

# Carry that weight

## Entrepreneurial teams, creativity and conflict in the Beatles

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**Abstract:** This article examines creativity and conflict in the Beatles. Building on the theory of entrepreneurial teams, the article shows that even in the most creative group settings, leadership is required to sustain creativity over time. Initially, restless determination and creativity can compensate for a lack of leadership, but eventually an absence of leadership can mean that conflict is not resolved. The pre-Epstein Beatles years can be characterized as lacking real organizational leadership, but this was compensated for by drive and the focal point of de facto leader John. The Epstein years brought strategic direction and leadership, while the post-Epstein years saw a disintegration of leadership, with others, particularly Paul, trying to fill the gap after Epstein's death. In the end, entrepreneurial teams cannot sustain their creativity without effective leadership. Evidence from the Beatles' career, particularly the *Get Back* sessions, is used to demonstrate how leadership is required, even among highly creative groups.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurial teams, creativity, conflict, leadership

This article examines entrepreneurial teams and the importance of leadership in the creative setting of the Beatles. An entrepreneurial team can be defined as a group of people with a common goal that can only be achieved by appropriate combinations of individual entrepreneurial actions (Harper 2008). Most often, entrepreneurial teams are studied in the context of a narrow definition of entrepreneurship, namely focused on business start-up and/or growth. Yet

a broad definition of entrepreneurship also encompasses aspects such as creativity and innovation (Huggins and Williams 2009). Often these can be applied to firm settings, but at the same time the study of entrepreneurship can learn from other fields, including the arts, where creative entrepreneurship takes place. Creative entrepreneurship can be defined as the entrepreneurial process of creative-design and creative-artistic entrepreneurs (Leick et al. 2023), with creative entrepreneurs drawing on their artistic and creative sensibility to identify opportunities and provide creative products, services or experience (Chang and Chen 2020).

The article focuses on such creative entrepreneurship in a team setting: the Beatles. The lens of entrepreneurial teams allows new insights to be developed which show how leadership is important in creative group settings, and that without it the team will become dysfunctional and ultimately disband. The Beatles were active as a group between 1960 and 1970 and were a creative group of musicians and also a business. The creative journey of the group is often examined as a success, eclipsing music groups that went before and have existed since (Sunstein 2022). As Lewisohn (2013) states, they are the genuine ultimate, both in terms of musical contributions and commercial success. Being a popular musician has always involved business dimensions (Haynes and Marshall 2018), and the Beatles' business operations have influenced countless people in the creative industries and beyond. Under the management of Brian Epstein from 1962 until his death in 1967, they became more business minded (McNab 2015), exploiting various commercial opportunities while increasing their creative output. This continued after Epstein's death, and after returning from India in 1968 they were, in John Lennon's words, 'ready to play businessman' (Slate 2020). Apple Corps was founded to handle the Beatles' business interests after accountants informed the group that they had £2 million that they could invest in a business or lose to the Inland Revenue in taxation, and the firm is still in operation today (Perry 2009). It was Apple that provided the communication that signalled the end of the Beatles. Apple issued a press release on 10 April 1970, announcing that 'spring is here and Leeds play Chelsea tomorrow and Ringo and John and George

and Paul are alive and well and full of hope' (Rachel 2021). Despite the upbeat nature of the release, it effectively announced the end of the group, with Paul McCartney later filing for dissolution of the Beatles' contractual partnership on 31 December 1970, which was finalized formally in 1974 after years of legal disputes. Business dealings would ultimately get in the way of the creative element of the band, and without the leadership of Epstein conflict would arise and not be adequately resolved.

Through the lens of entrepreneurial teams, a new understanding of the demise of the Beatles is possible. This article shows how the end of the Beatles was not simply the result of business dealings and personal animosities which emerged during their final years together. Rather, it examines how the different phases of their career as a group, from team formation, through effective collaboration and team dissolution, all contributed to ensuring the end. This study posits that this was a matter of leadership, which was effective for years under Brian Epstein's management but could not be replicated after his death.

This article examines how entrepreneurial teams can enhance individual creativity and how creativity can be enhanced in entrepreneurial teams. It also examines how creativity can be stifled depending on internal and external contexts. The article shows that the pre-Epstein Beatles years can be characterized as lacking real organizational leadership, but this was compensated for by the drive and focal point of de facto leader John. Drawing on the Epstein years of the Beatles, the article shows that managers are needed to harness individual creativity as well as that of the group. Management was important in the Epstein years, and indeed managers are important in all organizational settings (Foss and Klein 2022). The Epstein period led to increased organization of the group, increased access to commercial opportunities as well as critical success. The post-Epstein years saw a disintegration of leadership, with John increasingly distracted from the Beatles' creative output, and Paul assuming leadership responsibilities until Allen Klein was appointed as manager, despite not being fully accepted by the group. In the end, this leadership could not be sustained and conflict arose about the direction and

activities of the group and who should, or should not, be leading. This demonstrates that leadership was important throughout the career of the Beatles, and it was not just the artistic endeavours of the group and their eventual disharmony that led to the band's dissolution.

