

Organizations in crises may benefit from jazz ensemble model

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Organizational leaders may benefit from operating more like a jazz ensemble during crises in order to utilize their resources in unconventional ways, according to new research from Rice University.

"When a [crisis](#) hits, getting jazzy will help leaders in any industry adapt and positively transform their organizations," said Scott Sonenshein, the Henry Gardiner Symonds Professor of Management at Rice's Jones Graduate School of Business and lead author of the study [published](#) in the *Academy of Management Journal*.

"Leaders can unlock the hidden potential of existing resources by viewing them through new lenses and emerge from the crisis with better financials and higher team morale."

The research team studied two prominent performing arts organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, examined how they responded to adversity, and found that the actions of [management](#) and leadership significantly affect how employees can respond to crises as well as the organization's bottom line.

During a crisis, established organizations are presented the opportunity to reject their conventional processes or actions and transform routines in creative ways, Sonenshein said. For instance, the Houston Symphony abandoned the typical long-term planning measured in years and shifted to planning in weeks. This allowed it to become more flexible and "jazzy," which led to new content and new patrons.

The study also found that the Houston Symphony moved to new forms of music and presentation styles with the help of creative employees. The [leadership](#) at the symphony focused on transparency during the process, which fostered strong trust between management and employees, further enabling the organization to experiment with its resources and make quick decisions.

Agency, or a sense of control of circumstances, was fostered through a "can-do attitude," tenacity and an experimental mindset which prompted members to make the most of what was available, according to the

paper. Members of one of the symphonies surveyed said they felt empowered to opportunistically work within existing resources at the symphony to tackle the restrictions that came with the pandemic. Because members trusted management, they could take risks despite the uncertainty during the pandemic.

"We owe a lot to our management and our musician-elected committees ... not just to give up on it and say like, 'We can't handle anything at all, we can't take any risks,'" said a surveyed member.

The paper's findings unpack critical mechanisms and processes that explain whether and how organizations act resiliently over time, Sonenshein said.

More information: Scott Sonenshein et al, When the Symphony Does Jazz: How Resourcefulness Fosters Organizational Resilience during Adversity, *Academy of Management Journal* (2023). [DOI: 10.5465/amj.2022.0988](https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2022.0988)

Provided by Rice University

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