



# TUNING INTO THE HARMONICS OF MANAGEMENT *by Dorothy Marcic*



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Our organizations operate at 30% of capacity.
- Seeing employees as human beings with multiple intelligences can enhance productivity.
- Using harmonics in management education creates balance between rational, esthetic, and emotional approaches.

## INTRODUCTION

Despite years of hearing about learning organizations and high-performing systems, we still aren't there. Even the best organizations operate at pitifully low levels of productivity. From over two decades of experience with hundreds of companies, I estimate we operate at 30% of possible output. That is based on asking people how many in their organization work at between 0 and 50% of their abilities. A typical answer: at least half. What I mean by the level of their abilities is this: think how much time is spent in meaningless conversations, the real aim of which is to take up time, rather than conversations that add meaning and purpose. Employees are required to be at work certain hours, or, as in professional firms with flexibility of hours, are expected to have a certain amount of "face time." Rather than doing real work, some choose to move from one office to another and waste time. Or how about the mindless meetings that are all one-way communication from the boss to the crew, with information that could as easily be put in e-mail? Or time lost in endless and unproductive conflicts, personal attacks, jealousies, power games, and other dysfunctional routines?

Why such organizational listlessness? It isn't because people are lazy. Given the chance, the typical employee welcomes challenge, a chance to have input, a means to feel energized. Very few get up in the morning hoping for another boring, grinding day at the office.

## ONE SOLUTION

One reason for this lack of engagement is our management paradigm, which assumes a purely rational world, one that responds effectively to analysis and data collection. If we realize, however, that organizations are ideas populated by groups of people, we conclude that those people have human needs. Unless their needs are met holistic-

ally, they will not respond with total dedication or energy.

Reasons for lower productivity include endless conflicts, hurt feelings, domination strategies and retaliations. Such behaviors do not emanate from our rational and orderly minds. They are emotional reactions to perceived threats. Whether those threats are real or not, the reactions and toxic waste they leave are very real, causing demotivation and cynicism.

To create a more productive work environment, then, requires some attention paid to the workers' other intelligences, which include those in the "Harmonics of Management":

**Emotional:** self-awareness, relationship skills, motivation and behavior management. Building these skills will reduce the combustible conflicts, difficult conversations, and antagonistic interactions too common at work.

**Spiritual:** focuses on the values people work from. An environment that allows employees to develop their capacities with integrity, trustworthiness, and service will, over the long run, create a more stable and motivated workforce.

**Aesthetic:** being able to appreciate arts increases the ability to help find underlying meanings, motivations, and insights, as well as helping find deeper meanings about work. British-born poet David Whyte, author of *The Heart Aroused*, counsels leaders that they will never reach their full potential until they find poetry in their work and their lives.

Much of management education uses the rational mind to find the most efficient route to solving a problem. Because organizations have become so much better at this in recent years, we've seen prices drop on consumer goods so that the average person in a developed country lives in the kind of luxury reserved for kings hundreds of years ago. If this push for efficiency is taken too far, however, it squeezes out the ability to

tolerate and even appreciate the increasing complexity of the world. The success of business process reengineering came at the expense of the other intelligences.

"If I had my life to live over again, I would have made it a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once a week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would have thus been kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature." (Charles Darwin)

The new Internet world has changed the workplace and even workers themselves, as people are no longer willing to just show up for work they consider meaningless in order to get a paycheck. Younger workers particularly want their work to have some purpose, some impact, some meaning. Poetry and other arts can help sort through some of the complexity, so that underlying meanings, patterns, and our deepest yearnings emerge.

## SHARED INCOMPETENCY

Most leaders in organizations are not skilled in poetry, painting, sculpture, or music. In fact, if you asked them to participate in one of these activities, they would explain how irrelevant this was to their job or find some more pressing matter to attend to. Yet I believe it is the very fear these arts engender that makes them such a powerful teaching tool for managers. Much as the so-called "Ropes" courses work on the model of "shared incompetency," so too do programs using arts. Ask a group to write a song and the anxiety level goes up, ask them to draw a picture of their hand and nervousness appears. The growing number of trainers using arts in leadership programs report, though, that participants are able to find parts of themselves they had not accessed before, as shown below.

## MINI-CASE

*Amy Stein:* an artist who helps leaders draw their inner selves, thus accessing some parts of themselves which had been hidden and which now help them become fuller, more productive human beings.

*Barry Scott:* an actor who recreates Martin Luther King, Jr., and gives managers a deeper sense of organizational justice, pro-

*"Conscience is the inner voice that warns us somebody may be looking."*

(H. L. Mencken)



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foundly impacting their sense of the power they have for good or bad in their own decision making.

*John Cimino:* a musician who has gathered other musicians together to perform his "Concert of Ideas" in companies, helping people to reflect on their values and practices and bringing a sense of optimism.

