IMPROVISATION IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT: LESSONS FROM JAZZ

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Abstract

During this century, a seemingly strengthening trend can be observed in business research – several subfields, including project management, have been 'jazzed'. It can be noticed that music and orchestras, particularly jazz, are common metaphors in project, as well as in general and other business fields studies. Another proliferating trend is linking different, ostensibly separated subfields in business research. These initial observations lead to the question: what have the 'jazzed' subfields in common, what have they learned and can still learn from jazz (or more broadly, from music), and what can different subfields of business learn from each other? Jazz music approach is a very inclusive, democratic, horizontal, leadership and team-group balanced discipline, using 'improvisation' as the main vehicle for problem solving and development of new strategies. In this paper we carry out a literature review, examining what, how, etc. has been 'jazzed' so far, concentrating on general organization and project management studies. Next, we analyse the main findings and juxtapose the findings from jazz (or music) with counterparts in project management. In the discussion part we reveal possible developments and possibilities for fostering mutual learning and enrichment and provide suggestions for further advancement.

Key words: *project management, business, jazz, improvisation, music.*
JEL codes: L82, M1

Introduction

Since the beginning of this century, a seemingly strengthening trend can be observed in the field of business research – several subfields, including project management, have been 'jazzed'. It can be noticed that music and orchestras, particularly jazz, are common metaphors in project, as well as in general business studies. Another proliferating trend is linking different, ostensibly separated subfields in business research. These initial observations lead to the question: what have the 'jazzed' subfields in common, what have they learned and can still learn from jazz (or more broadly, from music), and what can different subfields of business learn from each other?

The aforesaid is an initial observation, leading to the question: why has project management, as well as several subfields in business studies, been 'jazzed'? A possible explanation is that they have learned and/or possibly can still learn something from jazz, and more broadly, from music. As some subfields in business research have been 'jazzed', they probably have something in common and have learned and/or taken over something from each other. And, it can be assumed that there are still (partly) unused possibilities for even more mutual learning and enrichment.

This article elaborates on these questions and will provide insights for subsequent learning and enrichment between jazz and project management, as well as other still apparently

separated subfields in business research. The following sections present an overview of existing literature about 'jazzing' in general and in project management, using a loosely structured historical method for studying routines / practices, starting with keyword searches in academic databases.

A question to be clarified at the beginning is – why jazz? The answer is improvisation, the main element of jazz music (c.f. Crook, 1999). According to Sandoval (2013), improvisation is a natural and organic element in all human beings (also animals) and occurs throughout everyday life, as we talk, move, respond, etc. Although theoretically possible, our actions and interactions do not happen in the same manner every time. Improvisation requires the adaptation and use of learned elements into a situation that occurs in a particular setting at a particular time. We feel different every day and the external conditions differ, and this obligates us to use different tools or techniques for a similar problem, or the same tactic for a similar problem. Improvisation could be also defined as a "problem solving" action, which in music also implies creativity and innovation, and in most situations implies group work and interaction. Varied study fields – for one, business, medicine, etc. include improvisation-related courses in their curricula, in order to prepare future professionals for a constant changing environment, with new needs and problems to be solved. Leadership and teamwork skills that have always been necessary for jazz musicians, become more and more important for all other professionals (c.f. Bourn, 2018). This is also an important plea of jazz. To be noted that improvisation in music is not exclusive of the jazz styles. Before the late XIX and XX centuries, improvisation was a normal practice among what we call today "classical" composers. Musicians such as Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, or Franz Liszt, among several others, were great improvisers, performing their own compositions and making "variations" as a normal practice in their interpretations. Later in the XX century, music institutions (i.e. European Conservatoires) focused almost entirely on performance and composition, leaving improvisation apart. Nowadays, musical styles such as jazz, folk/world, and popular, are regularly included in higher education curricula, in fact, they are gaining terrain together with the use of technology, and so it reflects the music industry, where "non-classical" genres have taken over.

