

Inspiring Creativity in Leaders with Music as a Medium
by Antonija Pacek, M.Phil

Imagination is more important than knowledge. - Albert Einstein

In this time of turmoil and crisis, companies are facing more than ever before a massive need for greater creativity and innovation to remain competitive. Equipping leaders and managers with the necessary ability to become more creative, even when they may not be so inclined, is a meaningful mandate. Such a quest demands new avenues of exploration, including various forms of art. Creativity is the fuel for innovation and those leaders that nurture creativity are certainly more likely to succeed. Current practices involving creativity in organizations require considerable reframing as presently their players rely too heavily on the left (logical) side of their brain. In order to process information in a novel way, we need to utilize both the logical and artistic (left and right) hemispheres of the brain. If we take an intact working-memory, strong intrinsic motivation and solid technical knowledge combined with intuition, music, imagination, visual instruction, creative storytelling, analogies and free exploration, we have a very powerful combination for any creative work.

Music has the power to engage the right side of the brain, which is often dormant within the realms of current business practice. Music has two basic parts—rhythm and melody. Dr. Sc. Jovancevic, MD points out, that “a nature of rhythm in music connects directly with our heart beat and breathing, which give us a feeling of life, regularity and harmony. Slower rhythm is related to peacefulness and relaxation, while speedier breathing and rhythm are connected to arousal and excitement. Science clearly shows that music has the power to relax and inspire us.” The coherence between heart beats and breathing result in the ability to relax, therefore contributing to better health and connecting us to our inner self. Kicking off a self-development session with live music relaxes and quiets our mind. Music also makes our mind more receptive during reflective exercises.

What are the best practices for inspiring creativity by engaging the right side of the brain? Drawing on a body of recent research, successful practices and personal experiences of the author (who is an international educator, consultant and contemporary piano music composer), there are five practices that inspire creativity by means of using music as an unleashing channel.

The first practice is a creative self-discovery, and is about tapping into our intuition and our right-side, “artistic” brain. The second practice supports working creatively and constructively under stress. It redirects energy to more positive thinking, resulting in more effective performance when under pressure. Once negative stress is under control, the third practice kicks in: identifying challenges and resolving them by employing intuition. When performing any task, involvement of both our heads and our hearts makes a profound difference. The fourth practice is finding our passion and understanding the role it plays in creativity. Finally, the fifth practice concerns itself with identifying existing creative talent within organizations. By knowing what personality

traits as well as personal experiences predispose an employee to be thinking out of the box, we could cherry-pick our creative talents that would make a positive difference in any working environment. The five practices take a holistic approach and include music. Their purpose is to inspire leaders to expand their own creative potential and to develop and sustain creativity and innovation amongst their people.

Integrating live music in leadership development sessions stimulates and powerfully boosts our creative mind. Music builds a powerful link between developing creativity in leaders/employees and getting them in touch with their dreams, passions and feelings. Research results point out that music inspires imagination, openness and more profound learning. Just in the same way as visual images, music knows no boundaries and is a universal language of the emotions. Not only does our auditory apparatus receive and perceive music, but also our skin (deeper layers of the skin contain Pacini and Meissner cells that react on certain music frequencies and on vibration of performance). Thus, we are able to “listen” and react to music with our entire body. Soft tones played in workshops with tasks of a reflective nature bring about relaxation as well as an emotionally arousing experience. Our working memory is also at its best when we are relaxed. Music is a powerful avenue to awaken and enhance participants’ creative potential.

The five practices, each combined with live piano music for awakening creative potential and deeper understanding of creativity processes, are examined more closely below.

Practice 1: Tapping into your intuition and right hemisphere

Regular classroom seminars as well as organizational processes usually focus too heavily on the left/logical hemisphere of the brain. Music is a strong and universal trigger to help participants tap into the right side of their brain, thus triggering their passions, visions, and creative mind. In order to access and to be in touch with our intuition and implicit learning (knowing how to do certain things, but having difficulty to describe this), we need to use more analogical, metaphorical, and non-formal ways of thinking. In addition, we must be aware of the power of recognizing and understanding our emotions and hunches when doing business. We should also utilize our personal flow or inner drive.

Once the artistic side has been awakened, the logical and artistic hemispheres of the brain can be integrated. The more we practice our imagination and intuition, the better we get at being more imaginative and intuitive. The further away from norm we go, by employing our moral compass, the more effective imagination gets.