*Laura Derocher:* a singer whose original music helps people remember what they want to be at work; she role models finding bliss and helps people evoke their former longings.

*Gene Audette:* a career counselor who uses pictures of sculpture to help clients figure out what their deepest desires are in terms of the types of work they wish to pursue.

*Judi Neal:* a singer whose music helps groups explore community, dissonance, conflict and harmony.

*Roger Nierenberg:* a musical conductor who teaches leaders how to manage a group of highly skilled and self-motivated individuals.

*David Horth and others at the Center for Creative Leadership:* teach managers the importance of complexity and underutilized capacities, as in the arts; participants in their programs report being able to speed up the strategic process or using poetry to develop marketing strategies.

*Michael Jones:* a pianist whose improvisational music for leaders and even Wall Street stands as a metaphor for the imagination companies need in the uncharted waters ahead.

*LeeAnn Hearn and Amy Powell:* sculptors and teachers who experiment with group-sculpting to increase interpersonal communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution.

*Michael London:* a musician who teaches team-building through helping groups write a blues song as a way of communicating their own struggles and having to overcome the obstacle of songwriting as a team.

The Harmonics of Management model is an underlying theory of employing the arts to make organizations more effective and fulfilling. Arts exploration helps people to access parts of themselves of which they were perhaps unaware. Imagine being able to sing or draw, something that had seemed impossible. That becomes a metaphor in organizations for learning new skills that seem too formidable, too difficult. Writing and performing a song, for example, not only highlights untapped talent, it also helps participants find their own courage to try

something completely new. And in this fast-paced New Economy business world, which morphs into new configurations frequently, accessing capacities to be bold and the willingness to experiment with unknown structures or processes is needed if companies want to remain competitive.

### MAKING IT HAPPEN ►►

- Invite artists in periodically for sessions on drawing, painting, or sculpture. Also have a facilitator to draw out the metaphors for organizational life. What can be learned from sculpture about being a leader, about molding the environment, yet learning to let the wheel and clay work their own process?
- Have musicians work with your people. On some occasions, have groups write a blues or other song as a means of learning team-building skills. Another time, individuals choose a song that describes their current life, another that articulates their dreams. What was learned that can bring greater productivity?
- As a group assignment, have people find popular songs that illustrate the culture of the company or have them find several songs that tell the firm's story. Present these songs in a general session, and then facilitate a discussion on how this music helps people better understand their environment and one another.

### CAUTION: HANDLE WITH CARE

As with any tool, using the arts can be done ineffectively. To avoid wasted time, money, and increased cynicism, note the following concerns.

- Don't run a session without the right teachers. In other words, if you want to teach painting, only use skilled artists and also use facilitators to help guide discussion.
- Avoid doing arts sessions without ample time for discussion. People need time to make connections between the art and their worklife. Don't assume they will "get it" on their own. Often the artist will not be able to do this kind of facilitation, as it is an entirely different skill set.
- If you have a series of sessions, make sure they relate to one another and run in

a meaningful pedagogical order. I once participated in a creativity and leadership session that was a grab bag of painting, drama, music, role playing, and dream analysis whose parts were totally disconnected. An hour of deep and often tearful analysis of poems written by participants was followed by a silly improv session, then, an hour later, everyone tried to focus on some deep and probing issue. In sum, the event was disjointed and not as effective as it could have been.

### CONCLUSION

The Harmonics of Management helps people find the deeper part of their soul that yearns for higher purpose in their work. Getting away from the Old Economy linear-thinking, rational-only model, it helps workers be fully present in mind and spirit each day. Unlike the old Western movies, where the cowboys had to park their guns at the sheriff's office, we no longer have to park our values and inner essence when we get to the office. Using the arts in our organizations can help people bring their minds and their souls to work.

### For More Information

#### Books and Journals:

- Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. 10th ed. New York: Basic Books, 1993.
- Nicomacheus the Pythagorean. *The Manual of Harmonics*. Translation and commentary by Flora R. Levine. Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1994.
- Rosenfeld, Jill. "Speak Softly, but Carry a Big Baton." *Fast Company*, July 2001: 46-8.
- Schuessler, Heidi A. "A Poet Taps into the Disillusionment of Managers." *New York Times*, June 20, 2001: C-2.

#### See also:

- ☆ **Creating Fun in the Workplace (pp. 37-38)**
- ☆ **Making the Workplace Flex, Not Break (pp. 31-32)**
- ☆ **Viewpoint: Henry Mintzberg (pp. 241-42)**
- ✓ **Downshifting: Working Less and Enjoying It More (pp. 812-13)**
- 🔗 **Innovation and Creativity (pp. 2000-03)**

*"A nobler economics. . . is not afraid to discuss spirit and conscience, moral purpose and the meaning of life."*

(Theodore Roszak)