

Conductorless Singing Group: A particular kind of Self-Managed Team?

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Abstract:

Purpose: Coordination of group activity is rarely more important than in a singing group that has no designated conductor. This paper aims to explore the group dynamics in an 11-man singing group whose members, all over 60, have without exception occupied senior leadership positions in their working careers. The study arose because responses to a wider research study revealed interesting perceptions of leadership issues in the group.

Design/methodology/approach: All the members participated in semi-structured interviews and interpretative phenomenological analysis of the responses was used to process the responses. This enabled the identification of practices that support the group's success and illustrated how this group of practiced "leaders" respond to a (relatively) conductorless situation.

Findings: It was confirmed that the group exhibits several characteristics of self-managed teams and string quartets. All members felt empowered to take a lead, although their backgrounds might have predisposed them to take such initiatives anyway. But the long-serving female accompanist is, by virtue inter alia of her superior musicianship, which appears to overcome any gender bias, in many respects the de facto leader. In performance, the singers synchronize their singing in response to cues from each other, but this could work better if given more specific attention.

Originality/value: Whereas conducted choirs have been extensively studied, such a self-managed group of amateur singers, all of whom are accustomed to leading in their working careers, has apparently not been studied. This study sheds some light on techniques for overcoming the challenges of creating quality performance in such a group and insights for similar groups, not necessarily musical, are identified.

Keywords: Team management, Group behaviour, Self managing teams, Leadership roles, Singing groups

Introduction

In the corporate world, leadership by a Chief Executive Officer or Managing Director and a Board is usually assumed to be essential to long term success. How leaders relate to other people (Mast, *et al.*, 2012) and how they are able to take a holistic view of the company, including the contextual environment, the internal environment and the process system, could either derail or enhance success (Koh, 2013). This paper focuses on an amateur male voice singing group (11 members) in South Africa which has flourished for over four decades without an acknowledged leader or conductor.

In the Conductorless Singing Group (CSG) studied, all members have occupied senior or executive leadership positions in their careers: they could be described as a “leaderless group of experienced leaders”. The group has existed for over 40 years and members share an average service of over 20 years. Such a group is unusual where there seems to be a decline of singing among males in the West (Taberner, 2012). Concern at this decline starts with the lack of emphasis on singing in boys’ education – the topic of a whole conference in Australia in 2005 (Harrison, *et al.*, 2012). These authors subsequently collected relevant research and justified its publication by remarking in their introductory chapter: ‘In the last 100 years, the apparent lack of male voice involvement in mainstream vocal activity has been researched, evaluated and documented’ (Authors’ underlining). The CSG’s survival in a world so apparently hostile to the development of male singing suggests that the reasons for this were worth exploring.

Successful small music ensembles have existed for centuries with string quartets in particular being extensively studied as examples of self-managed teams (SMTs), doubtless inspired by the significant attention this phenomenon has received in the business context (Cohen *et al.* 1996). Tovstiga *et al.* (2005) comment ‘one does wonder why many modern business leaders simply do not succeed in pulling off what musicians have excelled at doing over the centuries’ (p.216).

This case study forms part of a wider research project *Spirituality and Well-being: Music in the community* for which questions centred around group membership, teaching and learning, connections to community and to spirituality. What emerged was particularly interesting in relation to members’ perceptions of leadership, teamwork and team dynamics. The authors believe that these are sufficiently significant to be reported separately, arising as they do in a research context different from typical corporate settings. This paper thus describes the complex dynamics in the group, most of whom are now retired from full-time employment. It

focuses on how these practiced “leaders” respond to a (relatively) conductorless (leaderless) situation. The authors draw on the established characteristics of a string quartet and on the SMT to formulate conclusions about leaderless singing groups, as there are scant models to learn from. The findings could improve the group’s teamwork and performance outcomes and may find an echo in corporate settings.

All the above factors contributed to the belief that this analysis was well worth undertaking.

Literature review

An important feature of group singing activity relates to learning to sing in parts, which requires members to memorise the score for performances. The score in a vocal ensemble, like that of a string quartet, “has the highest possible reliability” (Badino et al. 2014, p.103). This process is assisted by the CSG’s division into the four basic voices for male groups, namely High Tenors, Second Tenors, Baritones and Basses. Members of each subgroup are significantly dependent on one another as individuals learn and memorise at different rates and with unequal facility.

