

Organizing the World's Largest Songwriting Camp: From a KM Perspective

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Abstract: In June 2024 the worlds' largest songwriting camp took place in a small town in Norway. The main organizer is a small music production company called the Woods. Although having organized more than 100 "ordinary" music camps, this was -by far- be the largest one, with approximately 153 participants from approximately 20 countries. The logistics alone is nothing less than challenging. This study will focus on the knowledge management perspective regarding the organizing, and we have through a qualitative study interviewed the main organisers. Our perspective has been to unveil how they plan for, coordinate and organize the participants as well as keeping track of the different groups' progress regarding developing songs.

Keywords: Project Management, Knowledge Sharing, Coordinating Processes

1. Introduction

Sometimes songs take a long time to be finished. Then it needs to be recorded and produced before the marketing and publishing. At The Woods, who is a company specializing in producing and publishing music, they have been organizing "music camps" to effectively develop songs. "Music camps" are camps organized as seminars lasting approximately 2-3 days (often from Friday afternoon to Sunday afternoon). The purpose of the camps is to write songs (lyrics and melody) that can be published. Most times the songs need further work such as a better production, but this varies.

After having organized nearly one hundred music camps, the Woods decided to organize a world record attempt by organizing the worlds largest music camp, Rena Song Festival.

For this they engaged the municipality, the university, hotels and hostels, restaurants and other providers in the municipality of Åmot.

After a year of preparations, the invitations went out and 153 participants showed up, making this the worlds largest music camp.

From an organizational perspective, the knowledge management in such a temporary organization is interesting to unveil. This paper investigates how knowledge is disseminated within this organization and how knowledge has been distributed during the preparations for the record attempt and during the camp. For the person that was the initiator and has been the "driving force" behind the project, it has been important to avoid crisis and to be as prepared as possible in beforehand. He has been agile regarding the fact that crisis might still occur, crisis that is beyond what is possible to plan for. The planning has however been meticulous in order to foresee most of what may go wrong.

Our research question is thus; *Rena Song Fest – how to organize the world's largest songwriting camp?*

Through group interviews and individual interviews, we have sought to identify how the people working in this temporary organization have perceived how their level of knowledge and access to knowledge have facilitated their work execution before and during the camp.

2. Theoretical Foundations

Knowledge Management is about sharing, disseminating and saving knowledge (Hislop, 2009, Davenport and Prusak, 1998). Knowledge sharing and communication have in this project been seen as vital to secure that this music camp runs smoothly. Knowledge can be shared in several ways within the context of organizational theory.

However, it is important to know what type of knowledge this is about. Tacit knowledge requires different approaches to sharing than explicit. Tacit knowledge is implicit and difficult to express as it may be about skills, wisdom or intuition (Polanyi, 1967, Davenport and Prusak, 1998). Explicit knowledge is thus what is possible to articulate, to write down and store.

The knowledge-creation process is about turning tacit knowledge such as ideas, experiences, impressions into externalized knowledge, combined with previous knowledge with the co-workers and then internalized (Castellani et al., 2021, Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, Nonaka, 1994). This model is otherwise called the SECI-model. This model is often referred to within theory of “Learning organizations” (Filstad and Blåka, 2007) as learning in organizations often depends on “unlocking” the tacit knowledge and sharing it with others in the organization.

Learning in organizations and organizational learning are terms that has been debated (Örtenblad, 2018). In some definitions it is a focus on the individual as a learner whilst other definitions are focused on the organization (Örtenblad, 2018, Marsick and Watkins, 1999).

Argyris and Schön (1996) proposes another take on organizational learning. Their single and double loop learning has had huge impact on how to view how organizations learn. The single loop is about acting on a result, for example something that has gone wrong, a complaint, etc. The double loop is about searching the reasoning for why the result occurred (for example a faulty product can stem from different types of predating issues, such as using faulty but cheap screws in a product) fixing the reasons for the results rather than just fixing what has been wrong (providing a new product if a product is faulty).

