RESONANCE LISTENING: A CONCEPT TO HELP ADDRESS WORKER STRESS AND IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND CREATIVITY

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ABSTRACT

The heavy focus on productivity, efficiency, and speed in the industrial society and current information society has led to an imbalance in humans, work and society. With the unidimensional goal to achieve efficiency and productivity a culture has developed in which humans have less capacity to recuperate, to generate, to listen, to breathe, to experience their creativity and to be aware of themselves and others. People have lost touch with themselves and their surroundings and have begun to vibrate to a new unhealthy rhythm. From the language of music and yoga, innovative approaches to listening and stress can be developed that help restore individual and collective balance to enhance organisational health and creativity. In this paper a new concept called *Resonance Listening* is presented. The concept was developed through a partnership between music, yoga and business to foster innovation in business through the arts. Findings from a pilot test and training demonstrated that participants decreased their levels of stress and felt more capable of managing stress and communication in daily life and at work.

INTRODUCTION

How often have you heard your someone say, ""I'm so tired, I don't have any energy to work"? "I am so stressed out!". The prevalence of stress in the workplace is growing with the complexities of the global information age (Levenson, 2017), and it is having a profound effect on humans, communication and creativity (Ren & Zhang, 2015; Rich, 2016). The American Institute on Stress (www.ais.com) reports that pressures at work continue to be one of the leading causes of stress among adults. The heavy focus on productivity, efficiency, and speed in the industrial society and current information society has led to an imbalance in humans, work and society (Pink, 2005). With the unidimensional goal to achieve efficiency and productivity a culture has developed in which humans have less capacity to recuperate, to generate, to listen, to breathe, to experience their creativity and to be aware of themselves and others (Gerber, 2001; Leeds, 2010; Leonard 2006). In short, people have lost touch with themselves and their surroundings and have begun to vibrate to a new unhealthy rhythm. The growing rate of worker stress has significant implications for creativity and innovation in organisations (Rich, 2016; Sarooghi, et al 2015). Leaders are challenged to create healthy work enviornments to foster not only individual well-being but creativity in teams (Rich, 2016; Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Th question is how can individuals and teams reduce stress to enhance creativity? Antonovsky's (1979) coined the term, "sense of coherence", suggesting that stress is best addressed when individuals perceive they have the skills and knowledge to recognize and address external stimuli in order to make them comprehensible and manageable.

In a unique approach to stress, the concept of Resonance Listening was developed through an initiative sponsored by a Regional Development Program in Sweden to pair artists and businesses to find innovative solutions to existing challenges. The program was one of many that

recognizes that innovation through the arts fosters a process of developing solutions to problems through a systematic iterative method that invites exploration and exploitation of new ideas (Rostron (2003; Taylor and Ladkin, 2009) For example, musicians in the workplace can contribute with new approaches to listening and problem solving through their honed skills in understanding how to tune the ear, listen to the rhythm and flow of a dialogue, and develop ideas over time by tapping into energy that carries you forward. The concept of Resonance Listening was born through a partnership between a Professor in Quality Management, two classically trained musicians and a Yoga Instructor schooled in Medical Yoga. The purpose of the project was to develop an innovative approach to address the challenges of stress, communication, and creativity in the workplace. With many years of combined experience in music, health, communication, and organisational development, the team developed a competence development model called " resonance listening", integrating different proven areas from: MediYoga (www.mediyoga.com; Raghuraj & Telles, 2003), Music as Medicine (Campbell & Doman, 2011; Stevens, 2012) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperider & Whitney, 2005) to teach individuals and groups how to be more aware of their own way of listening and communicating.

Based on theoretical principles in sound theory and vibrational theory, Resonance Listening combines perspectives from the language of music, yogic breathing and appreciative inquiry (ibid). As humans we are in constant motion with our environment influenced by vibrations and sounds. In these sounds are both melodies and harmony (structure and form) that help us meet these sounds and experience them as pleasant or unpleasant. When we listen (active or passive) to music, the nervous system absorbs the sound and is signalled to the brain trying to understand it. From here, the level of emotion that affects the hormones and chemical reactions in the body makes it feel good or not good. When there is a clear rhythm, melody, harmony and structure in a sound we can easily receive it, regardless of whether it suits our taste. If we like them, we can start experiencing "Entrainment!". If the sound lacks a clear rhythm, melody and structure it can be perceived and considered as noise. If the noise occurs for a long time or we do not pay attention to it, it can adversely affect our body at the hormone level. As active agents in sound creation, I would suggest that we have the power to change noise into music thereby changing the way in which we interact with our surroundings. Understanding the language of music can help us to develop the tools need to be co-creators in the sounds around us. Music as medicine builds on both an activation process and a deactivation process; It's about what sounds we stimulate and let in and what sounds we turn off or shut down. By developing a new language and skill set, individuals could develop what Antonovsky (ibid) referred to as Sense of Coherence making stressors comprehensible and manageable.

