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The Leadership Lessons of Ted Lasso: Enhancing the Discussion of Influence in Learning Environments

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Abstract: This paper explores the leadership lessons embedded within the television series *Ted Lasso*, using the show as a case study to illustrate the intersection of authentic and servant leadership theories. While leadership research has often debated the distinctions between moral leadership frameworks, Ted Lasso (the main character in the television series) presents a compelling example of how these approaches can operate in tandem. Through his unwavering commitment to empathy, resilience, and personal connection, Ted Lasso exemplifies how authentic leadership serves as a mechanism for enacting servant leadership, reinforcing the idea that true leadership is not merely about authority or expertise but about fostering growth and empowerment in others. By analyzing key leadership moments in the series, this paper highlights the ways in which Ted's leadership approach aligns with theoretical constructs in the literature, offering valuable insights for educators, practitioners, and students seeking to understand the complexities of leadership influence. The findings suggest that Ted Lasso provides an engaging and accessible framework for discussing leadership in learning environments, demonstrating that ethical and relational leadership approaches can drive both individual and organizational success.

Keywords: authentic leadership; servant leadership; Ted Lasso; ethical leadership

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1. The Leadership Lessons of Ted Lasso: A Case Study on Authentic and Servant Leadership to Advance the Discussion of Influence in Learning Environments

> "*The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others*"—Mahatma Gandhi

Leadership has been a widely studied concept in both the academic literature and practical applications. Scholars have explored leadership through various lenses, including transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), and self-leadership (Neck et al., 2024). Leadership is crucial in shaping organizations, motivating teams, and fostering a positive and productive work culture. Relatively recently, leadership scholarship has begun to incorporate the implications of morality in leadership, highlighting the importance of ethical considerations in leaders' decision making (Freeman et al., 2004; Lemoine et al., 2019). Out of this focus has emerged a great deal of leadership theories dedicated to ethically-focused influence, including the aforementioned authentic and servant leadership theories (Lemoine et al., 2019). This proliferation in moral leadership theories has led scholars to question how these novel forms of influence operate, with an intense debate surrounding authentic leadership

theory in particular (Lord et al., 2017; Gardner et al., 2021). To answer such questions, leadership researchers have attempted to classify moral leadership theories based on their underlying moral philosophies (Lemoine et al., 2019), similarities to classical theories of leadership (Banks et al., 2016), and even the underpinning theories of human behavior and interaction that inform our understanding of leader/follower dynamics (Eva et al., 2019).

However, scholars remain unconvinced of the ability of moral theories of leadership, such as authentic and servant leadership, to adequately inform our understanding of leadership influence beyond more classical theories of leadership (e.g., transformational; Banks et al., 2016; Lord et al., 2017; Gardner et al., 2021). Unfortunately, these questions may remain due to past research's failure to account for a unique perspective on authentic leadership. That is, rather than attempting to find clear divisions between moral theories of leadership, to best understand authentic leadership, it may be necessary to view it in conjunction with its theoretical counterparts. More specifically, authentic leadership may best be understood through the lens of a facilitator or mechanism through which other forms of leadership, such as servant leadership, may be performed by a leader (Banks et al., 2016; Gardner et al., 2021).

One unexpected source of leadership wisdom that illustrates this phenomenon has emerged from popular culture: the television show *Ted Lasso*. This series, starring Jason Sudeikis as the titular character, provides numerous lessons on effective leadership and illustrates the use of authentic servant leadership. *Ted Lasso* follows an American football coach who is hired to manage a struggling English soccer team, AFC Richmond, despite having no experience with the sport. While the premise may seem comedic, the show delivers profound insights into leadership, demonstrating how qualities such as empathy, optimism, and empowerment can create success in any field through the use of an authentically follower-focused style of leadership. Accordingly, the goal of the present paper is to utilize Ted Lasso as a case study for authentic-servant leadership in action. Through his interactions with players, staff, and management, Ted models key authentic-servant leadership behaviors that align with established moral leadership theories and principles. His approach, though unconventional, proves that leadership is not solely about technical expertise but about building meaningful relationships and fostering a culture of trust and growth. His character challenges traditional notions of leadership by focusing on personal development, human connection, and emotional intelligence over mere strategic prowess. In doing so, Ted Lasso illuminates how authentic leadership may serve as a mechanism for leaders to engage in effective servant leadership, while furthering our understanding of the operation of ethical leadership theories as a result (Banks et al., 2016; Lord et al., 2017; Gardner et al., 2021).