Jazzing and improvisation in organizations: general literature review

Jazz metaphor in project management seems to be rather traditional, thus it is difficult to figure out, by whom and when it was introduced. However, considering that the main feature of jazz is improvisation, leads to the liable influencer – the concept of organizational improvisation or improvisation in organizational theory. The musical process (Copland, 1939), seen in a wider sense, implies the activation of several simultaneous processes which would lead to a better strategic and anticipated thinking, directly related with how music evokes emotions (Huron, 2006), which would eventually lead to a better product design and organizational management.

According to Cunha, Cunha, and Kamoche (1999) this research stream formed in the 1990-s and embraces three stages of theory development and two generations of authors. They (*ibid*.) provided a proper review of the existing literature at this time (1999). Not deepening into details, some strains can be pointed out. First, this stream emerged quite gustily: virtually all influential publications are dated in the 1990-s, just a few in (late) the 1980-s. Second, during a decade of development, it proliferated into a wide range of areas in organizational theory, from general and strategic management to narrow specific topics (such as crisis management, risk mitigation, etc.). This situation naturally caused a multitude of definitions and understandings.

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And importantly, among other springs of organizational improvisation, jazz seems to be the most influential.

An important landmark in 'jazzing' of organization theory seems to be a symposium "Jazz as a Metaphor for Organizing in the 21st Century" at the Academy of Management Conference in 1995, followed by a special issue of Organization Science in the autumn 1998. This symposium included 'normal' scholarly presentations (by Mary Jo Hatch, Bill Pasmore and Karl Weick) but also a demonstration and discussion of jazz improvisation by Frank Barrett (both scholar and pianist) and Ken Peplowski (an avowed saxophonist and clarinettist), accompanied by two more musicians (on bass and on drums). The symposium attracted over 500 people, it was great fun but also generated a prolonged intellectual discussion (Meyer, Frost, & Weick, 1998). Barrett and Peplowski (1998[1]) performed and analysed there a jazz 'standard' "All of Me".

Why did the organization scientist turn to improvisation and jazz, is explicated by Weick (1998) in the introductory essay for the mentioned special issue – dominant emphasis on order and control causes disability to understand creativity and innovation. As organizations embody "*… orderly arrangements for cooperation, it is not surprising that mechanisms for rearranging these orders in the interest of adaptation, have not been developed as fully.*" (ibid.: 543). Hence, organizational improvisation is seen as a possibility for coping this shortage and jazz as a source of orienting ideas. The introductory essay brings out several parallels between improvisation in organizations and jazz (music) and educes practical implications, particularly 13 characteristics of groups with a high capability for improvisation, as well as limitations to improvisation. Among the highlighted aspects, the most important seems to be the proportion of success and mistakes. As jazz could be depicted as "*moments of rare beauty intermixed with technical mistakes and aimless passages*", it can teach organizational scientists that "*… that there is life beyond routines, formalization, and success. To see the beauty in failures ...*" (*ibid.*: 554). Making mistakes, it is also commonly accepted in jazz music, and in music in general (Westney, 2003), as one of the most effective approaches to develop new ideas and to problem solving, and as a way to unfold the mind and creative thinking.

The afore-mentioned special issue contained several articles, discussing different aspects in relating organizational and jazz improvisation. For one, Mirvis (1998) asserted that improvising is essential in various expressive mediums, such as sports, theatre, military, psychotherapy, etc.; and called to assess how different practitioners improvise and what could be learned from them. This special issue of an academic journal is uncommon also because it contains articles written by non-academic persons – like a jazz musician Ken Peplowski. In his article Peplowski (1998) discussed the process of jazz improvisation and performing of jazz music. He pointed out several useful parallels with organization and what the managers can learn or take over from musicians – for instance, the importance of listening, and sharing and shifting leadership – who takes a solo, takes also leadership and when finishing, gives it over to a follower. Nevertheless, the cited article looks odd: there are no references in the text and no literature listed. If somebody submitted this article to a regular issue, it was certainly rejected but this was a 'very special' issue.

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[1] The article has remarkable heading "*Minimal Structures Within a Song: An Analysis of "All of Me'*". All of Me is a popular song, probably familiar for most listeners, written by Gerald Marks and Seymour Simons. Recommended performance by Ella Fitzgerald, "Ella Swings Gently with Nelson" (1962, Verve).

