

Interplay and Voice. What Organisations and Communities Can Learn From Musicians

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Our subject - Universities and Covid as an illustration

- Our subject matter is listening, voice, exit, and participation, including the possibility of novel approaches to organising, managing and leading.
- These topics are pertinent to thinking about the response of universities to the Covid pandemic.
- E.g. one characterisation of typical institutional approaches to the “return to campus” for the 2021-2022 academic year might include:
 - Concentrated power - disguising authoritarian decision-making in a rhetoric of inclusive leadership;
 - Following government:
 - Doing as the ministry and public health office directs;
 - Presenting and relying on government information as uncontested knowledge.

- Does not recognise faculty, staff and students as individual human beings with their own circumstances and experiences.
- Does not rely upon their imagination and ideas as the foundation for decision-making.
- Neither listens to their voices nor enables space for those voices to develop.
- Does not have confidence in their choices about the requirements for an effective learning environment in the context of collegial responsibilities.
- Imposes centralised power, rests on the tyranny of a subset of voices, uses the threat of sanctions and forced exit, and follows the will of government.

Participation

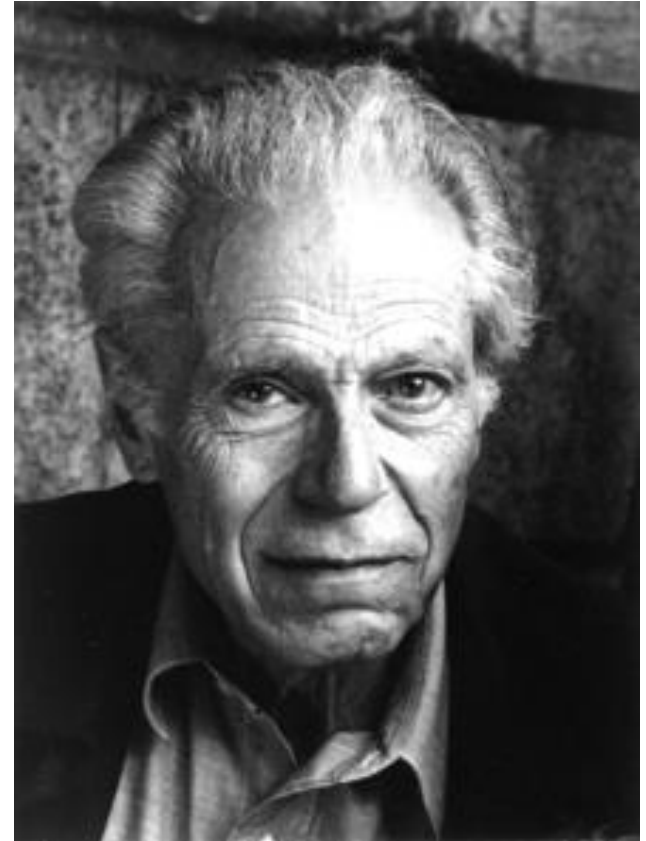
- The processes that support effective participation have always been difficult to define.
- This is possibly because the idea of participation is widely used in town planning, management, economic development, institutional architectures.
- For many, participation means taking part in decisions of interest for the benefit of participants, in a variety of contexts (e.g. from social movements, organisational hierarchies, to public fora and member assemblies) using different modalities for engagement (from debate to digital platforms).
- Typical governance issues relate to who should participate in decision-making and on what basis (e.g. ownership in firms), and to what effects (benefits).

The research focus

- We want to look beyond problems of membership and ownership, and focus on processes.
- We reason on what elements of participation can contribute to beneficial effects for participants and ask, for whatever level of decision-making and activity: ***what is essential about participation?***

Conceptual background

- We focus on the willingness of *listening* in conjunction with the seminal concepts of *voice* and *exit*, early explained by Hirschman (1970).
- In Hirschman, reactions of exit and voice refer to:
 - Political systems, or
 - Market structures, which are either competitive (in which case exit is a viable, low-cost option) or monopolistic (in which case voters or consumers are locked-in and obliged to voice, if they can).



