Leader & member networks predicting creativity and popularity in jazz music

Floor van den Born, VU University & Ajay Mehra, University of Kentucky, USA

Improvisation

- Improvisation refers to impromptu interaction (Moorman & Miner, 1998)
  - Composition and execution converge in time
- Improvisation is jazz musicians’ core practice to innovate (Berliner, 1994)

When the muse does not strike
Core tension

Deliberate techniques to divert from existing norms, standards, and conventions.

- Creativity: diversion from existing standards, practices and conventions

Conventions: stuff that people like because they recognize it and/or have heard it before

- Popularity: product acceptance among audiences

Divergence from exiting ideas

(Cole Porter’s “What is this thing called love?” (1929) vs. Charles Mingus’ “What love” (1961))
Social networks

• Social capital—the resources that result from social structural position—produces advantage (Coleman, 1988)

• Ties between actors serve as conduits for the flow of resources between them (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006)

• Structural position provides access to diverse knowledge (Ahuja, 2000; Tsai, 2001)

Structural position in social networks

• Differentiate between the leader’s and members’ social networks

• Structural marginality vs connectedness to the core

Leader and member networks

• Leader network position drives popularity
  – Leaders manage for creativity (Amabile & Khair, 2008)
  – Leaders oversee the different phases in the project (Venkataramani, ’14)
  – Leader’s role is to pull ideas together (e.g., knowledge integration, Long Lingo & O’Mahony, 2000)
    • Corroborate ideas with peers about potential impact of ideas
    • Gain legitimacy by being connected to the core (Cattani & Ferrai, 2008)

• Member network position drives creativity
  – Leaders select creative employees to contribute to create and be creative (Amabile & Khair, 2008)
  – Diversity of background of members
    • Distinguish between true creativity and creativity by testing ideas
    • Quick to experiment with new talent arriving
Networking exercise

- Networking is important but oftentimes feels uncomfortable

- Short exercise (adapted from Janasz & Forret, 2008) to gain insight in
  - How much you are networking
  - Where you are focusing your networking efforts
Debrief

- How much are you networking, and why?
- Experience?
- Career goals?

Improviseational challenge

- “To improvise, actors must simultaneously identify new challenges and generate responses, with little or no time to prepare. In fact, the process of improvising is one single step: a response is generated and executed as the task is presented” (Fisher & Amabile, 2009)

Role division: teams of 4, one leader, three members

→ However, preparation must happen previously, outside of the frame of action.
  - 2 minutes prep 1
  - 2 minutes prep 2
  - 2x4 minutes improvisational conversation

Debrief

For leaders:
- How did you stimulate creativity (divergence) and popularity (convention)?
- What improvisational actions did you apply to motivate team members to create ideas that have the potential to become popular?
- What was your own role in the creative process?
  - Did you contribute more to creating divergence or convergence?
- What keywords were used by whom?

For team members:
- How did the leader simulate creativity and popularity?
- What did you do to achieve your goals?
  - The timid, the joker, the subordinate: did your respective strategies work?
- How did the leader reply improvisationally?
- What did you think about the improviseational conversation?
  - Member interactions, fluency of the conversation, creativity, success?

What are the differences in experience for those who network more / less?
Exercise conclusion

• What can leaders do to stimulate the generation of popular (in contrast to creative) ideas among team members?
  – And what can members do?
• What can leaders do to stimulate their creativity?
  – How can members facilitate the leader to become more creative?
• What can teams do to deal with the tension between creativity and popularity?
• What is the role of networking capabilities?