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"Please Don't Dominate the Rap, Jack": Heterarchy and the Grateful Dead

Dougald O'Reilly

Although commentators often called Jerry Garcia the leader of the Grateful Dead, he consistently disputed that suggestion; instead, he exemplified what business theorist Barry Barnes has usefully identified as a combination of servant, transformational, and principle-centered leadership models (Barnes 2012). This essay builds on his and others work to trace how Garcia's and others' roles in the band's business reveal a more fluid organizational structure, one that usefully invokes heterarchy. The heterarchical theory has been usefully applied across various disciplines to explore organizational principles, presenting an option for either hierarchical or egalitarian theoretical interpretations. This essay presents an overview of heterarchical theory and the components that are hallmarks of organizations deemed to be structured along these lines before exploring the organization of the Grateful Dead. Although the organization went through several periods, throughout the Dead remained committed to a heterarchical structure. Although this belief was never articulated or framed in those terms, it stemmed from deeply held ideas about their project and led to a workable social, creative business organization.

Heterarchy offers scholars and business theorists a lens to better understand the guiding principles that the Dead espoused and sought to implement during their thirty-year career. Far from being an anarchic or chaotic bohemian enterprise, as detractors often alleged, the Dead were in fact focused on their mission and exhibited remarkable stability and commitment to those ideals, often in the face of challenges that terminate other bands and businesses. That success alone requires a more nuanced understanding of the band's inner workings, which heterarchical theory provides. This essay offers a first look at why.

Heterarchy, Organization, and the Grateful Dead

To casual observers, the Grateful Dead could represent "a cocoon of chaos" as a business (McNally 2002, 288). Yet the group's remarkable career and enduring success suggest a deeper commitment to structure. A central part of that is how they approached their work, developing a unique system of governance and decision-making. While the band and staffers never described the system of organization that evolved within the Dead as heterarchical, nor did they develop that approach explicitly, according to road manager Sam Cutler (pers. comm. 2022), heterarchy is the concept that, based on the evidence, best describes the organization.

The concept of heterarchy was first introduced in the 1940s to explain independent cognitive structures in the brain (McCulloch 1945, 89–93). Since then, the theory has been applied in several disciplines, including biological sciences, sociology, anthropology, management studies, and archaeology. Since the 1980s, several heterarchical concepts, such as flattening hierarchical structures, have been adopted in corporate America, with varying degrees of success. Perhaps the most robust application of the model has been in the social sciences, where it has been embraced by management theorists (Hedlund 1993), sociologists (Stark 2001), and archaeologists (Crumley 2005; White 1995; O'Reilly 2000, 2003) to provide a more nuanced interpretation of social organization.

In his study of business models in the former Soviet Union, David Stark describes heterarchy as "an emergent organizational form with distinctive network properties ... and multiple organizing principles" (2001, 72). Others suggest the theory describes "a partially ordered level struc-

ture implicating a rampant interactional complexity" (Kontopoulos 1993, 44). In archaeology, Carole L. Crumley has argued that, applied to social organization, heterarchy is best described as "the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked, or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways, depending on systemic requirements" (1987, 158). More recently, she has argued that the concept "offers a means by which human history and individual agency can be accommodated in a non-reductionist framework" (Crumley 2005, 41). Critical to her view of this model is the idea that "sources of power are counterpoised and linked to values, which are fluid and respond to changing situations" (Crumley 2005, 42). She offers a comparative advantage model of hierarchical and heterarchical systems (2005, 43), noting that the former provides clear lines of decision-making with well-defined rules and responsibilities for actors in a system that works to defend the organization and suppress internal dissent. In a heterarchical network, the benefits include consensus decision-making, high-quality information, and a variety of potential solutions to problems contributed by a wider range of disparate segments in the organization who are well recognized and rewarded.

She notes that each model has its disadvantages as well. In hierarchies, information is exchanged slowly; expedient decisions are not always popular and can demand coercion within the organization; and the cost of security is high. In a heterarchically organized system, disadvantages include the need for constant dialogue with a multitude of voices leading to a slow process of consensus building (Crumley 2005, 43). In short, Crumley feels that heterarchies value spontaneity, flexibility, and group decision-making; while this creates environments in which achieved status builds individuality and power is inclusive or counterpoised, it also makes long-term planning difficult and slows response times. Hierarchies, on the other hand, value rule-based authority and the status quo. They are systems where power is defined as control and social distinctions are emphasized (Crumley 2005, 44).

A heterarchical model does not require a consistent leader—a single individual in a leadership role. Distributed leadership, as Gary Yukl has written, results in organizations that "do not require an individual who can

perform all of the essential leadership functions, or a set of people who can collectively perform them." In such an organization:

> Some leadership functions (e.g., making important decisions) may be shared by several members of a group, some leadership functions may be allocated to individual members, and a particular leadership function may be performed by different people at different times. The leadership actions of any individual leader are much less important than the collective leadership provided by members of the organization. (1999, 293)

These diverse contexts and definitions point to how heterarchy allows scholars to explore the relationships in an organization from varied perspectives. The concept provides a way of understanding that as conditions change in some systems, so may the social order. As Joyce C. White has argued, the understanding of fluid social relationships is enhanced by understanding that ranking may be present or absent depending on the situation, and that "forms of order exist that are not exclusively hierarchical and that interactive elements in complex systems need not be permanently ranked relative to one another" (1995, 104).

