

Can organizations develop using movement? Eurhythmmy can generate new abilities in organizations

Abstract

In last month's issue, we gave an overview of how Eurhythmmy can contribute in a novel way to developing abilities which encourage paths of growth in companies and public institutions.

We start from the premise that businesses, like any organization, are a continuous act of creation and re-creation by man. They do not exist in nature, but exist and have a reason for being precisely because of the ingenuity and commitment of those who work in them, interact together and with the external environment.

Eurhythmmy gives people who work in organizations the opportunity to become aware of what will help them grow as individuals and what will help their organization grow as a living social organism able to develop, drive and manage changes.

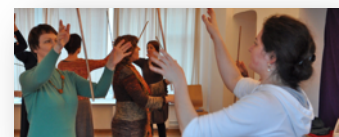
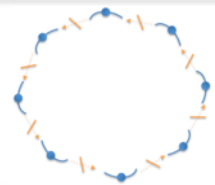
The use of Eurhythmmy in specific contexts

Health care and safety in the workplace

Eurhythmmy can play an important role in preventing industrial accidents and in enhancing both social relations and human activity in the workplace because Eurhythmmy helps people not only become more aware of themselves and others but also more active and better oriented to space and to what is moving around them. This way the “virtual” experiences undergone nowadays are counterbalanced.

Below is an example of what we call a real “life-saving” exercise.

Imagine a group of people, each holding a rod in their right hand, standing in a circle at a certain distance from each other. The aim of the exercise is to make all the rods move to the right around the circle. Given the distance between the participants, they cannot hand the rods to their neighbors on the right, so they have to throw them. This obliges everybody to become quickly aware of their actions in space: the rods must be aimed accurately, using the right-hand of the thrower who must at the same time catch another rod in his/her left hand. The next phase is to change hands and get ready for a new throw and catch. The direction of the throw can also be inverted or alternated and the rhythm varied according to the needs of the different groups.



This exercise, like others, is safe, simple and effective. It encourages presence, awareness of self and others, and the ability to perform while observing one's part in the process. This encourages autonomy and a sense of individual responsibility as each participant becomes engaged in a collective process. This not only encourages each person to become aware of his/her own abilities and of where improvements need to be made but also helps overcome resistance to comments made by third parties. Similarly the physicality of the experience avoids the trap of the purely conceptual understanding which occurs when topics are only explained verbally and make action difficult.

Last but not least, the feeling of harmony created during activities like the one described above gratify the participants whose confidence at working in a group is boosted and who, at the same time, enjoy the aesthetic feeling of coordination and balance.

We believe that social art in general, and Eurhythmics in particular, is an outstanding instrument for encouraging better human relations in the workplace as it unites two special needs of mankind: Art and interpersonal contact.

Personal development is often regarded as an activity of the individual, but it is never born out of solitude. It is never solipsistic, it is a practice that presupposes both an artistic attitude of continuous creation and a social and work context. We work with others and for others (cfr. Leadership & Management – Sept.Oct.2015).

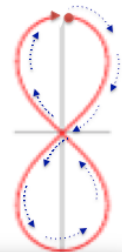
How to enhance the customer-oriented process

Eurhythmics used in the workplace allows participants to experience and to understand how all activities and functions are connected in the process of producing value for the customer. The importance of this experiential approach is that it accelerates an understanding of the dynamics of the different roles and the difficulties and opportunities which can occur during business development. This in turn encourages better observation and a more concrete evaluation of real processes and an appreciation of what both the individual and the group can contribute.

On most occasions the production of value for the customer is prompted by an external impulse (purchase orders, complaints, new market needs, moves from competing firms, and so on). Within an organization this process changes (or needs to be changed) into interrelated sense-making activities whose sense is shared by all those who carry them out. These activities should belong to a common plan (which respects the naturally different rhythms of people and activities) and which interconnects with other processes aimed at different stakeholders.

In Eurhythmics, one of the most helpful processes is that of the lemniscate, a form associated with the symbol of infinity. This form is helpful precisely because it contains internal and external relationships which are continuously regenerated.

Here is not the place to give a detailed step by step description of an activity that it is difficult to imagine through words. Instead we wish to convey the kind of experience a process of this sort can produce in the people who create this form. By physically creating the symbol, the participants feel how an impulse starting from the outside closely relates to the form inside. As a result, they become aware of the responsibility taken by the person who gives impulse to the internal structure and who must know how to modify both rhythm and perspective depending on what is being transferred. Through this exercise they not only become aware of this responsibility but also of the need for trust in order to allow the process to flow. They understand that the essence of the process is shape, rhythm, intention and connection and they become aware that this connection is not a natural phenomenon but must be sought and desired on the basis of a common design and sense of what is being forged.