Since the study on the Mozart affect (Campbell, 1997), it has been well-discussed that music affects us cognitively, emotionally and physically. Music in the form of tone, rhythm, melody, and harmony helps to create an inner balance in humans and many living objects (Fletcher, 2011; Stevens, 2012). Music has been found to positively affect health, including persons with diabetes, cancer, and pain (Campbell & Doman, 2011) The research evidence is strong: by developing our use of music we can create a better internal balance and enhance our capacities for listening, creativity and well-being (Leonard, 2006; Weider, 2004). We can reconnect to rhythms that are healthy and stimulating.

Interestingly, however, in most studies about music and health the respondents are passive listeners. What would happen to listening and creativity if people could develop skills from the language of music and become active participants? Would the application of the language of music to everyday life provide people with tools comprehend and manage external stimuli and internal reactions as a way to reduce stress? The purpose of this paper is to describe the concept of resonance listening and present findings from a pilot study in which the concept was tested with workers in a nursing home facility in Sweden.

BACKGROUND THEORY

Listening is claimed to be one of the most important skills for leaders in business today (Reichert, 2006) to create healthy quality-based work cultures. Studies show that listening is an important human ability to keep healthy and reduce stress, acquire good knowledge and build strong relationships (McClellan, 2000; Stevens, 2012). Listening is a key ability that contributes to participation and interaction, and can also provide increased well-being with harmonized and relaxing sounds (Gerber, 2001; Leeds, 2010; Leonard 2006). It is also well known that listening is one of the most difficult aspects of human communication that requires practice to be refined.

It is common to associate listening with the ear and cognitive processes. The International Listening Association, in their White Paper (2008) suggest that listening as a ”multidimensional construct” (p. 1) who’s processes are primarily cognitive, but perceived behavioural. However, they also suggest that there is little consensus about what is listening and what are theories of listening that exist (ibid). Most definitions and theories to date, as they point out, focus on a linear process of receiving, interpreting and responding to messages (ibid). As well, they conclude that the lack of consensus about what is listening and what theories can explain listening leave room for further investigation and new perspectives.

Studies in listening demonstrate that there is more to listening than then act of receiving verbal information. Mehrabian (1981, as reported by the International Listening Association) found that ”in a spoken message,

55% of the meaning is translated non-verbally, 38% is indicated by the tone of voice, while only 7% is conveyed by the words used. As well, others found that words only account for 30 -35% of the meaning. The rest is transmitted through nonverbal communication that only can be detected through visual and auditory listening (ILA, 2017). These statistics suggest that not only is there more to communication than the spoken word, but that tone of voice is significant, a point to which we will come further in this paper when exploring the language of music.

In more recent years, new research into listening suggest that listening is more complex than a cognitive linear process: listening is a whole body experience that affects how we perceive information, how we react to situations, and how we engage in communication (Kaetz, 2017; Truesedale, 2013). As well, barriers to listening can include both external noise as well as internal distractors (i.e. thoughts, feelings) (Golen, 1990). Such distractions, both internal and external impact the sensory systems, including the cellular level. Turning to sound theory and vibrational theory we can explore more the somatic aspects that perhaps lie beneath the cognitive act of listening to inform more deeply how we can develop listening skills. In this next section, the concept of Resonance Listening is presented as a response to developing somatic understanding about the importance of sonic awareness for listening and creativity.

MODEL CONSTRUCTION: RESONANCE LISTENING

Russel Paul (2004) In the book, The Yoga of Sound suggests that every human being has his own natural tone that contributes to how they perceive life and themselves in their surroundings, which also affects how they feel. He, among others, believes that everything around us is created by vibrations that, in turn, create sounds, but that we have lost our ability to listen and hear them (Gerber, 2001; Leeds, 2010; Leonard 2006). Meanwhile, we respond to the vibrations subconsciously, without understanding how they impact our listening experience and ability to hear. This is significant in particular when the experience is negative, as suggested in other studies mentioned earlier in which it was found that external noises and internal distractions are key barriers to listening. Unknowingly we respond to the negative experience, which often results in a negative exchange with the person with whom we are communicating. Our actions can be become negative because we find it difficult to distinguish what we hear and feel. The challenges is to develop our capacity to listen to ourselves and others, as well as to the sounds and vibrations around us (Fletcher, 2011; McClellan, 2000) and become aware of how they impact us. The language of music and yoga provides a structure and platform in which to begin to approach this challenge.

