

*Music and Dance in Southern Africa:  
Positive forces in the Workplace*

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*Chapter 12 From*

SAWUBONA AFRICA:  
EMBRACING FOUR WORLDS IN SOUTH AFRICAN MANAGEMENT

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*'I feel the other, I dance the other, therefore I exist'*

LEOPOLD SENGHOR

*'I am not an African if I do not dance'*

AMOS MUJANJA <sup>1</sup>

*'It is easy to say we have attained democracy, but we have to go further. If only we could find a way to bring songs and dance into the workplace. A song would remind workers that you have to give the best of yourself for the company and the nation. A dance could break the monotony. There has to be something that pulls us together at work. You will see how introducing a company song first thing in the morning and a dance after lunch will increase productivity. Italians have siestas. If we look at ourselves, with movement after lunch, just ten minutes, that helps you get through the rest of the day and the workplace becomes fun. We could also use music and other rituals to remember our heroes in the company.'*

WELCOME MSOMI <sup>2</sup>

The challenge for South African business today is to imagine how the essential qualities underlying southern African expressive forms can mobilize energy and creativity, and become a valuable resource in the workplace. The objective of this chapter is therefore to examine some of the salient features of southern African dance and music, and to offer

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<sup>1</sup> Amos Mujanja was a well-known writer in Zimbabwe. He has written a number of books on Shona proverbs.

<sup>2</sup> Interview by B Nussbaum: 7 June 1995. Welcome Msomi is currently a director of Msomi, Hunt and Lascaris in Johannesburg. He is also the author of Umabatha (a Zulu version of Macbeth).

suggestions as to how and why these performing arts can be harnessed by the business sector. In Chapter 6, Christie and Mhlope assert that storytelling has the potential to re-humanize the workplace. The same holds true for music and dance. The indigenous roots and roles of African music and dance are described in this chapter to highlight the potential they may offer in humanizing and energizing the workplace, enhancing productivity, fostering worker empowerment, and decreasing the sense of alienation in the workplace. In addition, the chapter will illustrate the potential application of music and dance as:

- educational resources;
- as powerful agents in managing morale;
- ways to enhance social cohesion;
- vehicles for team building; mechanisms to build company solidarity;
- strategies for individual and group stress management;
- tools for reconciliation and transformation within the company;
- alternative forms of internal and external marketing;
- resources to improve productivity.

While many southern African traditional dances and musical styles are no longer practised today, traditional values assigned to existing dance and music, and the personal and social creativity they demonstrate, continue to exist. Music and dance in their contemporary form embrace and reflect values of discipline, individual empowerment and group solidarity. Music and dance both foster and mirror processes of social transformation. In African culture they are important mechanisms to reaffirm relationships. As performing arts, they provide opportunities for fun, strength and stress release.

In summary, this chapter will:

- explore the fundamental differences between the role and function of dance and music in African and western societies;
- explore the role of the arts in traditional southern African cultures;
- examine how dance and music have reflected and incorporated change over time;
- provide suggestions as to how dance and music can be used as a positive force in the workplace.

## **Culture as a system of symbols reflecting the social network**

Anthropologists have defined culture as:

- the total way of life of a people;
- learned behavior which is publicly shared;
- a set of techniques for adjusting to the external environment and to other people;
- socially established structures of meaning.

Clifford Geertz describes man as an animal suspended in webs of significance which he himself has spun. The structure and form of the web is constantly changing in relation to

new circumstances and, in response, man is constantly rearranging his position (often unconsciously) within that complex construction to find meaning'.<sup>3</sup>

Cultural forms find their place in symbols, in artifacts, in various states of consciousness and in social institutions. However, these elements of culture do not constitute abstract entities: they draw their meaning from the roles they play in an ongoing pattern of life, and through the context in which they are used. It is therefore through social action (behavior) and through the interpretation of events (how people perceive events) that cultural forms find articulation'.<sup>4</sup>

## **African concepts of music and dance**

The essential differences between African and western societies in relation to the performing arts exist in the manner in which they are perceived, utilized and the values that are assigned to them'.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Music and dance as fundamental features of African culture***

African societies generally do not categorize music and dance as two separate and distinct art forms. In fact, they are so interconnected that they are accorded the same term in many vernacular African languages. In Zulu, the term *ingoma* refers to 'song and dance' performed at rituals, festivals and community celebrations. Likewise, *mahobelo* in South Sotho, *khiba* in North Sotho, and *pina* in Setswana refer to 'song and dance' as integrated cultural activities or processes.

According to ethnomusicologist John Blacking music and dance are part of the basic infrastructure of life in Africa. They are inherent to the essence of being human and are integral to the experience of birth, death, rites of passage, religious ritual and work: African societies treat 'music and dance as foundations of social life, which enable individuals to discover and develop their human potential, to reaffirm their relationships with each other, to sharpen their sensitivities and educate their emotions. In such societies, music and dance help people to remain politically conscious, intellectually alive and creative, constantly adapting to the changes that are required as people relate to their environment and make decisions about their future:'<sup>6</sup>

The structural and aesthetic principles inherent in African music and dance are inherent to all art forms, and further, provide the philosophical basis of all aspects of life on the continent. Leopold Senghor describes the holistic and integrated concept of rhythm in Africa in this way: 'Rhythm is the architecture of being, the inner dynamic that gives it

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<sup>3</sup> Geertz (1973:5).

<sup>4</sup> Geertz (1973:17).

