

From Scrum to Orpheus: Team Knowledge of Member Strengths

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Observing the self-governance of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra extends beyond the seamless interactions of the orchestra's "core" structure, in which participants' observations of group performance are respectfully and harmoniously integrated into continuing play (see Seifert and Economy, 2001; Hackman, 2002). Verbal commentary supplements the musicians' direct experience of instrumental voices and permits a continuous quality-assurance process upon musical production, similar to the group-consensual process advocated in the "Scrum" model of software development (Schweber, 2005).

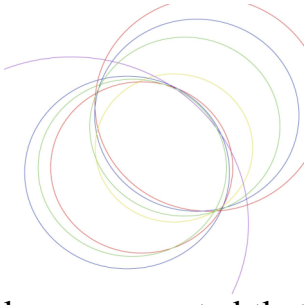
Also consistent with Scrum's autonomous team functioning are: 1) the bounded nature of Orpheus groupings, ranging from the Orchestra's full strength of 26, to the core of approximately 10; 2) the time limits of each iterative performance, with rehearsal periods crisply specified; and 3) the deliverable's tightly specified relation to an ideal to be interpreted. For Orpheus, the musical score presents an



omnipresent structure, which can be observed to focus rehearsal. This structuring within rehearsal's bounded time frame demands that the group both attend and agree to the obstacles presented by the music. Listening to members' rehearsal participations, one frequently hears a number called out, specifying a line of composition. Quickly "80" works back to "78" then to "75" as different players add their particular instrumental challenges to that section's obstacles. A quick integrative suggestion to begin at "75" is made, and the group plunges forward, only to stop and begin the process, repeatedly.

As with software's Scrum, the obstacles presented by the work task are a constant defining characteristic of ensemble performance. The continuity of the obstacle, problem, or interpretive conflict, is an ongoing awareness of Orpheus performers. Describing resolution of a difficult movement, an Orpheus member explained, "Its like a puzzle to be solved. Once solved here, it puts both earlier and later efforts into perspective" (Personal Communication, 2008).

During the first of three rehearsal observations for the Orpheus' new commission of Charles Wuorinen's "Synaxis", I wondered about the selection process within the Orchestra, either privileging a member to comment on the performance, or to be nominated to "listen" for feedback to the group. JR Hackman

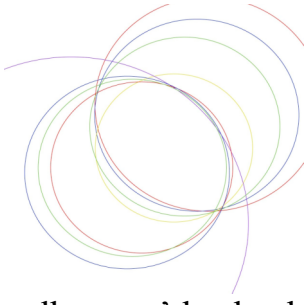


has commented that the democracy of the Orpheus process means neither a homogeneity of role nor authority. Members' rights are earned in relation to musical issues, based on talent, interest, and relative strength. He observes, "the orchestra's willingness to acknowledge, to respect, and to exploit the individual differences among its members is one of its greatest strengths" (Hackman, 2002, p.195).

The Tacit Nature of Social Perception

Making sense of what occurs in a team's social interaction, addresses the difficulty of participant observation. While it is hoped that the external observer recognizes what the participant sees, knows, and acknowledges, the externality of observational perspective may distort the clarity of task understanding. It is necessary both to have a clear point of view and to focus on specific observations- rather than on generalities- to achieve clear answers. Between my first observation of the Orpheus "core", and two other rehearsal observations, I carefully considered what I'd seen. My attempt was to consolidate what I understood, in order to frame hypotheses for further inquiry.

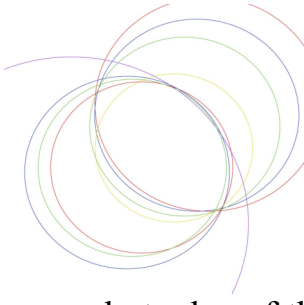
The shift from the core group during the first rehearsal, and the full orchestra, heightened my interest in leadership qualities recognized by members, in their



colleagues' leadership participations. My question to several Orpheus musicians concerned leadership during rehearsal at different moments. I described to each what I'd observed in as much detail as possible. Several of the leaders I'd seen--- who were also soloists in this performance--- had deep knowledge of the "New Music" that was the performance focus. Knowledge extended both to acquaintance with the composer and advocacy for Orpheus' programming of the composition. Not only were they commenting from their position as soloists relative to the orchestra, but also from deep content knowledge.

Orchestra members also commented on the differing personal styles of the violinists serving as concertmaster for different pieces. Would the choice of a particular composition--- especially a composition with which Orchestra members had much previous experience--- evoke great debate among musicians? If so, a concertmaster might be chosen based on personal strengths in reconciling disparate tastes. In a new piece involving difficult integration of orchestral sections, a concertmaster might be chosen based on personal strengths of firm direction and integration. Yet another piece, untried by the larger group, might best be overseen by a concertmaster with a firm directorial perspective.

At the core of Orpheus' collaborative teamwork is knowledge not only of the



game, but also of the team's situational leadership. Players rely not only on their own capacities, but also on their knowledge of teammates' capabilities, skills, and integrity. Such insider knowledge is the fulcrum upon which successful team choices often balance. This is social knowledge—the kind often assembled through an accurate 360 degree assessment. It is the tacit or explicit takeaway of social perception, through lived experience with others in groups. Often unstated, it is powerful and may determine the success of project management. It is the knowledge answering the question: which person in the eyes of which others, performs well under what circumstances?

References:

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Seifter, H. and Economy,P. (2001) Leadership Ensemble New York: Owl Books

