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

Abstract

In this age of continuous innovation where everything never ceases to change, the boundary of rational/functional models (which are valid only for what is already known) has been already overstepped and we can now venture into a new territory: the art of organizational development.

Eurhythmy, being a social art of movement - when applied in the workplace - can act as a first-rate flywheel for the development of organizations and people alike[1].

Modern-day world in general, and the world of business in particular are becoming more and more complex and interconnected. No organizations and no individuals can be considered as separate entities any more: we depend on others as much as others depend on us.

The rate of innovation is moving faster and faster: an idea or a plan is often undergoing further changes while it is still on trial.

The paradox is that the world of business is mostly ruled by extreme finance laws that unavoidably lead to the splitting of interests and to social disruption.
Therefore, while on one hand interconnection and innovation would call for cooperation and co-creation, on the other, market trends cause splittings among insiders. Were we talking about human beings, we could call this trend schizophrenia.

At this point the system may become pathologically stiff, but we do not intend to discuss here how things would change if -instead of our current wild capitalism- the community capitalism foretold by Adriano Olivetti were adopted; we want to focus on how Eurhythmy for Organizations– together with well-meant approaches towards change- can help face complexity, interconnection and cooperation to develop organizations according to Olivetti's philosophy, where they are seen: "…as professional and social communities , connected to their customers and to every worker, where everyone has the chance of making their own contribution while promoting the welfare of the establishment and at the same time becoming more and more part of it" (A. Olivetti "Il mondo che nasce")

With this in mind, let us choose a few strongholds at the basis of any organization development, trying to give them a new reading through an experience made possible by Eurhythmy.
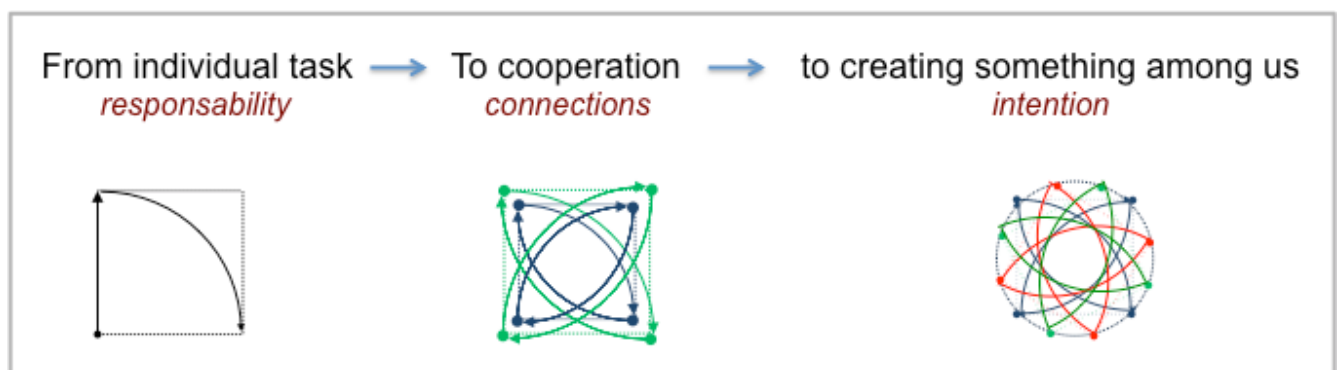
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[1] Eurhythmy is a recent art; better known as an artistic expression and for its healing, therapeutic, pedagogical uses; few people know about its employment for working life, as worked out by Annemarie Ehrlich . To know more, visit www.eur-org.com

A development into complex, innovative systems requires new abilities to build the road while we are walking along it.

Generating the new means to build a road while we are walking along it. If this is quite difficult when we come to think of someone's individual path, it is definitely more difficult when the road to be built involves a whole organization or at least to a group of people.

Indeed, this has little to do with working on team building skills and co-operation. To develop a process while we are part of it requires to be active doers and outside watchers at the same time. But, watchers of what? Not only of our and everyone's else acting, but also and above all of everything that is being created in-between, of what can be called common process, which manifests itself in what emerges in-between. Only from objective observation of it we can act on the process itself.

