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Finding US in Music™

A Method for Deeper Group Engagement That Integrates MUSIC with Ubuntu, Contemplation and Reflection

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Abstract

Increasingly both in the theory and practice of organizational development, themes of connecting with the other, participation and co-creation, leveraging “We Spaces” are becoming more common. How then can music bring a positive contribution to transformation within organizations? This chapter discusses the potential role that contemplating self and other through the frame of music can give to the transformation of consciousness. A pioneering approach to personal transformation is introduced in which music amplifies personal narratives in small groups and is the primary lens for self-awareness and mutual discovery. Theorists and practitioners from diverse disciplines inform a theoretical backdrop: from John Dewey (The later works of John Dewey (Volume 10, 1925 – 1953): 1934, Art as experience. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1989) and Maxine Greene (Active learning and aesthetic encounters, 1st edn. NCREST, New York, 1995) in aesthetic education; David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney (Collaborating for change: appreciative inquiry. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Oakland, 1999) – appreciative inquiry; integral organizational development; integral philosophy of Steven McIntosh (Integral consciousness and the future of evolution: how the integral worldview is transforming politics, culture and spirituality. Paragon House, St Paul, 2007) and Ken Wilber (A brief theory of everything. Shambala Press, Boston, 2000), and the African philosophy of Ubuntu Dion Forster (HTS Theol Stud 66(1):1–12, 2010). The integration of diverse perspectives paints a picture of how and why such music-centric approaches hold relevance for personal and group transformation in twenty-first-century organizations. This chapter is intended to make a small contribution to sparking inquiry and inspiring innovative practices, locally and globally in the evolving field of organizational development. We live during a time when finding viable and engaging approaches to heal and transform the many divides within organizations and societies globally are sorely needed.

Keywords Appreciative inquiry - We space - Ubuntu - Intersubjective space - Personal transformation - Group transformation - Organizational transformation through group engagement - Contemplation through music - Music and Ubuntu - Group as an art form: integral philosophy - Individual transformation - Contemplative approaches in organizations, organizational aesthetics - Finding Us in Music - Peter Gabel - Thomas Hübl - Chene Swart

Introduction

Collectively connecting, supporting, and co-creating with others – becoming “we” and “us” – is an increasingly important aspect in organizational development theory and practice. This chapter explores a group change methodology in which music enables participants to express and contemplate self and see the other as the group journeys to become “us.” It describes how the group’s consciousness transforms using this process.

This chapter introduces *Finding US in Music*, a pioneering approach to personal and group transformation in which

Music amplifies the personal narratives exchanged within small groups.

Music is the primary lens for participants’ self-awareness.

Music is a pathway to and reflection of the group’s discovery of their connectedness.

This chapter describes a holistic approach for transforming group dynamics and building cohesion by combining music with reflective and appreciative group inquiry and infusing the group’s culture with the emotional and spiritual intelligence of the African philosophy Ubuntu.

The integrated use of music, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and the shared humanity called forth by Ubuntu, intensifies the intersubjective space in a small group setting so that the resultant process is potentially generative and transformative. Music amplifies the energy and meaning within the space. Music embodies and enlivens how participants discover true mutuality in their relationships within a group.

This methodology, although refined over a decade, is still an in-progress unfolding work. It draws from various theorists and practitioners from diverse disciplines whose work informs and creates a backdrop for this new approach to personal and group transformation. *Finding US in Music* builds upon the works of: John Dewey ([1989](#)) and Maxine Greene ([1995](#)) in aesthetic education; David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney ([1999](#)) in appreciative inquiry; and Steven McIntosh ([2007](#)) and Ken Wilber ([2000](#)) in integral philosophy, and others.

In weaving together these diverse perspectives, a picture emerges of why music becomes so relevant and integral to personal and group transformation. We learn how to use music for this new purpose. The integration of diverse perspectives paints a picture of how and why such music approaches hold relevance for personal and group transformation in twenty-first-century organizations.

The *Finding US in Music* approach has potential to contribute to broad scale organizational transformation. However, the scope of this chapter is confined primarily to the small group as the locus for change.