Practice 2: Working creatively and constructively under pressure

Our perception and working memory is much more sensitive when our brain is relaxed. The current global recession has created a lot of turbulence, prompting widespread cost cutting, downsizing and short-term corporate behavior. As a result, employees face unprecedented tension, stress and fear. These strong, negative emotions diminish, or can

even paralyze our working memory, rational mind and our ability to be creative. Creativity and innovation are prerequisites for getting out of the current financial crisis. A positive step forward comes from learning more about how our perception changes under negative stress, as well as how stress kills both creativity and desire to try out new things. This practice provides insights into easy, do-it-yourself techniques (i.e., Emotional Freedom Techniques, breathing coherence, sport for relaxation and inspiring ideas, and energy redirected to positive imagery). These techniques quickly reduce stress in day-to-day business and help to cope better with negative thoughts and emotions in the long run.

Practice 3: Creative problem identification and problem solving

As we all have our own mental models or sets of typical behaviors, we tend to identify problems and find solutions according to these standard, accustomed ways. The third practice allows us to creatively identify the roots of a personal or organizational challenge by listening to music. People are encouraged to rely on their hunches or intuition whilst spontaneously and non-judgmentally identifying possible causes of difficulties and challenges (e.g., by employing more cross-functional cooperation, communication and using different art media). Participants also learn how they can transfer this practice to their organizations in order to identify the real causes to their problems. Creative problem solving strategies examine all possible alternatives through individual and collaborative brainstorming, followed by choosing the best alternatives for both short-term and for long-run feasibility. The final step is to use this input to focus better on a choice of strategy or process used to implement solutions. Creative solutions can be more easily formulated by using analogies and anecdotal or visual imagery.

In addition, a cooperative organizational culture based on solidarity and collegiality allows for free information flow and learning from mistakes. This, in turn, boosts the process of organizational problem identification and problem solving.

Practice 4: Finding your inner passion and the role it plays in creativity

‘What is the deeper meaning of my existence’ or, simply put, ‘Why am I here?’ mankind has been asking since its existence. The question is at the heart of reigniting our passion and purpose of life, whilst pinpointing our major values that govern our attention, vitality and energy. Mahatma Ghandi once said that purpose is the most powerful motivator in the world. If you know your passion and purpose, you are at the core of achieving high performance and have the feeling of being focused and inspired. Every one of us should uncover our own unique gifts to make a powerful, positive impact on our families, in our organizations, as well as in this world. Marcia Breitenbach, in her work on empowering intentional transformational music, recommends we listen to our own “theme music” that motivates us to stick to our passion or dreams. The same practice can be applied to organizations and the way in which they deal with their customers. Companies may need to rethink their values, visions and consider how they differ in their unique approach to

their clients — and accordingly find their “theme song” that would inspire their people to commit themselves more than ever before.

Practice 5: Identifying creative talent in organizations

The final practice empowers leaders and managers to more easily identify their creative talent, by knowing what personality dispositions and personal experiences they need to look out for in their people. Certain working environments better nurture and endorse creative behavior. Research highlights a set of personality characteristics of highly creative individuals, which include the following: openness to experience, self-reflection, an interest in art and communication, a flexible mind, ability to take risks and tolerate uncertainty (also culturally shaped). Creative people are also great visionaries who are highly perceptive, and are “originators”. Claxton points out that innovative minds need to integrate open-mindedness, playfulness and concentrated purposefulness. In regards to what corporations can do to prevent killing creativity, Teresa Amabile’s well known crushers of creativity in organizations are: inadequate or too profound challenges; insufficient freedom; having to fight for resources; dysfunctional working groups; poor or no supervision; and no organizational support. Both research and good corporate practices show that an atmosphere that is conducive to freely expressing ideas, to breaking the rules (albeit preserving moral code), to allowing employees to create their own working environments and to constantly sharing ideas among colleagues are positively correlated with higher degree of creativity in organizations. Dr. Braverman’s research points out that highly creative people have high levels of acetylcholine, one of the four neurotransmitters in our brain. Acetylcholine opens our mind to new ideas, speeds up our thinking and improves the fluidity and flexibility of our memory. The good news is that we can easily measure the levels with an “easy-to-do” self-assessment. Armed with that information, through adapting our diet, altering our lifestyle and particularly with the aid of artistic stimulation, we are able to greatly improve the amount of this brain chemical we can produce. The more leaders and managers nurture, encourage as well as reward behaviors that enhance creative work, the more creative talent is able to uphold innovation in organizations.

Should leaders and managers embed and actively use these five practices in their organizations, they will be standing on a solid foundation of inspiration, imagination and innovation that would nurture their competitive edge and propel them forwards.

Antonija Pacek, M.Phil, is a passionate international educator, keynote inspirational speaker, researcher and facilitator mainly in areas of emotional intelligence in business, people management across cultures, creativity and innovation in organizations, interpersonal communication and managing change. Recently she became an associate of a unique international consortium **Inspire Imagine Innovate** founded by **Kevin Asbjörnson, MIM**. Antonija recorded two albums of solo piano music, titled *A Secret Vision* and *In My Soul*, which can be previewed online at www.cdbaby.com/cd/antoniapacek.