2. The Importance of Leadership

Leadership is vital in organizations, teams, and even personal life. It sets the tone for workplace culture, drives performance, and inspires individuals to reach their full potential. Various leadership theories emphasize the importance of leading by example, fostering strong relationships, and maintaining resilience in the face of challenges. Ted Lasso exemplifies these traits, showcasing a leadership style that resonates across different domains. Effective leadership can significantly impact an organization's success (Yukl, 2013). Studies have shown that leaders who prioritize emotional intelligence, clear communication, and motivation contribute to higher levels of employee engagement and performance (May et al., 2004; Carmeli, 2003; Goleman et al., 2013). In an era where workplace culture and employee well-being are increasingly prioritized, Ted Lasso's leadership style offers a relevant and timely example of how leaders can create positive environments that empower individuals to excel.

Additionally, leadership plays a crucial role in times of crisis. Strong leaders provide direction, stability, and motivation in uncertain situations. Ted's leadership exemplifies how resilience, positivity, and empathy can be used to manage adversity and maintain team cohesion. His unwavering faith in his team, despite obstacles and external pressures, reflects the power of leadership to influence morale and inspire confidence even in the most challenging circumstances

3. Ted Lasso: An Overview

The TV show *Ted Lasso* debuted on Apple TV+ in 2020 and quickly became a cultural phenomenon. While the plot revolves around sports, its deeper message centers on personal growth, teamwork, and leadership. Ted Lasso, an optimistic and kind-hearted coach, wins over his players and colleagues not through technical expertise but through his unwavering belief in people. His approach to leadership offers valuable lessons applicable to any organizational setting. Ted's leadership philosophy is characterized by a deep commitment to his team, a focus on growth rather than short-term success, and an ability to navigate challenges with humor and grace. Throughout the series, Ted encounters resistance, skepticism, and failure, but his resilience and unwavering commitment to his team allow him to build a culture of trust and success.

What makes the leadership of Ted Lasso particularly compelling is its nuanced portrayal of leadership in multiple forms. Ted is contrasted with other characters, such as Rebecca Welton, the team's owner, who begins the series focused on revenge and personal agendas but evolves into a compassionate leader under Ted's influence. Similarly, characters like Roy Kent and Jamie Tartt undergo their own leadership journeys, demonstrating that leadership is not a fixed trait but a continuous process of learning and growth.

