The Metaphor of “The Jazz Band”: Ethical Issues for Leadership

Nicholas Sorensen

Introduction

Over the past twenty years the metaphor of “the jazz band” has been used in order to illuminate the phenomenon of leadership and the way we understand organizations. This paper takes a broad view, critically examining six examples of the way this metaphor has been used in order to gain an understanding of the insights that it can provide into leadership and organizations. This approach is underpinned by two assumptions. Firstly, that leadership and organizations cannot be viewed separately: a key purpose of leadership is to shape and transform organizations. Secondly, the use of metaphor to comprehend and communicate ideas about organizations is viewed as a leadership strategy and as such it cannot be viewed as being “neutral” or value-free. Consequently there are ethical issues for leaders who choose to work with the metaphor of the jazz band.

This paper is in three parts. The first part looks at the use of metaphor as a leadership strategy; the second part offers a critical analysis of six examples of the way the jazz band metaphor has been developed in a range of different contexts. Third, there is a discussion of some of the ethical issues that need to be considered when the practice of improvisation is appropriated through the use of this metaphor.

1. Understanding Metaphor

It has long been acknowledged that metaphors offer a powerful way to gain insights into how an organization works. In his book *Images of Organizations*, Gareth Morgan outlines a growing literature that demonstrates the impact of metaphor on the way we think, on our language, and on systems of scientific and everyday knowledge. Aristotle in “Rhetoric” states, “midway between the unintelligible and the commonplace, it is the metaphor which most produces knowledge” (367). Philosophers, such as Wittgenstein, who have focussed on language and other modes of symbolism in reality construction have helped these ideas gain prominence.

While it is clear that Wittgenstein has no explicit theory of metaphor, his writings contain an implicit view of the nature and significance of metaphorical speech (Gill 272), a view that is especially evident in his later writings such as *Philosophical Investigations*. Metaphor is seen as one of a number of language games that have a significant role to play in changing our “way of looking at things” (Wittgenstein 144) through the incorporation of new expressions. Metaphor is seen as one of the primary bearers of innovation by which two fairly well-established meanings generate a third. Yet the more significant feature of metaphor, for Wittgenstein, is that it allows us to bring to the surface our own tacit levels of understanding. In *Philosophical Investigations* he quotes St. Augustine: “What then is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to one who asketh, I know not” (89).

Through the use of metaphors we are able to bridge the gap in our understanding between what we already know and the ability to express what we know in words through language games: “The language-games are rather set up as *objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language not only by the way of similarities, but also of dissimilarities” (130). As Gill points out, “Everyday speech, which is heavily flavoured with and grounded in metaphor, is the necessary ‘ground zero’ or ‘square one’ of both our life and thought” (284).

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein brings our attention to the extent and the power of the “taken for granted,” the background activities that constitute the everyday lives that we lead: “reminders” to drawing connections between phenomena that would otherwise pass us by (127). As John Shotter points out, Wittgenstein moves us away from theoretical talk towards the more practical nature of our as yet unarticulated background ways of “going on” with each other (4). Shotter brings our attention to the dialogic, unpredictable, and indeterminate nature of “normal” activity and acknowledges the importance that Wittgenstein places on “the complexity of what we do spontaneously, without prior deliberation, problem solving, interpretation, or other intellectual working out” (5). It is this recognition of and interest in the improvisatory nature of the everyday that gives Wittgenstein significance in this area of study.

Improvisation in music has been acknowledged as being one of the most highly practised activities but the least understood (Bailey 1), and the same can be said about improvisation in other contexts. The use of metaphor develops our understanding of improvisation through establishing a language for talking about it. According to Karl Weick, metaphor helps us to “improve the way we talk about organizational improvisation, using the vehicle of jazz improvisation as the source of orienting ideas” (543).

In the social sciences, metaphor has been particularly important within the field of organization theory. Morgan’s premise is that “all theories of organization and management are based on implicit images or metaphors that lead

us to see, understand and manage organizations in distinctive yet partial ways" (4). For organization theorists, metaphors provide a way to recognise and understand the essence of a given phenomenon and to articulate ideas and concepts that may be difficult to put into words. Metaphor allows one thing to be understood in terms of another by foregrounding commonalities that might not otherwise be seen as compatible, such as the metaphor of life as a long and winding road (Hatch, *Organization Theory* 51). The understanding of the familiar half of the metaphor leads to a greater understanding of the unfamiliar half. Metaphor encourages exploration of the parallels between the new and the already known.

To what extent does metaphor help us understand organizations? Morgan argues that metaphor has a greater significance than simply the embellishment of discourse. For him, metaphor implies a way of thinking and seeing that pervades the way that we see the world generally; behind metaphor there are ontological assumptions. This significance is due to the fact that metaphor has a formative influence on science, on our language, and on how we think and express ourselves on a day-to-day basis (4). Two distinct approaches to the use of metaphor can be identified.