We can consider what is produced in a firm from the same point of view: a product is born from the interaction of variable factors (both human and technical), but in the end it gains importance in itself. The difference is that the product is evident and visible while the process is ever moving and changing and in some of its part not visible.

From individual task → To cooperation → to creating something among us
responsability   connections   intention

How much a process can change depends on ours and on others' acting, on mine and others' intentions and on common goals as well.

At this point it is worth mentioning that Michelangelo, he renowned Italian artist, would choose and carve every block of stone according to its potential future shape, invisible to others but artists.

In the same way it is possible to develop the necessary abilities to grasp the process and its evolution. As a consequence, everyone's acting will remain consistent with what the process shows at the moment it is taking place and every single action will affect the potential of the process itself, while at the same time new potential aspects may emerge.

The development of any organization can thus become a social artistic deed!

Eurhythmy makes all this experienceable, intelligible and most of all, allows everyone to enhance the abilities that are inherent in the social and working processes they are part of.

This happens because Eurhythmy deals with all the basic elements that are part of any living organism (and organizations are): structure, rhythm, relationships, intentions.
Becoming aware of these elements and train not only to recognize, but also to modify them with responsibility, enable people to enter the process of development in order to create and constantly feed the organism itself.

The basic elements of Eurhythmy connected to organizational life are taken into account :
  – Structure;
  – time and rhythm;
  – interrelationships;
  – purpose and motivation.
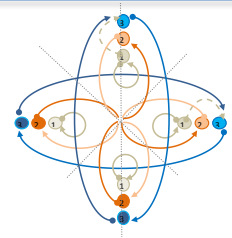
Every organization is a reality which develops through continuous dialogue from inside to outside and vice versa :

There are two impulses that flow into every organization from the outside and must there meet their synthesis: on one hand the product/service with its related innovation and research of quality; on the other hand, customers with their ever changing needs, expectations and wishes.

Within the organization, these two impulses find a special substance made out of its work processes, a physical part (i.g., technological and logistical equipment), its own culture, and last but not least, out of every single person working in and for it, each one with their own feelings, their own culture (seen not only as learning but also as values, motivation, purposes) and their own physical constitution.

Within steady markets, a synthesis between inner reality and outer impulses can be planned so as they can follow a procedure. In complex, ever changing frameworks, as we already know, rational/functional approaches do not work any more: only insiders (people working for a organization) can operate an ever moving integration.

For this reason, the challenge lies in making people able to work on their own abilities in order to achieve this integration and -in the meantime- to make the establishment become as a unique organism. This would mean that the organization, just as any other living organism, should be able to "perceive" market demands and internal requirements, to think up appropriate goods and services, to act turning thoughts into actions aimed at production and sale.

Through Eurhythmy for Organizations people work both on an individual and organizational level at the same time; everyone is involved as a whole, complex entity, in each of the three levels through which they are related to reality (thinking, feeling, acting), thus allowing to become aware of the personal pitfall over which we often (unconsciously) stumble in all social and working contexts, and to sidestep them:

– abstract thinking, which typically denotes speeches where fruitless thoughts and conceptual misunderstanding are brought forward
– excess of self-reference by which attention is drawn to one's own personal life and feeling regardless of what actually is going on
– automatic behaviour, which disconnects people from themselves, from others and from the common purpose

Eurhythmy helps individuals to make their inner reality and the outer reality to dialogue, since they are deeply connected each other, while, in the complexity of modern life, they tend to be lived more and more as two opposing worlds.

Moreover, Eurhythmy makes it evident not only how an organization cannot either exist as a closed or wide open reality, but also how it can develops in a continuous exchange between its inside and its outside.

Eurhythmy helps individuals -by themselves or through interaction with others- to become aware of the importance of these two dimensions and of their being mutually connected to their organization.