Pioneered in the USA, this approach has taken root in South Africa in a university that is committed to transformation. Applied in this setting, this method helps participants transcend and reshape many of the intractable constraints – structural inequality, colonialism, and *apartheid* – which continue to characterize South African societies and institutions. This chapter is intended to make a small contribution to sparking inquiry, inspiring innovative practices, locally and globally in the evolving field of organizational development. We live at a time when finding viable and engaging approaches to heal and transform the many divides within organizations and societies globally are sorely needed.

Why Music Is an Important Aspect of Organizational Transformation Through Group Engagement

For Meade ([2016](#)), a consequence of the reckless rushing around in modernity is that both individually and collectively we need to reclaim the authentic interior of ourselves – the part of ourselves that nurtures the sense that we can own important emotions, inherent purpose and that our existence must include the claiming and unfolding of our unique story that lives in every soul. The contemplative use of music is one method to accompany such unfolding of each person’s unique story and could easily become a means to explore both spiritual and secular aspects of life within the work context. Used in the new way described here, music also has the potential to be a humanizing and transformative force for teams, groups, and even large organizations.

All too often the strictures, structures and silos within organizations freeze creative energy and obscure the beauty, depth, and power of each person’s potential. Patricia Aburdene ([2005](#)) points out an interesting trend: that along with a rapidly changing world, the flow of spirituality from the personal to the institutional domains of life will become more prominent. She concludes that today’s employees want more spirituality. Others also find that workers want more meaning and connection (Carter and Nussbaum [2010](#); Briskin et al. [2009](#); Neal et al. [1998](#)).

Music offers a refreshing language of renewal and transformation that can enable employees to find greater meaning in and connection with their colleagues and their work’s purpose. It could become one of the easiest ways to build community, humanity, and connectedness into organizations because of its broad appeal, particularly among millennials, but for all age groups. While all art forms move and quicken the spirit, music is, perhaps, one of the more transcendental art forms in a work setting. For Bono of the U2, it is the language of the spirit and therefore is one of the most effective ways to build lasting connection between people working together.

It’s such an extraordinary thing, music. It is how we speak to God finally – or how we don’t. Even if we’re ignoring God. It’s the language of the spirit. If you believe that we contain within our skin and bones a spirit that might last longer than your time breathing in and out – if there is a spirit, music is the thing that wakes it up.... And it seems to be how we communicate on another level. (Bono in Wenner [2005](#))

The *Finding US in Music* methodology involves participants listening receptively to recorded music – the playing and sharing of tracks of music known and loved by team members. This experience is distinct from a group playing musical instruments; it is not about individuals performing. It is about what Michael Jones ([2016](#)) calls collective “artful presence” or what Otto Scharmer ([2007](#)) refers to as “co-sensing.”

As each participant chooses a song track to express the meaning and purpose of one’s life and interprets for the group what this song means in an intentional and conscious way, the invisible inner world of that person begins to be visible to others.

By helping people within a group setting share and reflect on their personal narratives, music provides a way to unfreeze and unfold each person’s unique story. It helps surface what Maxine Greene ([1995](#), p. 123) describes as “unheard frequencies,” unnamed talents, passions, and purposes. Interpersonally, the multidimensional language of music helps us express the potency and complex layers of the inspirational sparks within us when words alone are not enough.

Music not only offers an entry point into the subjective interior world of each person, it provides a larger vocabulary and richer language for expressing and experiencing connection between people. When the group is receptive and willing to explore this process, music enables the release of creativity and energy not only within the individual’s interior world but also the energy present in the spaces between the people in the group.

Contemplation through music gives the individual and the group access to dimensions of each person’s unique narrative and experience. It stirs our imaginations and opens our hearts. Music helps

us claim the truth of our own unique story and empowers each of us to express the paradoxes of our fulfilled and unfulfilled yearnings. We become livelier, more self-aware, more open, and more real. Music guides members of a group to remember and apply the healthy and soulful aspects of our nature. It enlivens our imagination and helps identify the individual and collective aspects of the group that have been marginalized, suppressed, and silenced in alienating organizational environments. It builds emotionally healthier teams and humanizes work environments. This music-centric method offers practical benefits of enabling greater organizational creativity, adaptability, and innovation. Music releases our imagination and enables us to become more productive as a “creative whole” – moving us beyond our gifts as individuals into a more cohesive and better-performing team.

