

A swing around turning points and direction.

One of my best friends always listens to ‘Sultans of Swing’ when we are drinking beer and, gradually, the famous Dire Straits-track has evolved into one of my favorites. The other day, I asked ChatGPT “why is ‘Sultans of Swing’ so good?” and received a list of seven arguments. For some reason, the third out these seven arguments struck me most: ‘Sultans of Swing’ is so good because it has “captivating storytelling” that “paints a picture” and “engages the listener”. Indeed, ‘Sultans of Swing’ is a story about a shabby jazz band with a grandiose name, something that is highlighted in the last part of the song:

And then the man he steps right up to the microphone,
And says at last just as the time bell rings,
"Goodnight, now it's time to go home",
Then he makes it fast with one more thing,
"We are the Sultans,
We are the Sultans of Swing".

Now, Mike Knopfler is not an ethnographer, and even less so a leadership researcher. However, it is possible to argue that his observations at a dingy jazz bar in London contains certain moments that fundamentally could be seen as “turning points” where different actors are accomplishing “direction”. Or, from my research on how leadership emerge through everyday interactions around innovation within one Swedish municipality – where I have focused specifically on turning points and direction – I could at least see that possible argumentation.

Although the concept *turning points* has become central within the theoretical field of *Leadership-as-Practice* (L-a-P) (Raelin 2019; Simpson 2016), and some empirical studies have developed it analytically (Lortie et al. 2022; Simpson et al. 2017; Sklaveniti 2020), it still seems difficult to specify without referring to another vague term such as “trajectories” or “direction” (Raelin & Robinson 2022). Interestingly, *direction* – or *accomplishing direction* (Alvehus & Crevani 2022) – is another recurring concept that has been emphasized as fundamental to all leadership definitions (Crevani 2018), especially as the research stream on collective leadership (Ospina et al. 2020) has shifted the ontological focus away from leaders, followers and their shared goals (Drath et al. 2008). Still, other than the loose metaphor of a (perhaps shabby) jazz band (Raelin 2014), an evident definition, or convincing empirical example, of accomplishing direction appears lacking. If leadership was an empty signifier (Kelly 2013) or Velcro (Alvehus 2021) before, it seems to have disguised as turning points and direction within L-a-P: Almost everything could be a turning point and actors are constantly accomplishing direction.

My research draws upon an ethnographic fieldwork, mainly consisting of observations, shadowing and audio recordings, within one Swedish municipality. I have primarily focused on the

'Innovation Squad', a small group who are working with innovation in the municipality's care and elderly care. While Sweden is facing challenges such as an ageing population (Hasselgren et al. 2021), and its public sector have been criticized for its expanding administration (Forssell & Ivarsson Westerberg 2014), leadership and innovation is generally portrayed as a solution (Torfing et al. 2016). In other words, with good leadership in the public sector, innovation should succeed and lead to an increasingly efficient care and elderly care.

In my initial analysis, I am not only searching for turning points where actors are accomplishing direction collectively in interactions, but I am also twisting the concepts of turning points and direction. For instance, I am also looking for *de-* and *pre-turning points* – instances where actors are not accomplishing direction. Additionally, I am trying to understand different definitions of direction, shifting between a more processual perspective, where actors are accomplishing direction temporarily (Crevani 2018), and conceptualizations connected to outcomes (Drath et al. 2008; Sergi 2016). I do so because empirically, it is difficult to separate turning points and accomplishing direction from administrative work.

In the paper and presentation that I would bring to ISLC, I would carefully examine excerpts from my empirical material and invite participants into a dialogue around fundamental questions such as “what is turning points?” and “what is direction?”. Hence, the discussion would be swinging around focal points such as: What are actors doing in those moments that could be labeled as turning points, how are they accomplishing direction and how could it be separated from administrative work? Of course, leadership and administration might be impossible to distinguish in a distinctive manner, however, we need to elaborate some kind of difference. Otherwise, the 'Innovation Squad' is either Sultans that constantly perform leadership or a dowdy group with a grandiose name.

(750 words)

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Social Creativity and Leadership in Star Architecture

Hanne Savolainen

Department of Management Studies
Aalto University School of Business
Ekonominaukio 1, 02150 Espoo, Finland
hanne.savolainen@aalto.fi

Niina Nurmi

Department of Industrial Engineering and Management
Aalto University School of Science
Maarintie 8, 02150 Espoo, Finland
niina.nurmi@aalto.fi

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Abstract

(Word count 750)

The star system, which sees the firm as a pyramid with a Designer on top, has little to do with today's complex relations in architecture and construction.

Denise Scott Brown, 1989

The traditional perception of architects as autonomous creative geniuses (Larson, 1993) overlooks the collaborative nature of design and construction work (Wiscombe, 2006; Pelkonen, 2012), which necessitates the collaboration of various professionals, such as architects, engineers, contractors, and other specialists. Creativity in architecture is not an act or characteristic of a single individual genius but rather a social act that emerges from collaborative efforts within a system of social relations (Glaveanu, 2013). Thus, the leading architect is not only a designer but also holds a leadership role. Yet, architectural education focuses primarily on the aesthetic and creative side of the work (Cuff, 1991), neglecting the development of leadership skills. This raises the question of how “star architects”, the creative geniuses, who also assume leadership roles, employ the social aspects of creativity in their work.

