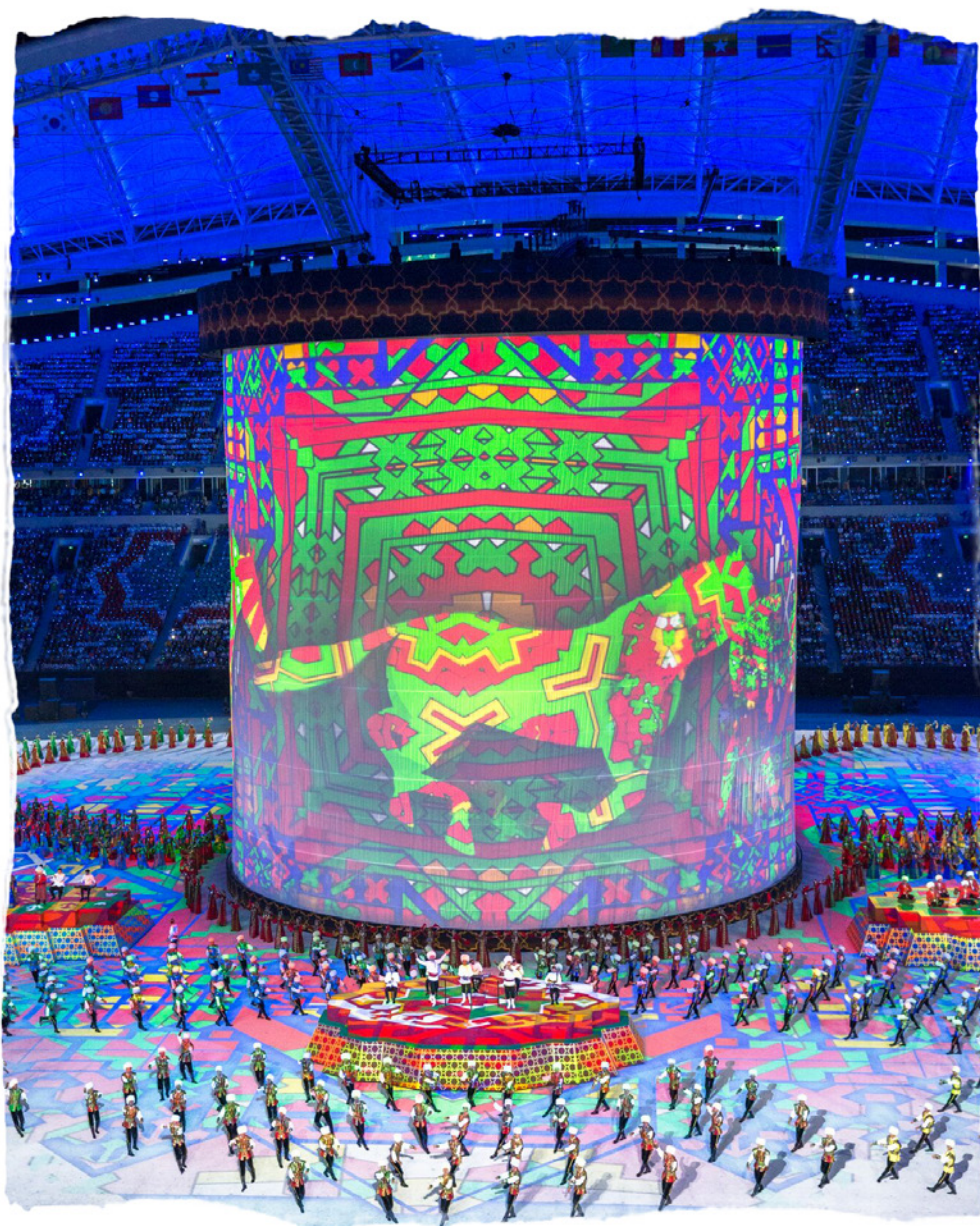


*Company Profile*

The Paradoxes of “Teaming” in the  
Creative Events Industry: The Case of  
Balich Worldwide Shows  
Beatrice Manzoni, Leonardo Caporarello

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL *of* ARTS MANAGEMENT



The Role of Background Music  
in Visitors' Experience of Art  
Exhibitions: Music, Memory  
and Art Appraisal

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How Orchestra Conductors Play  
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Cyrille Sardais, Josée Lortie,  
Emmanuel Coblence

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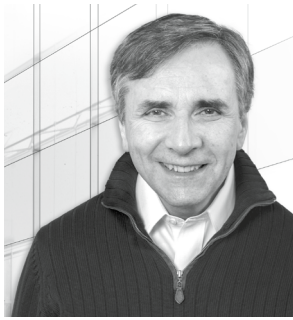
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## FROM THE EDITOR



**T**his Fall 2019 issue provides an inspiring view of management and marketing research in arts and culture. The topics of the articles included herein bring new perspectives on how arts organizations and cultural industries are managed.

In the area of marketing, our first article, by Sandra Maria Correia Loureiro, Holger Roschk and Filipa Lima, explores the effect of background music on the perception and memory

of an art exhibition. Based on two experiments, one conducted in laboratory, the other in seven art galleries, the authors show that, contrary to the general conclusion found in the literature, music may have adverse effects. However, art galleries can benefit from music if it matches the style of the artwork being presented.

The second article, by Elisa Salvador, Jean-Paul Simon and Pierre-Jean Benghozi, investigates how new disruptive technologies are challenging the whole organization and the value chain of the cinema industry. This research questions the current role of public intervention, asking whether this new environment should call for an alternative policy to the one of traditional silo financing that has dominated up until now.

In the next contribution, Mariachiara Colucci and Marco Visentin analyze how the development of new cultural products is rewarded, by considering the field of elite Italian winemaking, a context characterized by a semi-independent reward system. An analysis of the awards received between 2001 and 2005 reveals both convergence towards the dominant set of norms ("continuity") and a degree of openness to innovative products that deviate from prevailing norms and standards ("variety") within the same reward system.

In the realm of management, our first article, contributed by Udo Bomnüter and Annett Schulze, examines Germany's system of state aid for film, which combines a high degree of subsidization with a decentralized structure. Pairing public data with case studies and a content analysis of film funding guidelines, the authors show that, although films are merit goods, few funders explicitly link their support to non-monetary public benefits.

The next article is the result of a collaboration between Cyrille Sardais, Josée Lortie and Emmanuel Coblence, who mobilize Michel Foucault's framework of discipline to better understand the way in which orchestra conductors' leadership is exercised to combine "discipline" and "creativity." Using ethnographic data and interviews, the authors show that, even though the conductor himself is subject to discipline, the leadership of conductors, far from being undermined in this context, relies on disciplinary devices for reinforcement.