4. Leadership Lessons from Ted Lasso—Authentic Servant Leadership

Ted Lasso's leadership philosophy can be summarized through several key lessons, which collectively exhibit the use of authentic servant leadership. Ted's leadership holds a firmly authentic style, as he influences those around him through his own self-awareness, openness, and clarity regarding who he is, and through consistently disclosing and acting in accordance with his personal values, beliefs, and motivations (Banks et al., 2016). However, as can be seen through these leadership lessons, Ted's guiding values, beliefs, and motivations fundamentally drive him to act as a servant to those around him. Servant leadership represents a universal approach to leadership that focuses on empowering followers to grow in all aspects of their lives (e.g., ability, relational, emotional, spiritual) so that they may best achieve their goals (Eva et al., 2019). Thus, in Ted Lasso's case, acting with self-awareness and in accordance with his personal values compels him to engage in servant leadership, as this form of leadership most closely aligns with his deeply held beliefs in empathy, growth, and relational care (Banks et al., 2016; Lemoine et al., 2019). In this sense, for Ted specifically, authentic leadership facilitates servant leadership because his authentic self is defined by a desire to serve others. However, this alignment is not universally required. Authentic leadership is a values-driven model that encourages leaders to behave in ways consistent with their internalized moral perspectives, regardless of what those values may be. For some leaders, this may express itself through transformational, participative, or even directive leadership styles. Therefore, while Ted Lasso provides a compelling example of how authentic leadership can operationalize servant leadership, particularly when a leader's core identity is rooted in service to others, we acknowledge that other expressions of authentic leadership may not necessarily result in servant leadership. Recognizing this variability helps illustrate the flexible, yet deeply interrelated, nature of these two moral leadership theories (Eva et al., 2019; Gardner et al., 2021). The interplay between authentic

and servant leadership is illuminated in the following leadership principles, illustrated through Ted Lasso's behavior, interactions, and strategies, and serves as a playbook for effective leadership in any field.

5. A Deeper Theoretical Comparison of Authentic and Servant Leadership

Authentic and servant leadership are two moral leadership frameworks that share commonalities yet retain distinct differences. Authentic leadership emphasizes self-awareness, transparency, and consistency between a leader's values and actions (Bishop, 2013; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). In contrast, servant leadership prioritizes the well-being and development of followers, often placing the needs of others above personal ambition (Greenleaf, 1977; Pawar et al., 2020). Scholars have debated whether these leadership approaches are distinct or complementary, with some arguing that servant leadership is a practical extension of authentic leadership (Peltz, 2020; Banks et al., 2016).

One key distinction between authentic and servant leadership lies in their starting points of influence. Authentic leadership is grounded in the self, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, relational transparency, and balanced processing (Walumbwa et al., 2007). While two of these dimensions—self-awareness and internalized moral perspective—highlight the inward psychological processes that help a leader understand and align with their core values, the other two—relational transparency and balanced processing—reflect how those internal commitments are expressed in interpersonal interactions. Servant leadership, by contrast, begins with a primary focus on others, measuring a leader's effectiveness by their ability to elevate, serve, and develop their followers (Eva et al., 2019). In the case of Ted Lasso, we observe that his servant-oriented actions are deeply rooted in his personal values and identity, suggesting that his authenticity—his alignment between self and behavior—serves as a mechanism through which servant leadership is enacted. Rather than seeing these two theories as opposing or sequential, Ted Lasso offers a compelling example of how authentic leadership provides the foundation for consistently practicing servant leadership.

Critics of authentic leadership have argued that its strong emphasis on self-awareness and consistency with one's internal values may limit a leader's adaptability, particularly in contexts where responsiveness to organizational dynamics or stakeholder expectations is required (Gardner et al., 2021). Similarly, some have questioned whether servant leadership is effective in high-stakes competitive environments that demand rapid decision-making, assertiveness, or self-interested trade-offs for organizational gain (Lemoine et al., 2019; Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019). While coach Ted Lasso is a fictional narrative, it provides a compelling illustration of how these limitations may be mitigated when authentic and servant leadership are integrated. The character of Ted consistently demonstrates an ability to hold firm to his core values while also navigating difficult relational and performance-based challenges, suggesting that authenticity need not come at the expense of adaptability and that service to others can enhance, rather than hinder, performance in competitive settings. We do not present Ted's success as empirical evidence but rather as a vivid case narrative that invites reflection on how seemingly idealistic leadership styles might function under pressure. As such, the integration of authentic and servant leadership demonstrated by Ted Lasso serves as a teaching tool to explore how ethical leadership approaches can be reconciled with real-world demands for adaptability and performance.