There is no obvious single line of research that deals with dynamics in such an amateur group of singers, each of whom is a leader in his own right, albeit in another area of endeavour.

Although leadership and (small) group dynamics are well represented in the literature, even the encyclopaedic work of Donelson Forsyth (2016) makes no reference to singing. An apparently obvious source is research on SMTs, but the very label suggests the notion of management in a production environment, rather than one of shared enjoyment and performance which characterises the CSG. String quartets – much more comparable to the CSG – have received exhaustive attention when viewed as SMTs, and this proved useful (Cohen, *et al.*, 1996; Gilboa and Tai-Schmotkin, 2010 and Tai-Schmotkin and Gilboa, 2013).

Reference points in research on work design and teamwork in the workplace, particularly as

they relate to SMTs, were informative. The Functional Leadership Framework emerging from a review by Morgeson *et al.* (2010) provided a useful basis for identifying the various leadership roles revealed in the CSG.

Small Group Dynamics and Leadership

Numerous studies and guidelines are available on the management of dynamics in successful choirs (Davis, 1998; Decker and Kirk, 1995; Ginsborg, *et al.*, 2006; Guise, 2000) and Volpe, D'Ausilio, Badino, Camurri and Fadiga, 2016), have summarised analyses of a variety of small instrumental ensembles from duos to quartets from classical, popular and jazz genres. Small groups of singers (usually four to six members) are almost inevitably self-managed, but do not feature in academic literature. Singing groups/choirs of all sizes typically have a Director/Conductor who, with or without a support group of sub-leaders, takes the initiative in most aspects of the management of the performing group (Guise, 2000). These can include musical aspects such as choice of repertoire and arrangement selection, organizational aspects such as auditions and rehearsals as well as actual conducting of performances, and even finding performance venues, sponsors and marketing.

The extensive analysis of research conducted by Parker *et al.* (2017) in the field of work design describes an evolution in team formation and management that matches the development of workplace culture and technology. No such trend is visible in work on the performing arts, especially for amateurs, where the objective is more related to personal gratification, which was confirmed in the results of the overall survey from which this research project grew. However, those factors that develop team spirit in any group activity are clearly at work in groups of singers and in other musical ensembles. (Blatt, 2014; Eck, 2016; Zander, 2011).

Self-Managed Teams (SMTs)

The concept of a “self-directed” or “self-managed” work team (SMT) is widely discussed in business literature. It is typically defined as a ‘self-determining, permanent, cross-functional group of employees (usually six to ten) that shares the responsibility for a particular product or service an organization produces’ (Frankforter and Christensen, 2005, p.22). SMTs have found favour in many businesses for providing greater efficiency than the conventional hierarchical management structure (Tata and Prasad, 2004; Wageman, 1997) especially when the process of appointing them satisfies key criteria. However, all this happens in the context of an organizational power structure, where the SMT needs to be empowered by management (Gilboa and Tai-Schmotkin, 2010; Maes and van Hootegem, 2011), be provided with resources, and adhere to organizational objectives and controls (quite different from the situation of the CSG). A particular SMT characteristic, however, is empowerment to be responsible for a “whole” work process, delivering a product or service to an internal or external customer (Wellins, *et al.*, 1991). This aspect resonates with the CSG in that a musical performance can well be described as a whole product, delivered to an external audience, with regular rehearsals offering internal support for members.

Although the questions used as prompts in the interviews were not specifically structured to reveal aspects of team performance, the authors were gratified to discover a means of integrating the participants’ responses via the Functional Leadership Framework model of Morgeson *et al.* (2010). Their Framework was developed by integrating existing research on how leadership can manifest itself within a team. It was driven by the view that such leadership needs to be related to the various functions executed in a well-performing team and that they can arise from several sources. They discovered that there are 15 identifiable functions that recur in two major phases of activity labelled as Transitional or Action. The Transitional phase includes evaluation or planning functions, whereas the Action phase

emphasises functions that lead directly to the achievement of team objectives. The long life of the CSG means that the group cycles through Transitional and Action phases from time to time.

