes on and on; there cannot be a certain moment when there is pure performance.

It is important to know that he is not the only one to leave works unfinished - his pupils do likewise. He asks and allows his pupils to finish some of his works, as, for example, in the Virgin of the Rocks in London. It is an extraordinary way of working.

He learnt this in the Florentine workshops because the artists' workshop in Florence worked like this. He was born in Verrocchio's workshop. Verrocchio was a sculptor and painter who left his work unfinished in the workshop and his pupils worked on them.

For instance, parts of Verrocchio's Baptism of Christ in the Uffizi were painted by Leonardo, Botticelli and Filippino Lippi, who all worked in that workshop. You may think that this is a response to a theoretical principle, something programmatic and abstract. But it is actually based on a practical way of working in the workshop, an artisan's work. In Florence they had learnt that this was the path both for training and also for innovation and creativity. Even perspective was invented in this way and they corrected and perfected it by experimenting. They understood that theoretically it worked but they did not always get the effects they desired for a truly engaging verisimilitude. This is another really interesting topic: group work, work based on experience and practice, allowing yourself to be drawn in from the beginning by a method of unfettered knowledge like Leonardo's.



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