Not all that jazz! Jamband as a metaphor for organizing new models of innovation

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This study aims to understand, using a longitudinal framework the relationship between themes within the "jamband" music genre and innovation jams as a model for organizational innovation. It suggests the conventional metaphor for innovation-jazz, which has dominated our way of conceptualizing models of innovation, limits our understanding of contemporary and emerging forms of innovation. The study situates the jazz and jamband metaphors within the management literature and provides a comparative view between the music genres to enrich our understanding about organizational innovation. Three emergent themes evolved from this study that provides insight into organizing emerging models of innovation that are evocative of the jamband music genre. Using the themes of sense of community, collaborative feedback and knowledge sharing and expertise integration, this research explores how IBM Innovation Jams evolve from a concept, tool and service. The study concludes with a discussion on the implications of the findings for theorizing about new models of organizing innovation.

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1. Music as a metaphor for organizing

Using music and jazz as a metaphor for organizing is not new. With over 1300 citations (according to Google Scholar), the jazz metaphor has been used to understand several elements of management including: organizational analysis, improvisation and learning (Hatch, 1998, 1999; Weick, 1998). Researchers have extended the use of jazz as a mechanism to understand organizational innovation processes by suggesting that sub-genres of jazz may better represent the spirit of innovation (Zack, 2000). The relationship between jazz and innovation has been of continuous interest to researchers in product innovation (Kamoche & Cunha, 2001; Kamoche, Cunha, & Cunha, 2003), the management of organizational innovation (Bastien & Hostager, 1988), and the organizational structure and managerial control (Pasmore, 1998). Theorizing through the lens of a jazz band has aided in the understanding of complex concepts and frameworks, such as the process of innovation and its related constructs. This has shed light on the interplay of actors within the organization, the role that actors play between them, the connection to organizational systems, and in-leveraging knowledge and expertise for creativity and innovation (Kao, 1996). The jazz metaphor has enriched our

understanding of strategic decision making (Eisenhardt, 2003) and in explaining cultural differences and leadership within organizations (Walzer & Salcher, 2003). Table 1 highlights how prevalent the metaphor of jazz has used to enlighten us within the management literature.

Though the jazz metaphor has enriched our understanding of conventional approaches to innovation, the adoption of jazz as a form of theorizing about organizing has received "considerable resistance" (Hatch & Weick, 1998, p. 600). This opposition has been due to "limits of its application" that has highlighted its historical roots as being potentially insular or exclusive (Hatch & Weick, 1998). This parochial approach is evident through its limiting sources of (limits on) diversity (Hatch & Weick, 1998, p. 600). In fact, this view may show limited understanding of music genres and music history, thus undermining how music genres have facilitated different approaches to improvisation, creativity and innovation and needs to be understood within a 'collective, cultural context' (Nettl, 1974). Table 2 shows a comparative view of music genres. In acknowledging researchers' and scholars' interest in jazz and innovation, it is the new developments in the advancement of technology that potentially push the boundaries of the jazz genre in understanding emerging innovation practices-creating paradoxes and conflicts in understanding these new models. Emerging modes of innovation and the technology that supports them, give researchers the opportunity to use other genres in aiding the

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Table 1
The jazz metaphor within the management literature.

Constructs linked to the jazz metaphor	Corresponding management literature
Strategic decision-making	Eisenhardt (2003)
Cultural differences and leadership	Walzer and Salcher (2003)
Organizational innovation and creativity	Zack (2000); Bastien and Hostager (1988); Kao (1996)
Organizational improvisation	Weick (1998)
Product innovation	Kamoche and Cunha (2001); Kamoche et al. (2003)
Organizational structure and control	Pasmore (1998)
Organizational learning and theorizing	Lewin (1998); Crossan (1998); Peplowski (1998); Hatch (1998, 1999)

Table 2
Comparative view of music genres.

Jazz	Jamband
Insular, exclusive and closed	Inclusive and open
Limited diversity	Extensive diversity
Limited applications	Broad applications
No sharing of intellectual property	Open to sharing intellectual property
Draws from a single musical genre for creation	Propensity to cross musical genre boundaries for variation
Associated with defined social circles	Associated with influencing change and collective approach

Table 3
Chronology and context of data collection.

Source of data	World Jam 2001	Value Jam 2003	World Jam 2004	Habitat Jam 2005	Global Jam 2006	Innov. Jam 2008	SmWrk Jam 2009	GIPulse Jam 2010	SocBus Jam 2011
IBM Innovation Jam reports	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	n/a
News & trade publications	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Participant observations & field notes							*	*	*
Interviews & correspondence[a]	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Jam forums							*	*	*

[a] Interviews and correspondence were about Innovation Jams at IBM and conducted between 2009 and 10.

explanation of how organizational innovation can be arranged. This paper explores how the contemporary music genre of a jamband enlightens our understanding of new and open models of innovation.

The paper is outlined as follows: first a review of the musical genre of a jamband and how it will help in the understanding of organizational innovation, then an introduction to the relationship of technology in shaping open models of innovation. Next, the paper describes the methods used, data collection and analysis that were made. From this, the emergent themes are discussed as IBM engaged with innovation jams. Next, an evolutionary perspective of innovation jams evolving from a concept, to a tool and to a service is presented. Lastly, the paper provides a discussion on the implications and conclusions from this study.

2. Contextualizing the musical genre

IBM has leveraged the musical genre of a jamband as a way of organizing innovation. The use of the jamband metaphor will serve two purposes: (1) act as a tool to understand new objects and situations and, (2) allow us to refer to these new objects consistently through analogies as we relate them to known objects (Lakoff, 1990). Moreover, the jamband metaphor will aid us in describing the emergent development and use of innovation jams as IBM at they learned to engage with a model of organizing innovation.

A jam band utilizes similar aspects found within the jazz genre such as improvisation, experimentation, and experience to "speed up the pace of innovation" (Pasmore, 1998, p. 562), but has the propensity to cross genre boundaries, drawing from a wide-spectrum of musical traditions. A jam band combines and recombines aspects of several genres in various forms to create a new genre that is not bound by the constraints of any single genre and allows for variation in the creation of music.

Beyond incorporating aspects of jazz, a jam band employs a toolbox of genres from blues, bluegrass, funk, rock, psychedelia, and even techno to make and change the harmonic structure, melody, and rhythm of a song as it is being created (Budnick, 2003). By using this toolbox of genres, the characteristics of a jam band would allow for song crafting with both individual and "group-minded" improvisation that may last for lengthy periods, far from the pre-defined notes, chords, and scales with little resemblance of the original song (Tuedio & Spector, 2010). Each genre offers its own history, tradition, and repertoire to manage the complexity of making music. Since organizations employ a variety of strategies to manage the complexity of the innovation process, using the jam-band genre metaphor potentially provides a vehicle to improve the way we talk about and understand new methods of organizing innovation. In addition, the jamband genre which is associated with influencing change emphasizes a sense of community, collaboration, and sharing among the participants may help to invoke understanding of the latent elements in contextualizing new emergent models of organizing innovation.

Using the themes of sense of community, collaborative feedback and knowledge sharing, and expertise integration, this research explores how IBM innovation jams evolve from a concept, tool and service. Through this process we suggest the changing definition of jams and posit jams in relation to ten dimensions.