Finally, in the Company Profile – on the entertainment firm Balich Worldwide Shows – Beatrice Manzoni and Leonardo Caporarello provide insights into teamwork in relation to creativity, coordination of extra-large teams of extremely diverse and highly specialized personnel, and their capacity for working virtually as well as in person.

I wish you an insightful reading experience.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "A. Courchesne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "A." and the last name "Courchesne" clearly visible.

André Courchesne  
Editor

## MOT DU RÉDACTEUR EN CHEF

**L**e numéro de l'automne 2019 présente des articles inspirants sur la recherche en management et en marketing des arts et de la culture. Les sujets abordés apportent de nouvelles perspectives sur la gestion des organismes artistiques et des industries culturelles.

En marketing, le premier article de Sandra Maria Correia Loureiro, Holger Roschk et Filipa Lima se penche sur l'effet de la musique de fond sur la perception et les souvenirs que l'on conserve d'une exposition artistique. À partir de deux expériences, l'une en laboratoire, l'autre dans sept galeries d'art, les auteurs montrent que, contrairement aux conclusions présentées dans la littérature, la musique peut générer des effets indésirables. Toutefois, les galeries d'art peuvent bénéficier des effets positifs de la musique, si celle-ci correspond au style des œuvres d'art présentées.

Le deuxième article d'Elisa Salvador, Jean-Paul Simon et Pierre-Jean Benghozi examine la façon dont les nouvelles technologies perturbatrices présentent des défis pour l'organisation et la chaîne de valeur de l'industrie du cinéma. L'étude remet en question le rôle actuel de l'intervention publique en se demandant si ce nouvel environnement ne requiert pas un changement de politique qui délaisserait le financement traditionnel en silo qui a été la norme jusqu'à maintenant.

Signé par Mariachiara Colucci et Marco Visentin, le troisième article analyse la manière dont des produits culturels novateurs sont récompensés en se penchant sur le domaine de la vinification italienne qui se caractérise par un système de récompenses semi-autonome. Une analyse des récompenses attribuées entre 2001 et 2005 permet de discerner à la fois une convergence vers des normes communes (c.-à-d., la continuité) et une ouverture vis-à-vis des produits novateurs qui dérogent des normes (c.-à-d., la variété), et ce, au sein du même système de récompenses.

En management, le premier article proposé par Udo Bomnüter et Annett Schulze analyse le système important, mais décentralisé d'aide publique au cinéma en Allemagne. En jumelant des données publiques avec les études de cas et une analyse des lignes directrices relatives au financement des films, les auteurs concluent que peu de bailleurs de fonds lient de façon explicite leur soutien aux bénéfices non-monétaires du cinéma à la société, même si ces films sont des biens publics.

L'article suivant est le fruit d'une collaboration entre Cyrille Sardais, Josée Lortie et Emmanuel Coblence qui se servent du cadre d'analyse de Michel Foucault sur la « discipline » pour mieux comprendre la façon dont un chef d'orchestre exerce son leadership pour combiner à la fois discipline et créativité. À l'aide de données ethnographiques et d'entrevues, les auteurs concluent que le leadership du chef d'orchestre, lui-même soumis à la discipline, se renforce avec les mécanismes de discipline, au lieu de s'affaiblir.

Enfin, une étude de cas, signée par Beatrice Manzoni et Leonardo Caporarello, sur la firme de divertissement Balich Worldwide Shows approfondit la recherche sur le travail d'équipe en relation à la créativité, à la coordination d'un personnel nombreux et extrêmement diversifié aux compétences très spécialisées et à leur capacité de travailler en équipe virtuelle aussi bien qu'en personne.

Bonne lecture!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "A. Courchesne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "A." and the last name "Courchesne" clearly visible.

André Courchesne  
Rédacteur en chef

# The Paradoxes of “Teaming” in the Creative Events Industry:

## The Case of Balich Worldwide Shows

Beatrice Manzoni, Leonardo Caporarello

### Introduction

**B**alich Worldwide Shows (BWS) is one of the top 10 revenue-generating companies operating around the world in the entertainment special events production market and is the leader in revenues per event (see Table 1). Therefore, the BWS case is representative of how these companies operate at an international level.

Founded in 2013 by Marco Balich, Gianmaria Serra and Simone Merico, who alone had more than 20 years' experience in global events (see Table 2), BWS is the initial company of Worldwide Shows Corporation (WSCorp), an Italy-based organization in the live entertainment industry. In 2017, together with four other companies (Punk for Business, FeelRouge WS, Artainment WS and HQWS), BWS generated revenues of over 100 million (almost double those for 2016) and had a promising forecast of 70 million for 2018.

BWS designs, creates and produces large-scale ground-breaking celebrations such as Olympic Games ceremonies and events in new entertainment formats, from permanent and touring shows to exclusive live events (see Figure 1). Its creations include the Italian Pavilion (artistic direction) and the iconic *Tree of Life* at Expo Milan 2015. It also created the Olympic ceremonies for Torino 2006, Sochi 2014 and Rio 2016 (produced by CC2016) and the Olympic Flag Handover for Salt Lake City 2002, London 2012 and Tokyo 2020. In addition, BWS produced *Fairy Tale Wedding* in Puglia, Italy, in 2014, the 45th United Arab Emirates National Day and *Mother of the Nation* show in Abu

Dhabi, the *Burj Khalifa* show in Dubai in 2016, and the opening and closing ceremonies for the 5th Asian Indoor & Martial Arts Games (AIMAG) in Turkmenistan in 2017. Among the company's most recent productions was its first permanent show in Italy, *Giudizio Universale: Michelangelo and the Secrets of the Sistine Chapel*, in 2018, in collaboration with Vatican Museums.

BWS brings together the talents and skills of 83 employees in Milan and more than 300 freelance professionals every year. The average age is 36 and diversity is a key feature in terms of gender (63.6% are women), nationality (17 countries) and educational background (management, art, design, graphic design, communication, theatre production, acting). WSCorp counts 152 employees (110 based at Milan headquarters, 12 in Rome and 30 in Dubai) and 520 freelancers as part of its overall staff.

The core mission of BWS is creativity combined with delivery. “Creativity . . . generates emotions in the audience,” says its CEO, Gianmaria Serra. “Delivery is also important, because it determines the long-lasting impression on our client. Emotions are impactful, while project management determines financial results.”

In terms of organizational structure, BWS is divided into several departments that reflect this mission: Creative, Business, Communication, Executive/Production, Human Resources, Finance and Administration, and Office Services. The Creative department has a staff of 20 focused on creative direction and management as well as art direction and visual effects. The Executive/

---

**Beatrice Manzoni**, PhD, is Associate Professor of Practice of Leadership, Organization and Human Resources Management, SDA Bocconi School of Management, Milan, Italy. Her research focuses on managing professional service firms and fostering creativity at the individual, team and organizational levels.