The first view, initially supported by Hatch in her 1997 paper "Jazzing up the Theory of Organizational Improvisation," argues for the importance of the "root metaphor" as a distinctive and fundamental way of seeing, thinking, and talking. The root metaphor "captures the essence of a well-established type of experience that organises all other experiences of the world into a singular, overpowering perspective" (52). This view is shared by Weick ("Improvisation as a Mindset"), who sees jazz improvisation as an orienting idea: "my bet is that improvising is close to the root process of organizing" (553). Cornelissen ("Making Sense of Theory Construction") has extended Weick's ideas through looking at the way that metaphors can be used to develop theory. This involves determining the aptness of the chosen metaphor (through a process of logical "thought trials") in order to determine whether it should be retained.

An alternative view is prompted by Hatch in a later paper, "Exploring the Empty Spaces of Organizing: How Improvisational Jazz Helps Redescribe Organizational Structure" (1999), which rejects the notion of jazz being a new root metaphor for the field of organization studies. She cites Rorty's view that metaphor is a "passing theory," "a tool for keeping thought moving in a way that only temporarily suits our purposes and imaginations" (96). This view sees metaphor as a catalyst, supporting a Wittgensteinian perspective that metaphor, as a language game, is more concerned with moving us away from theoretical speculation towards revealing the intangible and overlooked qualities of everyday life, articulating the tacit knowledge that we hold, but find difficult to express.

Within the "singular overpowering perspective," however, lie the limitations of what can be understood through metaphor. Metaphorical knowledge can only be one-sided and partial, showing the similarities between two areas but not the differences. In highlighting certain interpretations, it forces others into the background. Morgan's simple premise that all theory is metaphor has far reaching consequences; potentially valuable insights have to be balanced against a recognition that those insights are incomplete, biased, and potentially misleading—consequently "the way of seeing through a metaphor becomes a way of not seeing" (5).

2. A Critical Analysis of Six Examples

Six examples of the jazz band metaphor have been chosen for critical analysis, selected from a growing body of literature that has emerged exploring the theme of "organizational improvisation." The process of selection has involved drawing upon two comprehensive literature reviews. The starting point is Cunha et al.'s review of the literature addressing "organizational improvisation," (300) which takes Bastien and Hostager's 1988 empirical study, "Jazz as a Process of Organizational Innovation," as a starting point and covers the main contributions to this field up to, and including, the special edition of *Organization Science* published in 1998. Holbrook provides a review that includes a further 19 papers that have been produced since 2000. These two sources were augmented by books and papers that the author has come across.

The methodology for selecting the sample drew upon the taxonomy created by Cunha et al. to chart the development of this field of writing (300). They divided the authors on this topic into two generations and the conceptual evolution into three stages. First-generation authors were characterised by grounding their study of organizational improvisation in the arts, especially jazz. Second-generation authors drew on anecdotal and empirical evidence from the business area to study this phenomenon directly, with only occasional references to jazz as a metaphor.

The three stages of conceptual development and the two generations of authors are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

A summary of the three stages of conceptual development and the two generations of authors writing about organizational improvisation.

First stage	Second stage	Third stage
Transposing to organizational contexts the characteristics of improvisation in jazz and improvisational theatre.	Using empirical and anecdotal examples of improvisation in organizational settings.	Surfacing of critical issues underlying second-stage writing. Focussing on improvisation in jazz. Fine-tuning a formal definition and characteristics of this phenomenon.
Authors: First generation	Authors: Second generation	Authors: First generation

From this frame, three papers were selected that all had a metaphorical grounding: Hatch's "Jazzing up the theory of organizational improvisation," Weick's "Improvisation as a mind-set for organizational analysis," and Barrett's "Coda: creativity and improvisation in organizations: implications for organizational learning." Cunha et al. also addressed the issue that organizational improvisation entails not only positive results, and identified those papers that take negative outcomes into consideration (330). The papers by Weick and Barrett both take these factors into account; consequently a further paper was selected, "Critical resistance to the jazz metaphor" by Hatch and Weick, to provide a critical balance.

Three papers written post-2000 were selected to show the development of the ideas of "first generation" authors in three different settings: Stoll et al., who applied the metaphor to learning organizations (within an educational context), Newton in relation to leadership, and Dennis and Macauley within the context of market organization.

A summary of the six examples, noting their context and the concepts that they attribute to the jazz band metaphor is given in Table 2. The examples are presented in chronological order of publication.

Table 2

Six examples of the jazz band metaphor, noting context and attributed qualities.

Author/s	Year	Context	Attributes relevant to jazz band metaphor
Hatch	1997	Organizational strategy and leadership	Spontaneity and intuition. Four dimensions are derived from these two concepts:
Hatch and Weick	1998		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretation • Copy • Fake • Improvisation
Weick	1998	The way we talk about organizational improvisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation lies on a continuum: interpretation, embellishment, variation, improvisation • Improvisation is always based on something (form) • All life is improvisatory • Act first, think later: improvisation grounded in form and memory

Barrett	1998	Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberate interruptions of habit patterns • Embracing errors • Shared orientation toward minimal structures that allow maximum flexibility • Distributed tasks • Retrospective sense-making • Being part of a community of practice • Taking turns leading and supporting
Stoll et al.	2003	Learning organization / school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuality respected • Individual talents acknowledged • The “score” guides but does not limit involvement • Leader creates climate of safety and trust • High level of performance when leader is not present
Newton	2004	Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation in leadership can be learned • Derive lessons from how jazz musicians prepare for performance through: • Pattern learning • Theory • Imitation • Taking risks • Leadership as accompaniment.
Dennis and Macauley	2007	Market orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common (minimal) structure • Deep musical knowledge • Role definition – each member of the band has a specific function • Quasi-autonomous leadership / empowerment to make decisions • Open communication (including listening) • Self-reflexivity