A remarkable conceptual contribution in this special issue was made by Frank Barrett, who is both researcher and jazz musician. Such a rare combination of competences was probably the enabler, solely organization scientist or musician was not able to do such interdisciplinary work. In his article Barret (1998) declares that Drucker's view of contemporary leaders as orchestra conductors "*... connoting pre-scripted musical scores, single conductor as leader — is limited, given the ambiguity and high turbulence that many managers experience*" (*ibid*.: 605). Thus, he turns to Weick's suggestion, seeing jazz band and jazz improvisation as models of contemporary organizations, maximizing innovation and learning. The main contribution of this ('coda') article was pointing out seven characteristics of jazz improvisation and exploring their applicability in "non-jazz contexts" – that is, in management of (business and other) organizations.

Alongside with the Organization Science 1998 special issue, another significant conceptual contribution appeared. Moorman and Miner (1998) provided a comprehensive overview of the notion of improvisation in different perspectives (organizational, musical, theatre, therapy, and teaching), related to a multitude of domains (from wide and general, such as management and music, to narrow and specific, such as firefighting management). The novelty of their approach was distinguishing the levels of improvisation – from slight modifications of a 'standard' theme to "free jazz" (the jazz metaphor used before considered traditional (mainstream) jazz, which is somewhere in between). Their main contribution was relating organizational improvisation to organizational memory and showing possibilities for the development of higher-level competency in improvisation.

The afore-cited works concerned improvisation in organizations under (more or less) stable conditions yet targeting on provoking innovation. However, even decades ago the environment was changing, and this forced organizations to change (or innovate) more often and extensively. Under these circumstances a subdiscipline – change management emerged. Not surprisingly, in change management there is also place for improvisation, as was shown by Orlikowski and Hoffman (1997). They noted that traditional change management models did not work well in unprecedented, open-ended, and context-specific situations. Thus, they proposed an alternative, improvisational model, adapting iterative experimentation, use, and learning over time.

The afore-cited work was somehow continued afterward by Kamoche and Cunha (2001). They examined side by side social and technical structures and jazz improvisation and synthesized an improvisational model for new product development. It contrasted the existing well-planned approaches of product innovation, adhering clear structures, dominating in rational-functionalist paradigm of that time. A focal keyword in this article (standing also in the heading) is "minimal structures" that allow merging composition and performance in jazz. The cited article showed their usefulness also in product innovation in turbulent and competitive business environments.

The noteworthy special issue of Organization Science was published already more than 20 years ago, and the symposium took place already in 1995. Thus, it might be a bit surprising that their core messages sound even more actual nowadays – but this is already a matter for later discussion. Looking at the developments following during the past two decades, several milestones can be picked out. One of these is a (2002) book "Organizational Improvisation". As the editors (Kamoche, Cunha, & Cunha, 2002) noted in the introductory overview, organizational improvisation was a recent (at this time!) theoretical development, starting to deserve attention of theorists and practitioners. This was because of its ability of coping with increasing complexities in turbulent environments and detecting new sources of competitive advantage.

These properties placed organizational improvisation aside other modern (at this time!) conceptual developments, including transaction cost and institutional theories.

A year later Kamoche, Cunha, and Cunha (2003) published an effort towards the theory of organizational improvisation. They scrutinized other improvisational phenomena and discerned possibilities for complementing the insights from jazz. Also, they claimed that theorizing guided by a 'one-best-metaphor' approach is possibly dangerous and called the researchers to go beyond the jazz metaphor, prevailing at this time. Yet, at that they recognized the important contribution of jazz and prevised its continuation in the future.

Looking at later developments, it is worth to bring out a work by Tsoukas and Chia (2002). Their main message was that treating organizational change as exceptional rather than natural is outdated approach and suggested to "*treat change as the normal condition of organizational life*" (*ibid*.: 567). This article was eloquent for further legitimatizing of 'jazzing' in organization theory. Even more: they stated that "*... the view of change suggested here helps us to better understand the process of jazz improvisation discussed by Barrett (1998), ...*" (*ibid*.: 576).