**Leonardo Caporarello**, PhD, is Professor of Practice of Leadership, Organization and Human Resources Management, SDA Bocconi School of Management, and Delegate Rector for e-Learning at Bocconi University, Milan, Italy. His research focuses on designing proactive organizations and professional service firms.

TABLE 1

### LARGE-SCALE EVENTS INDUSTRY: FACTS AND FIGURES

Considering the whole entertainment and media sector, the compound annual growth rate for 2018–2022 is expected to be approximately 4.4% (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2018). Large-scale events nurture this growth, especially since millennials (defined as people born between 1980 and 1996, now aged 18 to 34) are fuelling the experience economy: this generation not only highly value experiences but are increasingly spending time and money on them, from concerts and social events to athletic pursuits to cultural experiences and events of all kinds (Barton et al. 2014).

Today's large-scale events market and industry are characterized by two factors. First, entry barriers are huge. To conceive and produce entertainment spectacles, Olympic ceremonies, Broadway-style shows, global touring attractions, national and institutional celebrations, theme park events and other live projects demands authentic creative vision, stringent production engineering systems, and highly specialized and reliable partners. Second, new technologies – artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality and blockchain – are reshaping trajectories, which contributes to players' sense of an urgent need to rethink and re-engineer their business models (World Economic Forum 2018).

The current special events market is shared by several big players (see Informa's Special Events annual report for the top 50 events companies worldwide; [specialevents.com](http://specialevents.com)). BWS is in seventh position for annual revenue and top position for average revenue per event (see below). For Olympic ceremonies, the competitive arena is even smaller. Within this niche segment, BWS has only three competitors: Five Currents, Beiao and Jack Morton.

Company	Country	Number of special events per year (average)	Annual revenue from special events (2018 forecast) (million \$)	Revenue per event (average) (million \$)
Pico Group	China	360	385	1.07
George P. Johnson Experience Marketing	US	2,500	333	0.13
Freeman	US	5,000	330	0.07
VOK DAMS Worldwide	Germany	450	252	0.56
Ashfield Meetings and Events	US	960	160	0.17
Jack Morton Worldwide	US	2,500	100	0.04
Balich Worldwide Shows	Italy	7	60	8.57
Hargrove	US	600	80	0.13
InVision Communications	US	175	71	0.41
Filmmaster Events	Italy	80	70	0.88

Source: Elaboration by BWS based on Informa's Top 50 events companies, 2018 ([specialevents.com](http://specialevents.com))

### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Michele Telaro (COO AWS) and Christina Lidegaard (Executive Assistant) for supporting the study and facilitating contacts. We would like to thank several people for their rich and passionate insights during the interviews: Sofya Biryukova (Creative Coordinator), Laura Cappelletti (Head of Production), Simone Ferrari (Creative Director), Roberta Guaschino (International Media Relations officer), Silvia Guenzi (Planning and Reporting Manager), Julian Hill (Artistic Producer), Paolo Riboni (Head of People and Culture), Stefano Soso (HR and Recruiting Coordinator) and Giannamaria Serra (CEO).

### ABSTRACT

Balich Worldwide Shows (BWS) is an Italy-based firm that operates globally in the entertainment production market, creating, designing and producing live events such as Olympic ceremonies, permanent and touring shows and exclusive events. Projects on this scale require complex teams that are large, diverse, highly specialized and virtual. The authors analyze the BWS case from the team management standpoint and discuss five paradoxes related to *teaming*: (1) combining exceptional creativity with perfect execution, (2) managing extra-large teams with a small core team, (3) managing an extremely diverse team in terms of nationality, (4) integrating highly specialized skills within the project, and (5) working as a team virtually as well as in person. The article concludes with suggestions for management approaches to these topics.

### KEY WORDS

Creative teams, projects, organizational paradoxes, team management, management challenges, large-scale events, creativity

TABLE 2

THREE BWS PARTNERS: ONE SOUL

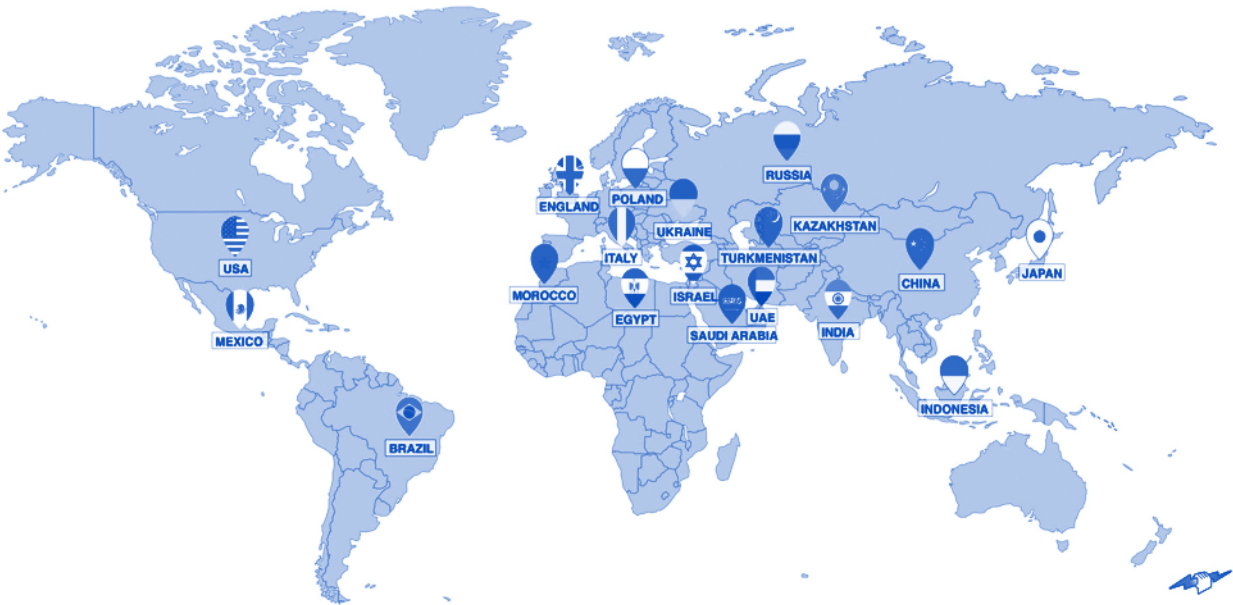
**Marco Balich** is Chairman of BWS. Creative Director and Olympics Producer, he is referred to as “Designer of Emotions.” He began his career in the music world, organizing concerts and music festivals and producing music videos. Balich is considered one of the top Olympic ceremony producers, having worked on over 20 productions, from Torino 2006 to Rio 2016.