<sup>5</sup> We are aware of the problem of presenting 'Africa' and the 'west' as unified cultural domains when, in fact, vast differences do exist between peoples within these regions. However, for the purposes of a general introductory discussion, we refer only to basic elements which we believe represent commonalities between cultures

<sup>6</sup> Blacking (1981:6).

form, the pure expression of the life force. Rhythm is the vibratory shock, the force which, through our sense, grips us at the root of our being. It is expressed through corporeal and sensual means; through lines, surfaces, colors and volumes in architecture, sculpture or painting; through accents in poetry and music; through movements in the dance. But, doing this, rhythm turns all these concrete things towards the light of the spirit. In the degree to which rhythm is sensuously embodied, it illuminates the spirit."<sup>7</sup>

***Music and dance as a unifying social force and an embodiment of strength in community***

Performance in Africa plays an essentially unifying social role. While specialist performers may be acknowledged in certain communities, the dictum 'if you can talk, you can sing; if you can walk, you can dance' remains basic to most African cultures. One's very presence at an event qualifies one as an active participant, and in the context of African performance, no separation exists between either producer and consumer or performer and audience. The importance of a performance lies rather in the process or the practice of a performance, rather than the finished product. It is through the act of performance that an individual is able to learn about him- or herself in relation to others; that individual and group identity is strengthened; that people affirm others and, in turn, are affirmed. In African culture, the highly interactive, communicative and communalistic nature of music and dance creates a high degree of social cohesion.

***The integrated nature of African performance***

The integrated nature of performance is symbolically reflected in the basic structures of dance and music in Africa. For instance, African melodies are cyclical in form. A song will generally consist of a short, repetitive declamatory 'statement' (melodic pattern) to which other cyclical melodies will respond in specific harmonic and rhythmic relation. This principle of multiple parts (polyphony) which interact with one another in a cyclical, call-and-response format is fundamental to both vocal and instrumental music in Africa. In fact, it exemplifies and embodies the highly interactive and communicative elements of African dance and music in a way that allows and encourages individual expression that is integrated with and supportive of group expression.

Similarly, African music is characterized by multiple rhythms (polyrhythms). In other words, music is not based on one rhythmic structure only, but will contain numerous seemingly mutually exclusive rhythms. In its simplest form, a duple beat will occur at the same time as a triple beat. To the uninitiated, these rhythms may appear to be disconnected and may not make musical sense. The listener will be drawn to the simplest of the two proposed rhythms - the duple beat - but will find him- or herself gradually exploring the more complex, conflicting triple beat. In so doing, the listener will perceive an abrupt shift in the music from a duple to a triple structural rhythmic configuration. Slowly, the listener will be able to move, with more perceptual facility, back and forth between duple and triple beats. Finally, he or she will be able to listen to both beats at the same time. It is in the resultant rhythmic pattern - the combination of duple and triple beats - that the dynamism, the energy and power of African music is situated.

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<sup>7</sup> Senghor (1956:74).

This auditory exploration into polyrhythms is generally a new experience for most westerners, whose own music is linear (rather than cyclical) and is most often based on one rhythmic configuration only. Where African music exists in cyclical form, western music follows a linear progression and, as such, tells a story. Structurally, it contains an introduction, a middle section (the introductory theme is developed) and a conclusion (the introductory theme returns in its original form). Rhythmically, western music is conceived on the basis of a two-step (duple beat) or a waltz (triple beat). Any change to the beat in the course of the music is considered a deviation from the fundamental rhythm, and therefore understood in relation to the principal rhythm. The notion of playing off the beat, for instance, as is common in jazz improvisation, is a play on the basic beat. Off beat is a temporary movement away from a principal beat, to which the music will always return. It is therefore the more complex principles of polyphony and polyrhythms that identifies African music as distinct from most western music.

Dance structures in West Africa, an area of the continent where highly complex and large drum ensembles are concentrated, characteristically reflect the multiplicity of rhythms. The body will mirror the rhythmic complexity of the drum ensemble. An accomplished dancer will conceivably move her shoulders in a triple rhythmic motion while her hips will move to a more rapid quadruple beat; her feet will follow a duple time, her hands in a more rapid division of a triple beat, and so on. Drummers and dancers will be dynamically interlocked in performance and, should dancer lack energy; the drum ensemble will similarly lose impetus. Conversely, if the drummers are highly motivated, the dancer will reflect their spirited momentum.

The interdependence of parts inherent in the structural arrangements of dance and music in Africa is symbolically reflected in the wider concept of social interconnectedness in African society. It is in this sense that the principle of inter connectedness',<sup>8</sup> as an illustration of *ubuntu*, is reflected in dance and music.

***Music and dance as tangible expressions of human values.***

Previous chapters in this book have referred to another central tenet of ubuntu, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (see Chapters 4 and 11). Similarly, the Venda of the Northern Province of South Africa express the same proverb: *muthi ndi muthu nga vhanwe*: a human being is a human through association with other human beings'.<sup>9</sup> This intensely communalistic notion is reflected in the mutavha reed-pipe ensemble of the Venda people. Every boy, upon completion of initiation, is assigned a single reed-pipe. The individual will be unable to perform a melody with a single note and will only be able to do so when performing with other reed pipe players. Venda reed-pipes are played in circular formation and each note is intricately interwoven with the others to ensure a resultant melodic pattern. Each performer is expected to hold his own while, at the same time, remaining in perfect synchrony with his peers.

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<sup>8</sup> Mthembu (see Chapter 11), Sawubona Africa, Edited by Lessem and Nussbaum.