5.1. Empathy Creates Connection

Servant leaders foremost seek to adopt an "other-oriented" approach to leadership, seeking to build an individualized connection with followers to best meet their diverse needs (Eva et al., 2019). Authentic leaders seek to develop relational transparency, such

that they display their true selves to others and share their thoughts and feelings with followers (Banks et al., 2016). Ted makes an effort to understand and connect with each team member, ensuring they feel heard, valued, and supported. His ability to listen and offer emotional support builds trust within the team. This is evident in how he learns about each player's personal life, showing genuine care and concern beyond just their role on the team. Ted often asks personal questions, remembers details about his players' lives, and makes them feel truly valued as individuals. Ted's open and honest communication and emotional reflection allow him to direct followers out of such individualized connection and stand as a hallmark of an authentic leader (Banks et al., 2016), while creating valued outcomes for all stakeholders impacted by his leadership as a requirement of a servant leader (Lemoine et al., 2019).

5.2. Do Not Let Criticism Define You

Authentic leadership is steeped in a self-regulatory perspective, requiring one to be anchored by their personal mission, principles, and motivations (Banks et al., 2016). To be an effective authentic leader, one must therefore remain steadfast in the face of others' attempts to dissuade the leader from acting in accordance with those values. Despite facing intense scrutiny and ridicule, Ted remains focused on his values and leadership philosophy of developing a team-oriented culture among his club. He does not let negativity define him, demonstrating resilience and self-awareness, despite critics calling for him to abandon his quest to develop a team-first culture in the face of a losing record. His ability to stay positive in press conferences and ignore the naysayers showcases this trait effectively. Even when the media mocks him or the fans doubt him, Ted remains unwavering in his commitment to developing his players above all else, again displaying servant leadership while remaining authentic to his personal values.

5.3. Success Is More than Just Winning

Ted prioritizes personal growth and teamwork over short-term victories. To act authentically to these values, he focuses on developing his players as individuals, which ultimately leads to long-term success. Servant leadership is manifested through such one-on-one attention to the individual needs of followers (Eva et al., 2019). For instance, his interactions with Jamie Tartt, where he helps him grow beyond selfish, yet successful, play to become a team-oriented player, illustrate Ted's motivation to win in accordance with his personal values of teamwork and togetherness over individual success. Ted understands that true leadership is not about immediate results but about building a foundation for sustained excellence. Thus, while acting authentically, Ted prioritizes a servant form of leadership to develop his players both personally and professionally.

5.4. Respect Everyone, Regardless of Position

Throughout the series, Ted is open and transparent about his values for every individual, from star players to support staff. He fosters an inclusive environment where everyone feels important, reinforcing the idea that leadership is about recognition and respect rather than authority. He holds the star players to the same standards as the support staff and vice versa, such as how he treats Nathan, a kit manager, with dignity and encouragement, later promoting him to a coaching role despite many viewing him as insignificant to his team's success. Once again, to act authentically to these beliefs, Ted must engage in servant leadership, prioritizing the needs and interests of every follower, down to the equipment manager, in order to foster the growth and development of all involved in his team (Eva et al., 2019; Lemoine et al., 2019).

5.5. Fostering Growth Builds Confidence

After a particularly devastating loss, Coach Lasso tells his detractors that it is not the number of wins or losses but rather his ability to help his players become the best versions of themselves, both on and off the field, that determines his success as a coach and leader of the team. To lead consistently with these principles, Ted once again draws upon servant leadership in the show. Servant leaders, first and foremost, develop followers based on their own ethical orientations (Eva et al., 2019), as seen by Ted pushing his team members to step beyond their predefined roles. Ted instills confidence and promotes both personal and professional growth. His belief in their potential pushes them to achieve more. A great example is his trust in Sam Obisanya, encouraging him to take leadership on the field. Ted consistently finds ways to nurture confidence and challenge his players to reach new heights, even if it means sacrificing short-term on-field success.