All of the papers were subjected to a content analysis (Cohen et al. 563) through asking the question “why is this metaphor seen as being valuable and what does it attempt to say about organizations and leadership?” Analysis involved a grounded theory approach whereby a constant comparative method was used to establish analytic distinctions (Charmaz 54). The papers were read in turn and initial codes were applied to key assumptions and practices. As each paper was analysed commonalities were noted and additional codes were recorded. Following this, all the initial codes were reviewed and grouped together in order to create analytic categories or focussed

coding. The 32 initial codes were grouped together to produce seven analytical categories; a summary is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

A summary of the codes derived from the analysis of six examples of the jazz band metaphor and the categories that were constructed.

Initial Codes	Focused Codes – Analytical Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postmodern context • Rapid change • Uncertain future • Chaos theory 	Ontological assumptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective and inclusive view • Supportive culture • Democratic 	Organizational characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As improvised activity • As performance • Relationship to followers • Developing others • Balancing individual and organizational needs • Creating a culture • Focus on process 	Assumptions about Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to express individuality • Having autonomy • Spontaneity • Turn taking 	Relationship between individual and organization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal structures provide maximum flexibility • Do structures enable or constrain? 	Structure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning from errors • Self-reflection • Intuition • Learning about improvisation 	Assumptions about learning

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patterns / automaticity • Imitation • Risk taking • Experimentation and play • Bricolage 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory generated from action • Understanding difference between real / non-real improvisation. • Improvisation a continuum 	Theories of improvisation

A Summary of the Analysis

A summary of the analysis will examine each of the main categories in turn, in order to discover why this metaphor is seen as being valuable and what it attempts to say about organizations and leadership.

a. Ontological Assumptions

All of the examples acknowledge that “the jazz band,” either as a metaphor or as an example of arts-based improvisatory practice, was valuable in providing new insights into a changing world. There was a shared acknowledgement of a “paradigm shift,” a rift between modernity (characterised by a capitalist economy based on industry) and a post-Fordist view of late capitalism (based on a knowledge economy). The break with modernity is expressed through a broad and confusing array of terms: “post-industrial society,” “post-Fordism,” “global age,” and “consumer society.” Whatever term is employed, certain common themes emerge that characterise and define this shift. For Stoll et al., these include the collapse of Western global hegemony, the globalisation of the marketplace, the integration of the world’s economies, and the influence of information technology and communications (3-5). As a consequence of these developments, and many others, the world is perceived as a chaotic system, where sudden and unexpected change has become accepted as customary. Weick makes an explicit connection between improvisation and chaos theory (546). This shift in perception has had a significant impact on the way that we view organizations.

This changing worldview has created a need to re-theorise our social lives and to find new models on which to develop a praxis that enables us to cope in a rapidly changing and complex environment. A range of theories, concepts, and metaphors have emerged that challenge a Newtonian worldview that regards the whole as the sum of its parts and thinks in terms of linear “cause and effect.” Alternative views, derived from quantum physics, see the world holistically and acknowledge non-linear dynamics. A non-exhaustive list of theories and concepts would include complexity theory (Stacey et al.), deep ecology (Capra), the new science of management (Wheatley), and “learning organizations” (Senge).

Within this context, the metaphor of the jazz band has gained prominence as a way to describe the complex, non-linear environment of the postmodern/post-industrial world. All of the examples use it to offer new insights into a changing world, a world which seems to be operating on different principles and which shares postmodern insights. Locating the emergence of this particular metaphor within a specific time frame (the 1990s) raises the question of whether it is still relevant or whether it is a passing management fad that is no longer fashionable or applicable. An important purpose of this metaphor was to bring a critical light to bear on then-current leadership practices: finding new ways to think and behave differently in challenging and unpredictable times. This change in direction is perhaps best expressed by Peter Senge with his conceptualization of “learning organizations”: “Organizations where people continually expand their capacities to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (3). The “learning organization” was a critical response to a prevailing system based on rewards, management by objectives, and a predominantly competitive ethos. As such, Senge’s learning organization and the metaphor of the jazz band suggest an ethical alternative to existing practice, favouring cooperation over competition. There was also a further shift, a shift of mind, which reconfigured the way that individuals perceived themselves and their world: “From seeing ourselves as separate from the world to connected to the world, from seeing problems as caused by someone or something “out there” to seeing how our own actions create the problems we experience” (12).

All of the writers share the assumption that organizational improvisation is a reality, and that metaphor can help to generate a language with which to comprehend and discuss this phenomenon. This is a necessary challenge for a dominant business culture that is wedded to quantitative data as the ultimate means of validating external and internal dynamics. The ontological assumptions behind organizational improvisation articulate the different reality of the globalized competitive market place.

b. Organizational Characteristics

The jazz band metaphor has been used in two main contexts: organization theory and leadership. As has already been argued, it is a mistake to view these two concepts as separate; they are effectively two sides of the same coin. One of the metaphor's major contributions is its articulation of a different way of perceiving organizations. We have already noted the importance of Senge's concept of "the learning organization" as a response to a perceived paradigm shift. The jazz band metaphor describes a more fluid and flexible view of organizations, an alternative to rigid and hierarchical structures.