In management studies, the principle of heterarchy "refers to an organizational form with a flat, non-hierarchical structure, in which alternative evaluative principles (i.e., alternative conceptions as to what is important, or valuable, or what counts, are measured according to heterogeneous criteria by different organizational actors) exist" (Taylor et al. 2019, 1637). The concept has also been viewed as a form of organization in which innovation thrives. David Stark believes that distributed intelligence (where innovative solutions are sought in a generalized and distributed way across an organization) combined with lateral accountability and an organizing dissonance in an organization encourages "productive friction" by recognizing and managing interactions between multiple competing evaluative principles (2009, 19).

In management terms, Stark feels that "heterarchies flatten hierarchy" (2009, 25). But they are not simply non-hierarchical. The new organizational forms are heterarchical not only because they have flattened reporting structures but because they are the sites of heterogeneous systems of accounting for worth. A robust, lateral collaboration flattens

hierarchy while promoting diversity of evaluative principles. Heterarchies are complex adaptive systems because they interweave a multiplicity of performance principles. They are heterarchies of worth. He goes on to argue that diverse opinions and debates are encouraged in these organizational structures as this often leads to creative solutions. In a later paper, Stark argues that "heterarchies involve relations of interdependence [which have] two fundamental features: lateral accountability and organizational heterogeneity" (2011, 28).

Referencing Stark's concepts of lateral accountability, creative frictions, and organized dissonance, Paola Trevisan has explored heterarchy as a way to understand the mode of organization that makes the search for and production of novelty in the creative sector possible (2021, 124). Trevisan's study is particularly interesting here for its exploration of artistic innovation in the performing arts through an analysis of the role of the organizations in Italian opera with a focus on interpretive innovation. Characterizing heterarchy as "a decentralized form of organization characterized by strong interdependences, requiring a lateral (rather than a vertical) form of accountability and multiple performance criteria," Trevisan identifies two sets of principles operating in the opera: the industrial register and logic guided by inspiration (2021, 126). The former refers to the technical criteria of performance production, encompassing all the technical professions and musicians, and as Trevisan states, "even if different values are emphasized according to the discipline involved (e.g., the technical concerns of carpentry are not the same as those of playing music), the industrial logic values specific knowledge, professionalism, ability feasibility, and functionality" (2021, 128). The inspiration aspect refers to the individual interpretation "of the meanings, values, and emotions of the operatic material that are transmitted in the live performance."

Hari Blackmore recently presented a holistic approach to heterarchical theory in a paper examining seven themes he believes recur in the literature (2021, 10). These themes comprise multidimensionality; multi- or polycentricity; situational evaluation, ranking and self-reference; decentralization, or network horizontality; autonomy; interdependence; and system flexibility/adaptability. Stressing the absence of a lone paramount value, Blackmore believes this "results in a multiplicity of values, each

of whose dominance is contextually dependent" (2021, 7). Blackmore's delineation usefully applies to the Dead and merits elaboration.

Multidimensionality represents a plurality of values or spheres of authority with no consistent superordinate. This concept is derived from Hedlund (1993, 212), who argued that heterarchy orders actors along three dimensions: knowledge, action, and position of authority, with no dimension consistently superordinate in all settings. Multi- or polycentricity is defined as multiple actors or agencies working in parallel with no consistent superordinate where the importance of local, specialized knowledge is recognized. Blackmore references research in archaeology and governance studies for examples of this concept, which he distinguishes from multidimensionality. Instead of values, multicentricity is seen when individuals or organizational units work in parallel with no consistent paramount. This is especially interesting here, since this concept is, in some cases, cast as representing several equal hierarchies within an organization, each governed by its own rules (Hanson 2009; McIntosh 1999; Yoffee 2016).

Blackmore's third theme is "situational evaluation, ranking, and self-reference," in which individuals or groups in an organization are functionally ranked based on the situation or context in which they find themselves. Often, this results in temporary coalitions forming, as Blackmore explains, referencing Stark's (2001, 2009) ideas:

> He describes a situation where multiple frameworks of valuation are used in parallel (by different members of a group in some situations or by the same individual in different situations). Context-dependent and potentially ever-shifting rankings and relative position are the result, with teams and leaders coming together and dissolving as conditions warrant. (Blackmore 2021, 12)

Flattening hierarchical order is part of Blackmore's fourth theme: decentralization, or network horizontality (2021, 9). This concept refers to the horizontal complexity, lack of a consistent paramount, and the lateral corporate networks within heterarchically organized groups. Gatekeepers between lower echelons and upper are largely absent; any individual may

interact and possibly influence another regardless of status or occupation within the unit.

Autonomy as applied in heterarchical theory implies independent decision-making by either groups or individuals in an organization. According to Blackmore, the principle of autonomy is crucial in decentralization and situational ranking (2021, 15). Autonomy infuses heterarchical organizations with dynamism, allowing individuals and groups to form shifting coalitions and express a degree of independence despite being interdependent. Interdependence is the sixth theme Blackmore highlighted, in which individuals or groups mutually support each other and depend on one another to achieve organizational goals (2021, 16). Feedback between actors or groups of actors is crucial in achieving these goals.