Example: Let us image a group of people standing in a circle. A circle in itself is a shape that clearly marks out the outside and the inside. Let us image walking along the whole circumference, facing the centre with our bodies and heads and always staring at it. What happens? The outside disappears from our attention. This is what happens, for example, in the organizations involved solely in the improvement of internal processes; they are doomed to collapse. This can be positively experienced because when you move like this, a sense of contraction results and the circle paralyses.
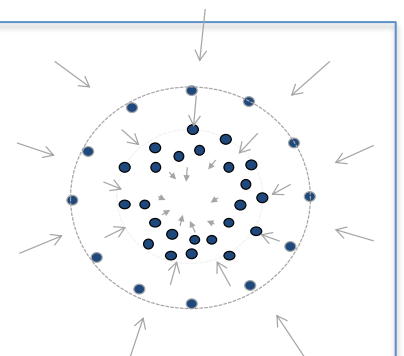
Example: Let us now picture a reverse situation: let us walk around the circumference facing the outside of it. In a short time, the sense of sharing a centre, of belonging to an organization as a whole, quickly slides off and in a moment the shape looses its significance and disappears.
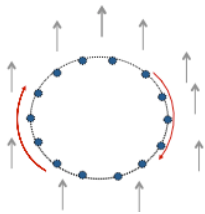
The experimentation then carries on evolving towards the relationship between the inside and the outside and introduces the point of view of customers, who are the prime regulators of any business process.
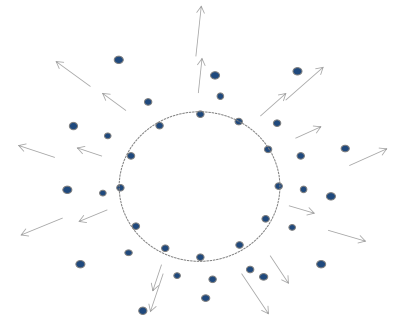
Such an exercise lasts just a few minutes but it is as effective as a one-hour theoretical session on the effects of open and closed structures and on pitfalls of social interaction and is a clear example of learning through direct experience and movement.

Countless similar exercises as well as increasing complex ones, dealing on different aspects of inside/outside relationship and on customer orientation can be suggested.

Horizontal leadership supports processes of change

The ever growing complexity and the quick pace of innovation expose every organization to so many external pressures that the traditional patterns of vertical leadership, where rules and procedures, authority and proxy can be relied on, fail as they are valid only along well-known paths. They also disconnect top management from the working team, to the detriment of the organizational growth
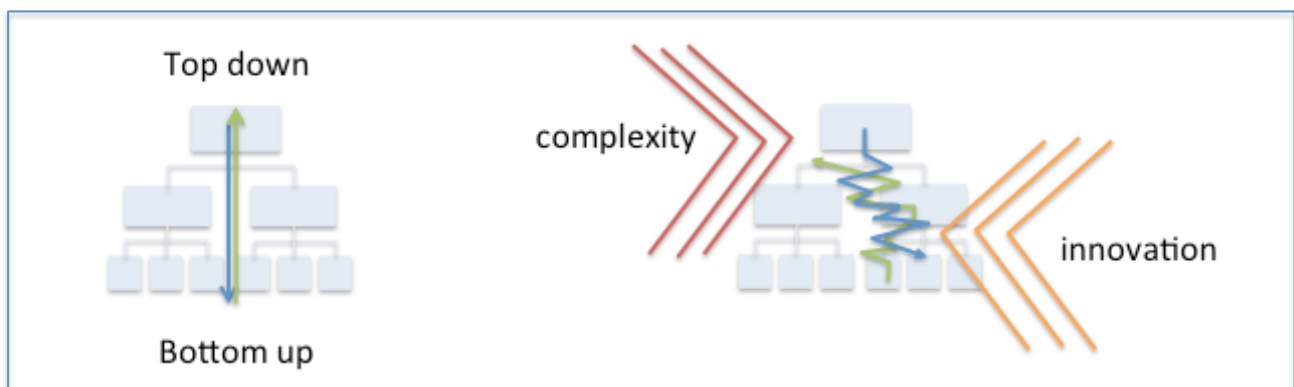
This "dissociation" which, according to Francesco Novara, we could call organizational schizophrenia, causes to increase of internal conflict as well as inefficiency towards external market challenges.

Therefore, in such a setting, the top management is no more called to act as a master who always knows what to do and how to lead personnel, but to create development processes in which everyone can become actively engaged and responsible; their role is then to mould the sense of the organization and values at the core of it; it is to be able to investigate "why"; to create ideal conditions for those who are responsible and committed to "what" and "how" and have to deal with customers, to stay in touch with the question, with the purpose of fulfilling its evolution process.