Crisis may still occur, and it may damage the reputation of an organization (Coombs, 2007). A crisis may be defined as a “sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organizations and poses both a financial and reputational threat” (Coombs, 2007). As the organizing company (The Woods) is mainly attracting customers due to a good reputation, it was vital that any crisis could be solved so that anything that may damage their reputation is solved as soon as possible.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) provide a framework that allows for understanding how stakeholders may react to a crisis. Stakeholders in this setting, may be the attendances at the music camp. Being on top of information going out to stakeholders are thus important. With the emergence of social media, news travels faster than ever. Stakeholders would also like to know how any crisis is treated to avoid a new happening. Emotions are also an important feature to pay attention to within handling crisis. According to Coombs (2007) *“behavioural responses are positive when a person is judged not to be responsible and sympathy is evoked”* (p. 166). This means that if the stakeholders perceive The Woods representatives to have done what they can to avoid crisis, they are more inclined to be positive and forgiving. Stakeholders with a previous bad relationship may amplify how they feel about the company.

It is also about how a message is framed as it may shape the perception of how a problem is defined, what caused it, who is responsible and how has it been solved (Coombs, 2007). It is also important to understand and assess the incidents recognized as crisis.

The SCCT model shows the different issues regarding a crisis. It shows that the crisis history and prior relationship reputation will affect the organizational reputation. Any crisis response strategies will influence crisis responsibility and organizational reputation as well as any Emotions. Emotions will influence behavioural intentions. If they are negative before entering the camp, they will be even stronger if something negative occur.

As the table 1 in the Appendix shows, there are possibilities of countering bad reputations.

Even if the staff working at Rena Song Fest establish what can be labelled an “ad hoc” organization (Morgan, 1998, Jacobsen and Thorsvik, 2002), it is still important to seek to avoid any crisis and unexpected events. It is about being “better safe than sorry” and thus take all possible precautions. Hence, the easiest way according to Gangdal and Angeltveit (2014) is to develop a culture within the organization based on routines, collaboration, cooperation and a unified understanding of what to be done, how it should be done and why these things should be done. It is about having clear goals, a common understanding of what the challenges may be, and how to arrive at common solutions. It is also about being able to place the responsibilities of the different tasks, work towards a common understanding of solutions, establish routines for detecting and preventing unwanted incidents and also develop a culture in which the participants encourage and dare to correct eachother. This, according to Gangdal and Angeltveit (2014) provides the manager with space and time that can be spent being ahead and prevent unwanted incidents.

3. Method of Inquiry

This paper is one of several reports from a longitudinal research project following the Woods song camps production management. We have used a qualitative approach that has included group interviews and individual interviews (Patton, 2002, Creswell, 2003). The group interviews were with the staff that were to support the people attending the music camp. The individual interviews have been with the representatives from The Woods. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide to pursue relevant themes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, Jacobsen, 2015). The data material has been analyzed by reading through transcripts from the recorded interviews to identify any interesting issues that throw light on the research themes. Our findings give us insight in project management processes; the planning beforehand and how the Rena Song Fest was carried out. Along the process we have discussed our findings in the research group, and our findings are also presented and discussed with the Woods project team. This check-back validates the understanding of our findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Planning the Rena Song Fest Project – Seeking to be “Better Safe Than Sorry”

The responsible organizers claim that they have planned for a long time, checking and double checking every detail in their plan. For example, all the food and beverage services were checked out, the hotels and hostels were contacted to double and triple check about the accommodation. Lists over who would share room with whom were distributed prior to the camp, and they even booked rooms that were not occupied, just in case something would happen, and they would need an extra room.

This shows that they have sought to be highly detailed in their planning process. This is in line with what Gangdal and Angeltveit (2014) suggest regarding seeking to be ahead of unforeseen happenings.

There were mandatory meetings where the staff was trained in issues that may emerge. Also, they had to attend regular meetings to report on progress and situation both before and during the Rena Song Fest.

This show that within their “ad hoc” organization, they shared knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) and through their common discussions and seeking to unveil challenges, were prepared to handle situations and solve problems that emerged (Gangdal and Angeltveit, 2014).

Equipment was organized well in advance and 38 studios distributed across the centre of the municipality (at the Inland University of Applied Sciences, Rena, at the County Hall and at The Woods) were set up several days before the start of the camp. All equipment was tested to check that the participants would be able to work as they expected allowing them to focus on the creative part of the song writing.

The preparation that the employees at The Woods have done to avoid crisis we find to be very (Coombs, 2007). They also seem to have sought to eliminate any occurrence of crisis. This may be due to their previous experiences with up to 100 music camps, although they have much less attendance. This record attempt would represent new experiences, but some issues they knew they had to attend to prior to the music camp. This indicate that their *tacit knowledge* allows for substantial preparations, both regarding accommodation, food&beverages, studio facilities and issues that may arise. Hence, the *tacit knowledge* the representatives from The Woods have obtained aid the process of sharing knowledge with what is now a part of the extended ad hoc organization (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, Nonaka, 1994). By giving the staff instructions and explaining what to do, what to avoid, what to report and how to solve (known) possible problems the representatives at The Woods have sought to externalize the tacit knowledge allowing the staff to combine this knowledge with prior experience and by working in the music camp, they have the potential to internalize this knowledge.