The customer-oriented process is not the only one - there can be different relevant markets just as there are different

processes provided by the organization. It is, however, probably the main process, since it represents the main *raison d'être* of the organization. Each process in a company has its own rules, principles, specific stakeholders and impulse for change, for example, the financial compliance and administrative processes have stricter rules based on principles oriented towards parties or stakeholders other than customers. These too, however, need to be linked to the main process.

How can we make these processes communicate in a continuous flowing movement and what particular abilities are needed to allow us to harmonize them without radically changing the specific aim of each process and role of the different sectors ?

Example: a lemniscate can be integrated with other lemniscates (different customer-oriented processes with varied rhythms and impulses) or with other forms (other processes that require integration). As the latter need different qualities of movement, participants experience which abilities need to be activated in order to respond to the impulses and principles of differently oriented processes. For example the square shape (as opposed to the circle) requires a decision to be made and a direction to be chosen, whereas the five-pointed star shape implies interconnecting, intersecting paths and simultaneous individual objectives.



Working on such questions through Eurhythmmy helps people gain a different sense of presence and an ability to perceive connections which they then transfer into real processes (see at the last part of the paper for more information about connection between experience, behavior and company processes). Here we wish to emphasize that the challenge nowadays lies not in obeying rules, but in dealing in a principled way with what the company wishes to achieve. If one works only in compliance with rules/procedures, without any understanding of the general sense, the whole system becomes rigid, making it effective only in very standardized processes (which are less and less). If instead individuals learn how to see and use the general principles that move the general plan behind the individual working processes, then they can also start to promote and work towards change.



All the elements of the process experienced when using Eurhythmmy are in fact present in our organizations and within each individual. It is for this reason that Eurhythmmy gives us an excellent chance to recognize these elements and to train for real challenges.

Horizontal Leadership Abilities

Increasingly it is being suggested that there is a complementary relationship between the vision and strategies of management and the ability to propose solutions and change by the staff who are in daily touch with the market and other stakeholders.

While these concepts may be easily understood on paper or verbally, what happens in real life? We see that paradoxically the more the challenges of organizational complexity and innovation increase, the more organizations react by increasing procedures, rules and checks.

The result is increased rigidity, fragmentation, internal conflict and a block in the potential for growth. When will they realize that the answer to complexity lies in people's (leaders', managers', staff's) ability to create a dynamic balance between changing needs and opportunities?

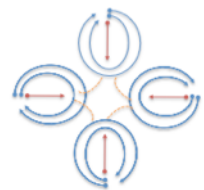
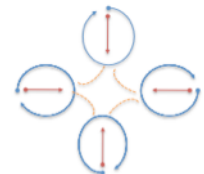
One answer is a horizontal leadership which creates a dialogue between those who are called upon to give a shape (in terms of the vision, mission, and direction to which one should tend) and those who, being more in contact with the periphery and dealing with the more pressing contingent aspects, can bring in different impulses and input.

Eurhythmia in working life provides a concrete experience of this at both the individual and collective level. The example below illustrates the ability to lead processes rather than people.

Example: Let us imagine a number of participants paired off in teams, standing in the same circle (=the organization), whose common target is to move together towards the centre of the circle and then go back to their starting position, after exchanging the ball they are holding in their hand, in a non-stop, flowing process.

The process we have just outlined highlights how those who are inside the common circle give impetus for the movement and share, not in words, but in facts, a common rhythm; they also have to pay attention not to get carried away by their own élan/impulse and not to trespass on their collaborators' working space, but to remain ready to re-start the process again as soon as their collaborators finish their own activity.

On the contrary, if leaders do not let the process go, the impetus becomes a frozen shape and the inspiration a rule collaborators are forced to follow/obey. In fact, there is a moment when collaborators cannot see their own leaders and if the latter fail to let the process go or collaborators themselves do not take charge of their own part of the process, they are forced to turn back in order to catch the right rhythm, thus losing both the process fluidity and the connection with other colleagues who are themselves in movement¹.



This kind of work can be made more complex, and the experience more worthwhile, thus increasing the organizational complexity as well, like this: participants are asked to face all the same part/side or else teams can be increased in number; each team can be made up of three or more people (leaders, managers, collaborators) and so on.