The final theme found in heterarchical organizations is flexibility and adaptability, which are often absent in hierarchical structures (Crumley 2007, 33). This theme stresses the ability to spread information quickly within an organization, allowing coalitions to form and decisions to be made based on varied situations. These decisions may be drawn from a wide pool of choices presented by various actors or coalitions of actors. Also critical in this theme is the concept of adaptation if a particular solution is not working or, as Blackmore puts it, citing Stark (2001), "avoiding lock-in of any organizational strategy that is sub-optimal in the longer term" (2021, 17).

Like Crumley (2005, 37), Blackmore notes that heterarchical systems have pros and cons (2021, 17–18). He cites Bruni and Georgi (2015), who argue that heterarchies are prone to oscillation and an inability to make decisions, and Crumley (2001, 2005), stating that reaching consensus in heterarchies is slow and potentially fraught with the danger of conflict and indecisiveness (see Cumming 2016). Dionysius of Areopagite coined the term hierarchy to describe the organization of the heavens, which he imagined as comprising nine unambiguous, subordinated levels with ultimate power existing at the top of the ordered structure (Campell 1981). Some see hierarchy as the dominant system of organization in nearly every system of organization (e.g., Kulish 2002), and it can be

defined as any ordered system in which subordinate relationships exist between actors. In social contexts, hierarchy and power may be conflated. Those who sit at the organization's top wield power and make decisions, and the flow of information is generally top-down. These structures are often modeled as pyramidal, with a leader at the top and subordinates below at varying levels of power. Hierarchies function as a chain of command with power vested in one individual or group of people, allowing this dominant individual or group greater wealth and access to resources.

From their inception in 1965 through the formal retirement of their name in 1995, the Dead underwent myriad changes in personnel and staffing. The band's organization weathered successes and disappointments, but the overarching operation of the band itself largely remained constant. Based on interviews with key individuals and historical accounts, an overview of the functioning of the Dead's organization, deploying Blackmore's (2021) summary of heterarchy, offers a way to define and assess how the Dead's organization functioned.

The general model of the structure and dynamics of the heterarchical system offers several insights into the organization of the Dead. Noted for their marked lack of hierarchy or formal, long-term leadership by a paramount figure, the Dead nonetheless enjoyed enduring popularity and remarkable success over their thirty-year career. How they built an organization that achieved such success offers insights for organizational theorists, just as organizational theory offers insights for scholars interested in the band.

Multidimensionality and Multicentricity

Returning to the core themes outlined above, the first two of these are multidimensionality, in which a plurality of values or spheres of authority exists, and multicentricity, in which multiple actors work in parallel and exist in the absence of a consistent superordinate with specialized knowledge playing an important role (Blackmore 2021, 12). There is strong evidence to suggest that the Dead's organization was, to a degree, multidimensional.

Applying heterarchical theory to an archaeological context, Susan Keech McIntosh (2000; 2005) interpreted her data to reflect the exis-

tence of multiple autonomous, overlapping spheres of authority mediated by group or individual reputation and specialized knowledge. Hari Blackmore believes that "these multiple spheres of authority would imply multiple axes of value, each relating to different specialist activities" (2021, 11). In archaeology, these are suggested to be rituals, varying types of craft specialization, food procurement, etc. In the context of the Dead, these spheres of authority may be represented by different fields of expertise: sound engineering, equipment management, stage setup, lighting, tour management, merchandising, etc.

In 1981, the band commissioned longtime staffer Alan Trist to produce a report on the organization's structure. Entitled "A Balanced Objective," the document acknowledges "disharmony in … relationships" caused by "ambiguity about responsibility for essential functions" (qtd. in Barnes 2011, 86). The report noted that the organization boasted a "broad range of creativity" but cited "the need to combine these resources in flexible ways." And Trist emphasized that the band's success was "carried out through, not a hierarchical, command-and-control business mode, but an ad hoc method that called on every employee's highest talents" (Barnes 2011, 86).

Musicologist Michael Kaler characterizes the Dead as a group "whose musical direction arose from the interaction of its component members … but the focus throughout was on the organization as a single thing composed of several independent but aligned voices, unified, if at times, only raggedly so …" (2013/2014,13). This characterization may be extended to the larger entity of the band's organization in that authority was distributed, thus, no individual or group was governed wholly by others. Still, power and the decision-making process were fluid and situationally dependent. As Kaler explains, from Lesh's point of view, "the aim from the beginning was to create a group consciousness that would enhance or fulfill rather than suppress the individuality of the various band members, and that would be able to create in spontaneous yet unified ways" (2013/2014, 13). In performance, although Garcia was "the lead voice, he was not always the leader," as Kaler puts it, and creative inspiration could come from "any of the members: any of them could become the momentary center of musical attention—the group's leader…

thus leadership, both in terms of direction between contexts and within a given context, is potentially available to any member" (2013/2014, 15). This scenario supports the concept of a lack of a consistent subordinate. In the early days, McKernan was the central figure onstage, although as Scully noted, "you wouldn't go so far as to call him the leader. No one is in charge" (2001, 10). However, even early on, Garcia was the dominant instrumentalist and was quickly seen as the leader of the band.