Both Barrett and Newton make the point that improvisation takes place in organizations as well as in jazz; therefore there is much to be learned by looking at improvisation in other contexts. This represents a shift in the way that organizations are perceived—a move away from seeing organizations as the sum total of prescribed actions by individuals (governed by job descriptions and regulated by time and motion studies) to the acknowledgement of the presence and value of the non-prescribed, agentic contributions that individuals can make.

This view potentially positions organizations in a more democratic light as it values the contributions that individuals can offer. Instead of only valuing each individual's experience in relation to a narrowly-defined role, there is a shift towards acknowledging the full range of each individual's background, and allowing their skills and attributes to be shared and developed to their full potential.

c. Assumptions about Leadership

The second context that has drawn upon the jazz band metaphor is that of leadership. The insights that have been derived from the metaphor can be grouped into two broad categories. First, there is the view of leadership as performance and as an improvisational activity, and second, there are insights into the relationship between leaders and their followers.

In "Jazzing Up the Theory of Organizational Improvisation" Hatch acknowledges the need to focus on leadership rather than management, and emphasizes that within a jazz band leadership is distributed, drawing on the analogy of musicians taking turns to solo. Barrett picks up on the idea of leadership as "taking turns," arguing for the leadership role to be shared throughout the organization, and for leaders to support this process. Stoll et al. see that "the group" is not totally dependent on the leader and that "a top-flight jazz group can perform at a high level even when the leader is not present because of its internal cohesion and trust" (114). Their claim is an arguable one as it is based on an idealised view of the jazz band and lacks first-hand experience. As such it highlights one of the weaknesses of using this metaphor—the value of the insights to be derived from this, or any, metaphor is in relation to the understanding of the source of the metaphor. Dennis and Macauley make this point: "there is a strong sense that many commentators write about jazz through secondary sources rather than first-hand experience" (614).

However, the metaphor does have clear implications for the relationship between leaders and followers. This relationship has been described in a number of ways: supportive leadership (Barrett), invitational leadership (Stoll et al.), or quasi-autonomous leadership (Dennis and Macauley). All of these demand a renegotiation of the relationship between leaders and followers, from a dominating hegemonic approach to one based on the encouragement of respect, mutuality, self-sufficiency, and autonomy amongst staff members. Each person's individuality is honoured, as are the unique qualities each brings to their work. Leadership as an activity is shared among the group, with individuals taking turns according to their skills or the demands of the moment. Finally, leadership is viewed as a supportive activity as much as a directive activity.

d. Relationship between the Individual and the Organization

Perhaps the most important contribution that the metaphor of the jazz band makes is the way that it can help us re-think the relationships between the individual and the organization. The binary distinction between individual and society, of course, is a key theme in broader sociological debates, and is usually expressed in terms of the relationship between individual and collective needs. Within the jazz band metaphor, this relationship is best understood through the extent to which individuals have autonomy. This is difficult to conceive in a culture that is rooted in notions of hegemonic influence and domination.

The jazz band metaphor, on the other hand, suggests the integration of both the individual and the social perspectives, posing a more ecological conception of organizations—a conception that recognizes the importance of interdependence and interconnectedness. Improvisation is neither wholly determined by individuals nor wholly controlled by social factors. The interaction between individuals in the context of the group enables the emergence of creative and innovative ideas and actions. This suggests the need for a more holistic systems-based approach.

e. Structure

An important aspect of improvisation is the issue of structure and the relationship between fixed and improvised elements. It is notable that in all the examples, a “score” provides a minimal structure that encourages flexibility and allows individuality to flourish. The key skill is to get the balance right between the fixed elements and the improvisational elements. Capra makes the distinction between design and emergent structures and Barrett suggests that there is a need for minimal structures that provide maximum flexibility. This poses a significant leadership challenge: namely, to get the balance right between the fixed and flexible structures in an organization.

Structure of one form or another is essential to improvisatory activity; you have to have something to improvise on. As bassist-composer Charles Mingus insisted, “you can’t improvise on nothing: you gotta improvise on something” (cited in Weick 546). A key question is “how much structure” is optimal, and how does the improviser relate to it? Nevertheless some writers raise questions as to whether structure constrains improvisation, or whether it is structure that enables improvisation to take place. Hatch critically engages with Crossan and Sorrenti’s view that structure is a constraint to improvisation, citing Giddens’ structuration theory as evidence that structures enable as well as constrain. Hatch recognises that a definition of improvisation is more than intuitive and spontaneous action: “Placing the emphasis on the enabling qualities of structure could prove far more useful to practitioners wishing to learn to be improvisational” (186). Indeed, it is the relationship between the “fixed” and the “generative” elements within an improvisation that holds the key to the significance of musical improvisation to non-musical contexts—in other words, those relationships in which structures enable improvisation to take place. Weick’s notion of improvisation as a continuum is useful here. Derived from Lee Konitz, a jazz musician who reflected on his improvisational processes, the degrees of improvisation range from “interpretation” through “embellishment” and “variation,” ending in “improvisation” (Weick 544).

f. Assumptions about Learning

Learning as a concept is integral to the metaphor of the jazz band. The metaphor is often used in relation to a learning organization; both Barrett and Stoll et al. explicitly make this connection. In their paper “Learning to improvise, improvising to learn,” Chalariu et al. point out that learning is central to the process of improvisation (142). All of the six examples offer a range of insights into the nature and practice of professional development and learning.