Deeper engagement through music and other art forms gives voice not only to greater wholeness within employees but also generates tangible experiences for making meaning of the spaces that exist between people. These in-between spaces are increasingly recognized by thought leaders (Allee [2003](#); Scharmer and Kaufer [2013](#)) as the new collaborative advantage for generating intellectual and social capital (Cook [2014](#)).

The chaotic world of organizations requires collective creativity and wisdom to address exponentially difficult challenges. Richard Barrett ([1998](#)) says it this way, “organisations don’t change, People do.” While meditation and mindfulness are becoming increasingly acceptable in organizations, they are not yet mainstream. And although the use of the arts is gaining recognition as a tool in organizational development (David Whyte using poetry www.davidwhyte.com/, Barbara McAfee www.barbaramcafee.com with singing and Michael Jones <http://www.pianoscapes.com/> with piano music), arts are still not regarded widely as central and substantive forces for organizational change. However, combining music (or other art forms) with contemplative group engagement could become a viable approach for raising consciousness and transforming relationships in a profound and sustained way. Perhaps music will be considered just as or even more acceptable to organizations than meditation.

Fresh insights and the images evoked by the co-interpretation of music in real time, in the relational in-between space existing among members of a group, can be profoundly transformative and productive for the business as well as the participants engaging in change activities. Both essences, of music and Ubuntu, not only intensify and deepen conversation but accelerate the rate of change within a group because of the profound levels of intimacy and sharing they arouse.

One Stellenbosch student team leader wrote. *“Music evokes an unforced, natural vulnerability, like nothing else can in me. You cannot help but be vulnerable and true when evoked by music. In four hours, I learned so much about my team. I learned their souls’ truths to an extent deeper than I know my own friends.”*

What then is the essence of Ubuntu?

Ubuntu Is a Pillar of This Approach and of the World’s Connected Future

Ubuntu is a quintessentially African concept. In Africa, the original cradle of humankind, humans first evolved our need for belonging and learned how to develop a sense of community (Nussbaum et al. [2010](#)).

Ubuntu is the art and quality of being human together and the responsibility that flows from living in community. *Umuntu ngumuntu Ngabantu* is the Nguni term, from South Africa, meaning that people

become people through people and more of who they are through dynamic relationships with other people. Ubuntu is not only about becoming more human in a social context, through basic compassion and respect for others. It also entails a lived spiritual commitment to the growth of all individuals within the group.

Ubuntu has recently been called integrative humanism (Lessem [2017](#)). It is a philosophy, a world view, and way of being that is part of the DNA of culture and spirituality in many African countries. There is a word for Ubuntu in at least 13 countries (Nussbaum et al. [2010](#)). The “best way of being a person according to African understanding of the human person is to have ubuntu” and that “[u]buntu is the ideal stage of being a human person” (Mcunu [2004](#), p. 25; Forster [2010](#)). Ubuntu requires artful and embodied attention, words and action in the present but is mindful of the past and invites in the possibility for co-evolving a positive future for the whole group, community, and society. Mkhize ([1998](#)), a South African psychologist, explains an aspect of Ubuntu which distinguishes its essence from traditional western notions of humanism – it is that “self” is rooted in community and is a communally experienced ontology of traditional African culture. A person cannot simply be described solely in terms of personal individual properties, but it is always in relation to the community that a person is defined. Ubuntu calls forth engagement of dignity and truth: and cultivates a shared capacity for promoting and maintaining dignity of all human beings. This applies at every level in the social context, dyad, group, and community. For Desmond Tutu, “my humanity is caught up and bound up in yours. When I dehumanise you, I inexorably dehumanise myself? There is very little separation between you and me, I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am” (Nussbaum [2003a](#)). Africans have understood this for centuries and thought leaders in the postmodern west are finally reclaiming this human interconnectedness, re-correcting a learned tendency towards individualism and separateness and now re-discovering a new language for what has always been alive in Africa. Dr Daniel Siegel, a psychologist, recently called this interconnection MWe (Siegel [2016](#)).