Yet the organization was consensus-driven and "radically democratic," according to Barnes (2011, 80); he notes that the band employed "a flat organizational model in which all members of the Dead organization … helped make crucial decisions." As John Perry Barlow commented, "There was a strong sense, primarily on Garcia's part, that it was important that it was leaderless … He did not want to be leader" (Bar-Lev 2017). Garcia confirmed this consistently; as he noted in 1971, "I don't regard myself as the prime mover in any group" (Garcia and Lesh 1971). According to Horace Fairlamb, "this lack of fixed subordination to person or idea explains the band's ability to evolve" (20007, 19). McNally noted, "there is a hierarchy, but it changes constantly, and the considered optimum is for everyone to lead as they feel their moment" (2002, 56). As Garcia put it, there was a leader, "but it's somebody different each time" (Garcia and Weir 1970).

Sam Cutler, whom the Dead hired after he left the Rolling Stones in 1969, saw that clearly. "The Grateful Dead and the Rolling Stones occupied different planets. On planet Dead, everyone could think and act like a leader. On Planet Rolling Stone, there was really only one leader." Garcia was "bemused" by this, Cutler recalled. "This struck Garcia as wildly impractical; he just couldn't get his head around the idea that one guy could make decisions on everyone's behalf." It reflected what Cutler saw as the band's resistance to "what could be described as 'the conventional approach' to organizing any kind of collective endeavor" (2010, 293). As Garcia summarized, "the Grateful Dead is an anarchy. That's what it is … It doesn't have any goals, plans, or leaders. Or real organization. And it works. It doesn't work like General Motors does, but it works okay. And it's more fun" (qtd. in McNally 2002, 56).

Cutler witnessed that at his first meeting with the Dead, when they

were planning the free concert that would eventually be held at Altamont: "No one here seemed to have any more status than anybody else, and frequently, people would talk at cross-purposes and over each other" (2010, 190). That was part of the organization's culture. "Everybody had a voice" in the meetings, Trist noted. "Nobody wanted to be in charge, nobody wanted to say no to anything" (Bar-Lev 2017). That had mixed results, as Bob Weir noted: "The meetings can be a lot of fun, or they can be frustrating." But that could also thwart those who sought to push an agenda, a phenomenon that Lesh saw at the Acid Tests: "Nine times out of ten, if someone tried to take charge, it would just dissolve in their hands," Lesh observed (Gans 2002, 205).

The importance of wide contributions in decision-making was still evident in the band's later career in the late 1980s, at the peak of their commercial success. During this period, monthly all-employee meetings were held, including everyone from "the lowliest cook and bottle washer, as it were, to all the band members," Trist noted (Barnes 2011, 89). The organization operated on the principle that any significant decision demanded a consensus supported by every single person at the meeting. As promoter Bill Graham's lieutenant Peter Barsotti put it, "The bottom line was that if one guy didn't want to do something, they wouldn't do it. That was the Dead Principle" (qtd. in Barnes 2011, 89).

Horace Fairlamb believes that the Dead were "in the business of tolerating as much insubordination as possible. Their flattening of the business hierarchy was possible due to their organization's extraordinary esprit de corps, as shown by the corporate status of their road crew" (2007, 21). As Mickey Hart explained, "Nobody is anybody's boss" (qtd. in Barnes 2011, 92). Rock Scully clashed with the road crew, calling them "pigheaded, intransigent, wilful, and sulky"; he thought that "the Band takes good care of them and the crew just shits on them" (qtd. in Brightman 1999, 242). Dennis McNally had a more nuanced view:

> In the world of the Grateful Dead, it was assumed that—aside from musicians—people could be evaluated first as to character, and then trained. With three exceptions—drug casualties all—only one or two people left the Grateful Dead in my fifteen years of observing. And that … is a very efficient business "machine"—turnover is costly. (McNally 2012, 5–6)

Situational Ranking

Crumley noted that, in heterarchical structures, power and therefore rank is linked to values that situationally change (2005, 39). As Blackmore (2021) writes, if different dimensions dominate in varied contexts, then units change in their functional ranking from situation to situation. Band members and crew saw that dynamic in their work as well. "The situation is the boss," Parish explained. "There were times when I was in charge of everything, there were times when Jerry [Garcia] was in charge of everything … and other times it would be somebody else" (Bar-Lev 2017). His view supports Hedlund's contention that such an organization views impermanent groups of people who know who needs to be worked with in particular situations, rather than permanent structures, as a far more important factor than a vertical scheme of formal control (1994, 228).

The Dead went to great lengths to introduce varied ranking into the operation of the organization, creating an environment of shifting positions and making members of the organization accountable to each other's "value frameworks" (Stark 2009, 147); this resulted in lateral accountability and authority structures, eschewing what Blackmore (2021, 13) calls one paramount axis of rank or value. Thus, drum tech Lawrence "Ramrod" Shurtliff might also serve a term as President, and Bill "Kidd" Candelario, who took care of the bass and keyboards on the road, also headed Merchandising; Parish stewarded Garcia's guitars on tour and managed his solo band. As Fairlamb notes, "the crew aspired to the dignity of skilled collaborators on whom the performers depend from moment to moment" (2007, 21), and that was intentional: as Parish put it, "We were intricately part of helping them get down the road and create the music" (Bar-Lev 2017). The band's organizational philosophy made that possible. As Barnes explained, the Dead "minimized structure, downplayed job descriptions and asked everyone to pitch in however they could best contribute"; and "because of the band's commitment to shared leadership, the crew took on a great deal of authority" (2011, 92). That didn't guarantee authority. As Cutler commented, "at times I was the General, at other times I was lower than a Private" (pers. comm. 2022).