Already during the first decade of substantial development of organizational improvisation it tended to relate to organizational learning. This was pointed out also in some afore-cited works, such as Moorman and Miner (1998) and Orlikowski and Hoffman (1997). Nevertheless, as stated by Vendelø (2009), works investigating learning and improvisation in organizations were missing at this time. Vendelø's article took stock of existed research on relationships between learning and improvisation in organizations and addressed challenges. Furthermore, a step forward in this vein was made by Bernstein and Barrett (2011), relating organizational improvisation to dynamic capabilities. Creation of dynamic capabilities was gaining popularity in the literature, as a feasible response to the problem of organizational inertia. Drawing upon the two notions, they show that dynamic capabilities can be enhanced by strengthening practices observed in jazz improvisation.

A notable work by Oakes (2009) discussed the empowerment as jazz metaphor, considering possibilities for mutual learning between marketers (managers and empowered direct contact staff) and jazz improvisers, in the light of two polarized concepts – freedom and constraints. The main message is that both jazz musicians and empowered service providers are not fully free, they must consider certain constraints. This work is notable also because it targeted on a specific field – service, stating that improvisation allows to create impression of a more personalized service encounter. In the same vein is a work of Cunha, Rego, and Kamoche (2009), designating the eventual role of improvisation in service recovery. Yet, at that they underline that improvisation without clear rules and boundaries may result in unwanted service variation, and poor improvisation can be costly for service organizations.

Even though the 'conductor' (of symphony orchestra) approach has been criticized by the 'jazzmen' (c.f. Barret, 1998), it seems to be place for a little 'intermezzo' here. Koivunen and Wennes (2011) remind that (even according to several gurus, like Drucker, Mintzberg, etc.) the conductor is proliferated as a symbolic metaphor of good management of leadership, yet this is very little reflected in research. Intending to fill the gap, they draw on organizational aesthetics and aesthetic leadership and develop three dimensions of the leadership of conductors: relational listening, aesthetic judgment and kinaesthetic empathy. It should be noted that several afforded elements are relevant also for players in jazz combos.

During the past decade of development in organizational improvisation, two streams can be discerned: general and field-specific. First, looking at progress in the general stream, Barrett

(2012) authored a book where he noted metaphorically that improvising in organizations will say 'yes to the mess', a novel pattern for leading and collaborating in organizations. This needs guided autonomy – that is, setting minimal structures and routines but not eliminating them totally. This will give freedom to experiment and respond to intuitive impulses that foster innovation. In 2014 another special issue on organizational improvisation appeared. In the introduction to the special issue, the editors (Leybourne, Lynn, & Vendelø, 2014) recognize increasing attention from both academics and practitioners, and point out the main headwords in organizational improvisation – creativity, adaptation and innovation. Thus, it was appropriate that this special issue appeared in (Wiley's) journal *Creativity and Innovation Management*. A notable contribution in this special issue (Cunha, Clegg, Rego, & Neves, 2014) asserts that "improvisational" labels very different processes – from impromptu reactions to organizational choreographies in set terms. Their main contribution is discerning forms of organizational improvisation (ad-hoc, covert, provocative and managed) and relating them to streams in organization theory.

A consolidating review of organizational improvisation literature by Hadida, Tarvainen and Rose (2015) states that organizational improvisation is increasingly recognized in management research. However, 15 years after the (probably first) literature review by Cunha *et al*. (1999), the cumulativeness of research remains low and a consolidating framework is still missing. Because this is a potential threat to the future of the field, they introduced a new, degree / level framework. The framework figures a 3x3 matrix, organizing the contributions to organizational improvisation across two core dimensions. First, the level: from single actors to (small) teams and organizations, labelled proportionately 'individual', 'interpersonal' and 'organizational' improvisation. Second, the degree of improvisation: that is, performing an existing task in a different manner, improvising a different task toward the same outcome, or a different task toward a new outcome – labelled respectively 'minor', 'bounded', and 'structural' improvisation. Also, they indicate potential areas for future research across areas, organizational settings and industries.

The presented before overview may seem as an apologia for organizational improvisation. However, wrong usage of something what is normally useful may cause serious damage and this is valid also for organizational improvisation. So Giustiniano, Cunha and Clegg (2016) elucidated the 'dark side' of organizational improvisation, analysing the notorious Costa Concordia disaster[2].