Existing research on leadership for creativity has predominantly been conducted in non-creative domains, leaving a gap in understanding leadership within inherently creative fields

(Vessey et al, 2014; Mainemelis et al., 2015). In this empirical study, we enrich the contextual sensitivity of the leadership for creativity literature by extending Glaveanu's (2010) "He, I, and We" -paradigms of creativity to the domain of architecture. Glaveanu's (2010) theory proposes three paradigmatic stages of creativity: the genius stage (referred as He), the creative person stage (referred as I), and the social stage (referred as We). The He-paradigm, which has traditionally been male-oriented, focuses on the ideal of an outstanding lone genius. In architecture, there is a longstanding tradition of celebrating individual "star architects" who are predominantly male (Heynen, 2012). The He-paradigm is followed by the I-paradigm, which maintains an individualistic focus but replaces the genius with a "normal" person, emphasizing personal attributes linked to creativity. Glaveanu (2010) further expands on these individual stages of creativity by introducing the social stage of the We-paradigm, arguing that creativity takes place within social relations, even for lone geniuses who are part of broader social groups and influences. In other words, while creativity is rooted in the individual, it thrives in a social context (Fischer et al., 2005).

This ongoing ethnographic study explores different leadership approaches in architecture firms. The first wave of the fieldwork took place in a Finnish architectural firm over a two-month period in spring 2023, followed by a round of in-depth interviews with the firm's partners and employees. The firm is both domestically and internationally awarded and led by two partners regarded as "stars" in their field. The first author, having 10 years of experience as a practicing architect and being a former employee of the case firm, assumed the insider role during the fieldwork, while the second author represented an outsider perspective.

Our initial findings shed light on the enactment of social creativity within the realm of star architecture. Based on our research, the two partners of the case firm, referred as Star 1 and Star 2, are not solitary geniuses working in a vacuum. However, their approaches to engaging in social creativity vary, ranging from instrumental to giving agency. Both Stars set a vision and hold the final decision-making power to themselves while heavily relying on subordinates to implement their visions. Star 1 draws inspiration to the vision mostly from his own aesthetic knowledge, which represents an embodied professional knowledge (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2007), leaving little room for social and collaborative development of the design. Consequently, the subordinates' roles become instrumental, resulting in disengagement. Star 2, on the other hand, sets the vision and guides the process towards his preferred outcome, providing a varying degree of agency to subordinates and encouraging them to use their own creative capabilities in creating alternatives. Star 2 leverages these alternatives to accelerate and develop his own creative thinking, lifting most of the ownership of the ideas to himself. While the approach of Star 2 is more flexible, it remains to some extent exploitative and restrictive.

In conclusion, our empirical study aims to provide valuable theoretical insights into social creativity and leadership in star architecture, enriching the understanding of creativity in inherently creative fields. By challenging the traditional discourse and expanding Glaveanu's paradigmatic stages of creativity, we emphasize the collaborative and social nature of

creativity within the architectural profession. This research has broader implications for the study of creativity in other creative domains and emphasizes the significance of inclusive leadership approaches in fostering social creativity.

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ISLC proposal – Anthony Ryan

Leadership Dynamics in a Chinese Music Scene: A Case Study on Punk Leadership

This presentation would respond to calls to look “beyond traditional entrepreneurial domains to other contexts” (Lingo, 2020, p. 997) and to contextualize and locally inform the study of entrepreneurship in China (Huang et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2019) by offering a comprehensive examination of leadership practices in China through the prism of an in-depth case study of a key entrepreneurial figure in the Chinese punk scene.

From a western perspective, the anti-authoritarian philosophy of Punk is not often associated with China and it sits outside of what we perceive as traditional notions of Chinese. However, figures within this scene have been active for over 20 years and have, in that time, furthered and sustained the scene by engaging in entrepreneurial practices and creating spaces where local and individual histories have been made and stored (Gallan & Gibson, 2013).

Drawing on studies which have been conducted on creative industries in other cultures and on subcultural movements and music scenes in societies such as Cuba (Dimou, 2014), Indonesia (Donaghey, 2016), Spain/Chile (Allimant & Castellano, 2020) and Melbourne, Australia (Gallan & Gibson, 2013) and on explorations of punk in non-Anglo-American societies (for example, Kolovos & Souzas, 2020), this presentation argues that these leaders are at the centre of multiple broad networks of actors within the scene, who work together to facilitate and grow music in China.

To contextualise the case, this presentation would first spotlight the DIY music scene in China as a fertile ground for the novel practice of leadership, highlighting the shifting “social typography” (Weber, 2002) of the last 40 years and the role of economic development and policy reforms since the late 1970s in reshaping the industry's landscape (Baranovitch 2003; de Kloet 2010). The core of the investigation will draw on interviews and participant observation at one key location to delve into the chosen leaders unique leadership strategies and their role as brokers and “cultural intermediaries” within their networks (Bourdieu, 1993).

The findings will open a window into the distinct leadership forms in the Chinese punk scene and stimulate conversations around the interplay between culture (and subculture) and leadership styles, the role of guanxi and network building in music scenes in China, the co-existence of tradition and modernity in leadership practices, and the transferability of these lessons to other industries or cultural settings.

The proposed research and presentation align with the conference's theme and aim, providing a rich, case-based exploration of leadership and networking practices within an often-overlooked industry and cultural context. I am confident that this contribution will

stimulate engaging dialogues and foster greater understanding of culturally nuanced leadership practices.

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