However, all staffers understood the primacy of the music—and that shaped the organization. Although Parish considered Garcia a friend,

he also looked up to him and recognized that "he was also my boss" (2003, 197). Yet Garcia's management style eschewed confrontation, unlike Hart. Parish found Hart "an extremely difficult and demanding boss … everyone else in the band had a fairly laid back attitude and treated the crew with respect and dignity. Mickey was a taskmaster … that was his prerogative, of course. He was in charge" (2003, 198). Parish finally switched jobs in order to avoid conflict and remain in the organization.

Situational ranking can be seen in the Dead's sound system, which grew over time to become the largest touring system in the United States. The idea for the system was Owsley "Bear" Stanley's, the Dead's first benefactor and sound engineer. A formidable personality who exercised tremendous influence in the early days of the band, Stanley helped support them in 1966 and spearheaded a number of innovations that improved the band's sound, as well as supplying them with LSD (Greenfield 2016). But Bear's contribution went deeper. As McNally notes, "He gave them a vision of quality that quite frankly influenced them for the next thirty years" (Greenfield 2016, 79). For example, Stanley pioneered the practice of recording the band's concerts with an eye toward helping them improve, but these "sonic journals," as Stanley called them, also provide some insight into situational ranking within the organization. The fluid nature of leadership played out on stage with the Dead in that no set lists were compiled before performances, a practice that persisted except for a brief period after Vince Welnick joined the band in 1990, while he was learning the repertoire (McNally pers. comm. 2022). Songs were chosen on stage in the spur of the moment, according to Garcia (Simon 1975), and the music itself was famously improvisational, showcasing long jams. The fluidity that characterized other aspects of their work was exemplified by these performances (Greuber et al., 1971).

Network Horizontality

Jessop (1998, 32) notes that heterarchical forms comprise self-organizing-interpersonal networks, and Blackmore (2021, 14) stresses a high level of interconnectedness among individual units in a heterarchically organized group. In the Dead, the organization was structured in a way that allowed each network to contribute to the overall benefit of the

operation. As Weir explained, the organization took "into account everybody's contributions":

> Not just the musicians' or the management's but the people who do the grunt work as well. Everybody has to contribute as a team, and how ever you set up your business mechanisms, they should reflect everybody's efforts and contributions. If they do, chances are the organization is not going to fold on itself and be diseased from within. (Qtd. in Barnes 2011, 89)

As Barnes observed, "everyone who worked for the band was considered a member of the family," a view that meant they had the right to "have their voices heard and to be well compensated for their labor" (2011, 88). In the early years, everyone in the organization made the same amount, and employees were paid full-time salaries even when the band was not touring (Barnes 2011, 88). McNally pointed out that "the crew had better pay, better working conditions and more influence on the band's decisions … than any employees of any music group ever" (2002, 213). This profit distribution extended to how the Dead distributed royalties and even credits for early compositions, although they did come to accept copyright registration norms later. Even then, they made it a point to acknowledge contributions; as Garcia observed, a composition was often only the "original creative flash," and he made it a point to share royalties with every member of the band who helped create the finished version of the song (Barnes 2011, 81).

Just as their music changed, so too did their organization, especially after the hiatus. The organizational model followed by the Dead became strained as their popularity grew. As McNally noted,

> That anarchy, which worked as a horizontal hierarchy—the band at the center, then the crew and other senior employees in the next ring out—began to suffer when the scale became distended by the addition of a million fans in the third ring. For anarchy disdains authoritarianism, and the pressure exerted by a million people is enormous. (2002, 56–57)

Yet they still managed to avoid some facets of hierarchy, such as information silos and gatekeeping, which obstructed information flow, McNally pointed out : "there was not as much gatekeeping internally, the energy

was so insane. There weren't any secrets, stuff spread like lightning" (pers. comm. 2022). However, territoriality could be an issue. McNally cites an incident during the Dead's 1978 concerts in Egypt as an example, when the band's piano tuner abruptly quit over a conflict with the crew, adding to the already challenging technical logistics of the concerts (McNally pers. comm. 2022).

Autonomy

As Blackmore notes, situational ranking and decentralization "imply, require and facilitate autonomy" (2021, 15), and the interpersonal networks in heterarchies depend on independent decision-making and actions of actors or groups of actors and authority being rooted in mutual obligation and dependence. Within the Dead, a good deal of autonomy was tolerated, even encouraged, but mutual obligation and consultative processes kept the organization together. Barnes notes that the Dead's "decentralized decision-making motivated employees to produce great work and remain loyal" (2011, 108). Individuals or groups working towards a common goal would often make autonomous decisions, but these were finalized after consultation.

There were autonomous units within the greater Dead orbit, such as the sound company Alembic. Created by Owsley Stanley, Rick Turner, and Ron Wickersham in 1969, Alembic was a separate entity, but the Dead were its primary clients, for whom they modified and designed new instruments and developed a state-of-the-art PA. According to Barnes, a "PA Consulting Committee" was established in 1972 to improve acoustics for the increasingly large venues the Dead were now playing, which would culminate in the plans for the Wall of Sound (2011, 72). But technical decisions, which could involve major issues on the stage itself, were made by Alembic, demonstrating autonomous action. Other autonomous units included Out of Town Tours, a tour booking business established by Cutler, as well as a travel agency and even a shop, Kumquat Mae, which sold records, band merchandise, and crafts.