**Gianmaria Serra** is Chief Executive Officer. He is an expert in engineering complex production and management systems. Serra has been at Balich’s side for almost 20 years, throughout his Olympic adventures, specializing in creating major ceremony management systems that enable hundreds of professionals from all over the world to collaborate efficiently.

**Simone Merico** is Vice President of Worldwide Shows Corporation and Vice President and Business Director of BWS, where he is in charge of strategic development for all productions. He is also Chairman of Artainment WS and FeelRouge WS and is Director of Punk for Business and HQ Worldwide Shows, based in Dubai. Merico has over 20 years’ experience in the entertainment industry.

FIGURE 1

COUNTRIES WHERE BWS HAS WORKED



RÉSUMÉ

Balich Worldwide Shows (BWS) est une firme basée en Italie qui travaille à travers le monde dans le domaine de la production de divertissement. Elle conçoit, met en scène et produit des événements en direct tels que des cérémonies de jeux olympiques, des spectacles permanents et en tournée et des événements exclusifs. Des projets d’une telle envergure exigent de grandes équipes qui sont diverses, hautement spécialisées et virtuelles. Les auteurs examinent le cas de BWS sous l’angle de la gestion d’équipes et discutent de cinq paradoxes reliés au travail en équipe : (1) la combinaison d’une créativité hors pair avec une réalisation sans failles; (2) la gestion de méga-équipes par une petite équipe de coordination; (3) le gestion d’une équipe extrêmement diverse sur le plan des origines nationales; (4) l’intégration de compétences très spécialisées au sein d’un projet; et (5) la nécessité de travailler en équipe virtuellement aussi bien qu’en personne. Les auteurs terminent l’article en suggérant des approches de gestion qui tiennent compte de ces enjeux.

MOTS CLÉS

Équipes créatives, projets, paradoxes organisationnels, gestion d’équipes, défis de gestion, événements de grande envergure, créativité

Production department has 25 employees whose focus is artistic production, technical direction, project management, budgeting, procurement and project administration. The Business department is responsible for seeking out new projects and managing relationships with existing as well as prospective clients. The remainder are staff units, which contribute to the business by ensuring media exposure for projects at the international level (Communication), attracting, retaining and engaging staff, both permanent and freelance (Human Resources), and reporting and controlling the economics of the company's projects (Finance and Administration).



## Managing Project Teams: Challenges and Approaches

Operating in a service industry, BWS is a people company and people are its main asset. The mission of the founders is to “build an environment that allows people to be themselves and to express themselves . . . We’re like an orchestra . . . The ‘music’ in BWS is the show,” says Serra. Staff members throughout the organization who were interviewed repeatedly mentioned the importance of cultural fit, reciprocal trust and respect in making this “human project” a daily practice.

Both permanent staff and freelancers are hired based on the values they share with BWS: excellence, passion, courage, candour and loyalty.

In the following sections we use examples from different projects in discussing the challenges BWS faces within project teams and how it manages these challenges.

## Combining Exceptional Creativity and Perfect Execution

Together with the other companies in the group, BWS produces several different types of offering: large-scale events such as Olympic ceremonies, corporate events, permanent shows and branded entertainment.

All of these have two things in common: a drive for something creatively exceptional and, in the words of the Creative Director, Simone Ferrari, an “intangible nature, which can never be predictable or standardized.” On this kind of project, planning is difficult yet essential. Creativity has to be channelled into a standardized offering, particularly since different projects are run concurrently during the conceptualization and production phases.

A constant challenge is that creatives have their own concept of the show, which needs to be approved by the client before the event moves on to the production phase. Approval is easier if projects are presented in a beautiful way: “You need to create the show before the show,” explains Julian Hill, Artistic Producer. “You need the cast, the choreography, the props . . . But there’s no way you can dress the cast if you haven’t approved the costumes yet . . . it’s a constant loop: they want to see things, as they have been approved, before having approved them.”

Therefore, BWS establishes a relationship with the client that works as a trust-based partnership where the client and BWS have a common goal: the show. BWS insists on frequent updates, discussions and dialogue.

Planning has to be as flexible as possible, “fluid” and “adaptable.” A back-up plan is always at hand: “The concept of the unforeseen becomes

## RESUMEN

*Balich Worldwide Shows (BWS, Espectáculos internacionales Balich) es una empresa basada en Italia que opera mundialmente en el mercado de la producción de entretenimiento, creando, diseñando y produciendo eventos en directo tales como ceremonias olímpicas, espectáculos permanentes e itinerantes, y eventos selectos. Proyectos de esta escala requieren equipos complejos, grandes, diversos, altamente especializados, y virtuales. Los autores analizan el caso BWS desde el punto de vista de la gestión de equipo y reflexionan sobre cinco paradojas relacionadas al trabajo en equipo: (1) combinar la creatividad excepcional con la realización perfecta, (2) manejar equipos extragrandes con un pequeño equipo central (3) manejar un equipo de una extrema diversidad de nacionalidades (4) integrar pericias altamente especializadas en el seno del proyecto y (5) trabajar como equipo virtualmente, además de en persona. El artículo concluye con sugerencias de enfoques de gestión en dichas circunstancias.*

## PALABRAS CLAVE

*Equipos creativos, proyectos, paradojas organizativas, gestión de equipos, desafíos de gestión, eventos de gran escala, creatividad*



something that you expect,” says Serra. “Unforeseen events are not expected, but you are more prepared to face them.” This is key also because allowing for uncertainty is vital. Ferrari explains: “It is important for every team member to know that each project is characterized by some level of uncertainty . . . if we cannot guarantee a situation of deep uncertainty, then we would create a failure. It’s the uncertainty that generates creativity.” This philosophy fosters a culture that is open to experimentation and tolerant of failure. People have to feel they can make mistakes, ask questions, disagree, experiment and suggest new things.

From a management point of view, there is a delicate balance between exploring and exploiting: “You have to know the vocabulary of the language used; you can’t enter a stadium without knowing the history of the ceremony’s language,” says Ferrari. “You can take advantage of the status quo, but if you get into the loop of ‘I know this will work and I’ll keep doing it this way’ you’re dead. You need to get out of your comfort zone, go to a zone of uncertainty. You have to take some risks.”

BWS people have to be passionate as well as a bit “crazy” and unconventional. They need passion, strength of character and focus to make things happen. “They cannot imagine that there is nothing else you can do,” explains Hill. “There is always a solution.”