The argument makes the following contributions to Beatles research. First, it shows that leadership is required to coordinate work (Foss and Klein 2022), and this is important in creative group settings. Although creative individuals can be autonomous, groups require leadership to ensure that creative talents can be harnessed and fulfilled. Second, it shows that without effective leadership, conflict can emerge and often will not be resolved. Conflict resolution is a key leadership skill but requires a leader in place to do it (Mohan 2022). This means that while creativity can burn brightly, it cannot be sustained over the long term. Divisions become more pronounced without management in place, eventually leading to the dissolution of even the most productive creative group settings. This brings new insights to analysis of the Beatles, as their dissolution was not just created by arguments and resentment in the later years, but was in fact a result of decisions made throughout their career.

I begin by briefly setting out the literature on entrepreneurial teams, and how this can be useful for examining groups in highly creative settings. I then examine the role of entrepreneurial teams in the pre-Epstein years, showing how restless musicianship secured success, but that in lacking real leadership formal success through record contracts and chart entries was elusive. The importance of leadership in the Epstein years is then discussed, demonstrating the importance of increasing the focus and commercial viability of the group. The post-Epstein years are then examined, which can be characterized as lacking real management of the group, despite the later involvement of Allen Klein, and increasing tensions and conflict. The conclusion presents a number of implications for understanding entrepreneurial teams in creative settings, and how the Beatles provide lessons for other forms of entrepreneurial teams.

## Understanding entrepreneurial teams in creative settings

Entrepreneurship research has tended to privilege the individual. Shane and Venkataraman (2000) emphasized the nexus of lucrative opportunities and enterprising individuals, while Schumpeter developed the notion of the ‘lone hero’ with exceptional creative ability who overcomes all barriers to launch new innovations (Harper 2008). Yet this ignores the fact that entrepreneurship is often a team effort (Cooney 2005; Klotz et al. 2013).

An entrepreneurial team can be defined as a group of entrepreneurs with a common goal that can only be achieved by appropriate combinations of individual entrepreneurial actions (Harper 2008). Entrepreneurial team members hold an ownership position and are motivated to utilize their human capital to benefit the group’s performance and growth (Tihula et al. 2009). To operate effectively, entrepreneurial teams need to apply rules such as shared goals, complementary skills, commitment to a common purpose and an approach that holds individuals mutually accountable (Katzenbach and Smith 2008). Entrepreneurial teams can differ in terms of their size, how the team members are arranged within the team, how authority to make decisions is determined and how the team communicate with each other (Harper 2008). Entrepreneurial teams also differ from organizational teams, in that they have undefined social rules, teams roles are ambiguous, and the organization is evolving (De Mol et al. 2015). This means that greater strategic freedom can provoke problems in team cohesion and decision-making processes (Preller et al. 2016).

All entrepreneurs apply creativity in some form, and creativity in entrepreneurship is discernible in processes such as the creation of new ventures and new products and identifying new markets. However, creativity takes on a new dimension when the creative aspect is a central force that is embodied by the person (Patten and Stephens 2023). Entrepreneurial teams cannot sustain creative outputs indefinitely. While the motivation of members of the team prompts them to invest efforts that benefit the venture, debating

and discussing decisions, if leadership lacks clarity or is not shared then conflict can arise (Schjoedt and Kraus 2009). Divergent visions can also lead to friction (Preller et al. 2020). Drazin et al. (1999) show that periodic organizational crises inevitably entail contradictions and tensions. This means that group members change their shared frames of reference and collective belief structures towards renewed shared understandings of what activities are deemed creative (Thompson 2018). A lack of team cohesion means that members' satisfaction decreases (Chen et al. 2017), ultimately rendering the team unviable. Understanding conflict in an entrepreneurial team is of significant importance because the quality of decisions in an entrepreneurial team has a direct effect on the team's sustainability (Amason 1996). With a lack of leadership, conflicts can remain unresolved. This can be particularly true in the creative industries, where leadership and creativity are complex, with artists reconciling very different, even contradictory, ways of thinking (Bilton 2013).