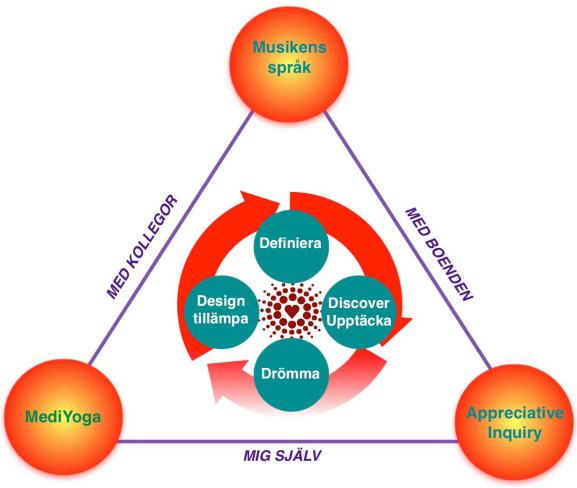

Figure 1: Resonance Listening: A concept to address stress and creativity through listening @ Snyder, 2013

The concept of resonance listening was developed by combining skills and language from music, breathing and reflective practice from MediYoga (http://sv.mediyoga.com/om-mediyoga/varumarke/) and exploratory development techniques from Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperider and Whitney 2005). In Figure 1, the three main components are illustrated in the outer circle, guided by an inner journey based on reflection and inquiry to identify, comprehend and manage external noises in relation to the sonic internal experience.

MEDIYOGA

MediYoga is a Swedish invention that is a therapeutic tool that provides fast and lasting effects in the mind, body and emotions by among other things reducing stress (Anderzen-Carlsson, et al. 2014). The MediYogan helps us developing awareness about our own internal responses to stress and gives us tools to restore balance and health. The effects that MediYogan demonstrated after 10 years of research is peace and quiet, presence, better sleep, less tense muscles, lower blood pressure, focus and more power in everyday life.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Ibid) is the organizational development concept and methodology that occurred in the United States in the 80's. The tools put the focus on identifying forces in people and situations instead of lifting the negative. By identifying forces, organizations open new opportunities for change and development. Central to this concept are tools in listening, reflection, exploration, asking questions to create understanding instead of assessing, keeping open to new ideas and other perspectives. AI's strengths are to help organizations and staff break the focus on complaints and the negative ones that arise with and feed stress, and instead listen to each other and self and discover new ways of managing work situations that reduce stress and contribute to meaningful living and well-being for the staff and those living.

THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC

The final element of resonance listening is the language of music based on sound theory and vibrational healing (Gerber, 2001; Leeds, 2010; Leonard, 2006; Mcclellan, 2000; Weider, 2004) . As living organisms, we are made up of vibrations which are formed in our cells (Gerber, 2001). We react and interact with the vibrations in our surroundings affecting our health and well-being and our basic functioning (Gerber, 2001; Weider, 2004). When we experience a noise, a person or an event that vibrates at the same frequency we have a positive experience. Conversely, when the vibrations don't match we experience disharmony and stress. Vibrational theory has been long studied in medicine (i.e., cellular biology) and sound theory (i.e. Leeds, 2010; McKusick), for example, and more recently is being applied to human dynamics to explore communication and listening. Paul (2004) and others (Leeds, 2010) suggest the need to develop awareness about how we listen and experience sound and vibration to turn "noise" into "music" and to regain our capacity to communicate, appreciate, innovate, revitalize, and get creative. The langauge of music can be described in three broad components, which can be transferred to every day situations to understand more deeply listening and communication: sound-rhytm, melodi, and harmoni (Stevens, 2012)**.**

Sound is made up of vibrations that impact how we feel and experience (Leeds, 2010; Mclellan, 2000). When vibrations within our own bodies or between ourselves and another being vibrate at the same frequency it is said to resonate. How we experience ourselves in relation to others and in particular communication is thus driven in part by the degree to which we resonate. Sound as medicine is about identifying objects, people, situations, sounds that resonate with us as individuals. If you passively choose to stay in an environment with vibration that does not resonate with your own frequency, you risk negatively affecting your nervous system. Therefore, we have a choice: changing our surroundings or changing our approach to our surroundings by understanding more about vibrations and sounds around us. In our communication with others vibration and sound have an important role. When our rhythm and vibration resonate with each other, we have easy understanding of each other. When they do not match, conflict can occur or just non-communication. With the help of Sonic Awareness, we can learn to understand what happens to us in communicating with others. We can listen curiously to the rhythm, tone, emphasis and frequency of others and be open to better understand what they say, how they feel and how our own rhythm and vibration can affect others.

