

# **General Business Musicians: Insights on Leadership During Initial Group Formation**

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*This exploratory, qualitative study investigated the initial formation of general business (GB) musicians. The findings of the study suggest that during initial GB band formation, direction-setting, expectations, and norms are of critical importance. The findings are almost identical to the existing research on initial group formation, which suggests that GB bands operate in a way that is similar to groups in more formal organizational settings. The results of the study highlight several implications for GB band leadership to consider, both during recruitment as well as during initial GB band formation.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This study explored the initial formation process of bands of General Business (GB) musicians. Berklee College of Music (n.d.) discusses a wide range of career opportunities for working musicians. One of these opportunities is called the GB musician, characterized as one who “maintains a diverse portfolio of musical material, granting them the ability to perform in virtually any situation, from weddings to private and corporate events” (Berklee College of Music, n.d., para. 4). GB musicians are professional instrumentalists and vocalists with a substantial repertoire of popular songs spanning various time periods, genres and styles. It is very common for bands of GB musicians to form, in which members are very consistent from season to season. These GB bands work with a booking agency and have members who are hired on a more permanent basis to make sure that the promotional items match the actual product of the band. Research on GB bands, their formation processes, and how band members learn to work together does not currently exist. As such, the intent of this research was to provide insights on GB bands’ initial formation processes. Often, a new approach or perspective in one area of study can help to inform other areas of study. Academic management courses, for example, regularly make use of team sports as applications to help the learner better understand how team processes play out in organizational settings (Grehaigne, 1989).

The goals of this study were to 1) Understand how GB bands initially form, 2) Provide some insights on how GB bands organize themselves, 3) Introduce research that can potentially assist with educating the individual GB musician as well as the GB band, and 4) Gain more understanding about the initial formation of groups in general. For this study, the following research question was explored: *How do members perceive the initial formation of their GB band?*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Tuckman (1965) defines the initial stage of the group process as the 'Forming' stage, when group members orient themselves and exhibit testing- and dependence-related motives and behaviors. Similarly, Bennis and Shepard (1974) discuss an initial phase of group development referred to as 'Dependence-Power Relations,' where group members experience anxiety. Wheelan (2014) refers to the initial phase of group development as 'Dependency and Inclusion,' which is consistent with the first two theories. The idea of a group working together to create a safe environment where members feel free to contribute and express ideas is noted by Edmondson (1999). Although there have been studies focusing on musicians within groups (Phillips & Strachan, 2016), research focusing on the initial start-up of a group of GB musicians does not exist. Analysis of the literature on initial group formation revealed some important themes. Group member anxiety appears to influence many aspects of a group's initial formation (Bion, 1961; Bennis & Shepard, 1974; Wheelan, 2014). The same is true for expectations (Tuckman, 1965; Gersick, 1988) as well as inclusion and exclusion (Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993; Ellemers, De Gilder, & Haslam, 2004; Levine & Kerr, 2007).

## METHODOLOGY

This was an exploratory study with a qualitative approach in order to look for themes that may have emerged from the data obtained (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The sample consisted of four GB bands of six to seven GB musicians per band, with a total of 25 participants. The meetings of newly-formed GB bands (i.e., within four months of existence) were recorded via video and were observed by the researcher, and each group member was interviewed individually using semi-structured interviews (Wengraf, 2001). Triangulation occurred by analyzing the video, observation, and interview data to make every effort to provide an accurate account of what emerged from the data (Patton, 2005). The previously-noted literature was used to inform and construct the questions for the individual interviews. As the primary researcher, being closely-connected to the work of GB musicians and bands as a GB musician and band manager necessitated the use of researcher memos throughout the study to examine potential biases being brought to the study (Merriam, 1988). Once all data was analyzed, emergent themes were identified.