5.6. Team Comes First

A servant leader is one who reorients both their own and others' self-interests toward concern for others within their organization and broader community (Eva et al., 2019). Throughout the series, Ted consistently reminds his players that individual talent is secondary to collective success. He ensures that no one receives special treatment, fostering a culture of unity and accountability that informs his decision making as a coach and is crucial to leading authentically (Gardner et al., 2021). In doing so, he adopts a moral consequentialist perspective on ethics, the underpinning philosophy behind servant leadership, as he seeks to bring positive outcomes to as many stakeholders he serves as possible (Lemoine et al., 2019). For example, this is evident when he benches his best player, Jamie Tartt, to emphasize teamwork over individual stardom in order to allow other players to find success on the field.

The principles of authentic servant leadership demonstrated by Ted Lasso are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Authentic servant leadership lessons from Ted Lasso.

Leadership Lesson	Example from Ted Lasso
Empathy Creates Connection	Ted personally connects with each player, supporting them emotionally.
Don't Let Criticism Define You	Ted remains positive despite media and public criticism.
Success Is More Than Just Winning	He focuses on player growth rather than short-term victories.
Respect Everyone, Regardless of Position	He values and uplifts even the lowest-ranked team members.
Fostering Growth Builds Confidence	He encourages Sam to take on a leadership role.
Team Comes First	He benches Jamie Tartt to emphasize teamwork.

6. Real-World Applications of Authentic-Servant Leadership

While Ted Lasso is a fictional character, his leadership style closely mirrors that of real-world leaders. A prime example is Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft, who transformed the company's culture through empathy, servant leadership, and authenticity (Green, 2023; Ferguson, 2023). Nadella's leadership philosophy aligns with Ted's—he fosters an environment of trust, encourages employees to learn from failure, and prioritizes the well-being of his team. Under Nadella's leadership, Microsoft experienced significant

innovation and financial success, proving that authentic-servant leadership is not just an idealistic approach but a powerful business strategy (Lemoine et al., 2019).

Another example is Herb Kelleher, the co-founder of Southwest Airlines, who placed employees at the core of the company's success. Kelleher's servant leadership approach emphasized treating employees well so they, in turn, would treat customers well (Cote, 2018). His emphasis on relational leadership and empowerment strongly mirrors Ted Lasso's style. Research suggests that organizations led by servant leaders see higher levels of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention (Eva et al., 2019).

Yet another compelling example is Rose Marcario, former CEO of Patagonia. Under her leadership, Patagonia became globally recognized not just for its environmental activism but for cultivating a deeply values-driven workplace culture. Marcario's leadership exemplified authentic leadership through her commitment to transparency, environmental ethics, and social justice—values that guided both internal policies and public-facing initiatives. She also modeled servant leadership by implementing policies that prioritized employee well-being, such as on-site childcare and environmental internships, as well as encouraging activism among staff. Like Ted Lasso, Marcario built trust and loyalty by aligning her leadership behaviors with her core beliefs and by centering the long-term growth and empowerment of her team. Her success demonstrates how authentic-servant leadership can thrive even in highly competitive and purpose-driven sectors (Gelles, 2021).

Similarly, Ken Chenault, who served as CEO of American Express from 2001 to 2018, provides a strong real-world parallel to the leadership values embodied by Ted Lasso. Chenault is widely praised for his calm principled leadership in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, when 11 American Express employees were killed and the company's headquarters were severely affected. He communicated openly and empathetically with employees during the crisis, demonstrating relational transparency and emotional intelligence. Over his tenure, Chenault also championed diversity, inclusion, and leadership development—hallmarks of servant leadership. His success in maintaining company stability while fostering a people-centered culture highlights how servant and authentic leadership can be highly effective in high-stakes corporate environments. Chenault's steady hand and ethical orientation mirror Ted Lasso's approach to resilience, care, and long-term thinking (Cowley, 2017).

