

# Preparing for Ensemble Performance: The development of rehearsal strategies in chamber ensembles

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## Summary

This project explores the strategies used by Western classical musicians to prepare for chamber ensemble performance. It combines an investigation into current rehearsal methods used by chamber groups, with a longitudinal study of ways of working in a chamber ensemble. Rehearsal methods of groups of different types, sizes and levels of experience are assessed through interview, observation and surveys. Using theory and methods from organisational routines research, a longitudinal study monitors changes in rehearsal routines over time, and the social and group dynamics which accompany this.

This research has the potential to provide musicians and educators with insights into what happens within the rehearsal room, and how ways of working emerge and develop in ensembles. Insights derived from the application of methods developed for studying evolving work practices in other domains may prove valuable in casting new light on this aspect of performance practice.

## Introduction

It is widely accepted that optimal group working is a prerequisite of successful collaborative music making, although in practice it has been shown to vary widely, even in professional groups (Murnighan and Conlon, 1991). Chamber ensemble rehearsal skills are acquired by a mix of informal and formal learning methods, involving the sharing of tacit and explicit knowledge (Smilde, 2009). Also, rehearsals of chamber musicians are not as well documented as compared with orchestral rehearsals with a conductor, as reflected in the size of the respective bodies of literature. Scholars in the field of organisational science have studied groups of musicians; whilst they are regarded as both 'special' and 'specialist', they are fundamentally a work team and can be studied as such (Sicca, 2000; Gilboa and Tal-Shmotkin, 2012).

The project aims to:

- Investigate methods used by student, amateur and professional chamber musicians in collaborative rehearsals, in order to advance understanding of the differences and similarities between group types and levels of experience
- Explore how the patterns and combinations of these methods (characterised as 'routines') emerge over time in newly-formed music ensembles, and how they contribute to group development.



## Research questions

What rehearsal methods are used by Western classical musicians to prepare for ensemble performance?

- How are rehearsal activities structured, and how do musicians collaborate and work together on technical and expressive musical elements? How open-ended or predetermined is the rehearsal process?
- How do the themes mentioned by student, amateur and professional chamber musicians help to explain differences in group type and experience?
- To what extent does the practice-based theory of organisational routines explain the nature and development of rehearsal methods in a student chamber ensemble?

## Theory

To provide the basis for characterising the elements of rehearsal, King (2004) provides a framework of rehearsal practices, based on the following dimensions, developed through empirical study of professional and student musicians. These elements are used as a starting point for investigation of the approaches adopted by chamber musicians:

- structural (order of rehearsal tasks)
- technical (nature of rehearsal tasks)
- collaborative aspects (interpersonal dynamics, communication, planning)

Also central to the research design is the theory of organisation routines, specifically the practice-based view proposed by Feldman and Pentland (2003). In this view, there is fundamental duality, characterised as 'ostensive' and 'performative', or 'latent' versus 'expressed' elements. In this respect, the routine can be considered a generative or emergent phenomenon (Kozlowski and Ilgen, 2006). This theory has not previously been applied in the context of musical collaboration, and the extent to which this model explains the development of rehearsal methods will form a key output of the research of potential interest to both musicians and organisational scientists.

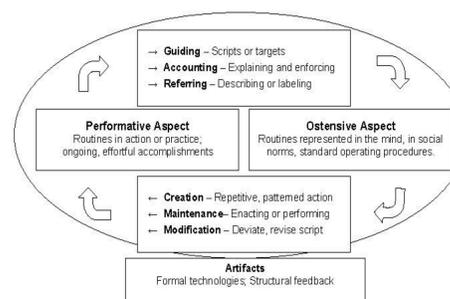


Figure 1. 'Ostensive and performative' theory of organisational routines

**Organisational routines:**  
"Repetitive, recognisable patterns of of interdependent actions, carried out by multiple actors" (Feldman and Pentland, 2003, p. 95).

## Methodology

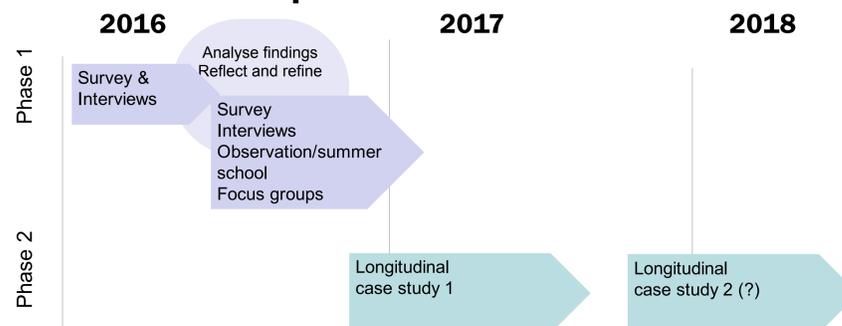
This is a mixed methods research design, planned in two phases:

**Phase 1:** Interviews, survey and observations of musicians will explore the types of approaches adopted in different settings, stages of development and types of group.

**Phase 2:** Longitudinal case study(ies) of newly-formed groups of musicians, using methods adapted from organisational routines research. These combine quantitative and qualitative elements to provide a detailed picture of the social dynamics and cumulative change in rehearsal content over time, as a group develops.

- Player tasks and interactions (performative aspects):
  - video of rehearsals (recorded by group members)
  - rehearsal logs
- Player expectations and interpretations (ostensive aspects):
  - Interviews at key points during the group's development.

## Outline research plan



## References

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