Stoll et al. point out that professional development is a responsibility of leadership and that there needs to be a balance between individual and organizational needs (173). Leaders need to allocate resources that support individual development as well as the organization’s imperatives. The jazz band metaphor offers a number of insights into the nature of learning. Newton bases his approach on the view that jazz musicians can learn how to improvise and that improvisation is not an innate ability that only some people have. If jazz improvisation can be taught, then some conventions of jazz pedagogy—such as patterns, imitation, risk-taking, experimentation, and play—can offer models for the development of improvisational skills in leadership.

Facility in jazz improvisation is often achieved through learning patterns and engaging in a process of sustained practice;¹ these “patterns” ultimately become automatic, unconscious competences that can be drawn upon according to the needs of the moment. Newton advocates that it is possible, and important, to learn the patterns of leadership through opportunities such as internships, mentoring, and reflection (89). The consequence of this is that the leader has a greater range of resources to fall back on when the need arises. A further insight on patterns is offered by Barrett, who recognises the importance of disrupting the habitual patterns that leaders fall back on (608). The two ideas, while appearing to be contradictory, are in fact complementary; through learning a wider range of patterns, leaders have a greater repertoire of responses to fall back on. Pattern learning is connected to another important aspect of jazz pedagogy: imitation, the importance of copying and observing others.

Hatch’s ideas on the significance of improvisation within the context of organizational strategy and leadership cites earlier work by Crossan and Sorrenti, who argued that good improvisation built on traditional skills in a particular domain and that improvisation was more than a metaphor. Crossan and Sorrenti adopted a realistic view: “we do not adorn either improvisation or learning with a halo. We do suggest that they are processes that can be managed to enhance their effectiveness” (Hatch 188). These ideas were developed (improvised upon) by Hatch, who explored their definition of improvisation: “intuition guiding action in a spontaneous way” (181).

This definition highlights another characteristic of improvisation that needs to be developed: risk taking and experimentation. Barrett talks about the importance of “serious play” (619) and the need to support risk-taking through “cultivating provocative competences.” (607) This links with another important feature of the improvisation metaphor: learning from errors. An “improvisational culture” is perceived as one in which “playing around” and seeing what does and doesn’t work is deemed to be appropriate (611). Accordingly, when things don’t work out as intended, this needs to be seen as an asset. Without this dimension, organizations become static and are unable to move forward. The way that mistakes are perceived is related to cultural assumptions. In her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Carol Dweck makes the distinction between “fixed” and “growth” mindsets (6). In the former, mistakes are seen as “bad” and to be avoided while in the latter, mistakes are a point of growth, and opportunities to develop and improve. Dweck’s concept of a growth mindset reflects to Guy Claxton’s view of an effective learner who perceives learning as “knowing what to do when you don’t know what to do” (11).

g. Theorising about Improvisation

Newton acknowledges the importance of theory to jazz improvisers as well as leaders. While both can function without theory, such practice is limited. “It is [...] a thorough grounding in theory that allows school leaders to act in unpredictable leadership situations” (90). Such theorising is essentially retrospective, it being impossible to theorise while improvising. Hatch notes the importance of reflection, and Barrett recognises how much improvisers rely on retrospective sense-making to boost the processing of information. Improvisation is essentially dealing with the unforeseen; action precedes thinking, and form is created retrospectively (Weick 547). Keith Johnstone in *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* writes about the importance of not trying to control the future: “The improviser has to be like a man walking backwards. He sees where he has been, but he pays no attention to the future” (116).

However, reflection on its own does not constitute theorising; there is the need for a critical perspective. Hatch provides a theoretical framework which distinguishes between different states of improvised activity and which determines the conditions in which “real” improvisation takes place. Taking intuition and spontaneity as two dimensions, Hatch generates a framework based on aspects of jazz performance and identifies four “states” of improvisation (“Jazzing Up” 182).

Table 4 – Summary of Hatch’s four states of improvisation.

copying	low spontaneity, low intuition
faking	high spontaneity, low intuition
interpretation	low spontaneity, high intuition
improvising	high spontaneity, high intuition

Such a theoretical framework is a valuable tool to help leaders develop a language for talking about what is improvisation, and what is not. Theories of improvisation can provide ways of conceptualising what is happening during improvised activity. Such tools for thinking are necessary for understanding the improvisatory nature of organizations and leadership. It could be claimed that the metaphor of the jazz band is in itself a theoretical construct.

3. Discussion

All insights are positional. As Morgan has highlighted, the insights that can be derived from metaphor are limited; potentially valuable insights have to be balanced against a recognition that these insights are incomplete, biased, and potentially misleading. From the preceding analysis, two questions warrant further exploration. First, what are the ethical implications for leaders of the metaphor of the jazz band? Second, is the metaphor of the jazz band still able to provide valuable insights; is it still worth pursuing? Finally, the conclusion to this paper considers the implications for further research.