Other autonomous units evolved to maintain control of the creative process. Tour manager Cameron Sears observed, "When we farmed things out, we found that, by that simple fact, we lost control, and control in the

creative process is very important; it's how we maintain our integrity. The more people that come between us and the final delivery of our art, the more diluted it becomes" (qtd. in Barnes 2011, 61). The culmination of that understanding was Grateful Dead Records, an independent record label that manufactured, marketed, and distributed their releases. Established in 1972, the company gave the Dead control of their business, allowing them to opt out of relationships and practices that they did not approve of (and that defined the major labels), maximize profit from record sales, offer lower prices and higher quality product, and develop their fan base (Barnes 2011, 63). Although Grateful Dead Records was incorporated independently, it was overseen by a board of key individuals in the Dead organization. Although it eventually succumbed to both internal fissures and external pressures, folding in 1976, it achieved remarkable success during its brief life, creating superior pressings, cultivating a deeper connection with fans, and imparting critical lessons that established a foundation for the success of the last half of the Dead's career.

Similarly, decisions regarding concerts and venues were made by a committee that Lesh oversaw. This committee would make decisions based on logistical concerns, the distance between venues, the ability to accommodate the band's sound system, etc. These decisions were then implemented by a promoter who would contact venues at least six months in advance (McNally and Cutler, pers. comm. 2022). Certain groups and individuals also had a reasonable degree of autonomy within the organization. According to Cutler, "In the hierarchy of the Dead family, equipment guys had far more influence and say than mere managers" (2010, 349). That could be a reflection of responsibility, but it might also owe to sheer force of personality. "Parish was the leader of the crew," McNally explained: "if Parish wanted [something] done in a certain way, it was going to get done that way" (McNally pers. comm. 2022).

Interdependence

Despite a degree of autonomy, heterarchical organizations are also highly interdependent (Blackmore 2021, 15), being structurally coupled (Jessop 1998, 29). Clearly, this applies in the music industry during the recording and performance processes, where feedback between different

units within an organization is crucial to deliver the best possible outcome for the organization and consumers. Garcia understood the interdependent nature of the Dead: "I'm not an artist in the solo or in the independent, artist-in-the-garret mold," he explained in a 1975 interview. "I'm part of dynamic situations, and that's where I like it and that's where I feel I function best" (Riley 2022, 115). And, as McNally noted, "the band's social organization flows from precisely the same principle … the result is an intelligent and functioning anarchy, with responsibility so diffused that the essential is accomplished" (2002, 55–56). Barnes notes that the performance of improvised music relied on team collaboration, making the musicians, in effect, interdependent: "the arrangements are almost nil," Garcia explained; "the intra-band collaboration is almost total" (qtd. in Barnes 2011, 19). Cutler stresses the interdependence in the Dead's organization, saying "all people who went on the road played a critical role to the effort. Everyone was necessary to being a functional unit" (pers. comm. 2022).

System Flexibility

Blackmore (2021) notes that flexibility is often cited as a benefit of heterarchical organization (Crumley 2005; McIntosh 2005; Stark 2001; 2009) as opposed to the more rigid nature of hierarchies (Crumley 2007, 34) in which information flow is often hindered by gatekeepers (McIntosh 2005). Trist highlighted the flexible nature of the Dead organization in his internal report "A Balanced Objective," where he noted, "To define the 'flexible group process' is to lose it … its value lies in the spontaneity which comes from acknowledgment of it and openness to the unknown next point of invention" (qtd. in Barnes 2011, 87). That was prescient: Barnes credits the Dead with pioneering a management style that was "long on flexibility and short on structure … that would be subsequently embraced by corporate America" (2011, 15).

In live performances, the band's flexibility was paramount: improvisation was a hallmark of their shows, as scholars and critics have explored (cf. Malvinni 2013, 169; Olsson 2017, 92). The band's approach to improvisation was rooted in their experiences in the Acid Tests, which Garcia noted were "our first exposure to formlessness. Formlessness

and chaos lead to new forms. And new order" (Garcia et al. 2009, 58). According to Malvinni, the Dead developed essentially three frameworks for improvisation, writing "although the Dead did not invent … these types of improvisation, they were the first … to employ … them within the same song, consistently, and over a wide range of repertoire" (2013, 169). Garcia's lead guitar in these jams often sounds like one voice among many, and the jams were only possible if the members of the band were "open to new ideas, formulations, episodes, modal relationships, and motivic emphases" (Malvinni 2013, 100).