In order to round up more positively, it can be claimed that development in organizational improvisation goes on, new publications appear steadily. Just some examples are recent works of Fisher and Barrett (2018), scrutinizing improvisation from a process perspective; and a case study of a musical intervention in a Finnish professional sport (ice-hockey) team by Sorsa, Merkkiniemi, Endrissat and Islam (2018). As they (*ibid*.: 373) state, "*Once the analogy between musical and team coordination has been established, a variety of different parameters of coordination are opened up, creating a field for both empirical research and applied initiatives.*". The message of these 'golden' words, as well as of the presented overview is that the analogies between business and music, particularly jazz, are promising. In order to use that potential, quite a lot has been done but the potential is not yet depleted, especially in terms of empirical research and elaboration of applications, useful for practitioners.

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[2] On January 13, 2012, the captain of cruise ship Costa Concordia decided to 'improvise', causing sinking the ship.

Jazzing of projects or improvisation in temporary organisations: targeted literature review

The above-presented overview of organizational improvisation disserted the phenomenon in permanent organizations. All organizations have life cycles, no one is permanent. It means that a permanent organization is a construct, used in project literature in order to differentiate from project organizations that are supposed to be temporary – that is, terminated when the project (as a set of tasks, activities, etc.) is completed and/or the deadline is over. This approach was coined by Lundin and Söderholm (1995) in a seminal work, outlining a theory of temporary organization. It should be noted that some publications, referred in the previous section, mentioned also projects; the best examples are Hadida *et al*. (2015), Cunha *et al*. (2014), and some others. They mention projects for just a single reason – projects enable more improvisation, compared to regulated and institutionalized permanent organizational settings. Yet, the mentioned ones are rare examples, projects do not deserve much attention in the mainstream organizational improvisation literature.

Against this background, it is good to denote that jazzing of projects – or in other words, improvisation in temporary organizations – has deserved attention from some project researchers. An early attempt of jazzing project management is a paper by Wikström and Rehn (2002). They compared overall characteristics of projects and jazz and pointed out five most important linkages: (1) plans are enabling, not constricting; (2) aberrations are normal; (3) work with what happens; (4) order is emergent, not pre-defined; and (5) disorder is not chaotic. These are fairly in line with general implications from the organizational improvisation.

In succeeding developments in jazzing of project management, several contributions are made by Stephen Leybourne, alone and with different co-authors. Leybourne and Sadler-Smith (2006) discussed the role of intuition and improvisation in project management and provided empirical evidence. They showed that statistically significant positive relationships exist between: (1) the use of intuitive judgements and improvisation; (2) experience and improvisation; (3) the use of intuitive judgements and experience; and (4) the use of intuitive judgements is related to external project outcomes (customer satisfaction). His next contribution (Leybourne, 2009) compared two emerging trends – improvisational working and agile project management (APM), that were not much recognized by the practitioner bodies (such as PMI, IPMA, etc.), nor the mainstream literature. Reviewing the extant literature on improvisational working and APM and comparing the findings led to several commonalities. Now, about a decade later, his conclusion "*... it is likely that both improvisational working, and the early manifestations of APM, will have something to offer the project practitioner that can assist in more effective execution of project tasks and a higher quality of project deliverables*" (*ibid.*: 532) appears far-sighted and tenable. Further, Leybourne, Warburton, and Kanabar (2014) discussed a more fundamental question "*Is project management the new management 2.0?*" and paid much attention to the role of improvisation, relating it with several aspects in changing paradigms, such as decline of organizational hierarchies, values of the Y-generation, and effectuation. Leybourne and Kennedy (2015) scrutinized the links between knowledge management and improvisation, introducing this subtopic in the project domain. One of their key points is that agile (iterative) approach will support better learning in projects, as well as improved management in contemporary contexts.