The sources of each function are weighted according to its importance in relation to its Formality (Formal/Informal) and Locus (Internal/External). Because the group is not subject to external leadership, except as derived from audience response, and has no acknowledged formal leader, the relevant functions could all be classified as Informal and Internal, as follows:

Transitional Phase: Compose team, Establish expectations and goals, Structure and plan, Train and develop team, Provide feedback. *Defining a mission* was omitted because the history of the group well precedes the adoption of this practice in management. *Sensemaking*, as defined by Morgenson *et al*, relates to major disruptive events in the internal or external environment and these were absent from the recent life of the group, so this aspect was also omitted.

Action Phase: Monitor team, Challenge team, Perform team tasks, Solve problems, Provide resources, Support social climate. *Managing group boundaries* and *encouraging self-management* were omitted as being irrelevant in the life of the CSG.

The String Quartet as SMT

Dynamics and power relationships in string quartets have been extensively studied (Gilboa and Tai-Schmotkin, 2010; King, 2006; Seddon and Biasutti, 2009, Timmers, Endo, Bradbury and Wing, 2014). According to Volpe et al (2016, p.2), “String quartets are deemed a significant example of self-managed teams, where all musicians equally contribute to a task”. The high standard of cooperation in a string quartet is described by no less a musician than Sir Yehudi Menuhin in these terms:

The quality of listening, the quality of ‘teamwork’, of adjusting to one another, of recognizing the main voice wherever it may be, of reconciling the different accents and inflections, and purity of intonation, is unequalled by any other ensemble except perhaps human voices themselves (Menuhin, 1996, p.248).

This link between the string quartet and a vocal group is central to this paper.

Most recently, Tai-Schmotkin and Gilboa (2013) used a model and questionnaire based on Cohen *et al.* (1996) to confirm that string quartets can indeed be viewed as SMTs. An intensive, broader-based investigation undertaken by Tovstiga *et al.* (2005) who studied the Carmina Quartet of Zurich, explored not only power dynamics in a quartet, but also their sense-making approach in rehearsal and performance. They describe a string quartet as a ‘dual dichotomy comprising individual-collective interactions and tacit-explicit knowledge processes’ (p.1). Although their study of the string quartet was aimed at better understanding of small group dynamics in business, some of the concepts, constructs and conflicts these authors discern in the quartet have been instructive in studying the CSG. Narrative research on singing groups abounds, but the literature provides few, if any, examples of in-depth study of their dynamics and success factors. However, the Menuhin (1996) and Tovstiga *et al.* (2005) insights on SMTs provide useful links to the group under examination.

Also of interest is the work of McCaleb (2014) relating to signals between members of music performing groups. He proposed a three stage framework, reinterpreted below for use by a small group of singers, especially where the three members in each of the four ‘voices’ stand close together and can readily turn slightly to look at each other. This is important because singers lack the larger scale body movements of string or brass instrumentalists. (McCaleb plays the bass trombone.)

McCaleb (2014, p100) identifies 3 Primary Stages of Inter-reaction, adapted for a singing group:

1. *Transmitting*: Just as instrumentalists' movements in operating an instrument are dynamically related to their musical intention, so can singers anticipate the words that they are about to sing with body positioning to emphasise enthusiasm, humour or even romance. The resultant combination of visual and aural cues informs other voice parts as well as focusing the audience's attention.
2. *Inferring*: Such positioning, with vocal tones and volumes in the singing, convey actual and intended musical nuances to fellow singers.
3. *Attuning*: Other singers can infer what is coming in the interpretation, making necessary adjustments to their performance.

From the evaluation of the collected data two research questions arose:

1. What dynamics in the CSG have enabled it to flourish for decades without an acknowledged leader, and what insights can be used to inform the learning and performing proficiency of this and other such groups?
2. Without models for leaderless singing groups, can conclusions drawn from the studies of string quartets be applied to this amateur singing group?

The Conductorless Singing Group (CSG)

Located in Pretoria, South Africa, the group comprises eleven males, all over sixty years old at the time of the study, from a variety of business and professional backgrounds including university professor, High Court judge, business CEO, MD or other senior executive, diplomat and managing partner in a professional firm. They sing two, three, four and five part songs across the voice range and from a wide spectrum of genres in several languages. The founding singer has been involved since the group's inception, 44 years ago, the other "original" member being the accompanist, a female, retired music teacher. Mean service of

singers in the group is about 20 years and the two most recent recruits have participated for four years.

The group meets weekly for 90 minutes in the early evening and presents one or two public performances a year plus a number of others for less public audiences including retirement centres and private parties. Any income in the form of ticket sales at public concerts and donations at private functions is given to various charities and group members pay their own expenses.

