



To BCG's network around the world,

I wrote to you a couple weeks ago about the enormous uncertainty we all face in 2021, and I'm sure it's a theme I'll return to in the months ahead. As we learn more about the challenges related to vaccine rollout, geopolitics, climate change, large economic uncertainty, and more, I keep coming back to a 30-year-old BCG publication whose relevance today is striking.

It was 1990 when John Clarkeson, then CEO of BCG, wrote "[Jazz vs. Symphony](#)." He suggested that it was time to shake up the notion of business leader as analogous to the conductor of a large symphony, guiding a complex organization of sharply defined functions through a singular, well-designed score. John told us to look to leaders of jazz bands for inspiration—with Duke Ellington as a prime example:

"His players were good but not without equal," he wrote. "He knew their quirks, their gifts, their problems, and he encouraged them to learn to do things they didn't think they could do. Some players came and went, but many stayed for years. They developed through their membership in the group, and they learned from each other. Most of all, their capacity for innovation grew as they built on their cumulative experience."

We will always need great experts who understand their disciplines and effectively execute the goals of their functions along fairly clear pathways. But amid the dynamism of our uncertain and rapidly changing world, leaders need to focus on developing their "jazz" skills—listening carefully;

creating diverse, high-performing teams that encourage individual expression; experimenting boldly; and always learning and adapting. We need to reshape our worlds as Duke Ellington and his peers did for the generations of musicians who followed.

I know John was not imagining a pandemic when he wrote this piece, but it's as if he was writing to us in this moment. Right now, we need to be playing jazz, not conducting a symphony. "There are no set pieces anymore," he said. "The new leaders are all around us."

I hope you'll find it an inspiring read. You'll find it below, along with a short video we created about it for TED a few years ago as well as another related read.

Until next week.



Rich Lesser
Chief Executive Officer



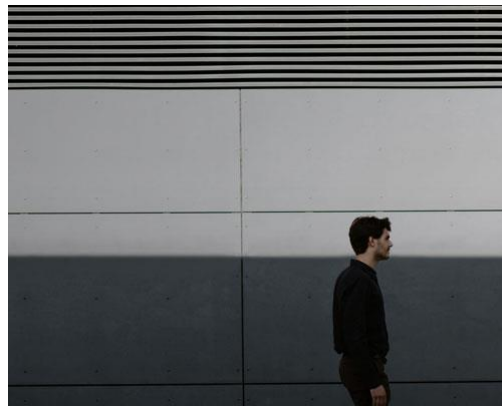
Jazz vs. Symphony

John Clarkeson wrote that the winning organization of the future will look more like a collection of jazz ensembles than a symphony orchestra. The future is here.



How Should a CEO Lead? A Musical Exploration

John Clarkeson's 1990 Perspective "Jazz vs. Symphony" comes to life in this animated video.



Becoming an All-Weather Company

The coronavirus crisis brought renewed attention to the value of resilience. Our research shows that resilience has an outsized impact on performance, and companies can take certain steps to put it into practice.