



Music as an Organizational Metaphor: Deadpan and Expressive Organizations

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Music guides the exploration and revelation of the complex layers of exchange that forms the relationship between organization and environment. Within scripture, music serves as a form of transformative expression that creates harmony while delivering inspiring messages to those with the ears to hear. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16 King James Version). Music is drenched in symbolism that manifests itself through the creative expression and artistry of the composer. This work explored how music parallels the degree of interchange between organizations and complex environments. Results found music parallels the expressive organization. Firstly, both music genres and organizational culture utilize symbolism in expression. Music’s immersion in social symbolism manifests itself through the creative expression and artistry of the composer. Similarly, organizations are continuously shaped and reshaped through symbolically mediated interactions. Secondly, the expressive

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organization and music composition remain in a state of becoming as both seek opportunities to evolve. Thirdly, the millennial cohort influences organizations and the evolution in the delivery of music. Thus, both are influenced by a powerful societal force.

MUSIC AS ORGANIZATION: DEADPAN AND EXPRESSIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Twenty-first-century organizations are operating within a fluid and complex environment. External phenomena continually vie for the attention of organizational leaders, thus disturbing equilibrium within organizational operations. Phenomena such as globalization, generational diversity, and technology continuously produce waves concerning expectations, deficiencies, and desires.

Globalization's vibration heightens the demand to a pitch that surpasses production, thus raising globalization's stance within the global economy (Ivancevich, Matteson, & Konopaske, 2008). Globalization also ushers in a colorful workforce that produces genres of culturally rich groups who serve as artists and composers. The millennial generation serves as a powerful band of artists, provoking changes in organizational operations and technology (McIntyre, 2011). The millennial group's rhythm urges innovation and its tempo suggests immediacy in the information. In response, organizational leaders utilize technologies to both improve organizational efficiencies and meet their artists' demands for immediacy in information and innovation.

This melodic exchange of information and knowledge supports the dual evolution of the organization and its inter-organizational network. "The priests, the Levites, the musicians, the gatekeepers and the temple servants settled in their own towns, along with some of the other people, and the rest of the Israelites settled in their towns" (Ezra 2:70 New International Version). This resource-dependent relationship encourages organizations to utilize the environment for its acquisition of supplies, capital, employees, knowledge, and to sell their products and services (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). Reciprocally, the environment transmits constant waves of information and knowledge to create harmony with organizations that produce desired outputs (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013).

A soundscape or the amalgamation of sounds (Truax, 2008) generated by the complex environment's stakeholders, competitors, and customers

has the power to reach an organization's architecture, but its successful entry remains dependent upon the organization's willingness to absorb or "hear" its attempts. Dysfunctional organizations have impermeable sound barriers that prevent exchanges with their environment, thus stifling their growth and jeopardizing its sustainability. We refer to this type of structure as a "deadpan" organization.

Now, if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands? (Daniel 3:15 New International Version)

Deadpan organizations operate within a vacuum, consequently stifling their ability to receive or generate rich and colorful patterns of expression. The deadpan organization's impermeable barriers block social and cultural sounds, thus leaving the organization unresponsive to the environment's constant attempts to exchange.

Comparatively, an organization that permits entry of the environment's sounds waves and responds to its melodic tones through reciprocal communication manifested in a harmonic interplay with its audience (or environment) is called an "expressive" organization. "David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their fellow Levites as musicians to make a joyful sound with musical instruments: lyres, harps, and cymbals" (1 Chronicles 15:16 New International Version). A form of artistic expression that serves as a natural metaphor for this relationship between an organization and its environment is music. Soundscape, in music, presents as sounds derived from its acoustic environment (Truax, 2008), or metaphorically the organization's ability to hear external phenomenon. Music is a social and cultural art form that emits rich vibrations and thick descriptions into its environment (Vlegels & Lievens, 2015). Thick description illuminates symbolic meaning that remains cloaked within everyday activities (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013).

