6-11-2011

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Recommended Citation
Ucbasaran, Deniz; Lockett, Andy; and Humphreys, Michael (2011) "LEADING ENTREPRENEURIAL TEAMS: INSIGHTS FROM JAZZ GROUPS (SUMMARY)," Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research: Vol. 31: Iss. 10, Article 2.
Available at: http://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol31/iss10/2

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LEADING ENTREPRENEURIAL TEAMS: Insights From Jazz Groups

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Principal Topic
Entrepreneurship scholars increasingly acknowledge that entrepreneurship is often a collective activity carried out by an entrepreneurial team, with positive effects on venture performance. We note the absence of studies that examine the role of leadership in these teams and echo Ensley et al.’s (2006) arguments that entrepreneurial opportunities cannot be exploited without the facilitation of individual and collective efforts through leadership. The growing body of work on entrepreneurial teams has tended to focus on issues surrounding team composition, team coordination (in particular conflict) and turnover (see Wright and Vanaelst, 2009). Unfortunately the micro-processes associated with these issues, and the role of leadership in these, is largely overlooked. Thus, we seek to explore how is leadership enacted in creative teams operating in dynamic environments?

Method
Our research is based on an inductive study that uses multiple-cases to examine closely how leaders in dynamic environments create and manage teams to maximize creativity and innovation. The empirical context of our research is the jazz band. Jazz is inherently and fundamentally a collective activity, which shares much in common with entrepreneurship, such as innovation, creativity and improvisation.

Initial data collection involved twenty in-depth semi-structured interviews with elite jazz musicians. Many interviewees frequently referred to a small number of significant band leaders. Therefore, we developed detailed cases on a number of these reference cases in a second phase of data collection; namely, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis and Art Blakey.

Results and Implications
Entrepreneurial teams and entrepreneurial leadership are two important contributors to successful entrepreneurial activity. To date, however, they have almost exclusively been studied separately, with little attention being paid to the leadership of entrepreneurial teams. In this study we seek to redress this by examining the processes associated with the enactment of team leadership in some of the world’s most successful jazz bands. Specifically, we examine the micro-processes of team leadership associated with team formation, team coordination and team turnover, in the context of a dynamic and rapidly changing environment. Our analysis attests to the importance of viewing the micro-processes of leadership as being interconnected, from which we draw out important lessons for research and practice.

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