In the authors' previous overall study (Authors, 2018), the respondents identified reasons for joining and remaining in the group, which included a love of singing, especially in a group, and the fellowship of like-minded individuals with similar origins and backgrounds. Their shared activity includes learning new pieces, rehearsing for performances, and the performances themselves.

Methodology of the study

Tools

As already indicated, this study emerged from a wider study for which the second author, who resides in Australia, had prepared open-ended questions that were used as a semi-structured interview guide. Questions were short and clear to achieve reliability and validity and were 'in line with the targeted population's vernacular and avoid[ed] problems such as double-barreled questions' (Bird, 2009, p.1311). Open-ended questions are very appropriate for research on a smaller scale, eliciting genuine personal comment (Cohen, *et al.*, 2000, p.255). The use of interviews allowed participants to tell their stories, describe their views of reality and give expression to their thoughts, commitments and feelings in their own words (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Crabtree and Miller, 1999).

Most of the questions from the wider study focused on enjoyment and well-being and these have been reported elsewhere (Authors, 2018). In this study the authors explored how and why the CSG has flourished for decades without an acknowledged leader, and sought insights that can inform the learning and performing proficiency of this and other such groups. In this context, only the following three questions were deemed relevant:

What are some of the highlights or lowlights of working with the choir director/accompanist?

What repertoire do you perform and why?

Who decides on the repertoire and what do you contribute?

Participants

All eleven singing members and the accompanist were interviewed. The first author, a group member, interviewed the singers; the third author interviewed the accompanist, well-known to her personally: both first and third authors reside in South Africa. Interviewees could thus share views with someone with whom they are familiar and have had a long-standing relationship.

Procedure

Ethical approval for the study was granted by Deakin University and the authors provided each participant with the approved Plain Language Statement and Consent Form. All interviewees consented to participating in the interviews, which took place between February and May 2015. Mind maps were used to record responses; data was then compiled into a series of statements for validation by the interviewees.

The authors used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a qualitative analytical approach to the data. IPA is phenomenological in that it seeks insider perspectives on the

lived experiences of individuals and recognizes that their beliefs should not be seen as biases to be eliminated but rather as necessary for making sense of the experiences of other individuals (Fade, 2004; Smith *et al.*, 2009). IPA also seeks to uncover meanings that go beyond those that participants might themselves articulate (Taylor, 2014, p.2; Joseph (2014, p.157) and challenges the researcher to listen, understand and trust the “participants” voice’ when interpreting the data.

Participants’ views were analysed by all three authors and then grouped into tables (Smith and Osborn, 2015). As per IPA analysis style, the findings are often described or justified on the basis of quotations (Pringle, 2011; Pugh, 2009).

Findings

The overall analysis of the wider study had been found to emphasise communication, collegiality, camaraderie and collaboration in improving the musical output of the team (Authors, 2018), and this provides a context for the findings in this paper where the focus was more specifically on leadership roles as they contribute to team performance.

The first question was directed specifically to the “Choir director” and the “Accompanist” and the data were grouped thematically in relation to these categories, as well as to Differences between rehearsals and performances, Similarities between the CSG and a String Quartet, and Correlations between the Functional Leadership Framework and the CSG.

The Administrator/Facilitator/Leader/Director

Responding to the interview guide’s call for comments on highlights and lowlights relating to the ‘Director’, several members observed, unprompted, that there is ‘no such thing as a Director’ and offered alternative designations for the member who strives to organize the group’s work. (This accounts for the string of options in the above heading.) Although one member was willing to use the term Director, this was only if prefaced with ‘*primus inter*

paes'. The words Facilitator, Co-ordinator and Organizer were suggested as alternatives. A member who has played this role previously identified the reasons as: 'Group size, competency and dynamics have led to the group not having a Director but rather an Administrator.' This latter term will be used in what follows.

The present Administrator was identified by general consent, but – presumably as with his predecessors – has had to mark out his own territory. In his words: 'Although I have no formal designation ... I play a leadership role in the group; organizing rehearsals and performances and providing input into the accuracy and quality of our singing.' His commitment to practical aspects of the task attracts positive responses: 'Does a good organizing job under difficult circumstances' and 'Performs a necessary function.' One commented with an apparent sense of how the task is circumscribed: 'He does what he does well.'