## RESULTS

Analysis of the observational data revealed three emergent themes, and analysis of the interview data revealed six emergent themes. All emergent themes relate to being a GB musician, leadership, norms, comfort, interdependence, expectations, and anxiety. Further analysis revealed four key findings. The first key finding indicates that during initial formation, GB band members enjoy their work, are invested in the success of their GB band, and become more comfortable in sharing their ideas with members of their GB band the more they play together. The second key finding showed that GB band members expect to be paid well, but members discuss not being paid well during initial GB band formation since the focus is on members being able to work effectively together. Third, participants perceive the formal GB band leadership as the initiators of direction-setting behaviors and as the definer of norms during initial formation. The fourth and final key finding suggests that members perceive two different types of norms within their GB band during initial formation, which include band-specific ways of working together, as well as rules of GB band etiquette that apply to being a part of a GB band in general.

These results show that what plays out in a GB band during initial formation is very consistent with the literature on initial group formation, and that GB bands can serve as rich examples of the initial group formation process. Additionally, this study connects with research relating musical groups to more formal organizational groups (Phillips & Strachan, 2016; Hadida, Tarvainen, & Rose, 2015; Lim, 2014; Seifter, 2008) by suggesting that GB bands are like the types of musical groups that have been mentioned in the research (e.g., jazz groups). Since it is rare for group studies to include video observation, this study provides an example of the benefits of doing so. The findings of this study suggest implications for GB

band leadership to consider, and these include group member expectations, direction-setting considerations, and the establishment of norms.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR GB BAND LEADERSHIP

The findings of this investigation suggest that what happens during a GB band’s initial formation is very likely to influence its future development. This prognostication is consistent with the literature on initial group formation (Smith & Berg, 1987). Since research on GB bands does not exist, this study is important because it finds that initial band formation is similar to initial group formation in general. Although it is not possible to make generalizations from studies with a small sample size (Patton, 2005), the findings indicate that GB bands could benefit from understanding some of the central aspects of initial group formation. Some of these central aspects include direction-setting considerations, group member expectations, and the establishment of norms (i.e., GB band expectations).

GB band leadership are what Theodorson (1953) refers to as the initiators of their respective GB band. Consequently, the onus falls upon them to address these central aspects of initial group formation with their respective GB band. The leadership literature identifies at least two types of factors to consider when managing a group, which include task-focused factors like setting direction, and relationship-focused factors such as communicating expectations to members or other interpersonal considerations (Robbins & Judge, 2015). Table 1 provides an overview of GB band leadership considerations for this study with a breakdown of the key findings.

**TABLE 1**  
**GB BAND LEADERSHIP CONSIDERATIONS: BREAKDOWN OF KEY FINDINGS**

<b>Relationship-Focused Factors (GB Band Member Expectations)</b>	<b>Task-Focused Factors (GB Band Expectations)</b>
Member Work, Investment, Comfort	Direction-Setting and Norms
Dissonance of Member Expectations	Dev. Norms and Codes of Conduct

The following sections will present strategies for GB band leadership to consider when addressing the key findings of this study as they apply toward their respective GB band during initial formation.

### **Addressing GB Band Member Work, Investment, And Comfort**

Participant responses from this study suggest that doing GB work allows for personal and professional development, and that these opportunities can contribute to the degree to which participants like being a GB musician. Highlighting the personal and professional development opportunities associated with being a GB musician could prove to be beneficial for GB band leadership, particularly when recruiting members who are new to GB work. GB band leadership could also highlight opportunities to take on extra roles within the GB band during member recruitment, and this potential for growth within the GB band may be appealing to GB musicians who are looking for personal and professional development opportunities. Personal and professional development opportunities for members are important when thinking about how member commitment can be sustained during initial GB band formation, as the promise of being paid well might not be enough on its own.

According to the findings of this study, being a member of a GB band during initial formation requires a great deal of investment. To address this, GB band leadership should seek out members who are likely to be invested in the long-term success of their respective GB band. This could be accomplished by asking specific questions of potential band members, such as their long-term plans for remaining in their current geographic location, for example. GB band members must also be committed to working collectively to achieve the intended tasks and outcomes associated with becoming a successful GB band. Ultimately, this means establishing a full schedule of performances each year for the GB band. Doing so

allows members to rely on their involvement in a GB band as a steady source of income. Conveying this significance during the recruitment process could prove to be beneficial for GB band leadership and potential members alike and doing so can help to screen out potential members who are not willing or who are unable to make the kind of commitment that being in a GB band during initial formation requires.