While much of the literature on entrepreneurial teams focuses on business venture creation, by taking a broader definition of entrepreneurship which encompasses creativity it is possible to view other forms of organization through this prism. Creativity is a facet of all entrepreneurial action, but has particular meaning in the context of creative industries (Patten and Stephens 2023). As with other creative entrepreneurs, the Beatles embodied the product they provided as well as being the exploiters of the opportunity. The Beatles were a 'business' in a broad sense. Yet it is their creativity, imagination and innovation in music which best defines them. In this sense they can be viewed as entrepreneurial (Staley 2020). The Beatles were creative entrepreneurs in that they provided symbolic content that required artistic creativity as quintessentially knowledge-based, culture-driven and artist-intensive labour input (Chang and Chen 2020). By drawing on the theory of entrepreneurial teams, it is possible to analyse how their creativity was harnessed and how, in the end, it could not be sustained.

## Examining entrepreneurial teams and creativity through the Beatles

The journey of the Beatles can be seen as distinct phases, which Duffett (2023) terms early development, Beatlemania, post-Beatlemania and post-Beatles. This article takes a similar view and focuses on three phases: team formation in the pre-Epstein years, team collaboration during the Epstein years and team dissolution in the post-Epstein period. This reflects the fact that entrepreneurial teams undergo a life cycle, in that teams are born, mature and eventually dissolve. This approach provides a useful framing for understanding the role of leadership and management in entrepreneurial teams, and complements the view of the creative process being at the heart of the Beatles (Clydesdale 2010). Figure 1 provides a visual overview of the life-cycle phases and the key elements of team formation, along with illustrative examples of the life cycle of the Beatles' journey.

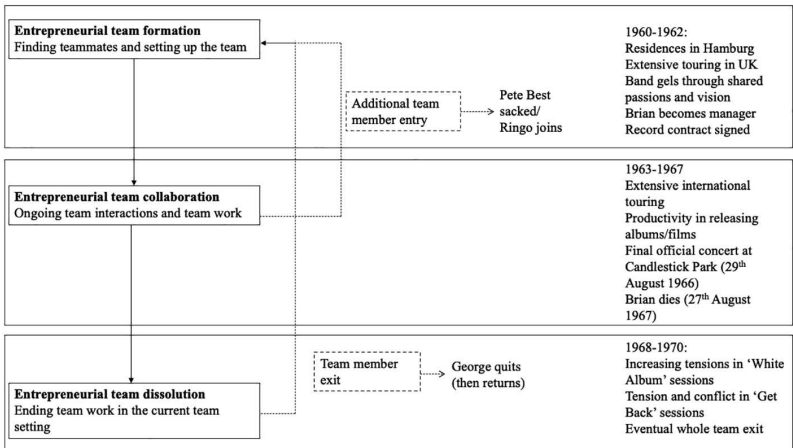


Figure 1. The entrepreneurial team life cycle and the Beatles journey (life cycle adapted from Patzelt et al. 2021)

***Team formation: the pre-Epstein years***

The life of an entrepreneurial team begins when an individual recruits other members or when a group of individuals starts to develop an opportunity (Lazar et al. 2020). The team formation phase is the time during which the team members find each other, agree to form a team, and set up the team's structure, and is guided to a large extent by the self-selection of team members (Patzelt et al. 2021).

The story of the Beatles' team formation is well known, from Paul meeting John at the Woolton Village Fete, to Paul bonding with George on the school bus over their love of music and inviting him to meet John. This meant that the team was self-selected, and the three would begin to play together, even without a distinct opportunity in mind. John was the de facto leader having formed the Quarry Men, and was fretting over his own leadership or whether to make the group stronger by inviting Paul to join (Norman 2005). Paul and George (and later Ringo) deferred to him in matters of strategic direction (Lewisohn 2013), and this continued throughout the Beatles' career, with John's leadership status never truly lost.

The pre-Epstein years can be characterized as a period of restless musicality, recreating the rock 'n' roll of the Beatles' heroes such as Chuck Berry, Little Richard and Elvis Presley, while trying to strike out with their own versions of the big hits of the day. John and Paul would write songs together at Paul's house, approaching creation with a sense of purpose (Brown 2021), and they would play whatever gigs were available. After struggling to secure paying gigs in their home city of Liverpool, the band took off to Germany. At this stage of their career, the intensity of the work schedule was an element in their team formation. Residencies in Hamburg quickly gelled the group, both as performing musicians and personally (Lewisohn 2013). They had to satisfy demanding club promoters and entertain demanding audiences. This period was not without management per se. Allan Williams had helped the group secure bookings in Hamburg as well as the UK, including a residency at the Indra Club for which they recruited Pete Best, as they were lacking a permanent drummer. Williams's management was not destined to last, and after an



argument about his 10 per cent commission the Beatles parted ways with him.