The function of the Administrator is challenged by members' backgrounds, described by one as 'We are all accustomed to being in/taking charge', i.e. giving, not taking, instructions. Another member showed a more sympathetic awareness of the challenges presented by this group of experienced leaders observing that he '... realises that the Group culture is that we are all chiefs and that we tolerate direction only if it is done discreetly and (he) has adapted his style to suit.'

Not all comments were this complimentary, as in 'inclined to be school master-like' or 'I dislike his "direction" when the group performs as it makes us appear to be a choir'. In addition to being former Chiefs, retirees in general tend also to see things in their own way and avoid direction. These two members had clearly not bought into their colleagues' recognition of the Administrator's ability to adapt to the situation.

Responses to the Administrator's efforts to provide 'inputs into the accuracy and quality of our singing' are nevertheless supportive. Two comments were: 'I admire his effectiveness and his good ear for music' and 'He works hard at maintaining momentum and improving standards.' As for the Administrator's authority, one member noted specifically: 'Defers to the accompanist'.

In summary, although the Administrator performs appreciated functions in the CSG, he is not regarded as providing overall leadership: no other member formally acknowledges him as a leader, despite his own claim to a leadership role.

The Accompanist/Musical Director

Leadership roles, as set out for a Conductor under *Small Group Dynamics and Leadership* above, are not well defined in this group, but singing members all defer to the musicality and technical insight of the Accompanist, who thus qualifies *de facto* as the undisputed, if informal, Musical Director as well as voice coach, repetiteur and major influence in repertoire selection. The question 'What are some of the highlights or lowlights of working with the accompanist?' elicited only highlights, ranging from the affirming to the lavish. Expressions included 'Her rating is 100%', and 'Have only good words for her'. Members admire her musical ability, a good example being one's declaration that 'I have an exceptionally high opinion of ... [her] ... musicality and ability to interpret pieces', an attribute that another described as 'constantly amazing'. The musical rigour and attention to detail she developed as a music teacher is clearly enough to earn respect when working only with high profiled males!

Such is their respect for her views that not only do some members express appreciation for her 'interventions' and 'constructive criticisms', but others plead for them to be more frequent: 'It would be an advantage to spend more time heeding her comments and

implementing them'. One member was even more emphatic: she doesn't 'take charge' enough and should interact more directly with individuals in rehearsal. This latter refers to the fact that she never personalises any comment on learning or performance.

That she receives high praise for her patience and long-suffering, also 'never losing her cool', clearly contributes to her sustained influence and effectiveness. Only one member detected a more assertive stance, remarking that she is 'feisty and courageous', but this may have referred more to her personality and behaviour in general than to her role vis-à-vis the group.

The above makes it easy to understand recurrent expressions of appreciation for the Accompanist, including 'She is a tonic', 'We are privileged to have her'. It also sketches the challenge of an accurate description for her role. 'Accompanist' is clearly inadequate, because her direction is consistently sought and respected, albeit offered mostly in a helpful and supportive, rather than directive, style.

Differences between rehearsals and performances

The group shares with a string quartet the characteristic that the dynamics in rehearsals and performances are very different (Butterworth, 1990; Gilboa and Tai-Schmotkin, 2010; Tovstiga *et al.*, 2005).

- ***Rehearsal:*** Although there is usually a formal list of scores that members are meant to bring to a particular rehearsal, the time required on a particular piece is a frequent topic of discussion, often very animated, as members' learning rates and patience cover a considerable range. In rehearsals the score is the "one main source of common information" that holds the ensemble together in performances. (Badino *et al.* 2013). Comments on dynamics and accuracy are led by the Accompanist and the Administrator, but all members contribute – usually unprompted and not always with agreement from the others. The Administrator

sometimes offers a gesture to start any difficult piece or entry, but as music becomes more familiar, the group tends to work on cues heard or otherwise perceived from each other.

- **Performance:** The group prefers avoiding the use of scores in performance, believing memorised music to be more expressive; performance style focuses as much on entertainment as on musical quality. A cue sheet providing some words – particularly the start of verses in a many verse piece – is, however, placed on a music stand in front of the group. Start signals are often contributed by the founder member, with variable success because, due to the way they stand, gestures are not always visible to all members, nor do they pay full attention because their focus may be on the audience. Entries are thus managed mostly by memory and cues from the accompaniment or other members of a voice part.