<sup>9</sup> Blacking (1981:10). 10. Ibid.

Blacking sums up the role of dance and music in Venda society, and relates his observations to other African groups: 'In Venda society, and in several other African societies whose life I have been privileged to experience, it seemed to me that opportunities for cooperation and creativity were built into the social system and inextricably linked with music and dancing. That is to say, music and dancing were the most tangible expressions of basic values, and their performance was a most powerful, if not the most powerful, way of expressing the values and fundamental structures of social and economic life.

Performance was always a creative, political act in the sense that it brought people together in a special social relationship, which could induce powerful shared experiences that make people more aware of themselves and their responsibilities towards each other. Thus it was not only the widespread use of music in Venda society that ensured that it was part of the infrastructure of Venda life. The very forms that the music took, if performed properly, required relationships between people that enhance the individuality in community that was essential for life together.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the fact that many traditional African music and dance forms and practices have changed over time, basic principles inherent to and values associated with performance have essentially remained intact. Modifications to expressive forms are often highly imaginative symbolic rearrangements of social realities. The arts therefore become a significant barometer of how people have had to mobilize, adapt and reshape available cultural resources to construct their own notions of social inclusion and exclusion, mutuality, morality and self worth".<sup>11</sup>

***The multiple roles of the arts in traditional southern African cultures.***<sup>12</sup>

Barbara Nussbaum<sup>13</sup> clarifies the variety of roles that are fulfilled by music and dance. The attention given to implicit versus explicit intention gives an indication of the variety of roles played by dance and music, and elucidates the sophisticated social functions of these performing arts.

Twenty dances in Zimbabwe were classified according to whether they have a developmental, preventive or remedial/rehabilitative function. It is important to note that, while the focus of the analysis was on dance, each dance is accompanied by music. The following definitions were used in the analysis:

**Developmental:** Dances which contribute to the education, socialization and development of individuals and groups.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Harries (1994:xviii).

<sup>12</sup> The term 'tradition' can be wrongly perceived to mean static, non-developmental. All cultures are dynamic and our use of the term in this context is to refer to specific cultural traits which have not been changed by western (commercial) influences.

<sup>13</sup> Nussbaum (1989:97-101)

**Preventive:** Dances which contribute to maintaining psychological health and social harmony.

**Remedial/Rehabilitative:** Dances which seek to assist an individual, a family or a community, when a situation or problem arises which is actually or potentially damaging. The dances are directed towards correcting the situation. This category also includes dances which seek to respond to a serious problem in an individual, a family, and the community. The purpose of the dance is to solve the problem that has occurred and to restore effective functioning.

It is clear that most dances fulfil a preventive or developmental function. This attests to the key role played by music and dance in education and socialization, and in the prevention and alleviation of stress through the promotion of social cohesion and group solidarity. Dances that are considered to have a remedial/ rehabilitative role, like the *bira* and the *dandaro*, are fewer in number, but are extremely important in the lives of people, both at a personal and at a community level. The analysis below demonstrates the centrality of music and dance. It also affirms the strong link between these expressive arts, communalism and spirituality.

### Dances, analysed by implicit and explicit function

#### DEVELOPMENTAL DANCES

GROUP	NAME	IMPLICIT FUNCTION	EXPLICIT FUNCTION
Shona	Chidange Chidange, Matakana Mahumbwe, Sawura wako,	Socialization regarding gender roles	Prevents fear of physical contact with the opposite sex.
	Tsigidzi		
	mutamu, Karombo kari musana		
Shona	Makwaya	Entertainment.	Helps young people cope with and

GROUP	NAME	IMPLICIT FUNCTION	EXPLICIT FUNCTION
			integrate westernizing influences.
Chewa	Chimutare	Entertainment.	Introduces young girls to the concept of becoming women (has a socializing role).
Shona	Chidzimba Madandanda		Motivational - orients people to the problems and challenges of hunting.
Shona	Mbende/ Jerusarema	Celebrates sexuality.	Teaches pride in sexuality
Shangaan	Muchongoyo	Promotes solidarity, physical fitness.	Develops identity, identification with peers
Ndebele	Isishikhitsha	Promotes fitness, praise	Develops identity, identification with peers
Shona	Makwaya	Entertainment, social commentary.	Helps people to cope with actual and potential tensions by allowing an outlet for social commentary, expression and criticism to prevent tension
Shona	Chinungu	Education for married life	Helps new bride anticipate and learn to cope with the more negative aspects of married life, through being able to face and laugh about the possibility of having a drunk husband. Also serves the purpose of demystifying marriage and preventing the development of unrealistic expectations

## PREVENTIVE DANCES

GROUP	NAME	IMPLICIT FUNCTION	EXPLICIT FUNCTION
Shona	Mbende, Jerusarema /	Expresses survival, encourages continuance of the clan through virility	Allows young men and women to practice sexual movements, present themselves to the opposite sex, witness the opposite sex's movement to decrease fears of sexuality and prevent future anxiety about sex
Shangaan	Chokoto	Puberty rite; opens the way for contact between boys and girls	Allows young men and women to get used to expressing themselves sexually, in relation with the opposite sex; matching and harmony of movement between pairs is encouraged; prevents fear of sexuality in relation to a member of the opposite sex
Shona	Dinhe	Playful, affirmation of life	Allows teenagers to be playful and to acknowledge the continuance of life in the community; prevents accumulation of stress and tensions
Shona	Jakwara	Threshing millet.	Allows free verbal expressions, provides outlet for humour, criticism and aggression in a way that helps to manage the stresses associated with the harvest season