Ethical Issues for Leaders

One of the assumptions of this paper is that the decisions to transfer theory to practice, to apply metaphorical insights within an organizational context, will lie with that organization’s leaders. Consequently, there is a need to consider the ethical implications of using this metaphor, specifically from a critical perspective.

Barrett identifies the limits to the applicability of the improvisation metaphor. The characteristics implied by the metaphor all rely on a base level of competence in all individuals; however in reality this is not the case. "Players," whether they are in a musical or an organizational context, may not have the skills, understanding, or knowledge that allow them to improvise. While involvement with more competent players might enhance individual performance, it can also have the opposite effect: a debilitating impact on group performance. Within a business context the margin for errors can be limited. This illustrates a fundamental difference between musical improvisation and organizational improvisation: with the former the decision to improvise is an aesthetic choice, whereas with the latter the decision is based on other, more existential, factors.

Hatch and Weick debate the critical reactions to Hatch's use of the jazz metaphor. A major concern for her had been that this metaphor could be used as a tool of domination by management. Referring to Foucault, Hatch pointed out that any metaphor, knowledge, or idea can be used to dominate, whether through influence or oppression. An alternative response is "to increase consciousness of the ways in which knowledge is linked to power so that whenever we use our knowledge, we do so with awareness of its political and ideological implications" (601).

Two further critiques that Hatch repeatedly met with were concerned with elitism and sexism. The charge of elitism centres around concerns that jazz musicians perform for themselves, that their musical interactions are targeted towards the other musicians rather than at an audience. One would not wish notions of insularity, exclusion, or egotism to be transferred to notions of organizing. Hatch counters this argument with the view that this is less likely in post-industrial organisations (where she argues that the jazz metaphor has the most to contribute) as the predictions are that managers will play a less central and authoritarian role.

The criticism of sexism is based on the fact that most jazz musicians are men and that it is a cultural province that is male dominated. The "notable exceptions" cited by Hatch are vocalists—a role which can be viewed as stereotypical for women within the music business. Furthermore, at the time Hatch was writing about, women were under-represented in jazz audiences. The question is therefore, as we move towards more diverse organizations in the future, will the application of the jazz metaphor to organizations reproduce the very gender relations that we claim we are trying to alter? It may well be the case that in 15 years, this issue is no longer relevant.

A third critical comment considered by Hatch and Weick was of the nature "I don't like jazz and therefore I don't like [and will resist participating in the use of] the jazz metaphor" (603). As an emotional and/or aesthetic response, this represents a significant limitation to the application of this metaphor in an organizational setting. As Hatch states "all metaphors imply some form of exclusion because not everyone will resonate or agree with their implied comparisons." The implied ethical issue is whether the use of metaphors encourages a greater criticality. There is an assumption that engagement with arts-based metaphors should be made with an eye on improvement, rather than control, in order to humanise potentially impersonal aspects of organizations.

The broad agenda for improvement can be seen in the narrative that emerges from the analysis of the six examples of the jazz band metaphor. The use of this metaphor was initiated by a need to generate alternative management theories to the scientific approach offered by Taylorism in the early decades of the twentieth century. Taylor applied science to the engineering of processes and management, encouraging rigid hierarchical management structures and precise job descriptions. This approach, which is based on a reductionist view of organizations, regards the whole as the sum of its parts. The metaphorical model of the jazz band suggests an alternative paradigm wherein the organization is seen in a more organic and holistic way. It also implies a different relationship between leaders and their followers. This can be seen in the way that individuals are viewed within organizations, the responsibilities that leaders have for their followers, and the kind of culture that is implied. The ethical implications for the relationship between leaders and individual members of organizations are very clear. Individuality is given a prominence that is disregarded in the reductionist paradigm; it is respected and encouraged. The "whole person" is a valued concept and leaders recognize that individuals will have a wide range of skills and experiences that need to be acknowledged. The uniqueness of each individual is seen as a virtue, and their strengths need to be built on, while allowable weaknesses can be supported and taken into account, either through team work or through professional development. A key quality is respect. This is not just in the case of leaders respecting their followers (and vice versa), but as a common quality, especially in relation to acknowledging and valuing the individuality of others.

The approaches to leadership that emerge from this metaphor are all concerned with working "with" people rather than "doing to" and instructing. These approaches are variously described as "servant leadership" (DePree 10), "supportive leadership" (Barrett 615), "invitational leadership" (Stoll et al. 109), "leadership as accompaniment" (Newton 94), or "quasi-autonomous leadership" (Dennis and Macaulay 617). These all imply an alternative to "top-down" notions of leadership that is concerned with the ethical implications of organizational learning. Organizations need to concern themselves with expanding the capacities and potential of individuals and the way that they think. The most significant challenge posed by the concept of "learning organizations" is to regard

learning as a collective act, “where people are learning how to learn together” (Senge 3). I would suggest that exploring how this happens should be a central focus of future research.