Discussion and observations to improve future performance of this SMT

Similarities between the CSG and a String Quartet

The following extracts from Tovstiga *et al.* (2015) are accompanied by italicised comments relating generally to the CSG (the three bullet points and the text under them, apart from that in italics, are quotes from their paper).

- **The string quartet is a unique organizational form:**

- a It is self-governing and inherently non-hierarchical. *In rehearsal the Accompanist's inputs are respected but performance involves all 11 singing members and the Accompanist influences only tempi. The CSG's correspondence to a string quartet is thus accurate in this respect.*

- b It features structures, processes, competencies and unique cultural attributes that rely on implicit mechanisms of interaction and exchange of knowledge. *This*

applies, if at lower intensity, to the CSG, In particular, bowing movements and other gestures are much more visible in a string quartet.

c Its task is extremely intense, immediate ('here and now') and complete, and its members are reciprocally interdependent. *This applies fully to the CSG as is also evident in some of the literature on string quartets (Seddon and Biasutti, 2009, Timmers, et al., 2014; Volpe, et al, 2016).*

• **The string quartet represents an intense work group (when in performance):**

a High levels of individual responsibility and expertise are coupled with an intense interdependency and respond in real time to ... continually changing conditions that demand on-the-fly decision-making of the type typically found in senior management environments. *This applies to the CSG but at lower intensity, because the musicality demands on amateur singers tend to be lower than on string-players.*

b String quartets evolve and innovate continually; performances provide opportunities for the testing of new ideas; the performance environment is highly contextual (here-and-now). *This also applies to the CSG.*

• **The string quartet must 'accept, confront and manage' a host of inherently**

'non-resolvable' paradoxes typically found in top management settings, including:

a The issue of leadership versus democracy. *This is very much present in the CSG, as indicated in various ways, above.*

b Resolution of group conflict through combinations of confrontation and compromise. *This is also very present in the CSG.*

As can be seen, there are clear similarities between the dynamics in the CSG, and a string quartet (Parker et al. 2017; Tata and Prasad, 2004). However, because musical challenges are fewer, those concerned with interpretation are at a lower intensity. The Second Research Question has thus been answered in the affirmative.

Correlations between the Functional Leadership Framework and the CSG

Considering all the above findings and discussion, each of the leadership functions deemed to be relevant to the CSG could be attributed to the Administrator, the Accompanist or the full Group, as is reflected in the Table. Where functions are not unique the principal source is identified with a ‘P’ and the lesser source(s) with an ‘m’.

Table: Attribution of functions to Roles in the CSG

	Roles		
Function	Administrator	Accompanist	Group
Transitional			
Compose Team	m	m	m
Structure and Plan	P	P	m
Establish Expectations	m	P	
Train and Develop	m	P	
Provide feedback	P	P	m
Action			
Monitor	m	m	m
Challenge	m	P	m
Perform	m	m	m
Solve problems	m	m	m
Provide Resources	P	m	m
Support Social Climate	m	m	m

Analysis has highlighted the extent to which leadership functions are distributed in the group, with members spontaneously assuming various leadership roles from time to time. The distribution of functions reflected in the table thus helps to explain why the CSG is persuaded that it is leaderless. The many cases where the Accompanist is accorded a Primary (P) role confirm that such leadership as exists comes mostly from her.

The work on SMTs and the string quartet, as a ‘musical’ example of an SMT, resonates with the CSG consisting of practiced “leaders” who respond to the (relatively) leaderless situation in the group. With a track record of more than 40 years, still continuing strongly, something must be going right: whatever the problems of an eleven-man conductorless group, this ensemble seems to have overcome them and the SMT/string quartet comparisons illustrate this.

As in corporate settings, meeting regularly, building trust and some diverse ideas may contribute to the group’s effectiveness. Over the years, regular rehearsals can contribute to effective and collaborative teamwork. Having explored potential benefits of ‘Music in Meetings’, van Niekerk and Page-Shipp (2013, p.6) conclude that

Trying to achieve consensus and cooperation with everyone in different moods is always difficult. However making music together can help in such situations, as it will lead to the diminution of strong feelings of self – ‘boundary loss’..... Those making music together mould their minds and bodies into a shared emotional state, and with that comes some loss of self-identity and a concomitant increase in the ability to cooperate with others.

