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# Striking the Right Chord: Leadership insights from jazz legends



How can business leaders and entrepreneurs learn from the jazz masters? **Andy Lockett**, Dean of **Warwick Business School** and Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, together with **Deniz Ucbasaran**, Professor of Entrepreneurship, offer practical research on leadership – with a difference.

**Related research:** Leading Entrepreneurial Teams: Insights from jazz groups, Deniz Ucbasaran, Andy Lockett, Michael Humphreys



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# THE 3 Ps IN A CoBS POD



## PERCEIVE

with a set of key takeaways



## PROJECT

with food for thought: on yourself, your organisation and the wider context



## PERFORM

by putting it all into practice using action tips





## ● PERCEIVE with a set of key takeaways

- Jazz bands exemplify the qualities of creativity, improvisation, and innovation, which are crucial for entrepreneurial success in dynamic and uncertain environments.
- Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, and Art Blakely and other jazz leaders valued uniqueness in personality and style when forming teams. This suggests a broader concept of diversity beyond gender, ethnicity, and skills in organizational contexts.
- Jazz leaders embraced mistakes as part of the creative process, fostering an environment where experimentation and risk-taking are encouraged. This shift of mindset from fearing failure to embracing it, can lead to breakthrough innovations and discoveries within entrepreneurial teams.
- Dysfunctional conflict often accompanies creativity in diverse teams. Rather than suppressing it, leaders are advised to embrace conflict and find ways to benefit from this tension and discordant behaviour. What kept these leaders' teams together, however, was an overarching higher goal: to create the best music.
- Jazz leaders acted as facilitators, providing minimal direct instructions and empowering team members to coordinate their actions collectively. This approach fosters creativity and experimentation while maintaining a basic framework for cohesion.
- Unlike traditional management views favouring talent retention, jazz ensembles experienced regular turnover. Leaders welcomed new ideas and creativity brought by new members and sometimes encouraged team members to become leaders themselves.
- Incorporating principles such as embracing mistakes, promoting experimentation, maintaining positive relationships with departing talent, embracing diversity, and fostering creativity can lead to entrepreneurial success akin to the improvisational spirit of jazz.



Read the article  
that accompanies  
this research pod:  
<https://cobsinsights.org/2023/01/03/playing-out-of-synch-what-jazz-teaches-entrepreneurial-leaders/>



## PROJECT with food for thought

- To what extent are the qualities of creativity, improvisation, and innovation ingrained in your entrepreneurial initiatives?
- What does a leader mean to you? For instance, what qualities or practices do you think a leader should possess? And how do your team members perceive your leadership?
- How does your team handle conflict, whether it be functional or disruptive? What are the results of this conflict in your organisation?
- What attitudes does your company have towards team turnover and in what ways does it affect the operations of your company? What is your relationship with departing talent?
- To what extent does your organisation promote individualism or egalitarianism?
- What does empowering individuals look like in your organisation? In what ways do you yourself empower your team members to take on leadership roles?

*Thoughts*

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# ● PERFORM

by putting it all into practice

## CHECKLIST

- Look beyond the conventional metrics of diversity:** When hiring new talent to diversify your team, go beyond gender, ethnicity, and cultural background differences, and consider the style and personality differences of candidates.
- Encourage your team members to gain new skills elsewhere:** Implement organisational techniques such as rotational assignments that help your team members to gain new skills and knowledge elsewhere to bring back to the group, to increase levels of creativity and knowledge in the team.
- Facilitate rather than dictate:** Act as a facilitator rather than a traditional manager, providing minimal direct instructions and empowering team members to coordinate their actions collectively. Moreover, maintain a basic framework for cohesion while allowing room for creativity and experimentation.
- Embrace conflict within teams and individuals:** Set up a system of managing functional conflict. Identify ways in which your team could benefit from this tension, rather than suppressing it.
- Welcome turnover and foster a positive relationship with departing talent:** Encourage departing members to grow and become leaders of their own team and welcome new talent as an opportunity for fresh perspectives and new ideas.
- Organize regular workshops that promote improvisation and innovation:** This encourages a culture of creativity, additionally shifting a mindset towards embracing mistakes. Instil in your team members that these mistakes should be seen as opportunities for growth and learning.
- Communicate the importance of these principles:** Ensure that the principles of embracing mistakes, promoting experimentation, and embracing diversity are embedded in the organisational culture. Furthermore, ensure that yourself and other leaders of your organisation are leading by example.



# Getting involved


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