7. Applying Ted Lasso's Leadership Lessons in the Classroom and/or Training Room

Educators can utilize the television series *Ted Lasso* as a teaching tool by incorporating video clips into lessons, facilitating discussions on leadership themes, and engaging students in role-playing scenarios. Showing clips of Ted demonstrating resilience, empathy, and motivation allows students to see leadership in action. Professors can prompt discussions with questions such as the following: How did Ted's leadership affect his team? How could similar strategies be applied in business settings?

Additionally, students can participate in role-playing exercises where they adopt different leadership styles and analyze their effectiveness. Reflective writing assignments can further enhance learning, asking students to compare their leadership approaches with Ted's and develop personal leadership action plans. A debate-style activity can also be incorporated where students argue the effectiveness of different leadership styles based on Ted's example.

By integrating the television series *Ted Lasso* into a leadership curriculum, educators can create an engaging and dynamic learning environment that connects theory with practical examples. These lessons not only provide students with insights into effective leadership but also encourage them to reflect on their own leadership styles and potential growth.

8. Expanding the Pedagogical Applications of Ted Lasso in Leadership Education

The use of *Ted Lasso* in leadership education extends beyond showing video clips and discussing leadership principles. One effective pedagogical approach is structured role-playing exercises (Stevens, 2015). For example, students can assume the roles of Ted Lasso, Rebecca Welton, and other AFC Richmond figures in case scenarios to analyze leadership decision-making under pressure. These exercises help students experience leadership dilemmas firsthand and reflect on their personal leadership styles.

Additionally, self-reflection exercises can deepen students' understanding of leadership principles (DiGregorio & Liston, 2022; Nesbit, 2012). Instructors can assign students to write "Leadership Growth Plans", where they assess their leadership strengths and areas for improvement based on Ted Lasso's principles. Such exercises foster self-awareness and encourage students to develop actionable steps for enhancing their leadership skills.

Corporate training programs can also leverage the television series *Ted Lasso* to cultivate leadership development (Ross, 2008). Businesses could implement Ted Lasso-themed leadership workshops focusing on building resilient teams, fostering inclusivity, and developing emotional intelligence. Research indicates that storytelling-based learning, such as using television narratives, improves leadership comprehension and application (Reissner, 2004; Gardner et al., 2021).

With this discussion in mind and to expand the pedagogical application of *Ted Lasso* in leadership education, we propose two exercises that allow students to engage more deeply with the principles of authentic and servant leadership. First, a role-playing exercise called "Coach for a Day" (see Table 2) immerses students in realistic leadership scenarios modeled after *Ted Lasso* episodes. Students must navigate interpersonal and organizational challenges using behaviors consistent with ethical leadership theory, such as empathy, value-congruent action, and empowering communication. The experience of stepping into Ted's shoes facilitates both skill-building and insight into the nuances of relational influence.

Table 2. Role-playing exercise: "Coach for a Day".

Objective	Setup	Example Scenario	Instructions
To help students embody and practice authentic and servant leadership behaviors by role-playing a real-time leadership scenario inspired by *the* Tedd Lasso *character*.	Divide students into small groups of four to five. Each group selects (or is assigned) a scenario inspired by the show (or uses real-world analogs). One student acts as "Coach" (Ted Lasso), while others play team members, staff, or media.	A key player has been benched due to a toxic attitude. Morale is low. The press is criticizing the coach. The team has lost three games in a row. The "Coach" must meet with the team, media, or individual players to rebuild trust, show empathy, maintain optimism, and align actions with values.	The Coach must lead the discussion or confrontation using authentic and servant leadership techniques. • Observers (in or outside the group) complete a brief checklist noting the following: ○ Evidence of empathy; ○ Value-consistent actions; ○ Inclusion and empowerment of others. • After the role-play, students debrief as a group: What worked? What did not? How did it feel to lead like Lasso? Debrief Questions: • What servant leadership behaviors did you observe or use? • How did the Coach's authenticity affect the group dynamic? • How did power dynamics shift when the Coach showed vulnerability or empathy?