The locus and source of leadership: An obvious success factor is the male members’ respect for their long-standing (long-suffering?) female accompanist, both as a person and as a musician. She has, with one exception, at least 15 years more experience than any members.

All of them – none with any professional level musical skills – view hers with a special awe, always seeking her acknowledgement of performance improvements. One member articulated this as ‘We do respect her opinion in this (and she is not easy to please)’ – this said despite the allegation, quoted above, that she ‘Doesn’t “take charge” enough’ attests to qualities and characteristics of a ‘leading musician’, or in more general terms, a recognised technical specialist.

In organizational contexts, the main feature of SMTs is that ‘the responsibility and authority usually vested in a supervisor is transferred to the members’ (Maes and van Hootegem, 2011). The CSG has no organizational context in which such a transfer can occur; members have to assume or attribute responsibility and authority in other ways. Respect for the Accompanist’s professionalism seems to be the social lubricant that ensures her authority – at least musically. In fact, she provides the reference authority that, in workplaces, would come from higher management. This point will be expanded later.

The psychology of her leadership status is interesting. She comes from a line of competent women, her mother having been the sole female university graduate in her 1919 class. Women’s suffrage arrived when she was a toddler. Perhaps one can conclude that she has always been ready for, and when opportunity arose able to demonstrate, leadership. Though the focus of this paper is not on women in leadership, it is pertinent that, since the advent of South Africa’s democracy in 1994, the role of female leaders has attracted much attention, especially gender parity in political leadership. This has not been similarly reflected in other structures, especially business, and the percentage of women in leadership roles in South Africa (Lagerberg, 2015, p.5) has been static around 27% for the last decade. Although this is decried as too low, the men in the group have had to become increasingly accustomed to female colleagues taking leadership roles. Add the Accompanist’s acknowledged superior musicianship, and the outcome is not surprising.

The Accompanist does not, however, have a leadership role entirely to herself. Several members, including the Administrator, have, and do not hesitate to express, opinions on musical performance aspects. In this respect group behaviour especially resembles that of a string quartet. Butterworth (1990) undertook a case study of the Detroit String Quartet, for example, using observations and interviews, to learn how it worked as a team. Members experienced a strong sense of collective responsibility without a supervisor or manager constraining their choices. Where expressions of opinion in the CSG coalesce, one could attribute this power to the group. In other cases members seek the Accompanist's view, treating it as final.

Returning to the positioning of the Accompanist's authority, it is helpful to refer to Tovstiga *et al.*'s list of characteristics. Comment needs to be modified in the light of insights from this study:

The string quartet (singing group) is a unique organizational form, self-governing and inherently non-hierarchical. This is shown to be only partially true, because of the respect the CSG display towards the Accompanist's musicality. This affirms that her role can be seen as somewhat analogous to that of higher management above an SMT.

Other aspects: In a conductorless group certain important ensemble activities need to take place, such as timing of entries and tempo adjustments. In this group's case tempi can be led from the piano, but entries need to be particularly accurate. Timmers *et al.* (2014, p.2) argue that even for ensembles with conductors who cue in entries "it is still likely that individuals distribute their attention, responding to and correcting for asynchronies with other members of the ensemble". Synchronising starting notes is the most obvious in vocal or instrumental ensembles. Small groups such as the internationally renowned King's Singers show little overt evidence of how they achieve this, but they are sufficiently expert musically and small

in number (6) to be able to sense breathing or minor body movement from one of the group; they stand in a shallow arc to sing. The CSG stand in two rows, the back row mounted on platforms: only obvious gestures are visible to all. These need to be sparing, with “conductor-behaviour” not popular in the group. Despite this, body language (in relation to posture, eye contact, head movement and breathing gestures) has served as an effective mechanism in the group’s success and longevity. In this way members adapt to each other in a dynamic and mutual way “as a self-managed or self-organizing team” (Timmers et al. 2014; Gilboa and Tal-Shmotkin 2010). Entries by one of the “voices” are easier to coordinate because the smaller number of singers involved in each case can use a “King’s Singers” mode. The full array of what Volpe et al. (2014) describe as ‘sensorimotor messages’ are obviously available, even if unwanted.

The management of rehearsals requires greatest sensitivity: some management being essential for progress to occur. Comments show that the present Administrator is mostly discreet enough with his efforts in this connection.