Findings suggest that there is an increase in GB band member comfort as the band progresses over time. Increased GB band member comfort might make for an increase of instances where the boundaries of leadership are tested by members, as they might share ideas that conflict with the direction set by the band leader. If this is the case, GB band leadership would need to be flexible in their management of the band, so that as the members of their GB band become more comfortable in sharing opinions, the appropriate outlets and processes are in place to properly manage the increase in individual input. In other words, it would be beneficial for GB band leadership to be able to anticipate the testing of boundaries within their respective GB band, and thus be able to treat it as a normal part of group development. Doing so might also make it more likely for GB band leadership to respond to these instances in ways that set clear limits, but do not shut down or discredit band member reactions. These instances of boundaries being tested during initial group formation are consistent with the literature on group development (Tuckman, 1965). Previous research on initial group development noted a constant testing of the power dynamic between group members and the leader in order to demonstrate expertise and elicit leader-like behaviors from the leader (Bennis & Shepard, 1974). During this time, band leadership can also examine who fits what they are looking for in members of their GB band, and who does not. Since personnel changes may very well be necessary during initial GB band formation, GB band leadership would be able to anticipate these changes and adjust the band as needed.

#### **Addressing Dissonance of GB Band Member Expectations**

GB band leadership can benefit from recruiting members who have expectations that are in line with the realities of a newly-formed GB band. Some of these realities include the potential for less pay during the beginning of the formation process, and the requirement of time and effort to prepare for the demands of GB work -- most of which is un-paid (e.g., rehearsals, showcases, meetings, etc.). Being a member of a newly-formed GB band requires a substantial amount of time and effort from all members for the GB band to be successful, and this may involve members having less time to devote toward other musical projects. As such, it would be beneficial for GB band leadership to address these realities when recruiting band members, which can be done by articulating the expectation that GB band membership will need to be treated as a top priority to all potential band members. Overall, GB band leadership can benefit from painting a realistic and clear picture of being a member of a newly-formed GB band during the member recruitment process. Additionally, GB band leadership can highlight some of the personal and professional development opportunities to band members in an effort to keep them motivated during the initial GB band formation process. Doing so, along with the other items mentioned, can help GB band leadership to more effectively manage the dissonance of GB member expectations during this time. Consideration for these relationship-focused factors of their GB band could prove to be beneficial as the band progresses.

#### **Addressing GB Band Direction-Setting and Norms**

According to the results of this study, setting good precedents for mutual expectations and norms appear to be pre-cursors of a healthy GB band. Since GB band leadership is expected to set these precedents, it is their responsibility to determine the specific set of considerations by which the band will operate. These considerations may include ways of setting direction for the GB band, managing the progression of the GB band, and establishing how leadership will play out during rehearsals, showcases, and performances.

The findings of this study reveal that GB band members look to GB band owners and band leaders to set direction for their respective GB band, which involves managing the tasks associated with the overall operation of the band. The way GB band leadership sets direction can make a difference, as setting clear

directions without being overly constrictive with band members seems to be important to allow room for band members to share ideas when possible. For example, during a rehearsal, a band leader can communicate to members of their GB band how a client wants a specific song to be played in a way that is clear and effective, but also in a way that does not completely rule out any input from members. Direction-setting and norms are critical components of initial group formation according to the results of this study. GB band leadership can formulate strategies ahead of time as to how to set direction and define norms for their respective GB band in a constructive manner, placing value in efficiency over procedure. Since the band leader is likely to be a member of their respective GB band, it would be beneficial for them to establish an active leadership role. The alternative, which would involve the band owner remaining in an active leadership role of the GB band, seems to minimize the importance of the band leader role in the GB band overall, but there may be good reason for the band to be managed in this way. Reasons may include excessive turnover among band personnel, or high levels of interpersonal (i.e., dysfunctional) conflict among band members (Robbins & Judge, 2015). Regardless of how a GB band is run, the ways in which direction is set is likely to influence how norms are established during the initial formation process.

The information provided above illustrates ways in which GB band leadership can work to set direction and establish norms for their GB band. In addition, these implications demonstrate the need for GB band leadership to think about the norms they want to establish within their respective GB band. These norms, along with the expectations established during member recruitment, will play an instrumental role during initial GB band formation.