Moving Beyond the Jazz Metaphor

Given that metaphorical insights are partial, it is only to be expected that alternative approaches have been sought. A strong criticism of the metaphor of the jazz band is that it is generally based on a restricted view of what jazz improvisation is, as represented by a model of performance derived from mainstream jazz (Holbrook 10). There seem to be three alternatives that are offered.

For Kamoche et al., moving “Beyond the Jazz Metaphor” involves seeking alternative models derived from different sources; Indian music, music therapy, and music-relevant role theory. One of the problems that arises from the use of the jazz band metaphor is that the quality and depth of insights to be derived from the metaphor are related to the level of understanding about the music. The most valuable contributions come from jazz practitioners themselves. I am unconvinced that switching the metaphor from one genre of improvised music to another will yield significant insights unless it is supported by an understanding of the relevant improvisational practices. On the basis of this argument, Dennis and Macauley suggest that there is a need to transcend mere metaphor by exploring substantive aspects of jazz improvisation as actually practiced. Given the reliance by many theorists on secondary sources, they see the need to augment this source of information with practitioner input from jazz musicians themselves, which would lead to an analysis of the core competencies of the jazz band (and also presumably jazz musicians).

Ucbasaran et al. have in fact followed this line of enquiry in their paper “Leading Entrepreneurial Teams: Insights from Jazz.” They perceive jazz as an equivalent entrepreneurial activity, undertaking an empirical examination of the leadership of teams in order to answer their research question “how is leadership enacted in creative teams operating in dynamic environments?” (3). Their assumptions are that jazz bands are synonymous with creativity and innovation, that they often operate in dynamic environments, and that jazz is a collective activity. While initially drawing on an extensive database of semi-structured interviews with elite jazz musicians supplemented by observations of rehearsals and performance, their study focuses on three exemplary musician-leaders: Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, and Art Blakey. From a critical perspective it seems a pity that the rich data from living jazz musicians, who are all coping with the same dynamic and unpredictable business environment that contemporary organizations are facing, has been overlooked in favour of musicians who are no longer living.

This articulates the dilemma of the jazz band, either as a metaphor or as an equivalent practice. In order for it to be thought to be applicable or generalizable, there needs to be a recourse to practitioners or jazz practice that can be readily understood by the lay person. And in so doing, we run the danger of diminishing the value and potential of this area of study.

Conclusion

My argument in this paper is that the metaphor of the jazz band does offer an alternative view of organizations and leadership that critically challenges and replaces reductionist, scientific approaches. This is based on a fundamentally different view of the relationship between leaders and organizations and acknowledges a paradigm shift in our world view.

As such, the metaphor of the jazz band can still be viewed as having value as a way to apprehend the fluidity and dynamism of a learning organization—an organization where interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships are valued. In my opinion, the most illuminating insights into organizations and leadership are derived from Barrett, Newton, and Dennis and Macauley, who are able to bring to bear on non-musical contexts their insider knowledge and expertise in jazz improvisation. Earlier it was noted that metaphor encourages the exploration of the parallels between an object of interest and something that is better known. Both Barrett and Newman provide evidence that the deeper the insight into the metaphor (in this case jazz improvisation), the greater the understanding it can offer about the object of interest.

In conclusion, I would suggest that in order to profitably continue the discourse between musical improvisation and the business community, we must go beyond metaphor in order to explore inter-disciplinary research into understanding improvisation in both contexts. Perhaps the way forward is to reconsider Wittgenstein’s use of metaphor as a way of bringing to our attention phenomena that would otherwise pass us by, in order to reveal that “the aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity” (129). The metaphor of the jazz band ultimately brings to our attention the dialogic, unpredictable, and indeterminate nature of all activity. It is this activity that Wittgenstein sees as being so important. It is through metaphor that we can focus on what Shotter describes as “the complexity of what we do spontaneously, without prior deliberation, problem solving, interpretation, or other intellectual working out” (5). Future research is most fruitfully located in in this area: for example, this could involve engaging practicing jazz musicians and leaders of

organizations in a critical dialogue about the nature of and practice of improvisation from their own perspectives. I would suggest that empirical investigations, based in a grounded theory approach, should characterise the next phase of research into the phenomenon of improvisation in both musical and organizational contexts. This could lead to a greater understanding of the form and function of “minimal structures,” the nature of practice and preparation, social inter-relationships, and the ethical implications of consciously working in an improvisatory way.

Notes

¹ The process of learning patterns is a contentious issue within jazz pedagogy due to association with a Jamie Aebersold-style approach in which the learning and repeating of “licks” is the basis of learning to improvise in a jazz context. I am suggesting a more complex and nuanced process here; the term “patterns” can apply to melodies, rhythms, harmonies, and textures, which musicians can learn from a host of different oral and written sources. The saxophonist Steve Lacy uses the word “research” to describe his practice methods: “It’s research. Part of it is like muscle building, and technical readiness building. But part of it is research, and that’s the part that’s interesting” (Weiss 143). I think a distinction can be made between practicing material for inclusion in a performance and Lacy’s approach, which sees practice and performance as parallel processes in which the former indirectly influences the latter over an extended period of time.