It is useful to view the process of learning and polishing pieces under the rubric of group sense-making. Goerner, one of the co-authors in Tovstiga *et al.* (2005, p.217), asserts

when an ensemble performs a piece, it creates a musical space, in which the audience is invited to participate by virtue of the audience’s own imagination ... the music is already there in the room; it just needs to be made audible.

Although no interviewee made the point explicitly, this perception may be tacitly present and account for the group’s desire not to have a conductor intrude on their shared sense-making efforts.

There are other powers that need to be granted or assumed for the sake of progress. These include the purely administrative, such as provision of scores, the ‘directive’, viz the

management of practice sessions, and the consultative (negotiation of gigs, obviously applicable to the functioning of any SMT).

Audience responses to CSG performances are perceived to be good, and sometimes very good, such as to ‘uplift the spirits’ of members. It has also been observed that, when any piece has been performed a number of times it comes off much better than after rehearsals alone. Without necessarily noticing this, the group appears able to improve interpretation and technicalities such as timing of entries under learning-in-action conditions. This would seem to affirm the observation of McCaleb (2014), in his studies of embodied knowledge, that physical movements, in his case relating to the management of an instrument, can go beyond the coordination of timing to the coordination of interpretation (Authors’ underlining).

Though the group rehearses only weekly, connections between members over decades makes it easier to read subtleties that enhance timing and interpretation, making the performance work for the sake of the music. However, it will probably be instructive for the group to pay more explicit attention to this matter, not leaving it to ad hoc comments.

Answering Research Question 1, the Functional Leadership Framework shows significant distributed leadership – as expected from an SMT. In aspects requiring advanced musicality, members find it easier to defer to the Accompanist, apparently because of the high regard they have for her subtle but telling intervention style as well as her musical skills. The reluctance to take such a lead from the Administrator may be a response to a real or assumed peer challenge. Anyone wanting to take a lead amongst a peer group of experienced leaders in singing-group mode would thus be well advised to be subtle and indirect. Superior music skills are an obvious advantage.

This group could make more use of body language in providing cues. A more conscious approach to coordination of entries by better attention to other members’ body language may

improve performance quality. If the group so chooses, there are lessons to be learnt and the work of McCaleb will be a useful source for leaderless singing groups.

This analysis of results that emerged unexpectedly from another study opens a new area of exploration, viz of leadership in performing arts groups without an acknowledged leader. In this case it appears that many leadership functions are shared amongst group members, but on the key issue of musical performance and interpretation, the singers accept the leadership of the Accompanist, who is effective because of her subtlety, combined with a high level of skill.

Although many members' responses are thoughtful and insightful, they are not shared to any significant extent. Certainly the issue of performance cues would seem to be worth sharing more openly.

Finding other essentially similar groups to extend the study is challenging, *inter alia* because of the paucity of male voice groups, as mentioned earlier.

Summary

This study has:

- Confirmed the expectation that CSG dynamics reveal parallels with those of the string quartet as an SMT, although the level of musicality required in a string quartet is higher.
- Demonstrated that the Morgenson et al Functional Leadership Framework, with its emphasis on multiple sources of leadership, provides relevant insights into the dynamics of teams outside the commercial/industrial production environment.
- Indicated that, despite the power competition in a group of (former) "chiefs", this "leaderless" male ensemble works as a collective whole with mutual tolerance of each other's views. Doubtless a love of singing, especially in a group, and the fellowship

of like-minded individuals with similar origins and backgrounds contributes to this, one respect in which the CSG does not resemble a work-environment SMT.

- Highlighted the special role of greater technical music expertise, relative to the singing members, of the Accompanist who enjoys ultimate authority resembling that of external higher management in a work environment. . Her expertise, knowledge and personality appear to be overriding influences, coupled with her firm but not challenging style. These attributes and services are lessons to be learnt for the workplace. In this case a technical specialist with good people skills has provided expertise to a group of relative amateurs, and played a central, but not dominant role.
- Suggested that some aspects of group music-making, eg response to visual cues from other members of the group, deserve more attention as a means of improving critical timing on entries in the CSG.

Working towards a common big picture such as a musical performance requires leadership and brings immense satisfaction to both performers and listeners. Even in the corporate world, leadership takes practice; the Conductorless Singing Group has certainly not stopped practicing.

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