### **Addressing Developmental Norms and Codes of Conduct**

Participants in this study described what were categorized as two types of norms that are present and play critical roles during initial GB band formation: Developmental norms, and codes of conduct. GB band leadership can benefit from addressing both kinds of norms during initial formation. During initial GB band formation, developmental norms are generated as a result of GB band leadership setting direction and become the standards by which the GB band operates. As such, it would be in the best interest of band leadership to communicate a clear message of what is needed from members in order for their respective GB band to be successful. Ways of doing this may include placing emphasis on developmental norms as they are created or providing a periodic summary of these norms during initial GB band formation. This could be reinforced by ensuring that these norms are reflected on the agendas for all GB band events (i.e., rehearsals, showcases, performances). The agenda on its own provides the *what* for GB band members, but the developmental norms provide the *how* for the GB band overall. Communicating a clear message of success to band members sets out mutual expectations, and GB band leadership can make use of this message as needed. Findings also suggest that developmental norms are based upon the preferences and style of GB band leadership, which make them specific to each GB band. Since findings indicate that GB band members look to band leadership for direction, it would make sense for band leadership to choose more of a direct style of managing the band. This might include direction-setting approaches to band-related tasks such as *we'll do it this way*, or *this is the best way to do it*. Understanding how developmental norms form, and how they are adopted by band members, can help band leadership make good decisions for their respective newly-formed GB band.

Codes of conduct, such as showing up on time and being ready to go at the start of the performance, generally apply to membership in any GB band, and members seem to gain a better understanding of these as they gain more experience as a GB musician. Since these norms are also defined by GB band leadership, finding a way to communicate some specific codes of conduct during the recruitment process can help with selecting the right band members, as well as with setting clear expectations during initial GB band formation. For example, it is common for GB bands to have a 'No Drama' rule, which implies that all band members are always expected to act professionally.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest several implications for GB band leadership to consider addressing during initial formation. These include implications for the recruitment of GB band members, as well as approaches to managing the newly-formed GB band. By developing a cogent understanding of

some of the central aspects of initial group formation, GB band leadership can address what is necessary for their respective GB band to be successful.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of this study, there are four applied conclusions. First, direction-setting is very important during initial group formation. By GB band leadership being more conscious and deliberate about direction-setting during initial formation, GB bands could potentially pull together more quickly while also being more effective throughout the initial formation process. Second, norms are established very early on in GB bands. Because this was not a longitudinal study, it is not known if these norms progress or become altered in any way during the initial formation process. Regardless, norms are an important part of initial GB band formation. Third, GB band leadership can benefit from being aware of each band member's commitment level to the band and if members have competing commitments such as original music projects. Being aware of member commitment during initial GB band formation can help band leadership be prepared to make accommodations or adjustments as needed. Fourth and finally, GB band leadership should learn ways to recognize signs of dissonant expectations among members of their GB band during initial formation. This awareness can help GB band leadership set the appropriate direction and introduce norms that will help ease the tensions of members potentially not making much money during initial band formation despite joining the band to make good money. Although these applied conclusions have little to do with the primary objective of a GB band (i.e., playing music), the results of this study suggest that considering group properties such as norms or expectations can make the primary objective that much easier to achieve. Much like any business, the external success of a GB band is influenced by the internal health of the band itself.

If GB bands incorporate aspects of group initial formation much like those mentioned in the literature into their practice, it can be assumed that this would have a positive result, although more research would be needed to draw any firm conclusions. The findings of this study indicate steps GB bands can take during initial formation that might help them work more effectively together, perhaps even becoming established more quickly as a result. Based on the results of this study, there are a number of opportunities to expand the research on initial GB band formation and group formation, and perhaps future studies will aim to do so. This research helps fill a gap for research about GB bands, and because so little research about initial formation of groups exists in the literature, this research contributes to this topic as well. Initial GB band formation draws many parallels to the literature on group formation, and it is hoped that both the bands and the GB musicians who comprise them can serve as models toward understanding group behavior going forward.

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