In this early phase of their career, shared (or team) cognition (Chen et al. 2017; Patzelt et al. 2021) was strengthened. This is important as it binds team members together in the early stages of activity (Chen et al. 2017) and can occur without effective or defined leadership in place. Shared cognition manifests in how well team members understand each other, by sharing the same goals. In pseudo-American accents, the group would ask of John: ‘Where we going, Johnny?’, to which he would reply ‘To the toppermost of the poppermost’ (Lewisohn 2013: 364). Shared cognition also plays a vital role in increasing a team’s cohesion. Team cohesion, which embodies the closeness of a team to each other and their commitment to the team, benefits entrepreneurial team performance because there are fewer process losses and better member coordination (Ensley et al. 2002). Team cohesion was built during these early years performing in Hamburg, although the final line-up of the group was not yet secured.

### ***The collaboration phase: the Epstein years***

Once an entrepreneurial team has formed, it enters the collaboration phase. The collaboration phase is the period during which an entrepreneurial team, based on its current composition and structure, interacts to develop opportunities together (Patzelt et al. 2021). While entrepreneurial teams can be seen as cases of self-management, with freedom and discretion and the ability to organize their internal work and structure (Langfred 2007), as a team grows and develops, more active leadership may be required (Patzelt et al. 2021). Thus, the Beatles turned to Brian Epstein.

Inviting Epstein to manage the group was based on the group’s understanding of what was best for them, an understanding that they needed a manager and more effective leadership than they had previously had (Lewisohn 2013). Epstein was invited to manage the group during discussions in late 1961, and the Beatles signed a contract for him to manage them on 24 January 1962 (Lewisohn 2013). This was despite Epstein not having music industry experience. He ran the music department of his family’s business

and happened to hear the Beatles at a lunchtime session at the Cavern (Brown 2021). He liked what he saw and heard: 'I was immediately struck by their music, their beat and their sense of humour on stage ... And even afterward, when I met them, I was struck again by their personal charm and it was there that it all started' (Lewisohn 2013: 517).

Despite Epstein's lack of music industry knowledge and experience, he provided the leadership which had been lacking. His management and drive can be exemplified through his efforts to get the Beatles signed to a record label. Epstein faced significant doubts from record companies, most notably Decca, whose head Dick Rowe apparently stated that 'groups of guitarists are on their way out' (Lewisohn 2013: 578). No one at these early record company meetings thought they were a team of creative geniuses (Clydesdale 2010). However, despite record company indifference, Epstein remained determined (Mohan 2022), and responded that he was completely confident that one day they would be bigger than Elvis Presley (Epstein 1964). Ultimately, George Martin, who would later become the Beatles' producer and was at the time an A&R manager of EMI's Parlophone label, was convinced by Epstein's faith in 'the boys' and offered them a recording contract after some initial reservations (Lewisohn 2013).

Epstein's effective leadership also meant that the group could withstand early setbacks and challenges. Due to the shared cognition built up during the early years of extensive touring, it was possible for the Beatles to withstand the exit of a team member. Pete Best undoubtedly played a role in the early phase of the Beatles as they honed their craft, but he left before the true creative phase, which involved the development of songwriting skills. The team withstood this early team member exit. As Patzelt et al. (2021) have noted, we do not know how teams in the early phases coordinate their composition in terms of potential members they do not wish to include. However, the story of the Beatles provides a good illustration of how this can be managed. The sacking of Best was one of Epstein's early decisive moves, although he had been cajoled by the Beatles to do it. The Beatles had performed a number of gigs with Ringo Starr when Best had been ill, and they

enjoyed his drumming as well as his company. As Paul commented, 'It had got to the stage that Pete was holding us back. What were we going to do – try and pretend he was a wonderful drummer?' (Lewisohn 2013: 677). Unwilling to deal with the emotional side of sacking Best, they went to Epstein and said 'You're the manager, you do it' (Lewisohn 2013: 677). Best was summoned to Epstein's office on 16 August 1962 and told that the boys wanted him out and Ringo in (Best and Doncaster 2001). This illustrates the importance of the manager taking the decisive action, but also how the search for a replacement had already taken place, meaning that the impact of the team member's exit could be minimized. When Ringo joined on 18 August 1962 the shared cognition of the band was enhanced further. Now they had a group who all were happy with, and who were all moving in the same direction. This meant that they could better share individual abilities with the group, provide shared representations, interpretations, mutual goals and a system of meaning, key features of shared cognition (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998).