## REMEDIAL REHABILITATIVE DANCES

GROUP	NAME	IMPLICIT FUNCTION	EXPLICIT FUNCTION
Duma clan	Chinyambera	Performed before or after a hunt	Performed after an unsuccessful hunt to remedy low morale that may result from failure; dance gives strength to hunters by seeking to find out why they have failed.
Ndebele	Hoso amabiza	Performed when Problems arise in the community	Helps community cope with anxieties about problems and circumstances that they face (e.g. no rain; fear of drought)
Shona	Mhande	Community healing dances	Helps communities cope with anxieties associated with drought
Shona	Bira / Dandaro	Problem-solving.	Helps communities and families cope with illness and other problems by identifying causes and remedial action to be taken
Shona	Bira	Performed when Severe illness or Tragedy afflicts and individual, family or the community	The ritual provides concrete solutions to problems to restore effective functioning; whether or not these dances are remedial or rehabilitative depends on the extent or seriousness of the problem addressed.

The significance of the above analysis lies in the fact that it explains how and why music and dance have the potential to provide motivational entry points in the workplace today, particularly among African workers. It could pose an interesting challenge to business practitioners (organizational development practitioners, trainers, psychologists and production managers) in the workplace. If empowerment, cooperation, participation and creativity are strategies of the 1990s, what are the roles that music and dance could play in the workplace? How can dance and music bring a collective wave of enthusiasm to the work context?

How can businesses build on the strengths of music and dance as vehicles for mobilization and education? What motivational entry points can be provided through these media?

### ***Diplomacy and interpersonal sensitivity expressed in art forms***

Previous chapters in this book have discussed the question of interpersonal intelligence. In relation to this issue, African culture has relatively conservative norms regarding direct expression of feelings and emotions, and a high degree of interpersonal sensitivity. There are many prohibitions regarding direct confrontation with another person. The arts provide a socially sanctioned vehicle for expressing complaints or criticisms of others. As a result of norms preventing direct confrontation, criticism was traditionally allowed to be expressed through the arts.

In fact, the arts provide a great deal of latitude and licence for this purpose<sup>14</sup>. Emanuel Chiwome explains that, in Shona society: “You cannot plainly say what you want to say. You have to dress it up in art. You can say a proverb, or wait for an occasion to sing it in a song.”<sup>15</sup>

In Zimbabwe there is a particular traditional threshing dance, called the *jakwara*.<sup>16</sup> This is a dance specifically adapted for threshing millet. Apart from the functional aspect of the dance which enables the men to move in an anticlockwise circle, swishing their legs back and forth to keep in the millet, its other purpose is to have fun during a period which is highly stressful. The threshing dance is accompanied by traditional beer and people are encouraged to sing out any criticisms they have about anyone else. The rules are that any criticism must be left at the *jakwara* and never taken up again.

### ***The arts as tools for education and socialization***

Both the acquisition and transmission of knowledge in traditional African society takes place primarily through informal processes. Learning happens through doing, experiencing, observing, imitation, and by the learning of social wisdom through proverbs, idioms and riddles. Enculturation is the process by which members of an ethnic group internalize knowledge of their culture and acquire social and survival skills. This process begins at infancy. Songs, dances, drama, folk tales and storytelling are the primary means through which enculturation takes place in African society.

Songs educate children about a variety of topics: the names of trees, rivers, mountains and districts. A particular song, Pfulumbwe, teaches Shona children about the agricultural year. Poetry is often combined with music and movement to facilitate integrative learning.

“Movement, feeling and thought are all engaged when poetry goes with performance. Learning becomes a concrete and pleasure-giving activity. Movement makes poetry a dramatic and dynamic activity. As the performance is staged, material is extracted from the poetry, enacted and internalized.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> South Africans will be particularly familiar with the use of music and dance as a form of criticism in protest songs and in toyi-toying.

<sup>15</sup> Chiwome (1987:49).

<sup>16</sup> Nussbaum (1989:80).

<sup>17</sup> Chiwome (1987:105).

### ***The arts restore harmony within the group***

Song, dance and poetry are used to interact with, and establish harmony within the group and with the environment. Conflicts are often resolved through a *bira* or *dandaro* ceremony, in which traditional songs and dances are used to call up the ancestors to assist in collective problem-solving. In the now internationally famous case of the Eastern Highlands Tea Estates, Lovemore Mbigi as managing director relied on dandaros to turn around an ailing company in Zimbabwe. *Dandaro* ceremonies were used frequently to solve problems that arose in the workplace"<sup>18</sup>.

### ***The arts restore harmony with the environment***

Traditionally, in African culture, human beings are not alienated from the environment. The arts play a key role in solving environmental problems. For example, songs and dances are used to make rain; *mhande* and *mukwerera* rituals are important in planning for the next agricultural year.

### ***Traditional song and dance in the work context***

*'If the trees are to be cut, you must sing; without the song the bush knife is dull.'*

WEST AFRICAN PROVERB

For centuries, Africa has had its own `industrial psychology: There has been a longstanding understanding that the arts help to transform physically taxing and boring work experiences into more pleasurable ones, through song and synchronized rhythmical movements. "Songs transform tedious, necessary activity into a recreational occasion. The song pleases the mind, thus diverting it from pain. Shona workers have a way of turning laborious work into enjoyable art. Hard work is made less burdensome through singing songs. The rhythm of the songs goes with the work pace."<sup>19</sup>

Rhythmic movement is fundamental to collective work efforts. Songs and movement were, and continue to be, strategies to ensure production efficiency and effectiveness. At a weeding gathering, known as *nhimbe*, the song would help to synchronize the movement of the hoes so that people maintained the same weeding rhythm.