These preparations also show that they act according to Argyris and Schön’s single and double loop learning model (Argyris and Schön, 1996). In fact, they seem to anticipate and solve any problems before they arise.

4.2 Running the Rena Song Fest – Hands on and Problemsolving

The employees from The Woods experiences from previous camps had also led to dividing the attendants into groups based on self-reported levels of competences regarding the different areas that are required to develop songs (singer, songwriter, producer, musicians, etc.). However, some producers fell ill and could not attend. This was solved by the “reserve staff” at The Woods, that were to be “stand in’s” and provide urgent help to groups that struggled now had to be producers in some of the groups. As this occurred at the last minute, literally the

same day as the camp started, this was the only solution. However, as these producers (from The Woods) originally were to be “spare” they were able to support the groups that were short of a producer. This is yet another example of being able to avoid crisis and bad reputation (Coombs, 2015).

The staff claim that they have been properly informed, and that they were clear about the “line of command”. The introduction and information provided prior to the camp were interpreted as a bit boring, but as the camp progressed, they found the information useful. They claimed to know what to do on eventualities and if they were not able to solve the problem themselves, they knew who to contact.

This implies what we have suggested above; the knowledge sharing and sharing of what to the employees at The Woods have of tacit knowledge has been externalized, and the informants amongst the staff claim that they have understood (combined) and internalized the knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, Nonaka, 1994).

In one case, there was an emergency as one of the places for staying overnight for the attendants to the music camp had trouble checking in the people arriving. Although this was originally taken care of by sharing lists and overviews of the distribution of sleeping spaces, it turned out that there were misinterpretations. This is a situation that may quickly have escalated to a crisis that potentially could have harmed The Woods’ reputation (Coombs, 2007). However, it was rapidly solved by the representative calling the responsible from The Woods who arrived at the “hostel” a few minutes later and the matter was solved within a short time. It was also resolved by *apologies* (see table 1 in appendix), *reminders* and partially by *ingratiation* in the SCCT crisis response table (see table 1 in appendix).

The examples above shows what Gangdal and Angeltveit (2014) suggest regarding enabling managers to be ahead of the problems and are allowed time and space to solve any emerging problems proves very useful. This is due to substantial planning and preparations, in combination with knowledge sharing and hands on management.

4.3 Posterior Actions

Posterior to the music camp, there have been several reflection meetings. One issue that arose that was unavoidable was the lack of producers at the music camp. According to the employees at The Woods, the learning they have from this is to offer courses for attendants that would like to become producers prior to the camp. This may solve any problems with lack of producers. This is an example of doing something with the reason for a possible crisis to emerge (Coombs, 2007) and strongly resemble double loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1996). Also, the feedback from the participants at the music camp has been excellent and many of them have signed up for new camps at The Woods. Hence, their reputation may very well have been strengthened rather than damaged from the project.

A meeting with the other stakeholders (minus the participants) (such as the municipality, the university, etc.) is planned. This meeting may serve as a learning area for the rest of the stakeholders. This dissemination goes beyond the organization but may benefit the society and the involved parties at the Rena Song Fest.

5. Conclusions

The way knowledge has been managed by distributing and disseminating vital information and experiences, the management at Rena Song Fest have been able to avoid a lot of crises that would have emerged with less planning and preparations. The knowledge sharing has been vital and functioned as they hoped. The staff making up the “ad hoc” organisation has learned a lot from the project and the learning is kept and managed within the organisation (The Woods). The formidable undertaking had less “mishaps” than one could expect, due to the diligence of the employees at The Woods regarding preparations ahead of the Rena Song Fest. This has also resulted in participants at the Rena Song Fest signing up for more (ordinary) music camps at The Woods. The learning that the organization take away from this experience will benefit the organization as they will now have experiences with large music camps. As the number of participants exceeded what has been listed as “the worlds largest song camp”, although only by three, Rena Song Camp is officially the largest song camp organized in the world.

Their approach to planning by “being better safe than sorry” has allowed the management to handle emergent crisis and also to avoid any major crisis to develop into e.g. reputations that could potentially be harmful.