Horizontal leadership is the leadership through which individuals and organizations alike do their best to connect themselves to what surrounds them in order to create their reference contexts according not to conservative processes, but to innovative ones. Below, a reference bibliography on horizontal leadership will be of help to deepen such an important topic .

Here we will confine ourselves to highlight how vertical and horizontal dimensions are not only concepts belonging to geometry, but also inner human qualities as regards existence and action in individual and common space. Eurhythmy, being related to human beings and to their connection with reality, has an inborn link into the three (vertical, horizontal and directional) dimensions of our world.

Through Eurhythmy, we can experience -in real social contexts- how these three dimensions affect us and what effect we can have on them.

Example: Just to give a very simple example of that, let us now imagine to stand in a circle holding an ball in our right hand. The task is to start off a non-stop simultaneous flow of balls from the left to the right. In doing, it becomes evident that the horizontal dimension as well as the vertical one (our standing upright) have to be activated. I have to be in the same time in the left and right side: if I turn towards my colleague on the right, to whom I must to hand the ball, I will inhibit or prevent the person on my left from handing me the ball, thus altering the flow of the common process. Besides, in order to achieve a regular flowing movement, without interruptions, the act of giving and receiving must take place at the same time. As I receive the ball in my left hand, then a new action must to take place by each one thus allowing the flow to continue .


Horizontal Exchange
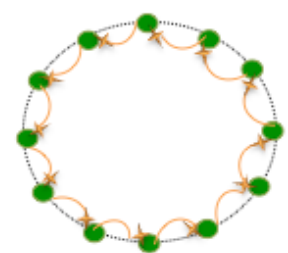
Assuming that the process works up to now, we can then include a different target to it: the exchange of balls will take place at the centre of the circle; therefore, everyone must move to the centre and from there exchange their balls with the others.

Horizontal and straight forward movement

Inevitably, once a forward direction is added to the movement, the horizontal dimension gets lost, and the shape of the circle, too. Moreover, the connection among people cannot be maintained: everyone will be somewhere near the centre, but not in the same position (some ahead, some behind). Walking all together again towards our target so that the three dimensions (vertical, horizontal, directional) can come into play again will work as a useful workout.

There are other similar or more complex exercises useful to set the three dimensions and their different qualities in motion.
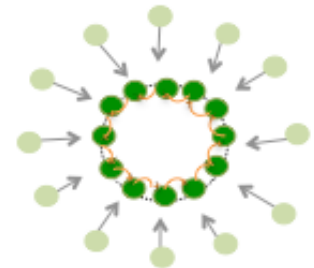
This new attitude to leadership, in which individual leadership (meant as leadership by which each individual is called into action) and continually evolving co-created processes cohabit, requires deeply different abilities from those implied in the traditional vertical leadership , where levers mostly rely on hierarchy and proceedings. Eurhythmy, owing to its distinguishing characteristics, can effectively help people to become aware of and thus train their own development areas, to create and strenghten more complex abilities such as: conceiving multi-related systems, staying connected with them without getting lost and being active amid complexity.

These are invaluable tools for any good leader (either on personal or organizational level) who understands how important is to activate development processes to face complexity instead of simplifying it.

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This article is meant to be just a brief introduction to the theme of organizational development connected with social arts, Eurhythmy in particular, of which we wish here to highlight two conclusive aspects:

– The process through which Eurhythmy for Organizations is carried on makes individuals always active and fully responsible and conscious of their actions as regards themselves and others; always aware of what is actually happening, of common goals and of the potential of the process itself. We believe that any social art is generated not from instinct but from intuition, not from naivety but from conscious behavior. For this reason, Eurhythmy sessions can start under guidance and then, after some basic rules of social art are acquired, it can be experienced more and more as an art in which everyone can play a role, even experiment co-creation processes.

– Eurhythmy speeds up the processes of change for organizations and individuals alike, above all when it is included in organizational development and in training projects that can be lead through renovating approaches and not through fixed programs. We are referring to approaches that turns critical issues into questions, questions into affordable steps towards a development path through an alternate rhythm between action and reflection. In such a context, a Eurhythmy session is constantly connected to the development topics that are being treated and what is subsequently learnt, too, will be connected to real progress in the working processes.

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