South Africans will also be aware of the song, Shosholoza, which was sung on the mines to help synchronize the movement of picks through rhythm. "The descending and ascending hoes are the rhythm markers. The rhythm forces the group to work at a certain frequency and to wait for everyone to pause and stretch."<sup>20</sup>

## **Western concepts of music and dance**

In contrast to the integrated and communalistic qualities of African performance, the reverence for individualism and uniqueness in western societies is reflected in the way in which dance and music are perceived and experienced. The construction of

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<sup>18</sup> Christie, Lessem, Mbigi (1993).

<sup>19</sup> Chiwome (1987:88)

<sup>20</sup> Chiwome (1987:91).

separateness in the western social fabric - for example, class division and the division of labour - is reflected in the diversity and compartmentalization of all aspects of life in the west.

John Blacking maintains that music and dance have become part of the `super-structure'<sup>21</sup> of western society. Although important in our lives, the arts are nevertheless deemed an optional extra to the fundamental operations of western society.

While music and dance may be performed in association with one another in western culture, they are conceived as distinct art forms, presented separately in schools and specialist institutions, and supported by different histories, theories and instructional pedagogies. Practitioners are selected on the basis of an identified `rare gift'; they are trained as specialists in a particular field, and their livelihood becomes solely dependent upon the successful display of their skills.

Professionalism in dance and music (which began to develop as a practice at the turn of the century) has resulted in the separation between those who produce and those who consume. Consequently, music and dance are practised by a few for the `enlightenment' and `entertainment' of many. Genres of dance and music are assigned values according to the social and economic contexts out of which they have developed. For instance, jazz is differentiated from classical music, folk, pop, country, traditional, and so on. Values assigned to these respective genres are determined by socio-economic and cultural hierarchies which are peculiar to British and European class structures.

Classical music is accorded a 'high' or `serious' art status, while pop music is referred to as a 'low' art or as `light' music. The former genre is valued as historical, based in the European intellectual tradition, learned, `civilized; individualized; the latter is associated with the popular, ahistorical, commercial, improvisatory, feelingful. The former has connotations such as: upper class, specialist instruction, technical mastery, specialized venues and lavish, monied productions. Popular music conjures up visions of mass production and marketing, electronically manipulated and mediated, rapidly transforming trends in sound and style, youth culture, anonymity, working class. The arts are separated from everyday occupations and relegated to specialist or leisure (non-work) activities.

Tracey captures the difference in the degree to which dance enters the central stage of life in western culture compared to African culture: `We westerners extract from team games and competitive sports something of what the African extracts from dancing. It is so long since we used dancing for general outdoor recreation or religious ritual that we are frankly surprised to find a folk altogether absorbed in this ancient human activity. It is perhaps because we have relegated dancing to the past, to the ballroom or the stage.'"<sup>22</sup>

It has been interesting to witness, more recently, occasions where African music has started to become popular with white audiences at sports events. At the Rugby World

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<sup>21</sup> Blacking (1981:6).

<sup>22</sup> Tracey (1952:1).

Cup, held in South Africa during 1995, a predominantly white spectatorship of 60 000 sang the song Shosholoza. The same transition has not, however, been made to the same extent in relation to dance. Whereas in African culture, in the context of sporting events, a characteristic of dance is in its spontaneous form of expression, either as a form of cheering on the players and as a form of celebration, this has not yet been adopted by white South Africans. At the final game of the African Cup of Nations, played in Johannesburg during February 1996, black spectators, President Mandela and the Minister of Sport, Steve Tshwete, expressed their unbridled joy, exuberance and enthusiasm at the moment of victory through dance.

## **Social changes that have influenced dance and music in southern Africa**

A variety of external factors have influenced music and dance in southern Africa. However, music and dance continue to play a valuable role and to provide an important platform for creative outlet, social transformation, the preservation of dignity, and group mobilization in protest.

### ***Christianity***

Christian missionaries strongly disapproved of the intimate connection between dance and spirituality in Africa. They consequently attempted to penalize and eradicate all forms of traditional ritual, dance and music, and to instill in Africans the notion that the adoption of western aesthetic norms was an index of their 'civilized' status.<sup>23</sup>

According to the late Dr Herbert Ushewokunze (former Zimbabwean Minister of Health): 'The colonial settlers used Christianity to dilute cohesion among the Shona. As long as there was cohesion and togetherness, creating an esprit de corps through dance, this was threatening to colonial settlers. For this reason, dance was one of the first things to be discouraged'.<sup>24</sup>

According to Welcome Msomi, traditional religious practices persist in urban areas throughout South Africa: "People in urban areas today came from rural areas and carried with them the spirit. Even though people may be Christian, traditional beliefs are there but may not be as pronounced as among rural people. We [continue to] give thanks through music and dance sessions and remember our ancestors."<sup>25</sup>

Many black southern Africans who adopted Christianity were able to use their faith, mission education and middle-class status as a powerful vehicle for political protest. As early as the 1800s, black composers of four-part choral music (makwaya) were able to use their music concurrently in Christian worship and political protest. While makwaya lyrics may have been religious, the melodies were often based on well-known traditional songs and melodic structures, thereby forging what was referred to 'as an authentic African expression of Christianity'<sup>26</sup>. These compositions, which represented

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<sup>23</sup> Erlmann (1985).