With the band settled under his leadership, the restless, leather-jacketed, pre-Epstein days were gone. In came suits as a sign of professionalism and uniformity (Staley 2020) and effective management. Epstein provided the group with the organization required to make it to the 'toppermost of the poppermost' (Lewisohn 2013: 364). Epstein drove the band forward in terms of recording contracts, merchandising, film making, publishing and many other commercial opportunities. Under Epstein's management the Beatles saw success such as no band had previously experienced and none since has truly emulated. The band released their debut album *Please Please Me* in 1963, and this was followed by *With the Beatles* (1963), *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), *Beatles for Sale* (1964), *Help* (1965), *Rubber Soul* (1965), *Revolver* (1966) and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), along with the films *A Hard's Day Night* (1964) and *Help* (1965). The Beatles' output was unprecedented in terms of innovation and productivity during Epstein's management. Clydesdale (2010) has argued that while Epstein was open to their creativity, none of his practices had an impact on that creativity. Yet it was a product of the freedom that he enabled the

band to have. The band were able to focus on honing their craft as musicians and the creative element of their output, rather than organizing gigs and attempting to secure record contracts.

The Epstein years were not, of course, without tensions and conflict. The group became increasingly frustrated with touring, and angry with Epstein for insisting on what they regarded as an exhausting schedule (Spitz 2005). The intensity of a work schedule can mean that close interactions have a high potential for engendering conflicts within teams (Forbes, Korsgaard and Sapienza 2010). The Beatles were tired of touring almost constantly and had become weary of performing concerts at which the screaming was often so loud that it drowned out the music (Duffett 2023). The last Beatles concert at Candlestick Park on 29 August 1966 meant that Epstein's role was going to change. It is also fair to say that his decision making had not always proved exemplary. He had licensed the Beatles' name and likeness for merchandise, stating that he would accept a penny less than 10 per cent, despite the typical range being 30–50 per cent. This decision cost the Beatles in lost royalties and when the royalty agreement was eventually renegotiated Beatlemania was on the wane (Greathouse 2015). Over time, Epstein had become increasingly worried that the group, particularly Paul, were discontented with his management, and made strenuous efforts to prove to the group that they still needed him (Norman 2005).

### ***Team dissolution: the post-Epstein years***

The dissolution phase is the period during which one, several or all team members leave an entrepreneurial team, such that the team discontinues its joint work on the venture (Patzelt et al. 2021). The post-Epstein years can be seen as a gradual dissolution. The band was ageing and becoming less passionate about remaining Beatles. Yet a significant factor in this dissolution was also the lack of effective leadership to resolve the increasing tensions and conflict.

Brian Epstein died on 27 August 1967, three months after the release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. In the early post-Epstein period, the Beatles struck a rich vein of creativity, moving from *Sgt. Pepper* through *Magical Mystery Tour*, *The Beatles*

(*The White Album*), *Let it Be* and *Abbey Road*. Despite this, this phase also marked a period of tensions rising, falling and rising again, with the restless creativity of the band being marshalled by its members, often Paul, and a string of hangers-on, lawyers and new management (McNab 2015). However, none of these, together or alone, could replicate the management of Epstein and the willingness of the band to operate under delegated leadership.

The cracks had begun to show during the *White Album* sessions in 1968 (Staley 2020). A creative outcome of the increased tension was the evidence of the individual tastes of each member of the Beatles coming more to the fore (DeRosa 2020). The *White Album* included the musique concrete of Lennon's 'Revolution 9', Ringo's country song 'Don't Pass Me By', Harrison's ballad 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' and the stomping rock of Paul's 'Helter Skelter'. The album was individualistic by comparison with previous recordings (MacDonald 1994). John had lost interest in collaborating with Paul, and poured scorn on his efforts when the opportunity arose, describing 'Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da' as 'granny music shit' (Kapurch et al. 2023: 149). John had also introduced his new girlfriend, Yoko Ono, to the group, which created further tension given her attendance at recording sessions. Yoko's presence was regarded as intrusive and disruptive of the creative flow of the band (Staley 2020), as they had previously worked without the involvement of wives or girlfriends (Miles 1998). This had helped to establish the working culture of the band, and reflects how through effective management entrepreneurial teams can establish cultures that allow members to openly communicate and express individual passions (Ginting-Szczesny et al. 2023). This was made more difficult with Yoko sitting, often silently, beside John and contributing to the difficulties of the sessions (MacDonald 1994). In later years the *White Album* would be seen as the beginning of the end, with Paul stating that it 'wasn't a pleasant one to make', and he and John both seeing the sessions as the start of the band's demise (The Beatles 2000). The band's increasing individualism would be a key factor in their downfall. The *White Album* was released in November 1968, and sessions for the next album (later to be released as *Let It Be* in May 1970 as the Beatles' final album,

despite being recorded before *Abbey Road*, released in September 1969) began in January 1969. It was at these sessions that tensions became even greater. The *Get Back* documentary brings many of these tensions to the fore, despite also showing a band still capable of brilliance and a desire to work through issues.