Through Ubuntu, individual consciousness matures and evolves in a way that the self is enriched by and facilitated through connection to the broader community. In Africa, everything is spiritual (Vilakati et al. [2013](#)). And given the African world view, Ubuntu can be described as integral humanism starting with God and ending in creation, including the wholeness and harmony of all reality: created and uncreated, seen and unseen, and tangible and intangible (Forster [2010](#)). So, Ubuntu brings in the presence of the spiritual while also evolving and refining interpersonal skill and simultaneously strengthening interconnectedness and interdependence with others. Another fundamental aspect of Ubuntu is that the African world view places a significant emphasis on the “wholeness of all being” (Setiloane [1998](#), p. 75; Forster [2010](#)).

Today, we still need belonging and community, and increasingly there are strong voices writing about the yearning for connection and the desire for mutual recognition. Peter Gabel ([2018](#)) names this desire as “social force that radiates throughout and across the social fabric of the world, as a vector emerging (as a force and a longing) out from the centre of each person as a pole of social being toward each other person.” At the same time, Ubuntu is acknowledged as one of the essential components for global citizenship in the twenty-first century because it is the ultimate recognition of humanity, the common humanity that transcends all differences (Gerzon [2010](#)). Recognized as an evolutionary leader, Gerzon joins the voices of an increasing number of thinkers who recognize the urgent need to evolve our individual and collective consciousness to meet the tough global, integrated challenges of today.

What then do music and Ubuntu have in common? Just as the impulse to express Ubuntu arises from our common humanity, the impulse to create and experience art arises from this same shared source. Dewey’s work is instructive here. He claimed that “all art comes from living, breathing, human

experience and the artist's own engagement with life" (Dewey [1989](#)). Neither Ubuntu nor music is easily distilled into concise scientific concepts. Both can be ephemeral and intangible yet when you experience the impact of a beautiful piece of music, or the affirming energy of another person's presence through Ubuntu, you feel it. Both Ubuntu and music involve artful presence, artful being, and artful communication. Both Ubuntu and music can be infused with spiritual intelligence through conscious intention. Like beauty, how we listen to music lies in the imagination and within the ears of the beholder. Just as we can choose to hold other human beings in a reverent way, so can we choose to listen to a piece of music with sacred intention. Music can also be used to distract ourselves from ourselves and separate ourselves from others. However, the framing of music in the *Finding US in Music* approach invites reverence for the other and enables music to become a lens for seeing the other clearly, connecting with self and connecting with others.

When something truly universal has been accessed in the artist's own experience, when truly good music is composed and matched by powerful lyrics, it is likely to have wide and even universal resonance in societies and across time and geographies.

Witnessed in more practical form, the call for Ubuntu consciousness permeates an ever increasing plethora of global movements and networks: Humanity's Team <http://www.humanitysteam.org/>; Alliance for New Humanity <http://anhglobal.org/en/>; Worldshift 2012 <http://worldshift2012.org/>; and Kosmos Journal <http://www.kosmosjournal.org/> to name a few.

The Group as an Art Form

While there is an alarming rate of increasing conflict and polarization in our world, these live alongside more hopeful trends that have been emerging in the global landscape for the past 20 years: the shift from separateness to oneness (Secretan [2006](#)); the emergence of a movement re-igniting the value of collective wisdom (Briskin et al. [2009](#)); the increasing appeal of the "group as an art form" (Johnson-Lenz and Johnson-Lenz [1995](#); Erickson and Briskin [2001](#)) embodying the shift from the power of the individual to the importance of the group; and the re-claiming of spirituality in the business social and economic context as important complementary imperatives (Neal et al. [1998](#)). The inevitability of complexity and change has also brought about concomitant calls for greater levels of shared awareness and in more progressive circles, the desire for a "we" culture (Wheatley [2006](#); Por [2015](#); Hübl [2014](#)). More and more thought leaders cite the conditions which make it possible for an individual to participate in the co-creation of a larger communal intelligence.

In this regard, Otto Scharmer's ([2007](#)) seminal work on Theory U specifically acknowledges the group as holding the shared consciousness from which organizational transformation emanates. Scharmer's later work, from Ego to Eco (Scharmer and Kaufer [2013](#)), reflects an approach to transformation that addresses three divides in society: the disconnect between self and nature – the ecological divide; the disconnect between self and other – the social divide; and the disconnect between self and self – the personal divide.