<sup>24</sup> Interview by B Nussbaum: 4 April 1989.

<sup>25</sup> Interview by B Nussbaum: 7 June 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Hodgson (1980:1) in Erlmann (1991:7).

traditionalism and the developing aspirations of an urban black elite, became popular nationwide, and they continue to exist as a significant medium for the expression of national political sentiment.

The most significant example of the politicization of a Christian choral composition is Enoch Sontonga's *Nkosi Sikeleli' iAfrika*. This was used both as an expression of solidarity among black urban professionals and to represent the workers' struggles from the turn of the century. It has now, as the South African national anthem, come to represent unity and pride among all South African peoples.

### ***Protest culture***

At the beginning of this chapter, we mentioned that symbols only become meaningful in relation to the contexts in which they are used and in how people perceive them. According to Erlmann<sup>27</sup>, songs need not be directly politically referential in order to express protest. The same song can be used to express the sentiments of totally different political groups; it can equally be used in religious worship or to accompany work. What makes a song politically significant there fore, is the performance style, the context in which it is performed, and the nature of the relationships which exist between those who perform it. In this way, a song becomes a symbol of communal knowledge and conviction, of group identity and solidarity.

For instance, chimurenga songs played a vital and inspiring role during the war of independence in Zimbabwe during the 1970s. These revolutionary songs, which were based on well-known traditional melodies and Christian hymns, were used to politicize rural Zimbabweans, to uplift the spirit and morale of the guerrilla forces, and to appeal for unity and solidarity among the people. Those songs which appealed to ancestral spirits for guidance were used particularly in situations where overtly political lyrics revealed support for the ZANU cause. Such sympathies would have placed singers in danger from the then Rhodesian armed forces. Lyrics which called upon ancestral spirits (such as the supreme guardian of the nation, Mbuya NeHanda) at once inspired and gave courage to the performers and effectively concealed the politicizing nature of the songs<sup>28</sup>.

Likewise, the contribution of music and dance to black self-determination in South Africa cannot be underestimated. Just as music and dance were critical in shaping behaviour and solving problems in traditional African social life, so have music and dance played a crucial role among black South Africans in promoting individual empowerment and group solidarity. Through performance, the repressed people of South Africa were able to regain dignity and to cope with the inhumanity of political domination. It was through communal performance that people were politicized and called to action.

The same song can be used to express different sentiments, depending on the objective of those who initiate the performance. Many companies have adapted political and religious songs to suit the work context. In this way, songs and dances become important expressions of conviction, of group identity and solidarity. In fact, in the case of *Europak*,

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<sup>27</sup> Erlmann (1985:1).

<sup>28</sup> Pongweni (1982)

toyi-toying has been adapted to energize workers and support the company, rather than serve as a form of protest.

## **The potential role of music and dance in the workplace**

In contrast to the centrality of the arts in African culture, little effort has been made on the part of South African businesses to find a useful role for music and dance in the workplace. Welcome Msomi speaks about the failure of white settlers in South Africa to find out about indigenous cultures: 'The Japanese use sound exercises [at work]. They realized what gives the workers energy to start the day. Because of how people came here, people never said: "How do you work in the fields?" Instead, we were told to clock in. They never took the trouble to listen to our [work] songs.'<sup>29</sup>

As noted earlier in this chapter, music and dance to the westerner are perceived as peripheral extras rather than an intrinsic part of social interaction. This has resulted in the total marginalization of song and dance in the South African workplace. The acceptance and integration of music and dance in the workplace may require much more imagination and flexibility on behalf of non-African managers.

Welcome Msomi talks about the potential role that music and dance have in nation building. He believes these ideas can and should be transferred to the workplace: 'Music and dance is the best way of communicating without having to spell out in words what you're trying to say. It's a feeling, you communicate a feeling. Africa has something very special to give in this area because it is a reality, it is not manufactured. When Africans dance, they dance with everything, so immediately. Bring a politician to change my views and nothing will happen. But bring a dancer, and I won't ask questions. I will listen to the music and watch the dance and I will be moved to tears, to thinking, to joy. When you look at what is happening here in South Africa, a lot of people misunderstand what music and dance can do to heal the people. We have been given this gift and we don't know how to use it to resolve conflicts, to discover ourselves, to enrich ourselves... The best communication is through movement - but human beings always have to complicate things. When you start a song in the village, people just join in and harmonize. . there is a capacity to improvise and harmonize.'<sup>30</sup>

### ***Leadership values in the performing arts as management values***

Perhaps one way to think about how to link dance and music with management is to examine the similarity between leadership values embodied in African performance culture and the leadership skills required by managers in the current context. In African culture, poetry, performance, music and dance are almost always conducted in groups. While there is usually free licence to improvise in poetry, song and dance performance, a number of norms exist regarding group and individual roles. For example, in spoken poetry, a common model is for the leader to begin and then the group responds in a complementary manner. In Shona, the word *kubvumira* means 'to be in agreement' or 'to

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<sup>29</sup> Interview by B Nussbaum: 7 June 1995

<sup>30</sup> Interview by B Nussbaum: 7 June 1995

respond positively: It implies to echo and complement what has been said and illustrates the cultural value of group harmony"<sup>31</sup>.