Malvinni contends that the preconditions for the jams the Dead are famous for were the result of band members listening to one another, an openness to change based on the situation, a focus on group mind, and the ability to play together as "fingers on a hand" (2013, 100). Ulf Olsson sees the Dead's improvisational leanings as a "means of resisting hegemonic power relations" in which "different interests and desires of the band members were negotiated" (2017, 2; 93). He argues that:

> The improvisations of the Grateful Dead reveal a dialogue that also includes a violent struggle, tangible, for instance, in the interplay between Lesh's bass and Garcia's guitar: There is a powerful tension there, based on their mutual understanding, that allows them to draw the music in opposite directions, using the other's playing to jump off into something else. Keith Godchaux, with his piano and keyboards, and Kreutzmann's drums, could violently force the band to investigate a harmonic and rhythmical figure. (Olsson 2017, 123)

Mickey Hart explained how that process worked in performance as a kind of musical decision making:

> [M]ostly it happens when someone is suggesting a song either rhythmically or melodically, with someone doing something that triggers a response from another person. And when three people are doing something that is recognizable, then the fourth person will jump on it. And then the fifth and the sixth … you really have to listen, and not be so involved with your personal ego and your sound. This is one of the best parts of the Grateful Dead, when we can transcend that. You can lose yourself and find the collective good stuff. (Brightman 1999, 135)

As McNally saw it, "there was endless flexibility, particularly in the early days" (pers. comm. 2022). Cutler echoed that, paraphrasing Helmuth von Moltke to sum up the flexibility in the organization: "no plan survives a battle, goodness knows that applies in the music business" (pers. comm. 2022).

Assessing the Dead

The Grateful Dead grew out of the wider counterculture of the 1960s and specifically the scene that developed in San Francisco and its environs, and they were closely involved in the psychedelic movement of the time, acting as the 'house band' for the early Acid Tests put on by the Merry Pranksters, led by author Ken Kesey. It may be argued that Kesey was deeply suspicious of traditional social institutions and the state, which he termed "the Combine" in his *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The Dead were very much a part of the counterculture bohemia that flourished in the Haight-Ashbury in the 1960s, although the band bristled at the term "hippie," which they felt was a media invention, as the celebrated Death of Hippie parade in 1967 made clear (Scully 2001, 133). Yet in many ways, their beliefs and even their lifestyle exemplified what commentators called "hippie," which band members noted fueled their creative inspiration. Asked about the group's communal living arrangement in 1967, Garcia explained that "when you have a lot of the people around who are stimulated—interested—it just presents more channels of communication. More ideas just flow" (Kofsky 2013/2014, 98).

The Dead's social milieu included other community groups such as the Diggers, a radical group of "community anarchists" (Dolgin 2007), as well as the Hells Angels, a motorcycle gang who had a house in the neighborhood. The Dead played concerts in the 1960s and early 1970s supporting some of these groups and others, including the Black Panther Party, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and Native Americans. The choice of which causes to support was also rooted in the heterarchical nature of their decision-making, as Garcia explained: "We don't arrive at decisions by vote, for example. We arrive at decisions [to do a benefit] by the lowest common denominator. If any one person does not want to do a concert, whether it's a benefit or what, we don't do it" (Garcia and Weir

1972). That could complicate the adoption of even sound ideas, however. As Crumley argues, a weakness in heterarchical structures is the fact that there is a need for constant dialogue with a multitude of voices, which lead to a slow process of consensus building (2005, 38). Garcia recognized the challenge of decision-making by consensus, once commenting to Dennis McNally that "the Grateful Dead is where good ideas go to die" (McNally pers. comm. 2022).

Political causes were especially problematic. In general, the Dead saw themselves as apolitical; as Garcia explained, "generally none of us are political thinkers or into political trips or activism or any of that kind of bullshit" (Itkowitz 1970). Although they did play free concerts in support of some political groups, they often cited non-political reasons; when they performed a benefit for the Black Panthers, Garcia referenced the practical work undertaken by the organization, not the political side of their activities: "they have a rhetoric trip going on—but what they're doing is actual, practical things. They got a free breakfast trip, and they're starting a free shoes thing, they're starting shoe factories and stuff like that" (Itkowitz 1970).

A laissez-faire approach to business did not always complement the heterarchical structure of the band. The Dead consistently struggled with finances in their first decade (Smith 1970; Cutler pers. comm. 2022). In 1969, Garcia discussed the need to bring in a new manager, Lenny Hart, to address the band's financial problems, noting that "we've given him the power to do what he wants to do; his whole trip is to straighten it all out, you know, and make it so that all is feasible, and also to help us with ideas for new forms and so forth" (Lydon 1969). That leeway gave Hart the opportunity to embezzle at least $155,000 from the band, over $1,253,139 in 2024 dollars.[1] Five years later, Ron Rakow was also terminated for alleged fiscal misconduct; although he disputed that charge, in the eyes of insiders he validated the accusation by writing a check to himself for $225,000 dollars, bankrupting the band's record company. As the band regrouped, they reverted to more heterarchical principles, relying less on fixed roles and distributing leadership and decision-making responsibilities, rather than concentrating them in the hands of one individual. Cutler noted that the response to Hart's embezzlement was to hire three indi-

viduals to manage the band rather than have one person handling funds, a solution Cutler found unfathomable (pers. comm. 2022).

By and large, the Dead embraced an approach throughout their career that represented a heterarchical organization. Although, as manager Jon McIntire noted, "At the really big junctures, Garcia called the shots," Garcia was the kind of leader who mistrusted the exercise of power; instead, he was a transformational leader who inspired others and acted as an agent of change (qtd. in Barnes 2011, 78). He did this through charisma and hard work: his band mates looked up to him, but he consistently rejected the role of leader, instituting a "flat organizational model" that promoted employee satisfaction (Barnes 2011, 85). Citing Pearce and Conger (2002), Barnes classifies the Dead's model as one of shared leadership, with power distributed among a set of individuals and not centralized in a single person. This also distributes the stresses associated with leadership and boosts creativity.