### *Management of Extra-Large Teams by a Small Core Team*

The BWS core of 83 employees and 300 freelancers expands to thousands of people on a particular project, including staff, suppliers, cast and volunteers. In Sochi 2014, for example, the Olympic closing ceremony – a romantic and magical journey into the roots of Russian culture and heritage – involved 2,856 athletes, 360 staff members of 34 different nationalities, 222 suppliers, 25,000 volunteers, and more than 4,000 volunteers ranging in age from six to 43, mostly from the Krasnodar region. For the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate in 2015, BWS embraced the challenge to create, in less than six weeks, a lavish live show telling the visual and emotional history of the “Eternal Country.” The show involved 5,000 Kazakh actors and dancers and 3,600 performers guided by 159 staff members and 152 suppliers.

A more recent project was AIMAG, held in Turkmenistan in 2017. BWS produced the opening and closing ceremonies in the new 45,000-seat Ashgabat Olympic Stadium. This project involved 340 employees, 475 suppliers, over

15,000 cast members and 100 animals. It is the largest project that BWS has ever managed in terms of team size.

Such numbers are the result of a strong network of collaboration that BWS activates for each new project. There is a core team of permanent employees and a larger team of professionals who typically have a relationship with and a history of collaborating with not only BWS itself but also the BWS project manager in charge of the production: “We have two families: an internal and an external family,” explains Laura Cappelli, Head of Production. “The internal family is made up of staff who are located at headquarters and are accessible from anywhere. The external family is assembled by the project team – in other words, it’s a team of people who share a common path.”

In managing these multiple “families,” teams face several challenges. The first is to attract and hire the right people. While remaining independent professionals, freelancers make up the company’s core, and over the years BWS has built long-term relationships with key individuals. For example, for the AIMAG opening and closing ceremonies in 2017 BWS collaborated with the local professionals they had worked with in 2011.

While loyalty and relationship history are important, BWS is also aware that a team is nourished by having new people on board. Thus, it mixes old-timers and newcomers: roughly 40% are professionals whom BWS knows and trusts from past projects and 60% are new people who bring enthusiasm and energy, pushing the limits. Every project is an opportunity to test new collaborations.

The second challenge is to build the team as quickly as possible: projects need to enter the performance stage as soon as feasible. To speed up the team-building process, in addition to depending on established professionals BWS looks for people who share the same values and work style. “Our context is highly demanding and is characterized by time pressure,” says Ferrari. “It’s important to find people who share the BWS approach: facility with a mix of languages, dedication to making a great show, a joyful, emotional personality, and a strong work ethic.” A key skill for the BWS management staff is the ability to quickly form a team and integrate people. They benefit from working with freelancers who are used to finding a common way to work within a few weeks. “People are used to working six months here, three months there . . . it doesn’t take much time to build the team,” continues Ferrari. “At the same

time, it's difficult to create a team identity, because every member has his/her own background and experiences, and also because you have to start from scratch every time. For all team members to be highly motivated, it's important that the team identify with the show." In other words, the show acts as a "glue" for the team. Serra elaborates: "Giving the sense of what we are doing and showing the big picture is always an essential element. It becomes even more important when you have to bring freelancers on board." This is done in the beginning and then periodically during project meetings. As the event date draws nearer, these meetings become ever more frequent. They are not just occasions to plan and update but also opportunities to reinforce the vision and the sense of "why."

Ferrari recalls working on the AIMAG closing ceremony and trying to make people fall in love with the show. He faced several challenges: his team members were the same people who were working on the opening ceremony, traditionally the most important event, longer and with a bigger budget and more stakeholder attention. "I worked so hard to make people fall in love with the show . . . [The closing ceremony] has always been seen as the ceremony where we can have more fun . . . it's easier in that everyone's attention is more on the opening ceremony . . . but you still have to tell your team what you're thinking, how you're making decisions . . . people have to be willing to listen to you."

Another challenge is managing day to day and keeping control of everything. "The problem is knowing what all of the 800 team members are thinking . . . everyone has to be going in the same direction," Cappelli explains. "Otherwise, the risk is that the ship will sink without you even noticing."

For BWS the management and middle-management levels make all the difference. "There must be cohesion between your leaders and heads of departments; they must share views, values and objectives and they must be heavily engaged with the project," says Serra. "The higher the level of engagement, the greater the cascading effect."

For this reason, project managers are given the autonomy to build their core team and to choose the heads of the different departments they will work with. This core project team, composed mostly of old-timers who are used to working with one another, helps manage the larger team, composed of professionals who may be working together for the first time.

### *Managing an Extremely Diverse Team in Terms of Nationality*

Of BWS's permanent staff, 32% are international: in addition to Italy, 16 countries are represented (Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Greece, India, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates and United Kingdom). Project staff are even more international: on average, 60% of the professionals involved are non-Italians from more than 40 different countries.

Working on a worldwide scale also involves contact with extremely diverse local cultures.

For the staff, this is a source of daily enrichment, bringing a mixture of attitudes and work styles. According to Sofya Biryukova, Creative Coordinator, "there are no disadvantages [to being multicultural], "just things you need to overcome that make you stronger." Moving one's workplace from Brazil to Turkmenistan means significant culture shock, yet everyone agrees that it is a valuable learning experience.

In a multicultural environment, the team is exposed to multiple challenges.

First of all, a BWS show tells stories that are embedded more in the culture of the host country than in Italian culture. Of his AIMAG experience, Ferrari says, "It seems absurd that we Italians go to Turkmenistan to talk about their country, their history, their traditions . . . If a Canadian person came to us talking about Italy, we would look at him suspiciously." At the same time, the show – wherever in the world it happens to be – has an international audience and the language has to be universal. "The ceremony has a land of origin but not a destination," Ferrari continues, "and its language is across different media: stage, video production, television."

To manage this challenge, BWS creates a universal show language while still digging into the cultural roots of the host country. When the BWS team is creating a show, the client sets up a cultural advisory board that helps the team explore the arts and culture of the country. For example, while organizing the AIMAG closing ceremony, Ferrari went to great lengths to meet with a female choir in Ashgabat, where the BWS team was exposed to several local shows and performers. "All these things were very useful but somehow were a bit artificial . . . Sometimes we were in empty theatres with performances staged just for us, and it seemed we were choosing from a sort of brochure. During one of these events we got in touch with a group of women over the age of 60 who were part of a local choir. They warmly approached us and began to tell us stories and sing songs that no one had shared

with us before. I asked to have a meeting with them, and, though it was difficult to arrange, we met with them . . . One of these women started to sing us a song that was a lullaby in a post-Turkish language that her mother used to sing to her. This lullaby, which we have not been able to find recorded anywhere, magically kindled something special in all of us.”

A second challenge is integrating different priorities and work styles. Cultural differences also relate to differences in what people perceive as important. “When you’re dealing with cultures you don’t really understand . . . things you consider very straightforward become very sensitive,” says Hill. “In Turkmenistan even a slight colour change of a shirt has a huge consequence. A different rhythm in a song is the difference between a funeral and a wedding.”