Another contribution by Leybourne and Cook (2015) explores the relationships between improvisation in organisation and in music across various musical genres, particularly orchestral, jazz, and rock music. In this work, they argue that rock music is the best metaphor

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for the business in the 21st century. At that, they concede that their divisions are blurred, as jazz varies from very structured to almost free. His latest article (Leybourne, 2017) takes stock of developments in both project management and organizational improvisation. As he notes, the paradigm that dominated during some decades, characterized as '*plan, then execute with minimum deviation*' has utterly changed. Nowadays most projects are uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, and this has caused significant changes in project management. This contribution focuses on a specific component of improvisation – adaptation, showing its usefulness in coping with ambiguity and uncertainty, and in avoiding additional risks arising from novelty of activities. Even jazz is mentioned very seldom, developed (and visualised) model for adaption is in line with the 'jazzing' approach.

Inquiring into other parallel developments in 'jazzing' of project management brings out a trend what was alluded also in afore-referred works. Several works by Leybourne (and co-authors) speak in favour of flexible and iterative project management methods, labelled generally as agile (c.f. Salameh, 2014). This development was resounded in a work by Suscheck and Ford (2008), arguing that just the jazz metaphor elucidates the organizational culture, required for supporting an agile software development processes, especially Scrum[3]. For one, the jazz or improvisation metaphor alludes that a general plan is reasonable, whereas dictating the details is unreasonable. This, as well as several other parallels are drawn upon Barrett's (1998) seven characteristics of jazz improvisation, especially working as teams with minimal structures for maximum flexibility.

Agile methods started to spread at the beginning of the 21st century, albeit in the beginning they were not widely recognized in the mainstreaming project management literature. Therefore, it should be mentioned that jazz and improvisation appeared also in the mainstreaming literature. For instance, Geraldi, Lee-Kelley, and Kutsch (2010) recognized the role of improvisation (and bricolage) in explaining the responses of project managers to unexpected events. Jerbrant and Karrbom Gustavsson (2013) examined project portfolio management practices and suggested that both project or portfolio management need "action spaces" allowing improvisation, not fixing the mind on planned, structured work. Klein, Biesenthal and Dehlin (2015) proposed a praxeological framework for resilient project management where improvisation has a crucial role. It assumes that the more knowledge (e.g. schools of project management thought) a project manager has, the more he/she can use and apply his/her knowledge in different situations, and at times improvising, the more prepared and resilient his/her project-management practices will be. Their framework combines two aspects: knowledge of instrument(s) and degree of improvisation; and discerns four types of project management: linear (rigid), bricolage, pluralist, and pure improvisation.

To end this overview just some more significant publications. Biesenthal, Sankaran, Pitsis, and Clegg (2015) examined contributions of project management literature to discussions of temporal issues in general management and organization literature. They emphasize the ability to improvise, as linear assumptions confront the complexities and point out the analogy with jazz. And finally, a book by Sivaraman and Wilson (2016) with expressive heading "*Making projects sing: a musical perspective of project management*". Discussing properly the relations of project management and music, they show numerous possibilities for mutual learning. This book is about music in general, not just jazz, yet pays copious attention to jazz and improvisation. Appearance of such proper work obviously signs the potential of jazzing and

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[3] Scrum is "… *a simple framework for effective team collaboration on complex products*" (source: www.scrum.org). This agile management method was first adopted in IT but now it is proliferating into a variety of fields.

more widely music in project management. As project management is an essential part of general management in contemporary organizations, most implications should be extendable to management and organization in general. In other words, the next step could be "making sing" the whole business and organizations.

Discussion of the main findings

The first deduction from the review of general 'jazzing' (i.e. organizational improvisation) literature is that the jazz (and more widely music) metaphor has been fruitful, perhaps even more fruitful than its introducers expected some decades ago. The trigger for 'jazzing' was an emerging need to refract the orientation on order and control, hence enabling more creativity and innovation (Weick, 1998). Considering almost two decades history of 'jazzing' organizations, we may ask – are the organizations in current societies already enough 'jazzed'? The answer is probably not, as nowadays most organizations need 'jazzing' more than ever. This comes from the paradigmatic changes, labelled as VUCA, standing for a combination of **V**olatility, **U**ncertainty, **C**omplexity, and **A**mbiguity (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). To cope with volatility and ambiguity, organizations need correspondingly (more) agility and experimentation (*ibid*.) Our analysis of literature brought out that the jazz metaphor propounds both agility (Leybourne, 2009; 2017) and experimentation (Orlikowski & Hoffman, 1997; Barrett, 2012). Regarding experimentation Bennett and Lemoine (2014) emphasize that it must be 'intelligent' – not just doing some (futile) things but rely on something – experience, knowledge, etc. The same is in jazz – a widely cited dictum from Charles Mingus uttered "*You can't improvise on nothing; you've gotta improvise on something*". All the mentioned, particularly agility and experimentation, relate to an important notion deriving from jazz – "minimal structures".