The *Get Back* sessions saw tensions mount and come to a head (Kapurch and Everett 2020), and showed a band aware of the lack of genuine management. While they were able to be productive and creative, the rot had begun to set in. As MacDonald (1994: 329) explains, ‘the truth was that they were adults and no longer adaptable to the teenage gang mentality demanded by a functional pop/rock group’. The lack of leadership was bemoaned. George, for example, lamented how things had changed: ‘Ever since Mr Epstein passed away, it’s never been the same’; and Paul stated: ‘There really is no one there now to say “do it”, whereas there always used to be ... but Daddy’s gone away now and we are on our own.’ In the face of the negativity, Paul tried to cajole the group: ‘We’ve been very negative since Mr Epstein passed away and that’s why all of us in turn have been sick of the group ... It’s discipline we lack.’ In many ways, this was emblematic of the lack of leadership within the group. Paul had assumed leadership responsibilities, albeit reluctantly: ‘I’m scared of ... me being the boss. And I have been for, like, a couple of years – and we all have, you know, no pretending about that’ (The Beatles 2021). In assuming this role, Paul created more tension and the group became more perturbed by his growing domination (Miles 1998). The *Get Back* sessions show George frustrated by Paul giving him and other band members instructions on what and how to play. For example, he says to Paul: ‘I’ll play whatever you want me to play, or I won’t play at all if you don’t want me to play ... whatever it is that will please you, I’ll do it’ (The Beatles 2021). In situations where leadership is clear, team members accept that the leader has more power and dominance than themselves (Yin et al. 2020). However, the Beatles lacked this, and this is reflected in George’s irritated response. They were not able to defer to a genuine leader to solve issues when conflict arose. The inability to resolve tensions was also not helped by John’s descent

into heroin addiction, which left him incommunicative and critical of the venture (Francis 2014).

Conflict in an entrepreneurial team is an inevitable social process that results from perceived incompatibilities between members (Chen 2006). The *Get Back* sessions contain numerous examples of low-level incompatibilities, with even seemingly minor decisions or disagreements taking greater significance. The Beatles started filming in Twickenham studios and there was disagreement about what the whole project actually was. A TV show is discussed, as well as a feature film and album, and a concert to provide a finale. Due to a lack of leadership, decisions are not made, or time is not allowed to gain everyone's tacit agreement, and conflicts remain unresolved. With no one prepared to be the real leader, and no manager in place, it falls to director Michael Lindsay-Hogg to try to push the band to make decisions, but with little impact. The disagreements highlight how the Beatles conform to two distinct forms of conflict: relationship conflict when there are interpersonal incompatibilities between team members, and task conflict, which occurs when there are disagreements regarding the content of the tasks that are being performed (Chen et al. 2017). Such disagreements can be generative, in that tension can lead to creative outputs. Indeed, despite the relationship conflict and task conflict in the *Get Back* sessions, the band still write, record and perform together. Positive conflicts create energy, while negative disputes detract from the creative output (Mohan 2022).

During *Get Back*, the Beatles are able to rally together to remain creative, making conflicts as positive as possible. However, a further element of the team dynamics which resulted from a lack of real leadership was how the need for achievement became more of a source of tension. Within teams, the perception of an individual's contribution can be a key source of contention (Khan et al. 2015). The need for achievement is particularly apparent in George in the *Get Back* film. As the youngest member of the band, George had always been treated as a 'junior' by Paul and John (Jones 2023). His frustration is part of the journey of the team. The journey of a team is emotional and highlights the important role of conflicts embedded in feelings and perceptions (Khan et

al. 2015). George had often been frustrated by his perception of resistance from John and Paul to his contributions to albums, but this increased in the later years and is evidenced in *Get Back*. At a time when he is growing creatively, George is more uncomfortable with his secondary songwriting role, talking with John about how he could do a solo album based on all the songs he has written to fill his 'quota' for the Beatles for another decade. In a salient move, the band rehearse George's 'All Things Must Pass' but do not record it. This represents an emotional ambivalence towards George, and can be a feature of teams in which positive and negative emotions towards different passion foci increase team conflict (Ginting-Szczesny et al. 2023).