Second, a self-reflection exercise titled "Lasso Your Leadership" (See Table 3) invites students to examine their personal leadership experiences in light of Ted Lasso's example. Reflection prompts encourage the identification of core leadership values and the creation of a personalized leadership playbook, fostering both self-awareness and developmental intentionality—core tenets of authentic leadership theory. Used in tandem, these exercises provide experiential and introspective entry points to moral leadership education and reinforce the value of media narratives as leadership development tools.

Table 3. Self-Reflection Exercise: "Lasso Your Leadership".

Objective	Instructions
To foster deeper awareness of students' own leadership values and behavior by drawing connections between their experiences and Ted Lasso's leadership philosophy.	Students write a 2–3 page reflective essay in response to the following prompts: 1. **Describe a time when you were in a leadership role** (formal or informal). How did you lead? How did it feel? What challenges did you face? 2. **Compare your approach** to Ted Lasso's leadership. What similarities and differences do you notice? 3. **Identify two core leadership values** you observed in Ted (e.g., optimism, empowerment, humility). Which of these do you already demonstrate? Which would you like to develop? 4. **Create a personal "leadership playbook".** List three concrete actions you will take to lead more authentically and with a servant mindset. Students can optionally revisit this reflection at the end of the course to assess their own growth.

Finally, as the popularity of *Ted Lasso* grows in educational and professional development settings, it is important to acknowledge potential copyright considerations when using the show's content in workshops or training programs. While discussing the show's themes and leadership lessons for academic or instructional purposes typically falls under fair use, especially when accompanied by commentary or critique, caution should be taken when adapting *Ted Lasso*-themed branding or materials for commercial use, such as corporate workshops or promotional events. To avoid copyright infringement, facilitators should refrain from using official logos, character likenesses, or episode clips without appropriate licensing. Instead, we recommend using general descriptions of leadership scenarios inspired by the show, paired with original discussion prompts or role-plays. This approach preserves the pedagogical value of *Ted Lasso* while respecting intellectual property rights and ensuring ethical application in practice.

9. Counterarguments to Relying on Ted Lasso for Leadership Lessons

While Ted Lasso provides a compelling model for leadership, it is important to recognize its limitations. One potential critique is that Ted's approach relies heavily on emotional intelligence and optimism, which may not always be effective in high-stakes or highly competitive environments. Certain leadership contexts, such as crisis management or military command structures, require a more directive and authoritative leadership style (Banks et al., 2016; Hannah et al., 2009).

Additionally, alternative leadership frameworks such as transactional leadership emphasize structure, rewards, and consequences as primary drivers of success. In environments where efficiency and productivity are paramount, transactional leadership may be more appropriate than servant leadership (Lemoine et al., 2019). Ted Lasso's leader-

ship might be ideal in team-based and developmental settings but may struggle in highly hierarchical or performance-driven organizations.

This critique does not diminish the value of Ted Lasso's leadership style but rather highlights the need for a flexible situational approach to leadership. By incorporating elements from multiple leadership theories, leaders can adapt their style to different challenges and environments, ensuring both relational and performance-oriented success.

Furthermore, we argue earlier in this paper that the lessons discussed could serve as a "playbook for effective leadership in any field". While the leadership lessons derived from Ted Lasso are grounded in authentic and servant leadership theory, it is fair to question our "playbook" statement as to whether such lessons can be broadly applied across different organizational or situational contexts. After all, theories like Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Model suggest that leadership effectiveness depends on the leader's ability to adapt their style to the developmental level of followers and the demands of the situation. In contrast, servant and authentic leadership emphasize consistency in moral character, follower development, and value alignment, regardless of context.