Jazz musicians may be classified as entrepreneurs, building a jazz music career in the same approach as a start-up company. A jazz musician normally wants to bring in a new style and artistic conception into the music business industry by introducing a fresh approach to performance and improvisation, and in many cases, composition, arranging and production as well. This "fresh new approach" is only possible through a deep knowledge of the jazz tradition, its language, and techniques (Reeves, 1995). Truly free jazz improvisation, not in terms of the "free jazz" style, but referring to develop a performance technique with full freedom to recreate and improvise, it can only be achieved after a comprehensive understanding and mastering of the jazz fundamentals and its roots. The jazz approach may be understood as an open view to a concrete circumstance and environment, which requires specific action(s) to accomplish the goal (i.e. performance of a new/old song within a group situation), in the same way that a project manager would deal with problem solving. Developing a new voice or personal style as a jazz musician requires both deep knowledge of the jazz tradition but also, and most important, an artistic vision which leads musical and aesthetic components into an original new proposal as an artist. Jazz artists need to be able to adapt to a constant changing multi-cultural and technological environment, intrinsically connected with the music industry, market, and audience demands.

In jazz, minimal structures allow improvisation – simultaneous creation and performance; in organizations they enable working (especially in creative teams) with optimal flexibility. Both jazz musicians and workers must follow their minimal structures – in jazz the harmony, rhythm, etc.; in business the routines, rules, etc.; not eliminating them totally. If a group of jazz players will not agree upon the theme, tonality, tempo, etc. and just start to play, the result will

probably be not admissible for the listeners. Similarly, if a product or service design team will not have any agreement between themselves or a task given by the higher-level management and just start to develop something, they probably develop something useless, unfeasible and unprofitable. Such result in business means not only useless result but also wasted resources – manpower and even money. Thus, everywhere must be some structures, but they should be as minimal as possible.

A question that has not yet enough been addressed in the organizational improvisation literature is the level of minimalism. Our proposition is that the optimal level varies, and we use jazz music metaphor to scrutinize the idea. First, the case described by Barrett and Peplowski (1998), how they analysed and performed a jazz 'standard' "All of Me". They performed with two more musicians (on bass and on drums) and obviously they had previously agreed the theme (song) and tonality (on a figure in this article it is in C), probably also the rhythm and tempo (or it was forced by the drummer). How they performed, is not described in the article but we assume that it was quite traditional – one of them (clarinettist, as a melodic instrument), played once the theme (melody), while the piano provided harmonic support, and then they played alternately several improvisational solos. (Bass and drums are usually accompanying instruments but sometimes they also take solos, did this happen at this performance is not known.) We realize that this example might be not easy to understand for non-musicians, but it describes the "structures" they had and needed for this performance. These structures were minimal, that is, optimal in this case. Yet, the same 'standard' "All of Me" has been performed by big bands[4] and in this case more structures are needed. If several instruments play together without orchestrated and notated (written) scores, the result will be total cacophony (that is, dissonance). Although musicians in big bands play improvisational solos, such actions cannot be spontaneous, they are premeditated by the arranger and/or conductor. Big band music is balanced between written and improvised sections, depending on the nature of the style and composer. Moreover, this jazz 'standard' has been performed also by symphony orchestras, whereat the structures are more rigid.