In *Finding US in Music*, music offers just one kind of salve among many in the market place to heal some of these divides and so becomes Ubuntu's comrade in the arts of the heart and for creating connectedness in small and large group settings. Another modality is Appreciative Inquiry.

Appreciative Inquiry Is a Fundamental Technique for Every Participant and Every Session

Appreciative inquiry is integral to the *Finding US in Music* method. The introduction of (AI) begins before the first session convenes and guidance for how to use this technique continues in every group conversation. Understanding and practicing appreciative inquiry is key to experiencing the benefits of this approach.

The underlying assumption of (AI) is that organizations can embrace new possibilities by asking organizational members to focus on

The best of what is

Appreciating life-giving aspects of organizational life

Providing challenges to problem-based approaches

Offering alternative languages to problem-oriented approaches

Because the AI perspective involves the asking unconditional positive questions, the resulting narratives from the group describe and envision social and organizational reality in creative and constructive ways. Appreciative inquiry liberates the socially constructive potential of organizations and the wholeness within human communities.

With appreciative inquiry, spaces for new voices and languages emerge and circles of dialogue expand to build a supportive relational context (Ludema et al. [2012](#)). (AI) catalyzes an “epistemic stance of liberation” freedom, group solidarity, and a deep appreciation for “the miracle and mystery of life” in organizations, and specifically, AI helps discover the strengths in the hidden reservoir that lies at the “positive core.” AI also shares with the field of positive psychology an understanding of the role that positive emotions can play in the area of change; “*building and sustaining the moment for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding – hope, excitement, inspiration, caring, camaraderie, sense of urgent purpose*” (Lewis et al. [2008](#)).

(AI) is both a generative and a transformative methodology for producing positive organizational change and shifts in individual mind-sets. AI is an expansive way of being that results in generative perceptions and understandings of the world around us. It inspires and catalyzes fresh possibilities. Posing the unconditional positive question allows groups and whole systems to “discover, amplify, and multiply the alignment of strengths in such a way that weaknesses and deficiencies become increasingly irrelevant” (Ludema et al. [2012](#)). In the *Finding US in Music* approach, appreciative inquiry leverages the relational and conversational potential that exists in the spaces between people within the group or the larger organization.

In addition to this method, many other powerful tools and processes are now available and offer exciting containers for collective change: David Isaacs and Juanita Brown’s World Café (www.theworldcafe.com/), Otto Scharmer’s U Process (<http://www.ottoscharmer.com>), and David Whyte’s use of poetry (<http://www.davidwhyte.com/>). Verna Allee ([2003](#)) expressed the idea that we are moving to a time when we will use collective containers not only for healing but for integration and co-creation. Dr Jacob Needleman in *The American Soul* named the importance of the group for our future. He suggests not only that the art form of the future is the group but that the kind of intelligence and benevolence we require can only come from the group. For Needleman, creating this intelligence emerges out of relationships between people who are willing to struggle against the human tendency towards illusion, egoism, and fear. He added that assuming the group is an art form of the future, then we must regard the art of convening groups as an artistry we must cultivate to bring about the full potential of the future (Needleman [2003](#)).

Since then, vehicles for harvesting a more promising future come in the form of practical tools and theoretical frameworks now characteristic of an emerging integral age.

The Emergence of WE in the Integral Age

Our zeitgeist is a new (and ancient) awareness that we participate in a world of exquisite interconnectedness. We are learning to see systems rather than isolated parts and players. (Wheatley [2006](#), p. 158)

The principles of Ubuntu and the technique of appreciative inquiry enable participants of *Finding US in Music* sessions to connect more deeply as a group. This experience accesses and reflects the “we” – a topic of growing interest to organizational development professionals. Although the concept of “we” – how people act as individuals and as members of a greater society – has been in discussion since the late 1990s, today this concept enjoys a greater understanding and practice among professionals now.

Living Systems

Over the past 20 years, organizational development theorists and practitioners have been increasingly open to embracing a living system view of organizations. They see that organizations need to become more flexible and hence more compatible with the reality of rapid and chaotic changes in the future business environment. Understanding interconnectedness between people as they engage as parts of an organization has become more central to seeing the organization itself as a living whole entity. The shifting concept of the organization from that of a machine to that of a living system has opened the way for different images of what organizations are becoming in the twenty-first century. New methods are moving away from instrumental approaches and towards the need for more impactful and transformative team and group processes that occur in an evolving organizational context.

