

New Directions in Leadership Research Conference

INSEAD

2nd and 3rd June 2017

Author:

Noah Askin, INSEAD

Paper title:

What the production and reception of popular culture can tell us about (creative) leadership

Abstract:

What are the contexts and conditions that foster the creation and subsequent popularity of creative outputs? Across organizations and up and down their hierarchies, managers and leaders want more creativity from their employees, despite often doing whatever they can to control those employees and inhibit their creativity. “Be more creative” or “empower people” provide little in the way of guidance as to what creativity looks like and how it gets recognized in social contexts. To begin to provide some answers to these questions, I share insights gleaned from two separate studies of the creation and performance of popular music. Using a unique and vast data set comprising a large percentage of the known, recorded (Western) music from the past 60 years, I first look how musicians’ differentiated positions in social, cultural, organizational, and geographic networks affect their propensity to create novel products. Then I look at how the acoustic features of musicians’ output (i.e., songs) contribute to the kind of optimal differentiation that appears to be a key driver of popular performance. Evidence suggests that different network affiliations and positions have varying effects on artists’ ability to generate novelty, and that some degree of novelty—but not too much—is necessary for songs to ultimately “catch on” and spread.