Jazz, as well as other music genres, are sometimes performed by single musicians, yet most music performances are collective actions, involving several people – from duets and trios and small (ca 4-6 musicians) combos to big bands, orchestras and choirs with 20-40 musicians, and in specific occasions[5] up to thousands. Thus, performing music, particularly jazz, is collective and social phenomenon. Music collectives are different, varying from small, informal or semi-formal (jazz) combos to bigger and more formal organizations, like most (symphony) orchestras. Moreover, the music collectives vary in terms of their desired life cycles: some (usually smaller and less formal) are temporary, formed for a single performance (or recording, etc.) whilst bigger orchestras are often desired to be permanent. As mentioned before, no organization is permanent, yet some music collectives[6] have very solid history, comparable to solid businesses. Just in jazz, there is other extremity, called 'jam session' where musicians (mostly instrumentalists, possibly even strangers) improvise on tunes or just chord progressions.

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[4] Big band is the most characteristic instrumental big ensemble in jazz history, originated in the early 1940s during the "Swing Era". Traditional instrumental setting includes saxophones (5), trombones (4/5), trumpets (4), and rhythm section (4: piano/guitar, bass, drums), with a total number of around 16-18 musicians, which may vary depending of the size of the band and the specific program. Occasionally, a singer is added, and in contemporary settings, strings and electronic instruments are widely used as well. It is very typical that big bands feature top level soloists performing a specific program of just as regular member of the band.

[5] Like Baltic song and dance celebrations, see https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/baltic-song-and-dance-celebrations-00087

[6] A good example is world-famous *Die Wiener Philharmoniker*, established in 1842 and still performing.

In this process, they form bands – temporary organizations with very short life cycles – from some minutes to some hours.

Analysis of the general organizational improvisation literature brought out that projects are considered, yet chiefly because temporary organizational settings are more improvisation-friendly than institutionalized and regulated permanent counterparts. This is probably true in most cases; however, the situation may be not so bright there. As Lundin (2007) stated, there is also a dilemma of "the beauty and the beast", epitomizing respectively creativity and innovativeness, and project management. Order and control, prescribed by traditional project management approaches, tends to kill creativity and innovativeness. Perception of this dilemma was probably the main trigger for 'jazzing' of projects. As the seminal paper by Wikström and Rehn (2002) pointed out, plans should be enabling, not constricting, aberrations are normal, order is emergent, not pre-defined, and disorder is not chaotic. All these principles are somehow reflected in an alternative approach of project management, labelled agile. Our main conclusion is that all the journey of 'jazzing' of project management has explicit parallels with overall developments towards agility.

After all, we want to emphasize that agility is not a 'silver bullet' that could kill any enemy. According to some recent findings (c.f. Cooper & Sommer, 2016), agile approaches have several advantages, but they do not suit everywhere, traditional approaches are quite good in some cases. For instance, agile approaches appear more suitable when (project) teams consist of experienced members, are relatively small and changes during the task (project) are probable. In opposite cases, when (project) teams are larger, unexperienced members dominate and the requirements are fixed, traditional (or plan-driven) approaches probably work better.

Considering aforesaid, the prospective future might be hybrid approaches, combining both agile and traditional in a suitable way. In this vein, it is possible to claim that the possibilities for learning from jazz are bigger than ever before. In our opinion, the nature of jazz is corresponding just the hybrid approach, setting minimal structures, allowing freedom to improvise when this is suitable and establishing enough order when this is needed.

Conclusions

This conceptual paper takes a fresh stock of existing research in 'jazzing' of organizations, giving special attention to temporary organizational settings. Review of literature and discussion of findings brings forward increasing importance of organizational improvisation as a powerful enabler of creativity and innovativeness. In the contemporary (VUCA) world, most organizations should forget about stability and seek for new possibilities and solutions. Jazz (also music) has been a fruitful metaphor and source of learning so far, however, the possibilities are not depleted yet. Even the main derivative from jazz – the principle of "minimal structures" – was accentuated nearly two decades ago, the developments tend to bound on the conceptual level, empirical work is still rare and importantly, tools for practical application in organizations are virtually absent.

Scrutinizing the history of 'jazzing' and developments in project management brings out a substantial trend towards agility. Although agility appeared in project management, this notion is swiftly proliferating in other fields. Thus, there is a need for more and deeper research, especially empirical, covering also other fields, such as services, process management, entrepreneurship, and others.

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