Albert O. Hirschman (1915-2012)

Why participation?

- The exit-voice framework offers two options for a rational individual who is willing to improve a personal or collective situation.
- We shift attention to contexts where there is no slack (e.g. the organization is managed effectively and with no waste of resources) and where interactions are not regulated by the existence of extreme power unbalances (as in monopoly).
- **We consider participation for the sake of creative action**, not necessarily to protest or resolve a governance or market failure.

What is essential about participation?

- We take the view that what matters is the genuine willingness of people to bring forth their ideas and creativeness, following imagined scenarios and foreshadowed opportunities.
- Consider, e.g. the response of a university to Covid.
- A university has a responsibility to address barriers to an effective learning environment, to ensure inclusion across diverse students, specifically:
 - Lack of campus access – e.g. students unable to cross international borders;
 - Undue levels of anxiety and mental wellbeing amongst students and staff - e.g. because some people are immuno-compromised, or are anxious about virus transmission to family and wider communities.

- Addressing these barriers requires thought, imagination, and deliberation about new forms of delivery.
- In turn, that requires the engagement and creativity of academics and students.
 - Necessitates space for each of their voices to be developed and expressed.
- The issue is not for decision by authoritarian academic leaders who follow public health officers.

Why listening?

- The type of coordination that we suggest so as to enable participation, is one where listening is emphasized as the pre-condition of voice.
 - E.g. for people to voice there must be someone else listening.
- Listening requires cooperation and reciprocity among the persons involved in a process of communication over a time period.
 - E.g. re the response to Covid, listening is necessary amongst academics and students so that they can communicate, share and learn with each other, deepening their understanding and enriching the opportunities for ensuring an effective learning environment.

Interplay

- We explain the synergies between voice and listening by building a parallel with interplay.
- Interplay is in itself “an art” that musicians express as they communicate with the sounds or silence they produce, composing new music as they play along together (Sacchetti, 2020).
- Listening matches the alternate production of sound by others (voice) and it is a skill, as important as being able to execute a piece of music (Hargreaves, 2012).

Interview (profile)

- **ID:** professional Jazz musician. Composer, performer and music teacher, with several productions and artistic collaborations.
- More details are available (social network analysis maps).
- The English translation of the interview comes following the original Italian version.
- **Years of presence in the music sector:** since the 1980s - long
- **Degree of artistic activity (productions, collaborations in bands):** high
- **Degree of teaching activity:** high

Extracts

What is interplay to you? In your musical practice...

“It's listening, and it's interest in the fact that a common result comes out. And therefore there is no egocentrism, and so if interplay involves you staying still and quiet and not playing because the music benefits, that's what you do.”

“Interplay is probably the result, it's the goal, it's the overall communication. That's what it is for me.”

So when are you satisfied when you interplay?

“When the result is consistent. When the communication between those who are playing brings out a flow of sound that is meaningful to the listener, obviously not just to the player.”

Extracts

How do musicians interact when they interplay?

“If you know that I am the leader, you behave as a person who supports the leader, not as a subordinate (which is bad). And so the result is perhaps a foregone conclusion.”

“If, on the other hand, I am the leader first and then you are the leader, then the result may be less obvious, more interesting, more consistent...”

Implications for organisations and territories

- A crucial lesson that comes from our research on music interplay is the importance of publics building an appreciation of both listening and voice, as well as the value of listening to silence, that is listening to unspoken voices.

In the case of universities and Covid

- Academics and students match the alternate development and expression of their own voices with listening to the voices of each other.
- Paraphrasing ideas and explanations that we heard from musicians, participation by academics and students in addressing barriers to an effective learning environment entails a shared interest in achieving a common result, therefore no egocentrism, hence periods in which each person stays quiet and does not voice.
- Everyone is involved in leading - first one person leads, then another, all participants supporting whoever is leading at a point in time through listening, and voicing.
- There is an appreciation of silence – listening to silence – that entails each participant listening out for, and to, unspoken voices.

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