As far as the BWS people are concerned, the greatest difference culturally is in terms of mindset. For example, while the Italians are creative problem-solvers, the British are organized and efficient. This mix of creativity and rigour, flexibility and precision is a great asset for a team.

Adapting to the local culture is an issue in some countries more than in others. In Turkmenistan, drinking, being out after 11 p.m. and social networks are forbidden. In summer the daytime temperature can be over 40°C. These factors obviously have an impact on people’s lives.

Useful for managing both challenges is the ability to embrace a listening and inclusive approach, which also aligns with the strong emphasis on people and on the founders’ “human project.” This approach is adopted at various levels: with the professionals who are part of the team, with the client and with the local community. BWS starts building local connections before arriving on site. From Milan, the company first approaches scholars and researchers in Italy who have studied the host country and might be able to facilitate connections there. Then it contacts local institutions such as universities and music and art schools. In addition, the client, whether public or private, has its own network of contacts that can be utilized.

Local stakeholders are integrated into the project team; they are seen not as external consultants but as team members. This is how BWS builds a strong bond of trust with the local people. In the Emirates for *Mother of the Nation*, for example, the show could not be produced without the use of poetry as a language. Therefore, local poets were part of the team and were exposed to all the creative chaos. “If you open the Pandora’s box of the creative process that you have in mind – and this consists of research,

trials, uncertainties, questions,” explains Ferrari, “and you call some local people with an artistic perspective to your table, they immediately feel engaged and trust you.”

Another frequent practice is finding similarities, which can be stronger than differences, such as the common reason why all team members are there: the show. “There is a feeling of everyone being in the same boat,” says Biryukova. “What do we do? We row together. If you do something wrong, the boat goes slower . . . It’s a sort of feeling of unity. We all have the same goal of producing a great show. It’s something in the end you are also proud of.” The heads of the Creative and Executive/Production departments have great responsibility in this process. “If you make people fall in love [with the show], then you get a high level of team cohesion that in turn will allow your team to achieve any goal,” explains Ferrari. Many people said that these two managers, in particular, can make all the difference in spreading enthusiasm. The Creative head sets the vision and the head of Executive/Production makes it reality, and they pass on their energy to their teams.

### *Integrating Highly Specialized Skills Within the Project*

On a show, BWS acts as the project coordinator for highly specialized skills, such as live action design, costumes, prop design, show calling (technical direction) and stage management, provided by freelancers or specialty firms (see Table 3).

In terms of organizational structure, every project has an executive producer and a creative director. It is the executive producer who is ultimately responsible for delivering the show on time and within budget. She is in charge of project management, artistic production (including segment production and video and music production, as well as show calling and stage management), logistics, administration, production and technical issues. The creative director is responsible for creative content, including choreography, costumes and make-up, set and prop design, lighting, music and video. In addition, there are the suppliers (such as those for projections and special effects, intercom systems, audio, stagehands and catering) and the cast and volunteers (animals are also included in some shows).

Despite the unity of purpose, the main challenge is that different departments tend to have different objectives and work styles. In terms of departmental objectives, the creatives aim for the most spectacular show ever, and the production

TABLE 3

EXEMPLARY SPECIALIZED SKILLS INVOLVED IN PROJECTS	
Live action	<b>Bryn Walters</b> is one of the world's leading experts in choreography for stadium events. He has worked on 25 stadium shows, including the ceremonies for five Olympic Games (Athens, Turin, Vancouver, London, Rio) and three Commonwealth Games (Manchester, Melbourne, Delhi). He served as Live Action Director for the AIMAG opening ceremony in Ashgabat in 2017.
Pyro and Flames design	<b>Groupe F</b> specializes in fireworks production and design. As CEO, Christophe Berthonneau has been responsible for such events as the Olympic Games in Athens 2004 and Turin 2006, Expo 98 in Lisbon and the Millennium Celebration in Paris, where the Eiffel Tower was "set alight" using breathtaking pyrotechnic effects.
Opera	<b>Francisco Negrin</b> is an award-winning opera director, known for his musical approach to staging. He specializes in Handel operas. He has directed more than 40 major productions over the past 20 years, working with prestigious opera houses in Sydney, London, Chicago and Copenhagen.
Lighting design	<b>Act Lighting Design</b> combines creative sensibility, innovation and emotion in architectural projects. Its projects include <i>Le Rêve</i> in Las Vegas, the opening ceremony for King Abdullah Sport City, the opening ceremony for the Singapore 2010 Youth Olympics and <i>Le Puy du Fou Cinéscénie</i> .
Video design	<b>Luke Halls</b> is a British video designer who produces videos and animations for a wide variety of music, theatre and dance performances. He has worked for Pet Shop Boys, U2 and many other artists. In 2012 he was creative director of screen content for the London Olympic and Paralympic closing ceremonies.
Props design	<b>Michael Curry</b> is a production designer specializing in transformational scenery, large-scale puppetry, costuming and character design. He creates iconic, exhilarating and profoundly moving performance experiences for The Walt Disney Company, Cirque du Soleil, Universal Studios and the Olympic Games.
Technical consultancy	<b>Piers Shepperd's</b> career spans design, production management, lighting, automation and development of cutting-edge manufacturing processes. He has more than 25 years' experience and has worked on such events as the Olympic ceremonies in Athens 2004 and London 2012.
Music	<b>John Metcalfe</b> is one of the United Kingdom's most sought-after arrangers, working for artists such as Blur, Morrissey, George Michael and The Pretenders. As a violinist, he has toured worldwide with top artists in the fields of pop music and dance in film, TV and theatre.

team aims to make it a reality within the budget and the timeframe. In terms of work styles, project documentation does not always reflect how the creatives, in particular, are accustomed to communicating. "E-mail, Excel, Word, calendars – these are the common languages of business," says Hill. "To assume that a musician has a working knowledge of Excel is ambitious to say the least. This is not the language they speak."

Managing this challenge requires cooperation between the creatives and the executive producers, which works very well at BWS. While the executive producer knows how to control the budget, the creative director knows how to spend the money. They need to engage in a productive dialogue to explore possibilities and make decisions about the show that involve the economic performance as well as the artistic one.

A balance must also be sought between a too-formal structure and a loose and unconventional one in terms of project documentation, in order to ensure that the language is understandable to everyone.