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Appendix

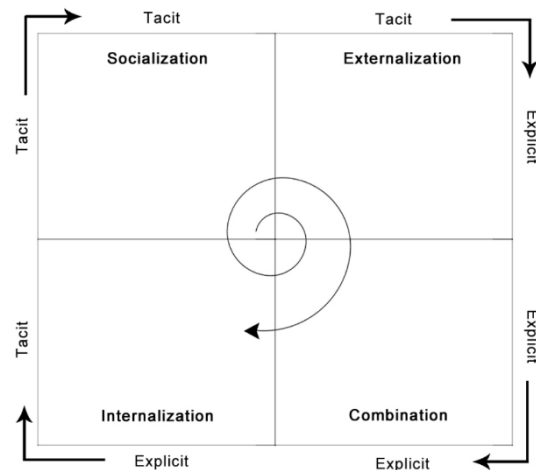


Figure 1: The SECI-model (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka&Takeuchi, 1995)

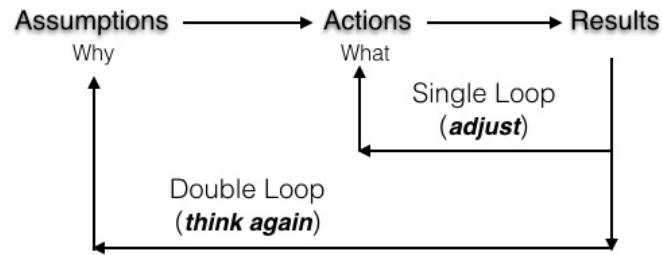


Figure 2: Single and Double loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1996)

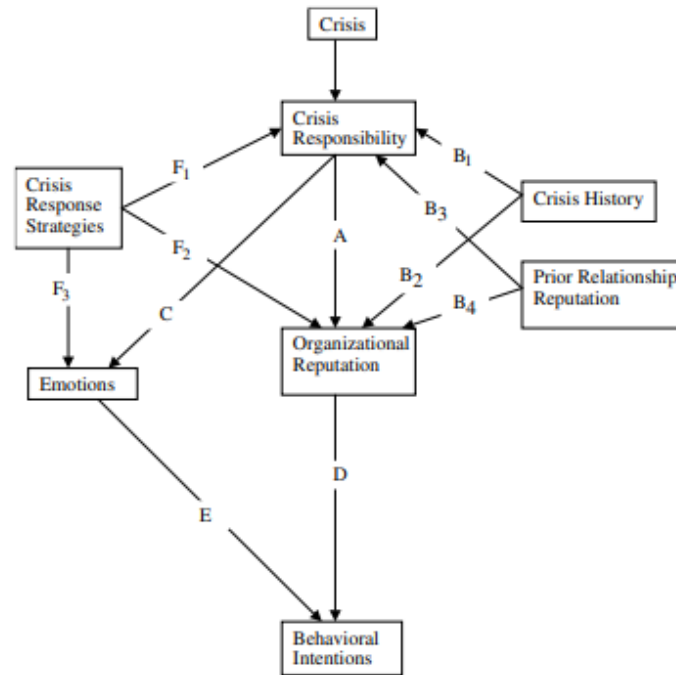


Figure 3: SCCT model (Coombs, 2007, p. 166)

The SCCT crisis response strategies are listed in this table:

Table 1: Table on SCCT crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2007, p. 170)

<i>Primary crisis response strategies</i>	
<i>Deny crisis response strategies</i>	
<i>Attack the accuser:</i>	Crisis manager confronts the person or group claiming something is wrong with the organization.
<i>Denial:</i>	Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis.
<i>Scapegoat:</i>	Crisis manager blames some person or group outside of the organization for the crisis.
<i>Diminish crisis response strategies</i>	
<i>Excuse:</i>	Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis.
<i>Justification:</i>	Crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis.
<i>Rebuild crisis response strategies</i>	
<i>Compensation:</i>	Crisis manager offers money or other gifts to victims.
<i>Apology:</i>	Crisis manager indicates the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.
<i>Secondary crisis response strategies</i>	
<i>Bolstering crisis response strategies</i>	
<i>Reminder:</i>	Tell stakeholders about the past good works of the organization.
<i>Ingratiation:</i>	Crisis manager praises stakeholders and/or reminds them of past good works by the organization.
<i>Victimage:</i>	Crisis managers remind stakeholders that the organization is a victim of the crisis too.