Given the current challenges of growing polarization in so many societies, the capacity to build, sustain, and transform relationships increasingly becomes an organizational necessity. Ellinor and Girard ([1998](#)), Secretan ([2006](#)), Scharmer ([2007](#)), Senge et al. ([2004](#)), and Wheatley ([2006](#)) are among a growing number of organizational theorists and practitioners who articulate the awareness that we are not separate and that we no longer live in a world of discrete people, organizations, lands, nations, things, or feelings (Carter and Nussbaum [2010](#)).

The recognition of this interconnectedness within and between people and systems paves the way for different organizational development perspectives and practices. Discerning the need for greater openness and fluidity within organizations, Ellinor and Girard ([1998](#)) noted the increasing interdependence within and between systems and underscored the idea that strong relationships and dialogue are crucial to manufacturing the relational glue essential for robust organizations.

In more recent years from the discipline of psychology (Siegel [2016](#)), to organizational development (Senge et al. [2004](#); Scharmer [2007](#)) from emerging fields of new sciences (Wheatley [2006](#)), integral philosophy (Wilber [2000](#); McIntosh [2007](#)), collective intelligence (Por [2015](#)) and collective wisdom (Briskin et al. [2009](#)), and integral education thinkers and practitioners (Palmer [1998](#)) are identifying the trends, creating language, and identifying competencies both to understand the changing context and to evolve practitioners to work in the emerging WE space.

Insufficiency of Rational Approaches

Related to the need to develop living systems is the understanding that rational processes are insufficient to create substantive change. Neal et al. ([1998](#)) recognized that rational theories of transformation may have reached their limit and that what sparks *transformation is neither reachable through logic, nor tied to rationality*.

Their work gave voice to the importance of intangible spiritual realities affecting organizational transformation, likely to be characterized by “grace, magic and miracles,” factors as equally important as economic considerations. Their work also paves the way for methodologies which can explicitly include spiritual realities in organizational transformation.

Increasingly, psychologists, integral philosophers, and practitioners recognize that the mind is more than the product of the brain; and that the mind arises both from subjective experiences and through bonds with others. This realization speaks to the need to create more personal, interpersonal, spiritual, and global well-being in our collective lives. This concept carries significant implications for the field of organizational development.

Siegel tells us that the brain is not just the mind, and describes an emerging view that mind acknowledges the power of relationship. He states the importance of greater interconnectedness with both our own and others’ inner being. When we honor our distinct subjective lives and then connect them with attuned, empathic communication, we create the potential for more interconnections (Siegel [2016](#)). For Siegel, an integrated identity would involve combining this “me” with “we” as a “MWe.”

George Por voices a related idea that both collective intelligence and “shared mindfulness” start within (following the pattern of the “we” space that starts with “we-in-the-I” (Por [2015](#)). Perspectives from an emerging group of integral thinkers and spiritual practitioners all over the world focus on the competencies that are needed to develop the kind of presence and the personal and empathic relationality that the “we” spaces demand (Brabant [2014](#); DiPerna [2014](#); Wombacher [2014](#)). There are calls for “an awake and self-reflexive intersubjective consciousness” (Venezia [2014](#)) and for approaches to “show up” in the “we” spaces. All point to how practitioners themselves can step up differently as agents of transformation and “hold space” in new ways.

Thomas Hübl, an Austrian spiritual teacher, is pioneering what he calls the “inner science of transparent communication” emphasizing the required subtle competencies to listen to others in a more conscious, attuned way, to create a culture of the “shared we.” Hübl suggests that we can potentially *perceive everything in everyone else, understand others in their depth, and allow the spiritual aspects of life to reveal themselves in our everyday experience* (Hübl [2014](#)).

He has articulated the increased need for growing our sensitivity to the possibility of a field of shared awareness through which a larger spiritual intelligence can show up. This kind of awareness speaks to an intelligence that takes account of the practice of living with awareness of the spaces within me, between you and me/I, and the space between US (Por [2015](#)).