In the performing arts, in the context of African culture, there are usually two criteria used to choose and identify group leaders<sup>32</sup>:

- the ability to lead in a way that is satisfactory to the group; and
- the ability to take turns in leadership according to the rules of a particular game

It is interesting to note that at a 1994 workshop sponsored by the Wits Business School, these criteria were discussed by participants from the business community, who expressed the belief that many skills were pertinent to managers in the South African workplace today. Additional criteria have been identified by Emanuel Chiwome and are discussed in relation to their relevance to management skills:

*Voice/oratory:* This involves the use of voice tone, lyricism and singing ability. While singing is not yet a dominant feature of management skill, Christie and Mhlope (in Chapter 6) have pointed out that storytelling and the capacity to tell stories are increasingly recognized as useful skills for managers - in terms of training and mentoring, building corporate culture, and as an influencing skill.

*Rhythmic timing:* While this, in the sense intended by Chiwome, relates to rhythmic movement, the application of rhythm is relevant in management in a number of ways. Firstly, a good leader would be able to apply rhythm-based casting and timing in relation to workflow, production processes and decision-making. Secondly, the ability to include the rhythm of songs and synchrony of movement as fundamental features of collective work efforts, with a view to enhancing productivity, would be an excellent way for a leader to enrich the atmosphere in the workplace.

*Flexibility and the ability to coordinate with the group*

A good leader is extremely sensitive, flexible and responsive to group needs. These are increasingly recognized as essential skills, enabling a leader to know when to lead and when not to lead. In this way, the rhythm of leadership and followership takes on a flexible tone.

*Improvising topical issues in a humorous way.* `A leader who is erratic and without improvisation skills does not become popular: <sup>33</sup> The ability to improvise and create appropriate stories and jokes is part of the repertoire of management and interpersonal skills required today<sup>34</sup>. If singing were to become a more acceptable communication form in the workplace, a good leader would be able to make up clever lines for a song. On a lighter note, during a deadlock at the discussions of the Transitional Executive

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<sup>31</sup> Nussbaum (1989:54); South Africans are familiar with responsive pattern in the refrain `Amandla' followed by `Awethu' used by the African National Congress during the years of these political struggles.

<sup>32</sup> Chiwome (1987

<sup>33</sup> Chiwome (1987)

<sup>34</sup> Christie and Mhlophe (see Chapter 6).

Council in South Africa, prior to elections, Cyril Ramaphosa is said to have softened his adversaries and facilitated agreement by singing them a song!

*Expanding the song/dance in a way that pleases the group*

This ability relates to artistic and improvisation ability, and to interpersonal and facilitation skills. Again, while song and dance is not part of mainstream business culture, these are, in essence, communication and facilitation skills, which are more likely to be used through the art of storytelling, training or a company mass event.

*Ability to recognize and respect taking turns in leadership*

This ability is important in Shona culture and in other cultures in southern Africa. This norm is reflected and reinforced in childhood games. Certain leaders may become more popular than others, but when they have had their turn, they allow less competent ones to have a chance. This characteristic of taking turns to lead reflects the intrinsically democratic nature of African society. 'Many things are taken in turns. Art is not the monopoly of one person. This concept is enshrined in the proverb 'vashe madzoro' - chieftaincy is taken in turns. Even when one temporarily assumes a position of leadership, one remains subject to the wishes of the people.'<sup>35</sup> With the transition to a more consultative, participative management, this management skill is becoming increasingly valued.

*Encouraging harmony in the group: facilitating interpersonal Synchrony*

If taken more broadly than at the level of song and dance, this would refer to a leader's capacity for creating cooperation and synergy. A good leader would also be able to enhance the complementarity of performers. This would refer to the capacity of a manager to build the team, enhance cooperation, and create synergy and complementarity between staff, using a variety of strategies.

In reflecting on the qualities cited above, one may be reminded of management writers such as Peter Vaill whose book, *Management as Performing Art*,<sup>36</sup> stresses the interpersonal aspect of management.

## **Practical implications and conclusions**

*'If I had a hammer,  
I'd hammer in the morning,  
I'd hammer in the evening,  
All over this land...  
If I had a song to sing,  
I'd sing it in the morning,  
I'd sing it in the evening,  
All over this land...  
We'd sing about quality,  
We'd sing about production...*

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<sup>35</sup> Chiwome (1987:143).

<sup>36</sup> For more information, refer to Vaill (1991), Chapter 5: 'It's All About People

*We'd sing about the harmony  
Between managers and workers  
All over this land...'*

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the most creative aspects of song is its adaptability for different contexts and, thus, the diversity and flexibility of potential application. The same song can be used and adapted for completely different purposes. What is important is that 'a song becomes a symbol of communal knowledge and conviction, of group identity and solidarity'<sup>37</sup>. How the song is adapted depends on the collective decisions and improvisations made by the group singing it.

In revisiting the initial vision presented briefly at the beginning of this chapter, we make the following suggestions:

### **Educational resources**

- Dance and music could be used as an educational resource in the context of training:
- The creation and improvisation of a song or a dance could be used as a small group exercise to tell a story about a problem or a solution to a problem
- Song and dance could be introduced into training sessions as ice-breakers or tension relievers.
- Movement exercises could be introduced to build trust.

### **Music and dance could be introduced at the company level as powerful agents in managing morale and creating company solidarity,**

- Company songs could be composed by either building on the talents of existing employees, or by eliciting the services of an outside expert, or a combination of the two
- Company songs could be sung at the beginning of each working day and/or at company functions.
- Songs, with or without accompanying movements, could be created for a variety of reasons: launches of new products, to celebrate company achievements, to honour company heroes.
- Songs could easily be used for motivational purposes, to mobilize employees About the importance of beating the competition.