The experience always works on three levels: as individuals, as people relating to others, and as people relating to what is being produced. This accelerates understanding and gives the opportunity to coach a change in behavior, a change which is not possible in purely verbal instruction.

¹ This work reveals to each participant their possible areas of improvement, e.g. "I think I am giving the right impulse, but then I realize I am not"; "Much as I am convinced that I am leaving enough space to my partner, in fact I am not"; "What can I do to prevent my partner from chasing after me?" and so on. In the same way the participants may say: "I arrived late at the point of exchange, as I wasn't able to free myself after the impulse was given"; "I muddle up my hands when I have to exchange balls"; "I forget what comes after the exchange"; "I feel I am disconnected from the impulse and from the other participants as well"...

In smart working contexts, business networks, and local development projects etc.

As long as productive business life is concentrated in a single site, it is relatively easy to recognize an organizational structure and see how the different processes revolve around it. Then it is possible to single out, in a principled way, the actions which set the structure in motion according to impulses arising from the marketplace or from within (see previous article). The shape of an organization can be of great assistance since all structures connect the elements which compose them and create relationships among those who contribute to them.

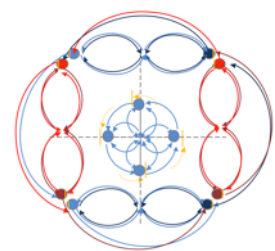
The question is what happens instead when the boundaries of an organization become less well-defined, when local development business networks, or co-working and other forms of social innovation start to emerge? What kinds of ability are required? The types of organization mentioned above are obviously all different and need to be dealt with accordingly. Here, however, we can only consider the aspects which are in common and see how Eurhythmy can make a fundamental contribution to these. One aspect is “inclusiveness” - meant as the ability to connect parts within a single open system. One issue that needs to be addressed by everybody is the relationship between the nucleus, the corporate identity that keeps a working group together, and the activities that have to be carried out in considerable autonomy while being open to the market forces.

Eurhythmy helps people to experience the skills required when working in an open system. It shows them how to carry out their own work without being lost in external processes, and at the same time how to stay in touch with the central core, without being diminished by it.

Example: imagine a number of *lemniscates*, each set in motion by a different person. Each lemniscate has its own sense of identity; each has its own starting point, its own internal/external relationships, etc. Then imagine them all as part of one circle, i.e. as a project which has its own core but whose vital processes -shown separately by each of the lemniscates- take place on the periphery.

If the movement of each lemniscate is to be perceived as the movement of the system as a whole (without modifying the essence of the whole), then the people involved need to develop the capacity to find connections between themselves and the centre of the circle at each stage of the process. They need to learn how to observe while they are part of what they are observing, they need to learn how to change viewpoints and their way of acting, and they need both to change the rhythm of their own processes in order to match that of the collective process while at the same time actively giving impulse to any new path that is required.

The impact of this experience is multiplied when the participants are asked not only to maintain their own lemniscates but also to move to other spaces in a common line, thereby creating an overall rotating effect.



It is important to remember that whenever we refer to connections, we are not referring to empathetic relationships or other “personalized” feelings, but to the principles that lie at the basis of the living process and to the ability to adjust our movements to make these principles visible to those outside (in the same way that products or the quality of services provided are easily recognizable by consumers).

We have given above a few examples of varying complexity which show how Eurhythmy can effectively contribute to both the development of individuals and of organizations. The amount of complexity and the contents of the activities are chosen in a dialogue with the person responsible for the organization or for the specific project and are finely retuned according to the response of the participants during the session.

At the end of each session time is specifically allocated to let participants reflect on their own experience; to transform all that into learning concerning themselves as well as their work processes; to let them to perceive the next concrete steps that can be taken in their daily work context.

Eurhythmy not only engages in generating new practices in organizational development, but also addresses any specific development topics that may arise, and works on the concrete learning steps necessary for the business processes concerned.

The connection between experience, reflection and action helps generate new abilities which can support a much needed change in organizational culture. Long-lasting sustainable growth is in fact always the result of an overall development of the culture of an organization.

This same point was made by Giuseppe Ungaretti, a well-known Italian writer who, more than fifty years ago, foretold that computers would eventually become so powerful that they would override imagination and human beings would be tempted to have computer-like thoughts, unless they were prepared to take a significant cultural and ethical step forward.

An approach like that of Eurhythmy can only occur when art and organizational science are linked together. The basic premise of Eurhythmy lies in the uniqueness of man compared to other living beings and even to the most sophisticated of machines. This uniqueness is the ability to generate complexity which can be changed into art, culture and meaning.