The Integral Age and Integral Education

More recently, there has been the emergence of the Integral Age. While the writings of Ken Wilber ([2000](#)) and Beck and Cowan ([2014](#)) are particularly prominent in the literature, many thinkers and practitioners are shaping the “integral field” (McIntosh [2007](#); Schieffer [2016](#)). Most integral frameworks seek to reconnect and re-integrate the fragmented perspectives about many dimensions of life. They aim to give voice to the impetus of the human species to evolve towards higher levels of shared humanity, wholeness, and transformation.

Integral Education is relevant to this area of exploration because its primary focus is on the ontological aspects of intelligence, i.e., the being of the human being. An additional assumption is that wholeness in a human being in turn creates a “ *transformative context where learning becomes more real because people acknowledge more of who they are. People become more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am*” (Palmer [1998](#), p. 13).

Integral Education emphasizes wholeness and relationship: connection to oneself, others, and all of nature as an embodied phenomenon. Integral Education is a catalyst for transformation that *it moves our emphasis in education from gathering knowledge to growing consciousness*. By focusing on expanding awareness, we open a paradigm shift from epistemology to ontology. This fundamentally alters where our attention is placed. *We move from having and doing – to being*. This provides an opening to directly experience ourselves as the shapers and creators of our reality (Adams [2011](#)). For Adams, an integral perspective is committed to weaving together the isolated, fragmented, and disconnected phenomena that take place in our world, “in a manner that allows for seeing with new eyes. When people experience and understand how different occurrences connect together to create a full picture, it changes the way they think, act, speak, and listen, and the way they view the world—a larger picture becomes apparent and their relationship to that image is made clearer (Adams [2011](#)).” A common theme among integral theorists focuses on the idea that we are progressing from separation to integration.

Our Progression from Separation to Integration

Separation and fragmentation can be traced to early Greek theorists who used rational argument to reveal the true nature of the world.

In the seventeenth century, Rene Descartes’ insight “I think therefore I am” heralded the arrival of the rational, autonomous modern self and gave human beings the capacity to see the world as they had never seen it before – *objectively*.

Descartes’ work inspired the thinking of modern scientists for 400 years, gave rise to the scientific revolution, and ushered in the beginnings of a paradigm based on objective analysis and logic.

Through the dominance of this world view, the understanding of the human experience became divided into the inner perspective and the outer perspective. Descartes’ focus on rationality produced negative consequences and fragmentation for society and, consequently, for how organizations are run.

Over time, the west has been facing the erosion and loss of the magic and mystery and beauty, the myth, and the sense of oneness that all of us once knew (Secretan [2006](#)) and which the west has been struggling to correct. Gebser ([1986](#)) predicted that the crucial next step for humanity is to transition into the integral state (Schieffer [2016](#)). In 1923, we saw Martin Buber and then other philosophers begin to reclaim the depths of connection through relationship, through intersubjectivity.

In the 1990s Integral Philosophy was born through the work of Ken Wilber and others. Wilber, a philosopher, scientist, and theologian offered a ground-breaking approach – reintegrating spirituality with science, people with nature, historical eras – past and present, giving us a language to describe and distinguish what occurs in the internal universe of individuals and societies. One of his great contributions was in discerning the analytical distinctions between the subjective individual interior, the collective interior (relationships), and the individual exterior (behavior) and objective collective exterior (systems).

This focus on integration offers humanity a crucial corrective re-balancing perspective which attempts to reverse the galloping trend towards fragmentation, separation, and specialization. The integral movement is transforming our worldviews, offering integrated, inclusive frameworks that help us evolve a new consciousness and culture by reclaiming the power of the internal universe and intersubjectivity. (This is about the “we” spaces.) For Phipps ([2007](#)), “Wilber’s 21st century integral synthesis ... does for the *internal* universe what Descartes’ philosophy did for the *external* universe.”

Because of its mastery of We spaces and its socially generative qualities, Ubuntu offers a complementary framework and, perhaps more importantly, a different way of **being** to enliven and embody the WE space . Ubuntu has the potential to plant the seeds for regenerative, transformative, communally expressive, and embodied humanity so urgently needed in our world and so desperately needed in our organizations . *I am because we are, and because we are I am* being a way of being core to Ubuntu. It may just give the internal universe a new vocabulary of being and a direct pathway to connection with the other. It offers a transformative impulse and evolutionary direction in integral approaches.

What then are the subtle transformative shifts that occur in living the experience of we space?