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<sup>37</sup> Blacking (1981)

Part of building morale is simply making the work environment more fun and interesting. According to Velaphi Ratshefola: 'Workers don't want a boring environment. People must work with their hearts and minds, not just their minds. Some teams (at Europak) even pray every day. Management in South Africa has not understood the deep-seated spiritual foundations of African culture and the centrality of music and dance'.

As vehicles to enhance social cohesion, the process of creating and performing songs and dances, whether they are company songs, production songs or songs for internal marketing, would be an extremely valuable one. Song creation could be introduced into organizational development activities. The process of creating a company song would be as effective if not more powerful than creating company values or a mission statement, because the song, the melody, the variety of languages used and the choice of words have the capacity to reflect the diverse values of all the people working in the company.

As vehicles for team building, song and dance could be extremely useful: different production teams within the same company could create different songs for their own team. Alternatively, song and dance could be incorporated in formal departmental or company-wide team-building sessions. The experience of singing and or dancing together builds team spirit very quickly.

As strategies for individual and group stress management, revitalization and re-energizing, music and dance could be embraced in the same way that fitness programs have been adopted. All that would be required would be the allocation of an appropriate room with enough space for employees to meet, and the provision of facilitators. It is our belief that, in most companies, there would be an ample supply of people who could lead music and/or dance sessions, without having to hire outside professionals. Also, reiterating Welcome Msomi's suggestion, a ten-minute dance after lunch and prior to the afternoon shift could easily serve to re-energize and revitalize employees.

As tools for transformation and reconciliation within the company, the process of creating a company or departmental song would, of necessity, have to include give and take on both sides. Decisions would have to be made about which and how many languages to use, what melody, purely choral or including instruments and, if so, which instruments. A most valuable aspect of song, particularly as it is used and performed in African societies, is its capacity to embody and reflect transformation. The case study provides, in detail, examples in which struggle songs were adapted and used for different purposes. For example, in Eastern Highlands Tea Estates in Zimbabwe, a motivational political song became a motivational song for productivity:

*'Before Chitepo died, he said you must take up the gun,  
Now Chitepo says you must take up plucking of the tea leaves'*

### ***Alternative forms of marketing***

In the realm of internal marketing, specially designed songs could provide an interesting alternative to company memorandums or boring briefing sessions. Perhaps a company needs to introduce new safety measures. If the new measures could be explained in a song, this could be an excellent way to communicate the changes in a way that would be enjoyable and ensure that the safety measures were internalized and remembered.

In the area of external marketing, a creative example is provided in the case study of Group Africa, which found an interesting way of marketing Omo washing powder through a song competition. Schools had to compose a song which included lyrics about the power and benefits of Omo. This strategy had the effect of involving entire communities all over the country, and produced an interest in creating commitment to the product by thousands of children and their families.

As resources to improve productivity, songs can be used in a number of ways. Teams or departments can create songs about production processes, new products or even about different phases of the production process, such as quality control. In the following case study, Lovemore Mbigi provides an example of how a Methodist hymn was adapted to a song which inspired workers to care about experience of quality.

## **Summary**

This chapter has sought to illustrate and clarify not only the central role that music and dance have played and continue to play in African culture, but also the that fitness creativity, strength and empowerment that are embodied by and reflected through music and dance. The examples of songs and dances have endeavoured to highlight how and why music and dance have always created, and continue to create, a strong unifying force in both rural and urban African communities. We have demonstrated how and why the highly interactive, communicative and communalistic nature of music and dance generates a high degree of social cohesion and how this capacity has withstood the test of time, continuing to find expression through protest and work culture, in those contexts where songs and dances are permitted.

From Blacking, we learned that in African societies music and dance are foundations of social life, which enable individuals to `discover and develop their human potential, to reaffirm their relationships with each other. Music and dance help people remain intellectually alive and creative<sup>38</sup>.

In addition, the description of music and dances have explained the degree to which music and dance were and continue to be direct and concrete expressions of basic values, particularly cooperation, creativity and group solidarity. Senghor's description of African social philosophy, *'I feel the other, I dance the other, therefore I am,'* incorporates and embraces, in dance form, the proverb *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu - 'I*

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<sup>38</sup> Blacking (1981:6).

*am only a person through other people*: Senghor's phrase, in this sense, becomes by extension, 'I experience my connectedness with other people through dance.' We have also sought to explain that music and dance, when performed properly, require relationships between people that enhance and empower both the individual and the group.

In African societies, according to Blacking, performance was a most powerful, if not the most powerful, way of expressing the values and fundamental structures of social and economic life. If we accept this premise, the challenge for South African businesses is how to bring the strength, creativity and empowerment that are an intrinsic part of music and dance performance into the workplace.

The notion of unity in diversity and the fact we propose to be the cultural rainbow nation is ironic in the light that it appears that the culture of business remains Eurocentric. The proposal of this chapter is to seriously consider music and dance as potential sources of energy in the workplace, because they are absolutely central to the development of the individual and the community in the context of African culture. It is because music and dance are intrinsic vehicles for understanding oneself in relation to others, that acceptance of this is an important starting point. Such acceptance and consequent experimentation with these media will help to embrace the notion of difference within and between groups at work.

Music and dance could play a much greater role in the business sector in South Africa. All that is needed is the courage to create, the ability to imagine, and the conscious decision to allow such fundamental strengths of African culture to be expressed and add value.

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