Music, as an organizational metaphor, guides the exploration and revelation of complex layers of exchange that form the relationship between the organization and the environment. The complexities surrounding organizations and their related environments continue to challenge leaders and researchers (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013; Ivancevich et al., 2008; Morgan, 2006). Organizational leaders, or composers, must navigate the

complexities surrounding competing forces while cultivating a cultural melody aligned with the organization's mission and goals.

All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. 13 The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, the singers raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang.... (2 Chronicles 5:12–13 New International Version)

Therefore, this work sought theoretical understanding and practical application surrounding the performance of organizations and environments through the utilization of music as an organizational metaphor. There is an abundance of literature using varied organizational metaphors to increase understanding of organizations; however, what remains to be explored is the use of music as an organizational metaphor. Therefore, this study is significant because (a) understanding the relationship between organizations and its environmental dimensions is critical within environments of constant flux, (b) organizational leaders will gain practical knowledge related to navigating a heterogeneous workforce and its interrelated environments, (c) leaders and consultants will gain insight on advising organizations that have interests in transforming from a silent to an expressive organization, and (d) researchers will have a new organizational metaphor to build upon for future investigative studies. The purpose of this work was to explore how music parallels the degree of interchange between organizations and complex environments. Similar to music composition, each section of this manuscript serves as a musical scale that builds upon the former, weaving in musical undertones that manifest the natural parallelism amongst an organization and music.

This paper includes (a) a section explaining the characteristics of music as organizational metaphor and corresponding sub-sections demonstrating parallelism between organization and environment, (b) a practical application section that uses the force of the millennial group to anchor the theoretical and conceptual components of the manuscript, and (c) a conclusion that discusses strengths, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

MUSIC AS ORGANIZATION

Music is the convergence of sounds that create harmony and forms of expression (McIntyre, 2011). Musical genre and expressive artistry are key elements of music composition (McIntyre, 2011). Music is drenched in symbolism that manifests itself through the creative expression and artistry of the composer, musician, vocalist, or instrumentalist. “Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy” (Psalm 98:7–8 New International Version). The mediums that moderate this expressive form of artistry are musical genres. Thick and rich in form, a musical genre underpins the design, melody, harmony, and overall composition of a piece of music. Music’s exploratory and inductive nature seeks input from its environment to generate a fruitful, creative, and innovative composition that delivers an appealing and engaging performance to its audience. “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19 King James Version). According to McIntyre (2011), “the general music environment of a society can be read as an indicator of social conditions which produce it and may tell us much about the trending and evolution of that society”(p. 142).

The following section augments the described elements of musical genre and the social structure of creative expression to explain how music, serving as an organization, follows a similar sound wave in its quest for composition and organization.

THE GENRE OF MUSIC AND THE CULTURE OF ORGANIZATION

Music’s immersion in symbolism evokes creative expression and artistry of the composer, musician, vocalist, or instrumentalist and its inter-networks. Comparatively, organizations are culturally rich, symbolic, or otherwise socially constructed realities where networks of meaning form links of emotion and symbolic connections (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013; Morgan, 2006).

Music Genres

Music genres distinguish compositions of music as sets of shared traditions (Vlegels & Lievens, 2015). Genre is immersed within a culture, and culture represents a deep and complex totality of shared knowledge, traditions, customs, and art of a society (Vlegels & Lievens, 2015). Culture provides the opportunity to classify and manifest experiences with symbols. However, the use of a classification methodology does not confine or restrict the emergence or growth of interrelated elements. According to Vlegels and Lievens (2015), music genres are living concepts that continually emerge and evolve, thus promoting creativity and artistry. Expressive forms of art, such as music, are derivatives of the complex social interactions that permeate throughout the culture. “Four thousand are to be gatekeepers and four thousand are to praise the Lord with the musical instruments I have provided for that purpose” (1 Chronicles 23:5). Society’s reaction and draw to music are comparable to subject matter experts (i.e., musicians or composers), suggesting implicit knowledge of music components (Hallam, 2012). As such, music’s immersion in social symbolism manifests itself through the creative expression and artistry of the composer, musician, vocalist, or instrumentalist. The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, the singers raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang” (2 Chronicles 5:13).