### *Working as a Team Virtually as Well as in Person*

During the first months of a project, the team works remotely, not on site. At the beginning, some team members are not yet fully engaged in the project. The majority of interactions are via e-mail and conference and video calls. Then, when the whole team moves on site, the number of e-mails drops by 80% because people are able to talk face to face. The intensity of communication and proximity increases so much that team members have little privacy; they all live in the same place, in the morning they take a shuttle together to get to the site, they have lunch and dinner together, they go out together. The team goes from being too far away to being too close. Both work situations are challenging, for different reasons.

When the team works remotely, the challenge is threefold. First, team members may be located in different time zones, so they have to know how to interact and coordinate with each other. The higher the level of heterogeneity of the virtual team, the greater the need for coordination.



Second, it is hard to get the full commitment of team members when they are working simultaneously on other projects, especially since professionals engaged on a project basis become fully dedicated only when they move on site. “We want to save money for the on-site part, so we try to engage people in advance for the least time possible,” explains Hill. “It would be really great if everybody were engaged full time from the beginning but this is not the best way to spend our money. The team slowly builds over the six months.”

Third, miscommunication is much more likely when people are not in the same room and when nothing is yet “real”; they can more easily overreact or overestimate or underestimate the consequences of decisions. “When nothing is real, everything is a potential disaster,” Hill says. “Basically, you’re working on a show that doesn’t exist, with people who are not in the same place; you have far fewer resources than in reality because you’re assuming that everything is going to cost more and take longer.” Yet the decisions taken by the team at this early stage have consequences for the duration of the project. “The number of consequences from a small conversation is staggering,” he continues. “If you’re aware of that, it’s fine. Sometimes you simply need to fill in a document to keep things moving. This is only a problem when someone at a later stage realizes that you’ve all been working with an incorrect number for the past three months.”

Managing this virtual team requires additional efforts in terms of being open to dialogue and being able to manage differences and conflicts. To some extent, BWS over-communicates at this stage to make sure that people fully understand.

When the team moves on site, the challenge is to prevent stress from becoming overwhelming. For a few months (anywhere from 3 to 9 depending on the role and the project) they are far from home and family, maybe in a country that is unfamiliar in terms of culture, traditions, food and so forth. They are immersed in their job with very little work/life balance.

The team experience is always “extreme.” “What’s funny is that every time you say, ‘If we survive this, we can face anything,’ and then you survive and you realize that it’s always harder and harder,” recalls Hill. “But then we keep coming back, because we like it.” When a team moves to the host country to work on site, people experience a sort of “exhausting pressure” mixed with “positive adrenaline.”

The challenge, at the individual level as well as at the organizational level, is to ensure good quality of life and prevent burnout. At the

individual level, people are encouraged to ration their energy, especially on longer projects. At the company level, every project is assigned a Human Resources staff member whose role is not only to provide administrative and logistical assistance but also to ensure the right “climate.” A welcome kit contains key information for working and living in the host country. The heads of the different departments are encouraged to take care of people and make sure the project runs as smoothly as possible. Stressful conditions could lead to disaster – even moving a team from one accommodation to another, as happened in the case of AIMAG (two weeks before the go-live). Even a minor upset can feel like a disaster if the team is already facing stress from other sources.



### Implications for Management in the Creative Large-Scale Events Industry

“Special events are a gathering of human beings, generally lasting from a few hours to a few days, designed to celebrate, honour, sell, teach, or observe human endeavours” (Goldblatt 2005, 2). As projects, they are unique occurrences of limited duration with a fixed budget and timeline. They require a degree of coordination of tasks by a dedicated team.

In the case of BWS, we elaborate on the teamwork literature to describe five teaming paradoxes and how they can be managed by organizations and professionals when delivering creative events.

#### *Paradox 1: Every creative event is unique, yet it requires a standard set of approaches, techniques and skills*

In the large-scale events industry, planning is vital, yet every project follows a unique path where exceptional creativity is stretched to the limit and where uncertainty, while valuable for creativity, requires flexibility in order to adapt and change course. In the case of BWS, for the short duration of each project the teams gather the best skills currently available on the events market, so the team is different every time. This exemplifies the need for *teaming* more than teamwork. Teaming is “a way to gather experts in temporary groups to solve problems they’re encountering for the first and perhaps only time” (Edmondson 2012, 4). Teaming requires planning and executing in the face of complexity and uncertainty and fostering collaboration in shifting groups (Edmondson 2012). Therefore, every BWS event is the result of a unique collaboration

between experts, a one-off blend of exceptional creativity as well as outstanding day-to-day management and organizational skills.

### *Paradox 2: A team's strengths are also its weaknesses*

BWS project teams are characterized by hundreds of highly specialized people of dozens of nationalities working from everywhere in the world. As such, they perfectly mirror project teams in the events industry, which are large, diverse, specialized and dispersed. According to Gratton and Erickson (2007), these are the four characteristics of a *complex team*. The paradox is that although these are necessary characteristics they make it hard for teams to get things done. "The qualities required for success are the same qualities that undermine success" (Gratton and Erickson 2007, 102). Collaboration is vital for complex teams, but natural collaboration decreases in large, virtual, diverse and specialized teams unless they are properly managed to create the conditions that foster collaboration across the organization (Gratton and Erickson 2007).

### *Paradox 2a: Creative events rely on a very small permanent team to manage up to hundreds of temporary team members*

The team for an event is often labelled a "pulsating organization." A pulsating organization is one that expands and contracts during its regular activities (Toffler 1990). This happens to an extreme degree in events management (Johnson 2017), where the team size can change rapidly from as few as 10 people to as many as 800. To be financially sustainable and flexible in terms of management and operations, events organizations have no alternative but to rely on a small proportion of core staff to manage a large number of additional staff, suppliers and volunteers who are equally key to an event's success. Internalizing so many highly specialized skills would be unsustainable for a company operating in this industry. For example, BWS has a permanent staff of just 83. For a project, an even smaller core group of people manage hundreds of project staff. Thus, BWS permanent employees need to be highly flexible and prepared to manage both very small and very large teams. This is where the Human Resources department steps up.

### *Paradox 2b: Creative event teams are multi-cultural and at the same time "uncultural"*

Cross-cultural teamwork is a key to success yet is something people struggle with (Neeley 2014). On the one hand, culturally diverse teams show

increased creativity and greater team satisfaction than culturally similar ones. On the other hand, cultural diversity can result in disharmony and poor performance. Culturally diverse teams tend to conflict more, especially if the task is complex and they are co-located. Moreover, the larger the team and the more time its members spend together, the lower its communication effectiveness (Stahl et al. 2010).

Many of these issues emerge at BWS, where people discuss the challenges of managing different priorities, work styles and cultural habits, especially in Eastern countries. In BWS's case, however, it appears that diversity tends to eliminate the multicultural issue. This aligns with the theory that fault lines are unlikely to emerge when the team is homogeneous and when team members are very different from one another (Gratton et al. 2007).