The impetus for this approach reflected band member personalities but it was also the result of experience, sometimes painful. In 1968, increasing frustration with Weir and McKernan by Garcia, Hart, and especially Lesh resulted in "a meeting, and we all sat around and kind of skirted the issue," Kreutzmann recalled. Even though Weir and McKernan left feeling that they had been fired, Kreutzmann believes "Nobody could actually come right out and fire them" (Kreutzmann and Eisen 2015, 124). Regardless, they emerged the stronger for it, Lesh telling a reporter the next year that they "had passed the point where breaking up exists as a possible solution to any problem. The Dead, we all know, is bigger than all of us" (Lydon 1969).

Olsson (2017, 130) sees the Dead and, indeed, Garcia's role in the band, as based on charismatic authority, borrowing from Weber's model of social organization in which "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber 2012, 358). Olsson writes that the band members were "aware of the vulnerability of a charismatic organization [and] … constantly tried to free themselves from performing as an authority or from a position of power." They did this by emphasizing the role of

the audience as "part of the band, [and] the insistence that the band was apolitical" (2017, 131). Garcia himself, Olsson feels, "was forced into the position of charismatic authority even though he worked hard at fending it off" (2017, 132).

Barnes credits the Dead's organizational model with inspiring later corporate developments in North America (2011, 100–102). Many large American businesses have indeed adopted some aspects of the heterarchical model. The trend of delayering or flattening hierarchical structure was embraced by many corporations beginning in the mid-1980s, and the concept began to appear in literature on management studies in the early 1980s (e.g., Amara 1980; Hazledine 1984). Yet whether that was meaningful could be questioned, as Brian Arthur wrote: "There is much talk these days about a new management style that involves flat hierarchies," but he wondered, "Are these new insights, or are they fads?" (1996, 47).

A move away from hierarchical structures did indeed appear to be a trend: a study of over 300 large corporations in the United States found the hierarchies in these firms changed significantly between 1986–2006 (Wulf 2012, 8). But that study also found that in many of these companies, although Chief Operating Officers eliminated layers of management, rather than widening access to power, they "broadened their spans of control" (2012, 8). To date, the heterarchical model employed by the Dead has never been widely adopted in mainstream business culture.

Maintaining that heterarchy proved difficult for the band as well. After the death of Garcia, the Dead retired the name, but various aggregations of the remaining band members reformed under various names, including The Other Ones, The Dead, and Further, before finally all reuniting in 2015 for five well-received reunion concerts. Although fans found the music inspiring, internally the heterarchical nature of the Dead's organization began to unravel, along with the rest of the business structure (Selvin 2018). It was disillusioning for all concerned, as Kreutzmann wrote:

> Under the new guard as just The Dead, however … it became a business. A corporation … the head trips were so monstrous and so big in that scene, with everyone—including non-band mem-

> bers—fighting for another piece of the pie. Or for more power. Or for more control. (Kreutzmann and Eisen 2015, 427)

His remarks suggest that while Garcia may not have been in charge, his personality and leadership served to maintain the heterarchical nature of the Dead. Lesh made that point explicitly: writing about the post-Garcia efforts to reorganize the band's business, he noted, "Without Jerry's presence to pull us together, we were spinning farther and farther apart" (Lesh 2005, 328).

A few months after the Dead formed, they took LSD. Shortly after that, they decided to participate in the Acid Tests, Ken Kesey's multimedia free-form theatrical events, where they forged a foundation for their approach to music and to their work. As Garcia explained in 1969, what LSD taught the band was that there was "another plane, or several other planes, and the quest is to extend that limit … In the Acid Test that meant do away with old forms, with old ideas, try something new. When it was moving right, you could dig that there was something that it was getting toward, something like ordered chaos" (Lydon 1969). For decades, his comment fueled mainstream media dismissal of the band as disorganized, which their well-publicized friction with Warner Bros. Records amplified. Yet the band's continued pursuit of excellence, without the constriction of earlier forms, meant that their innovative approach to music was also reflected in their business practices, as business theorists have increasingly come to recognize (Rifkin 2015/2016).

The Dead's embrace of heterarchical principles in their leadership reflects that commitment. Vacillating and shared leadership are traits that have been shown to represent multidimensionality, situational ranking, network horizontality, autonomy, a great degree of interdependence between units in the organization, and a significant degree of flexibility. For business theorists and for scholars in Dead studies, the heterarchical model offers a compelling framework for understanding and assessing the band's remarkable success over time, especially in an industry organized around very different principles and based on very different models. The Dead's enduring success came from a willingness to embrace unorthodox and novel approaches to problems across a wide spectrum of arenas, from

musical to technological to organizational. Heterarchy is one of those approaches. Not only is it the most useful model for understanding the organizational structure of the Dead, heterarchy goes to the heart of their project—and their enduring appeal.

Note

1. Dennis McNally cites that widely circulated figure (2002, 362). Shortly after the theft and prosecution, Garcia noted, "A great deal has been lost and is missing ... there's really no way of estimating how much money we've lost, as a result of that. There isn't. There's only sort of rough estimates" (Garcia, Reich, and Wenner 2003, 76).

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