Music’s soundscape presents as sounds derived from its acoustic environment (Truax, 2008), or metaphorically the organization’s ability to hear external phenomenon. The audience, or hearers of the music composition, receives the form of expression and interprets it based on previous experiences. Hodges and Wilkins (2015) posited, “When people listen to preferred music, there is dynamic interconnectivity linking music to self-awareness, along with associated personal histories, core emotional memories, and empathy” (p. 41). Comparatively, organizations are socially constructed realities where networks of meaning form links of emotion and symbolic connection amongst their constituents (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013).

The Culture of the Organization

Organizations, similar to music, are constantly shaped and reshaped by its members through symbolically mediated interactions (Hatch & Cunliffe,

2013). “Sing to the Lord a new song...” (Psalm 98:1 New International Version). Morgan (2006) described culture’s manifestation within organizations as shared values, ideologies, beliefs, meanings, and understanding. Culture expressed within the context of an organization includes reality progression that offers individuals the opportunity to comprehend phenomena, behaviors, activities, or utterances in distinct ways (Morgan, 2006).

West (2013) posited, “Human beings construct knowledge for themselves, in the context of their interactions with others and their membership within particular cultures and societies” (p. 13). Charney (2003) emphasized national cultural identity’s significance by asserting “national identity [is] over and above all of the other ‘identities’ that an individual might have....” (p. 301). As such, culture is an influential force that shapes the organization’s actions.

Parallel to culture’s influential force on music, its degree of pervasiveness affects organization because an organization’s culture not only represents its employees, customers, competitors, and suppliers (which are aligned with music’s composers, customers, competitors, and producers), but it also determines how an organization will interact with these critical actors. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music” (Psalm 98:4 New International Version). This ideology of organizational culture blurs boundaries between an organization’s culture and its structure since the attributes of the organization are direct manifestations of cultural presumptions and expectations about how the organization operates (Barney, 1986). As such, members of both organization and its inter-organizational network perceive culture as a living, influential, and a permeable phenomenon that offers internal and external members the opportunity to re-create reality and contribute to organizational decision-making.

THE PROGRESSION FROM DEADPAN TO EXPRESSIVE

This section illuminates the experience of a deadpan organization’s journey to a crescendo, which culminates in the form of an expressive organization. The section closes by orchestrating a practical application that utilizes the force of the millennial group to anchor the theoretical and conceptual components of the manuscript.

The Deadpan or Mechanistic Organization

The amalgamation of sounds generated by a complex environment seeks to create harmony with its ecology. The deadpan organization, however, operates within a narrow and rigid structure and remains impermeable to all exterior forms of expression, leaving incumbents mute and within a state of discord and obscurity. “It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools” (Ecclesiastes 7:5 New International Version). This organization resembles a mechanistic organization.

Originally described by Morgan, mechanistic organizations are hierarchical structures of power that manifest within formalized and unyielding roles and functions (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). Additional characteristics of this organization include controls from the highest point of the corporation, standardization with guidelines and techniques, close supervision, and vertical communication from leader to subordinate in the form of directives (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). Hence, incumbents are not able to see, hear, or voice expressions within, or beyond, their captive structure. Consequently, this type of oppressive structure subtly disarms, devalues, and dehumanizes the workforce. Entrenched by a reality of discord, stagnation, and rigidity, organizational members may become unconsciously trapped within this vacuum that is devoid of matter, or mentally traps. Morgan (2006) referred to this phenomenon as a “psychic prison” (p. 207). Organizations marred by this entrapment have lower levels of sustainability amidst organizations that compete within a resource pool, or ecological niche (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013).