Melody is the second component of music that can be used to enhance listening and communication. There is a natural melody our voice when we talk. When we emphasize words, a shape and structure is created in the melody that emphasizes the message. If we end up with an upward emphasis, we convey a question, but if we conclude with a downward emphasis we make a statement. Our word choice, in conjunction with the melody we use, creates meaning and message with others. Melody is also called the language of the heart (Stevens, 2012). It conveys how we feel in the heart and help us communicate our feelings. Through melody we can convey our emotions and heal the heart. Everyone has a unique melody in itself: an individual "soundprint". It's our unique song to convey who we are. When we are seen and heard, we feel strong and we feel good. Many say our own song is most heard when we work with what we love. Melodies can help us get in touch with our feelings and open the heart and start a healing process. When we close emotions, we close the heart, therefore, melodies are particularly important in order to keep us in balance. Empowerment: Melodies, through their connection to voice and speech, give us strengths and confirm who we are, how we feel, and how we think. In groups, melodies can be used to strengthen togetherness and energy.

Harmony is the third component to make up music based on the relationship between different tones that together create a pleasing experience (Campbell & Doman, 2011; Weider, 2004). In human communication it represents a community where you create something new together. It's about uniting and finding a balance together. To be able to do it, it is necessary to open each other and listen to how our energy, melody, rhythm correspond. The concept of harmony can be applied to human interaction in a number of ways, including

- Match with others (be in tune): to listen in and feel
- Join: To find in each other's rhythm (entrainment)
- Blend in: To blend with each other's dynamics, sound, volume, etc.
- Co-create: Creating together without a leader

RESONANCE LISTENING: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

When you listen in and out with resonance listening, you reflect on what is happening within yourself in relation to your surroundings. The purpose is to both balance and strengthen ourselves individually and open ourselves to one another collectively. As an individual, we can rejuvenate appreciative reflection to become aware of what is happening in our surroundings and how this affects our community with others. In other words, appreciative reflection helps us harmonize with our environment when we listen to the melodies around us and become a part of rhythm of communication. Curious questions that help open to listening and harmony are for example:

- What happens when I listen to someone else's breath, melody, energy and use my own breath, melody and vibration to balance or harmonize with another? (Be-in tune with)
- What happens when I listen to strengths in the other and do I use my own rhythm to create a harmony between us? (Join)

- What happens when I listen to someone else's dynamics, sound and volume and use my own dynamics, sound and volume to create harmony in conversation and community?
- What happens when I dare to release / renounce assessments and expectations and open up to create something new together based on our common or complementary strengths? (Co-create)

PILOT TESTING

Pilot 1: In spring 2013, resonance listening was tested with a group of 12 caregivers in a nursing home in a two-day workshop. The program was developed and tested by a Professor in Quality Management who is also a professionally trained classical musician. A second professionally trained musician and a licensed instructor in MediYoga.

Participants were trained in music and yoga using four practical exercises from Medical Yoga and illustrations from music. Three themes were exemplified by the music: 1) how we sound, interpret and hear each other, 2) be open and listen in and out, and 3) use the Appreciative Inquiry with music. The participants and management team responded positively to concept and asked for a more comprehensive training program.

Pilot 2: A more comprehensive training program was offered to 16 people from the staff at the same nursing home in the fall of 2013. Participants were divided into two groups (eight people per group). Selection of the participants was left to the management and the training took place at the workplace (three of the persons in the second pilot group participated in the first).

The skills development training provides the staff with tools in listening and communication, integrating research and tools from music, yoga and the concept of appreciative inquiry to create practical exercises for listening, reflection and communication staff. The goal of the program was to help participants:

- Develop knowledge and skills in listening for leadership
- Develop knowledge and skills in kinesthetic intelligence and physical thinking
- Improve conditions for participation and collaboration with others and in organisations
- Explore the relationship between sound, stress, listening and creativity
- Develop techniques to reduce stress through sound
- Develop knowledge and experience in physical thinking to listen communicate through the body
- Develop knowledge and skills in dialogue and appreciative inquiry for leading

Participants met every two weeks for two hours during a series of five workshop. The first three workshops were used to introduce skills and concepts in the music of language: sound, melody and harmony. In the third and fourth workshops participants were introduced to appreciative inquiry and worked with the tools for each of the four stages: dream, define, design, discover. MediYoga was offered during each of the workshops. Between workshops participants were given a set of activities to perform to develop their skills and test them in a real world setting.