### *Paradox 2c: In skills specialization, creative event teams are "virtuoso teams," to which elite professionals bring exceptional expertise but also cumbersome personalities*

Attracting the best event professionals from around the world in every discipline (lighting design, stage design, costume design, music, opera) is a key success factor for this type of project team.

These outstanding professionals can be described as "virtuoso teams," which comprise "elite experts in their particular fields who are specially assembled for ambitious projects . . . Virtuoso teams consist of star performers who are hand-picked" (Fisher and Boynton 2005, 118). Yet this can become a weakness of the team. Virtuoso teams emphasize the individual, celebrate their talents and elicit the best from each member. However, in doing so they risk encouraging competition and solo performances and need huge amounts of energy to maintain balance between individual and team identities and goals. This is something BWS has to confront at each event.

### *Paradox 2d: Geographically, creative event team members are either too far or too near*

Professionals working on an event typically come from all around the globe and do not meet until they are on site just a few months prior to the event. Before that, they work together remotely. BWS teams spend at least half of a project's timeline working apart before meeting in the host country. This makes them both virtual and real.

When they move from being virtual to real, they also move from being too far away to being almost too close. Both situations are challenging.

On the one hand, virtual teams easily experience misunderstanding and confusion, leading to anxiety and reduced engagement, productivity and innovation (Dhawan and Chamorro-Premuzic 2018). On the other hand, real teams living together away from home can be too close and feel pressured, with no means of escape. They are constantly exposed to face-to-face, intensive interaction under stressful conditions (O'Leary and Cummings 2007).

In order to manage these teaming paradoxes, BWS has adopted a set of strategies that offer managerial insights that are valuable for any creative large-scale events organization (see Table 4).

- At BWS, team-building is critical to engaging large, diverse teams of international freelance professionals as well as local stakeholders, while overcoming stressful situations by keeping the team focused on the show. As is evident from the BWS case, **engaging team members in a common sense of purpose, creating, sharing and repeatedly reinforcing a strong vision** (Edmondson 2012) and a compelling direction (Haas and Mortensen 2016) is a way to inspire them and align individual goals with those of the team.
- BWS managers know not only that a good team is made up of highly skilled specialists but also that these professionals have the same

TABLE 4

PARADOXES AND MANAGEMENT APPROACHES	
Paradoxes	Management approaches
1. Managing creative projects is a daily routine, yet every event is a unique compilation of exceptional creativity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a trust-based and dialogue-oriented partnership with the client and other stakeholders</li> <li>• Use flexible planning and an adaptable problem-solving approach</li> <li>• Create a culture that is open to experimentation and risk-taking</li> <li>• Hire people who are focused, resilient and passionate but also a bit "crazy" and unconventional</li> </ul>
2a. Creative events rely on a very small team of permanent core members to manage up to hundreds of temporary project team members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract freelancers who are aligned in terms of core values and work styles, in addition to their proven technical competency</li> <li>• Frequently add newcomers to the team of old-timers to provide a fresh view and to test potential future collaborators</li> <li>• Share the vision and keep reinforcing it as the go-live approaches</li> <li>• Make people fall in love with the project to encourage their full commitment</li> <li>• Give managers the freedom to build their team and choose their own people</li> </ul>
2b. In terms of diversity, creative events teams are multicultural and "uncultural" at the same time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt an open and inclusive approach with all relevant stakeholders, within and outside the team</li> <li>• Create a universal vision that is able to speak in different ways to different people</li> <li>• Share the behind-the-scenes experience: involve people in the process so they understand the "why," not just the outcome</li> <li>• Align people based on similarities, which can be stronger than differences; focus on the show, which is what creates unity</li> <li>• Ensure that the energy of managers is evident and spills over to all staff down the line</li> <li>• Use an integrative approach to resolve conflicts</li> </ul>
2c. In terms of skills specialization, creative events teams are "virtuoso teams," to which elite professionals bring exceptional expertise but also cumbersome personalities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in tandem with the creatives and the producers, respecting their points of view and engaging in dialogue</li> <li>• Find a balance between over-structured, formalized documentation and procedures that are too lax</li> </ul>
2d. In terms of geography, people in creative events teams are either too far from each other or too close.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in dialogue and (over)communicate to ensure that the team fully understands</li> <li>• Make sure staff has support from Human Resources and managers to avoid unnecessary stress</li> </ul>

values and work styles. The BWS recruitment approach thus focuses on **hiring people more for their cultural fit than for their competence** (Bouton 2015). Fit matters in terms of the relationship between person–job, person–organization, person–group and person–supervisor (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005). This is absolutely vital when the team has to deliver results as quickly as possible and cannot afford to spend much time on the “forming, storming and norming” phases.

- BWS event teams are made up of roughly 40% professionals who the company knows and trusts from past projects and 60% newcomers. When seeking team members for a project, BWS leverages heritage relationships (Gratton and Erickson 2007) with professionals from one project to another, while at the same time testing collaborations with new people. The underlying aim is to improve both effectiveness and creativity by **mixing old-timers who can speed up execution and newcomers who can offer novelty** (Choi and Thompson 2005).
- Our interviewees repeatedly pointed out that honest, open, frequent communication is essential for getting to know and engaging people, clarifying the sense of purpose and building trust. **Communicating extensively, being open to listening and engaging in a dialogue with everyone** (Groysberg and Slind 2012) also serve to minimize misunderstanding, especially when the team is virtual, and to manage conflictual and stressful situations. Communicating is about listening, observing, querying, and relating to one another both professionally and personally. In the end it is caring about people (Neeley 2014). BWS uses dialogue not only to engage team members but also to work in a participative way with local communities and stakeholders (Anberrée et al. 2015).
- BWS employees point out that, in the events industry, uncertainty is certain. However, through a **flexible and open attitude uncertainty can become a driver for creativity. This calls for the building of psychological safety and the embracing of failure** (Edmondson 2012). BWS is committed to investing in a culture that is open to experimentation and risk-taking: this type of culture makes people willing to try new things within reasonable limits and to produce unique shows. However, the full potential of such a culture is unleashed only when it becomes a shared mindset (Haas and Mortensen 2016).
- It is evident from the interviews that flexibility is a mantra for BWS staff. By making

plans that are neither long term nor rigid, BWS is able to exploit the potential of uncertainty as a source of creativity, remain adaptable to changing requirements and remain open to new ideas. This approach can be described as **adopting “loose planning” in the way that projects are organized and managed**, allowing for structure and creativity, firmness and flexibility (Bouncken et al. 2008) and at the same time innovation and tradition (Manzoni and Caporarello 2017). Loose planning also allows for the creation of a “developmental space” (Derksen et al. 2017) where people can create, plan, reflect, organize and dialogue.

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