Hatch and Cunliffe (2013) posited population ecology derives from “the principles of evolution: variation, selection, and retention” (p. 72), where the environment selects from a group of competitors that are most suitable to meet its needs. Variation manifests by entrepreneurial innovation through the adaptive organization’s ability to hear, listen, and respond to threats or opportunities. Selection occurs when organizations that are capable of meeting the demands of their ecological niche’s needs are provided resources. Retention implies continuous support with resources; however, the organization must remain adaptable and responsive to the environment’s complex needs. Hence, a deadpan organization is likely to be classified amongst the weak within a population niche, but the disadvantaged organization may elect to employ a change management plan to

create higher levels of harmony within the organization and ultimately the environment.

*The Emergence of Organization Expression
and Music Composition*

Cummings and Worley (2014) posited a change management process should be formal, thus a model such as Lewin's normative model of planned organizational change (unfreezing, movement, and refreezing) may be utilized. Unfreezing destabilizes the static environment and may be applied in the form of communications or story-telling to address the "why" behind the change, which demonstrates vision. Movement involves influencing the direction of transformation, which may include directing incumbents' core values to align with the organization's new values that will subsequently affect behaviors.

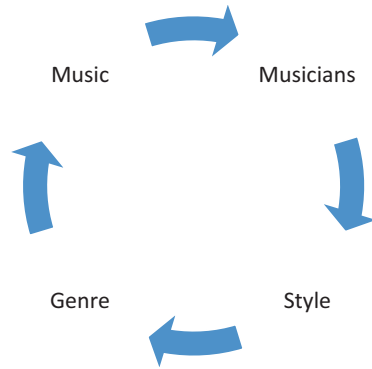
About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. (Acts 16:25–26 New International Version)

Refreezing or institutionalization of new behavior norms can occur by ensuring all policies, goals, and initiatives support a diverse environment where employees feel as if their contributions are important. Essentially, this procedure signifies the emergent organization. Like music composition, the organization represents a continuous state of becoming.

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. (Psalm 98:1–3 New International Version)

In music composition, the continuous shaping and reshaping of the musical elements consist of a web of interplay between the composer and his or her network (customers, producers, competitors, etc.), which underpins the musical composition. Subsequently, a feedback loop emerges that manifests in forms of dynamic artistry. The music inspires the

Fig. 10.1 Music composition feedback loop. (Source: Author's creation)



development of musicians who contribute modern or new styles of music that add greater depth to current genres or give birth to new forms of genres (see Fig. 10.1).

Hence, musical composition is a fluid and living loop of composing and recomposing that form rich and thick-layered music. Comparatively, in organizations, the concept of emergence that encourages the formation and reformation of organizing through continuous lower-level social interactions subsequently illuminates and brings forth new social and physical structures that distinguish an organization as a complex adaptive system (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013).

Emergence may be considered a phenomenon that occurs as a consequence of continuous interplay amongst lower-level interrelated elements within ecology that begins to take shape and “emerge” to a higher level of relevance for the organization and its interconnected components (Porter & Zivanovic-Nenadovic, 2014). This phenomenon takes form through self-organization that represents the exchange of elements, but independent from the interference of control mechanisms from higher levels within the organization (Porter & Zivanovic-Nenadovic, 2014).

The Crescendo: The Expressive or Organic Organization

A stark contrast exists between mechanistic and organic structures. Differing from mechanistic systems, organic structures are open, malleable, and expressive structures that are distinguishable by conformability, creativity, and innovation. Organic structures have complexly flattened

and vertical integration, as opposed to differentiation, and decision levels are inclined to be more decentralized, as opposed to centralized, with greater levels of consultative interactions amongst peers (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). Moreover, the organic structure has lower levels of formalization than its rigid counterpart, and thus it is more responsive to internal and external influences. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music” (Psalm 98:4 New International Version). Therefore, this type of organization encourages and supports communication, interaction, teamwork, and social responsibility. These characteristics of the expressive workplace are in alignment with the core expectations of the highly discussed millennial group. Millennials represent an instrumental force shaping and reshaping the composition and acquisition of artistry and the infrastructure of the organization.