Works Cited

- Bailey, Derek. *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*. Ashbourne: Moorland Publishing, 1980. Print.
- Barrett, Frank J. “Creativity and Improvisation in Jazz and Organizations: Implications for Organizational Learning.” *Organization Science* 9.5 (1998): 605-22. *Informa Online*. Web. 12 November 2012. <http://orgsci.journal.informs.org/content/9/5/605>.
- Bastien, D.T. and T.J. Hostager. “Jazz as a process of organizational innovation.” *Communication Research* 15.5 (1988): 582-602. *Sage Journals*. Web. 12 November 2012. <http://crx.sagepub.com/content/15/5/582>.
- Capra, Fritjof. *The Hidden Connections*. London: HarperCollins, 2002. Print.
- Charmaz, Kathy. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. London: Sage, 2006. Print.
- Chelariu, Christian, Wesley J. Johnston, and Louise Young. “Learning to Improvise, improvising to learn: a process of responding to complex environments.” *Journal of Business Research* 55 (2002): 141-7. *Science Direct*. Web. 12 November 2012. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296300001491>.
- Claxton, Guy. *Wise Up: The Challenge of Lifelong Learning*. London: Bloomsbury, 1999. Print.
- Cohen, Louis, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison. *Research Methods in Education*. 7th ed. London: Routledge, 2011. Print.
- Cornelissen, Joel P. “Making Sense of Theory Construction: Metaphor and Disciplined Imagination.” *Organization Science* 27.11 (2006): 1579-97. *Sage Journals*. Web. 12 November 2012. <http://oss.sagepub.com/content/27/11/1579>.
- Cunha, M.P., J.V da Cunha, and K. Kamoche. “Organizational improvisation: What, When, How and Why.” *International Journal of Management Reviews* 1.3 (1999): 299-341. *Wiley Online Library*. Web. 12 November 2012. onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2370.00017.
- Dennis, Noel and Michael Macaulay. “‘Miles Ahead’ – Using Jazz to Investigate Improvisation.” *European Journal of Marketing* 41.5 (2007): 608-23. *Emerald*. Web. 28 November 2012. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/03090560710737642>.
- DePree, Max. *Leadership Jazz*. New York: Doubleday, 1992. Print.
- Dweck, Carol. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Ballantine, 2006. Print.
- Gill, Jerry H. “Wittgenstein and Metaphor.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 40.2 (1979): 272-84. *JSTOR*. Web. 26 November 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2106323>.

- Hatch, Mary Jo. "Jazzing Up the Theory of Organizational Improvisation." *Advances in Strategic Management* 14 (1997): 181-91. Print.
- . *Organization Theory: Modern Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997. Print.
- . "Exploring the Empty Spaces of Organizing: How Improvisational Jazz Helps Redescribe Organizational Structure." *Organization Science* 20.1 (1999): 75-100. *Sage Journals*. Web. 26 November 2012. <http://oss.sagepub.com/content/20/1/75>.
- Hatch, Mary Jo and Karl E. Weick. "Critical Resistance to the Jazz Metaphor." *Organization Science* 9.5 (1998): 600-604. *Informa Online*. Web. 12 November 2012. <http://orgsci.journal.informs.org/content/9/5/600.full.pdf+html>.
- Holbrook, Morris B. *Playing the Changes on the Jazz Metaphor*. Boston: Now Publishers, 2008. Print.
- Johnstone, Keith. *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1981. Print.
- Kamoche, Ken, Miguel Pina e Cunha, and Joao Viera da Cunha. "Towards a Theory of Organizational Improvisation: Looking Beyond the Jazz Metaphor." *Journal of Management Studies* 40.8 (2003): 2023-51. *Wiley Online Library*. Web. 12 November 2012. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1046/j.1467-6486.2003.00410.x/>.
- Morgan, Gareth. *Images of Organizations*. Rev. ed. London: Sage, 2006. Print.
- Newton, Paul M. "Leadership Lessons from Jazz Improvisation." *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 7.1 (2004): 83-99. *Taylor and Francis Online*. Web. 12 November 2012. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13603120409510591#.Udqq9qy8CSo>.
- Senge, Peter. *The Fifth Discipline*. Rev. ed. London: Random House, 2006. Print.
- Shotter, John. "Now I Can Go On': Wittgenstein and Communication." Paper given at University of Calgary, Department of Communication, 1994. *Massey University, New Zealand*. Web. 26 November 2012. <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/virtual/wittgoon.htm>.
- Stacey, Ralph D., Douglas Griffin, and Patricia Shaw. *Complexity and Management: Fad or Radical Challenge to Systems Thinking?* London: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Stoll, Louise, Dean Fink, and Lorna Earl. *It's About Learning (and It's About Time)*. London: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Ucbasaran, Deniz, Andy Lockett, and Michael Humphreys. "Leading Entrepreneurial Teams: Insights from Jazz." *Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship*. 1-18. Web. 12 November 2012. <http://www.isbe.org.uk/BestPapers#papers10>.
- Weick, Karl E. "Improvisation as a Mindset for Organizational Analysis." *Organization Science* 9.5 (1998): 543-55. Print.
- Weiss, Jason, ed. *Steve Lacy: Conversations*. London: Duke UP, 2006. Print.
- Wheatley, Margaret. *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999. Print.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953. Print.