George's frustrations are not resolved and on 10 January 1969 he leaves the band, quietly announcing: 'I think I'll be ... I'm leaving.' John replies: 'What?' George: 'The band now' (The Beatles 2021). There then follows a discussion which highlights the lack of leadership, George suggesting that they write to the *NME* for a replacement, Mal Evans replying that he will speak to George Martin about money, and George saying, 'But he shouldn't be bothered with that ... That's why we've got Apple' (The Beatles 2021).

A key element in understanding the eventual dissolution of an entrepreneurial team is when a team member exits (Patzelt et al. 2021). In the case of the Beatles, George quitting in the middle of the *Get Back* sessions is illustrative. He wasn't the first person to quit the Beatles. Ringo had done so previously during the *White Album* sessions, forcing Paul to record the drum track for 'Back in the USSR' (MacDonald 1994: 310). Ringo was wooed back with charm: when he returned he found his drum kit decorated with flowers (Hertsgaard 1996). George quitting created more uncertainty precisely because the team was in a weaker position. As such, different responses to team exit emerge (Patzelt et al. 2021). The greater level of cohesion present when Ringo quit meant that creativity and understanding could be nurtured. However, when George quit there was less cohesion among the team, and affective conflict led to anger and alienation. This is exemplified in the lack of an initial strategy to get George to return to the



group. At first the response is aimless, and the *Get Back* film shows Paul the day after George quits contemplating the uncertainty and looking emotionally vulnerable. Paul also tries to find humour in the situation, saying 'It's going to be such an incredible sort of comical thing like, in fifty years' time, you know: "They broke up because Yoko sat on an amp"' (The Beatles 2021).

A conversation recorded via a hidden microphone shows John and Paul well aware of their bandmate's lingering frustrations (Fisher 2022). They discuss whether George will return; John: 'It's been a festering wound ... and yesterday we allowed it to go even deeper, and we didn't give him any bandages'; Paul: 'I'm assuming he's coming back ... If he isn't then it's a new problem' (The Beatles 2021). John and Paul offer different reasons for George's frustrations. John says that Paul has silenced members of the group, is overbearing and has intimidated the other Beatles out of making musical suggestions, while Paul states that John has 'always been [the] boss' of the group (Fisher 2022: 246). Such emotional team relationship conflicts can be attributed to personal incompatibilities and to a divergence in perceptions, expectations and opinions (Khan et al. 2015). George quitting shows how relationship conflicts, which are person-related disagreements that include tension, animosity and annoyance among team members (Jehn 1995), become heightened without leadership to resolve them. In order to minimize the impacts of conflict, entrepreneurial teams must reconcile internal conflicts that could potentially hamper team cohesion and new venture performance (Chen et al. 2017). George quitting was symptomatic of the fact that the desire to remain in the group was waning, and that internal conflicts could not be resolved.

After George's departure, there were two band meetings and a six-day break to try to figure out a way forward. When George returned on 21 January the band had relocated to the more homely and welcoming basement of Apple's offices on Savile Row. There is also a new face at the sessions, Billy Preston, who the band had first met in Hamburg. Inviting guests was a means of cutting through tension and attempting to keep the group positively working together, an approach that had been taken before, with

Eric Clapton joining the 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' recording for the *White Album*. At George's behest, discussions about a final concert to end the *Get Back* sessions are sidelined, but only in the short term. Paul, in particular, is still keen on the idea, believing in live performance as a source of creative energy (MacDonald 1994), as is Michael Lindsay-Hogg, and it re-emerges in conversation. There are numerous discussions regarding the location of the concert, to be filmed at the conclusion of the sessions. Several ideas are rejected, including a boat at sea (George: 'The idea of the boat is completely insane'), the Tunisian desert and the Colosseum. John at one point mutters: 'I'm warming to do it in an asylum' (MacDonald 1994: 329). Finally, the group settle on the rooftop of Apple Corps in Savile Row as a compromise (Staley 2020). This is despite George's initial resistance: 'I don't want to go on the roof' (The Beatles 2021: 189). However, after some cajoling the concert takes place, but weeks after the band had all but washed their hands of the entire project (Lewisohn 1992).