A PRACTICAL VIEW OF THE MILLENNIAL COHORT, AS COMPOSER

The millennial generation (Generation Y), born roughly between 1980 and 2000, contains over 75 million members. The group is termed “digital natives” born into a world of computers and digital devices. Technology offers the cohort immediate acquisition of information and services, such as music (Farrell & Hurt, 2014). “...all of them trained and skilled in music for the Lord... Young and old alike, teacher as well as student, cast lots for their duties” (1 Chronicles 25:7–8 New International Version).

Major advancements in technology emerged, in the mid-to-late 1990s, as a response to consumer demand. This group revolutionized music acquisition by shifting the consumption of tangible products, such as compact discs (CDs), to the virtual downloading of music from the global internet (McIntyre, 2011). Internet radio offered the accessibility and consumption of genres of music, essentially from any time and any place. Music distributors, such as brick and mortar retail stores, suffered a crippling crack within its foundation, thus leaving the physical form of music consumption on fragile ground (McIntyre, 2011). McIntyre (2011) posited the group’s desire for downloading increased consumer “control and individualistic creativity” (p. 143). Similarly, Kirby (2006) suggested the internet “gives the undeniable sense (or illusion) of the individual controlling, managing, running, making up his/her involvement with the cultural product” (p. 35). The complex characteristics, such as the

aforementioned and vibrational patterns of this group are felt and heard within the employment soundscape as well.

This “genre” will soon represent the majority of organizational members (Turner, 2014). Leaders must increase their understanding and knowledge of phenomena that influence and shapes their reality, and hence behavior. Phenomena such as the September 11 attacks, the War on Terror, and the Great Recession have affected their ontology, which manifests in social interactions in the workplace. These influencers have formed a genre, or culture, which acknowledges financial obligation, inclusion, collaboration, knowledge sharing, learning and development, work-life integration, and innovation as critical influences (Balda & Mora, 2011; Turner, 2014). The group also requires consistent feedback, mentoring, and organizations that are technologically efficient (Balda & Mora, 2011). Comparable to music’s continual evolution, the group embodies the power behind a communicative, evolving, and dynamic driving force.

CONCLUSION

Morgan (2006) argued a metaphoric perspective may be used to gain insight concerning organizational behavior. Twenty-first-century organizations are operating within a fluid and complex environment. External phenomena continually vie for the attention of organizational leaders, thus disturbing equilibrium within organizational operations.

Music, as an organizational metaphor, guides the exploration and revelation of the complex layers of exchange that forms the relationship between the organization and the environment. Within scripture, music resides as both antecedent and consequence of joyful experiences. Music served as a form of transformative expression that created harmony while delivering inspiring messages to those with the ears to hear. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16 King James Version).

The purpose of this work was to explore how music parallels the degree of interchange between organizations and complex environments. Results found music parallels the expressive (or organic) organization. Firstly, both music genres and organizational culture utilize symbolism in expression. Music’s immersion in social symbolism manifests itself through the creative expression and artistry of the composer. Similarly, organizations are continuously shaped and reshaped by its members through

symbolically mediated interactions. Secondly, the expressive organization and music composition remain in a state of becoming, as both seek opportunities to evolve. Thirdly, a practical view suggested the influential millennial cohort influences organizations as well as the evolution in the delivery of music. Thus, both are influenced by a powerful societal force.

Therefore, a strength of this metaphor is its offering of both theoretical knowledge and practical application to augment understanding. Winston (2012) suggested, “Knowledge becomes information, and information becomes wisdom in the process of understanding the ever more increasing application.” (p. 181). An additional strength of this metaphor is its manifestation as a musical scale with each section building upon the other, weaving in musical undertones that demonstrate the natural parallelism amongst the organization and music. However, there are limitations and areas of discovery that researchers should consider for further investigation.

This metaphor used organizational structures that were polar in characteristics or elements. Many organizations; however, do not fall on such extreme ends of the spectrum. As such, future replications of this work may consider research with the realm of the average organization, or in other words, an organization that falls in the middle and displays characteristics of both the deadpan (mechanistic) and expressive (organic) organization.

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