However, these approaches need not be viewed as mutually exclusive. Indeed, what Ted Lasso offers is not a one-size-fits-all prescription for leadership but rather a set of core leadership behaviors—empathy, humility, empowerment, and integrity—that can be adapted to a wide range of circumstances. While situational leadership emphasizes flexibility in directive and supportive behaviors, servant and authentic leadership emphasize consistency in ethical orientation and interpersonal engagement. The show illustrates how even in high-pressure environments (e.g., professional sports), a consistent commitment to these human-centered values can generate trust, cohesion, and long-term performance—outcomes that are broadly desirable across industries.

Moreover, empirical research supports the idea that servant and authentic leadership styles positively influence follower engagement, psychological safety, and team effectiveness across a variety of sectors, including healthcare, education, technology, and finance (Eva et al., 2019; Lemoine et al., 2019). These findings suggest that while specific leadership tactics may need to shift according to context, the underlying values modeled by Ted Lasso—such as treating people with respect, encouraging growth, and leading with emotional intelligence—can serve as foundational pillars of influence in any field. In this way, the Ted Lasso example does not contradict the importance of situational awareness but rather complements it by reinforcing the idea that adaptability can be anchored in authentic service-oriented values.

Additionally, while *Ted Lasso* has garnered widespread acclaim and cultural resonance, we acknowledge that some readers may be unfamiliar with the series or its characters. To address this, we have intentionally focused on leadership behaviors and outcomes that are both contextually grounded in the show and theoretically transferable beyond it. The use of supporting characters (e.g., Jamie Tartt, Sam Obisanya, Rebecca Welton) serves not to require prior knowledge of the show but to illustrate specific leadership principles—such as empowerment, inclusivity, and value-based decision-making—in action. These character examples are employed as accessible case vignettes that mirror real-world leadership dynamics, making the lessons applicable regardless of one's familiarity with the show. Moreover, educators and trainers can easily introduce brief clips or context summaries to bring these scenarios to life in instructional settings, thereby enhancing relevance and engagement for all learners.

Finally, it could be argued that our discussion strictly focused on the positive aspects of Ted Lasso's leadership. Indeed, it is important to bring up the less-than-perfect aspects of Ted Lasso's leadership. While Ted Lasso offers a compelling model of authentic and servant leadership, it is important to recognize that the series also portrays the imperfections and

limitations of these leadership styles. For example, Ted's persistent optimism occasionally leads him to avoid difficult conversations, such as delaying critical feedback or conflict resolution with players and staff. His reluctance to assert authority early on allows certain team dynamics, like Jamie Tartt's toxic behavior, to persist longer than necessary. Additionally, his initial lack of strategic knowledge and underestimation of power politics within the club highlight the risks of relying solely on relational strength. These leadership missteps, while eventually addressed, serve to remind us that moral leadership is not inherently perfect. Instead, it requires ongoing self-awareness, feedback, and growth. By including these complexities, the series offers a more realistic portrayal of leadership development, reinforcing the idea that even the most principled leaders must navigate ambiguity, failure, and personal learning in their journey.

10. Conclusions

Ted Lasso is more than just a fictional soccer coach—he embodies the qualities of an exceptional leader. His approach aligns with the intersection of key moral leadership theories, notably authentic and servant leadership, through demonstrating how leaders who value empathy, optimism, and empowerment must adopt servant leadership in order to be a truly authentic leader. By leading with kindness and purpose, Ted Lasso provides a blueprint for leaders in any field, proving that true leadership is about inspiring others to reach their full potential. The show's popularity underscores the universal appeal of its leadership messages, making it a valuable resource for leadership education and professional development.

Ultimately, Ted Lasso teaches us that leadership is about more than strategy and control—it is about connection, belief, and the unwavering commitment to bringing out the best in others. Leaders who embody these principles can foster not only successful organizations but also thriving, motivated, and resilient teams. In highlighting these truths, the series broadens our understanding of moral theories of leadership, suggesting that authentic leadership serves as a mechanism through which a leader may effectively utilize servant leadership (Banks et al., 2016; Gardner et al., 2021).

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