Although not on camera, the *Get Back* film hints at the introduction of Allen Klein, the manager of the Rolling Stones, to the group; he would eventually become John, George and Ringo's manager. John and Ringo discuss a meeting with Klein about taking over the Beatles' business, which foreshadows a bitter split with Paul. John is clearly impressed: 'I just think he's fantastic' (The Beatles 2021). Tensions had grown regarding the appointment of someone to manage the financial affairs of the Beatles, which had been lacking since Epstein's death. This remained unresolved following the conclusion of the *Get Back* sessions. Paul was in favour of appointing Lee and John Eastman, the father and brother of Linda, whom he married on 12 March 1969. However, John, George and Ringo favoured Klein. The group could not reach agreement, and as a result both Klein and the Eastmans were temporarily appointed, Klein as manager, while the Eastmans acted as their lawyers. Further conflict ensued until on 8 May Klein was named as the sole manager and the Eastmans were dismissed, despite Paul refusing to sign the contract. These disagreements would have long-term repercussions for the Beatles, with business contracts being a key source of dispute years after the band had split up.

Despite the tensions evident in the *Get Back* film, it is also important to note that it was also a highly creative and productive period, with many new tracks written, rehearsed and performed. In this sense, conflict can be seen as a catalyst for creativity and understanding as well as animosity and resentment, with effective teams embracing the benefits of conflict and avoiding its costs (Ensley et al. 2002). In the absence of effective leadership, the Beatles were unable to avoid the costs of conflict. Ultimately this would lead to the dissolution of the group.

While the *Get Back* sessions were not the last recordings by the Beatles, they signalled that the end was nigh. The Beatles rallied in order to record *Abbey Road*, which was released in September 1969. George Martin had been surprised to be invited by Paul to return to the recording studio, given that he viewed the *Get Back* sessions as a ‘miserable experience’ and ‘thought that it was the end of the road for all of us’ (Gould 2007: 560). The tensions continued at Abbey Road, with John rejecting Martin’s proposal of a ‘continuously moving piece of music’, instead wanting his and Paul’s songs to occupy separate sides of the album (Gould 2007). It would not be long after the release of *Abbey Road* that the group would split. This team exit represented the formal dissolution of the group; however, the end of the Beatles was not clean cut. All the members did not decide to leave at the same time. While John had said he was leaving, Paul was the first to formally announce that the band were no more. This would be followed by years of personal animosity and legal acrimony.

## Conclusion

And in the end, the Beatles became a worldwide sensation and succeeded where others had failed (Sunstein 2022). Their creative output was a process of continual improvement over time (Clydesdale 2010). However, the creativity of the group could not be sustained. The story of the Beatles shows that leadership and management are important. Authority and hierarchy are required in order to coordinate work, including creative outputs (Foss and

Klein 2022). Leaders can satisfy the competency, autonomy and emotional needs of team members and can strengthen the team culture to enhance mutual understanding (Yin et al. 2020).

The Epstein years brought effective leadership to the Beatles, which led to a period of unrivalled creativity and productivity. After Epstein's death, this leadership could not be replicated; there was no true successor who carried the credibility of having been there from the beginning (Jones and Podrazik 2022). With no one to carry the weight previously borne by Epstein, conflicts arose and were not resolved, which ultimately led to the dissolution of the group. When they arrived at the *Get Back* sessions, the gang mentality was lost, and while Paul was still determined to make things work, George was yearning to play guitar in an easy-going American band, Ringo was looking forward to being an actor, and John wanted to break the band mould and confront the world through cultural subversion in tandem with Yoko (MacDonald 1994). As Staley (2020) states, with hindsight the break-up of the Beatles was inevitable; the band was not artistically sustainable and art was the critical value that drove the enterprise.

It is possible for the members of cohesive teams to exhibit high levels of affinity and trust for one another as well as higher levels of satisfaction with and affective attraction to the group as a whole (Ensley et al. 2002). This can sustain a team for an extended period but cannot last forever. Indeed, the Beatles' affinity for each other and for what they were producing held them together in the team formation and team collaboration periods. From the early years of John and Paul honing their songwriting skills together, to the four members of the group producing a huge amount of highly creative and innovative output, this could not have been achieved without significant team harmony. The nature of the team was such that it possessed high levels of exchange and complementary blends of expertise and thinking styles (Clydesdale 2010). However, there are a variety of important paradoxes that seem fundamental to creativity in groups. One such paradox is the tension between freedom and constraint in the creative process (Rosso 2014). The Beatles had freedom to experiment and to explore new sounds

and new ways of recording. As the personal relationships of the Fab Four grew more strained, their own musical tastes and artistic whims became more pronounced. Over time, this meant that their approach became more individualistic, meaning that they no longer needed the group as a creative outlet. In many ways, the strains and tensions at the heart of the Beatles' story helped to inform their creativity but would also lead to the group's demise.

## Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to Hannah Preston for valuable comments on an earlier version of this article.

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