Participants were given workbooks including a theoretical presentation of the different tools and skills related to sound theory and music as medicine. As well they were given practice activities to explore and try the new approaches in their daily life and work. Tips for also provided in order for the participants to develop a”grab-bag” of solutions that could be applied to different scenarios and situations. The combination of theoretical background, practice activities and tips were intended to give the participants the tools to both identify, comprehend and managed external stimuli that could be seen as stressors or strengths.

Data were collected throughout the pilots through a combination of stress inventory, reflective dialogue and formal evaluations. During the first workshop participants completed a stress inventory (PSS-14). As well they completed a survey indicating noises that were perceived as negative and positive. Breathing rates were measured pre and post workshop through yogic breathing and a reflective dialogue was held at the beginning of each workshop to understand how participants practiced and experienced the tools and knowledge from each of the workshops. After the last workshop participants completed a post-stress inventory (PSS-14) and a program evaluation, which was both written and verbal.

RESULTS

Of the sixteen participants, 12 completed the training program. The remaining four persons were re-assigned to other tasks and were unable to attend. As well, the leader of the nursing home went on sick leave during the training, which can perhaps explain some of the findings from the program. Among the number of pre-post stress inventories only five persons completed both times.

Findings from the stress inventory (N=5) indicate participants improved their ability to handle stressful situations during the course of the training program. Among the factors that all participants experience most improvement in were:

- Improved ability to handle change
- Improved ability to handle difficult situations
- Less frustrated when things didn’t turn out as planned
- Less stressed and nervous
- More in control

These findings suggest that tools and practice in reflection and listening can reduce stress and help individuals to feel more in control of their situation.

Findings from the evaluation indicated that participants develop tools that were useful to improve their listening and handle stress. Strengths in the program that were identified by the participants included:

- Starting the workshop with a yoga pass help them to feel calmer and develop control over their breathing
- They are comfortable using the language of music as a way of strengthening their own and others' well-being
- They acquired tools to take charge of their own health
- They have the skills to identify sounds and their impact on them, as well as tools to nuetralize the effect of negative sounds
- They feel that they have skills that can help them to improve their communication with others
- They experienced improvements in deeper breathing
- They experienced improved sleep

During the workshop participants worked with the Appreciative Inquiry method to identify stressors and design improvements that would contribute to a more health work environment. Findings from this process resulted in the need for:

- Routines in the workplace around mobile phones, breaks and temporary work staff
- Special cleaning staff who only clean to free-up the care staff to care for the residents
- More time for to engage with residents in visits and excursions outside the accommodation or activity in peace with the residents in their apartments such as time for conversation, music listening and walking
- When a resident is in danger of death, the regular staff will be alerted and temporary staff will be replaced instead of the regular on schedule

CONCLUSIONS

The results from this small study indicate that working with yoga, music and appreciative inquiry can provide individuals and groups with tools to handle stress and improve well-being. Moreover, the acquired tools help them improve listening and communication. In particular, they identified work with listening to sounds and breathing as most significant.

Participants experienced, among other things, improved sleep, and a greater sense of calm, a finding that is in line with similar studies about the effect of yoga on sleep and stress (Anderzon-carlsson, et al 2014). Participants indicated that deep breathing was a powerful tool to deal with daily stress; a tool that could also be used in a group to help people address stressful situation. This was an interesting outcome to witness how participants transferred application of the tools from their individual selves to the group, suggesting the desire among individuals in organisations to care about one another. This finding alone is important for leaders who seek to build healthy teams and aim to spawn creativity. In general, participants indicated they had a good use of the training tools. They have also signalled that they are curious about how the education could have had a greater impact on their working environment if they had managerial functions that participated in the education to a greater extent and were able to continue with the tools after the end of the education.

What we can see from the pilot workshops is that resonance listening has the possibility to create new opportunities for using music as a tool for the health and creativity in individuals and businesses. Integrating music with other areas, such as MediYoga and Appreciative Inquiry, enables a more comprehensive response to the growing need to find new forms and tools for well-being in today's information society for both individuals and businesses. The approach provided participants a beginning to building what Antonovsky (1979) called ”Sense of Coherence”. Applying Resonance Listening doesn’t require much for individuals to benefit from the approach. It does require that people practice to the tools and develop a culture of listening in and out to identify, understand, and manage external stimuli. This project was as well another example of how artists, health care specialists and businesses can partner to find innovative solutions to contemporary challenges.

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