Transformation Comes from the In-Between Spaces

For McIntosh ([2007](#)), Wheatley ([2006](#)), and Allee ([2003](#)) (among others), it is in the spaces in between ourselves and others that we find the golden threads which give vibrancy to the connections between the “I” and the “we.” It is in this space where change can be woven and transformation can happen. The spaces within which the dynamic and evolving living systems of human culture are interacting are where opportunities for transformation lie.

McIntosh underscores the idea that regarding the evolution of culture and consciousness, whether in organizations or societies, we are talking about development that is for the most part invisible. Outward manifestations of consciousness can be visible in behavior or artifacts or buildings, but what integral philosophy helps us see is that “a big part of that which is actually evolving is internal.”

The experience of an inner life defines what it means to be human. “What is transforming and evolving in human culture is the quality and quantity of connections between people, the shared meanings we co-create, the relationships and mutual understandings that we build—these constitute what we might call the organisms of cultural evolution.” (McIntosh [2007](#), p. 5).

Erickson and Briskin ([2001](#)) produced a pioneering booklet, giving depth and texture to the subtle movements that occur in the in between spaces of a group, identifying the significance of gathering in a group. Several principles outlining the significance of gathering in groups are mentioned, describing and enlivening the transformative processes and moments in groups:

Witnessing: An “aspect of witnessing lies in being a mirror for each other’s learning.

People release a kind of collective sigh as they relax into knowing that they have revealed themselves, and have been validated; even as they stand in validation of others. This aspect of witnessing takes on critical importance in the collective healing of humankind (Erickson and Briskin [2001](#), p. 51).”

Quickening: “People speak of a moment when the ‘magic’ happens, a moment of awakening, deepening, quickening, when they seem to transcend their egos or their personalities. They sense a world unseen, unheard, yet truly more there than anything they’ve experienced before. Erickson and Briskin ([2001](#), p. 11).” (This same tendency was cited in Neal et al. [1998](#))

Connectedness: “In the group, people experience the power of being seen, being heard and understood at a very deep level; a sense of coming home, of belonging (Erickson and Briskin [2001](#), p. 21).”

Re-membering: “People are drawn together in groups to remember who they really are. To re-member, meaning to join, to become whole, to fill the place where a part was missing. There is a part in each person that has not forgotten that we are one, and so

there is a natural desire in each of us to return, and to experience again the joy of being a part of the whole (Erickson and Briskin [2001](#), p. 29)."

In naming the intangible processes, Briskin's work gives important substance to this exploration. In what other ways might music, "we" spaces and the integral age be mutually complementary?

The Links Between Music, Ubuntu, WE Spaces, and the Integral Age

Moving on to the approach described in this chapter, *Finding US in Music*, the beauty of music is that it can accurately hold, mirror, and give accurate external expression to individual's inner world. When music combines with group engagement, the threads of an individual's life – the golden, black, red, blue, silver, and the infinite range of colors and textures – become visible and woven together more clearly in the intersubjective "we" space. Music and storytelling together ravel and unravel and re-create the threads of a dynamic tapestry, which are woven and rewoven by the people making meaning of their inner worlds. The group become co-interpreters of words, stories, and co-weavers of the whole. Music externalizes what is in the individual interior, so that it becomes part of group awareness, the collective interior, and the collective conversation. The music itself becomes an integral and integrating force that enables the connecting, the witnessing, and the remembering of each human being in the group.

The integral frame and Ubuntu both explain how everything is connected to everything else. But the main remedial and transformative gift that integral thinkers have given back to the world is in the power that they accord to what Schieffer calls **the inner core** – the intrapersonal parts of self – which connect and integrate the development of self, team, organization, community, and society.

For Schieffer ([2016](#)), the integral view is holistic; it can take account of all the aspects of a living system including the arts as well as nature, community, ecology; culture, creativity, science, systems, and technology; and enterprise, economics, and politics.

The transformative and evolutionary potential of the integral perspective lies in its capacity to restore wholeness in a world which has become too rational, linear, and fragmented; a world which has lost touch with the most magical, mysterious, and graceful aspects of what it really means to be loving connected human beings witnessing each other, and remembering each other.

Intersubjectivity

The notion of intersubjective or shared mindfulness is one of the fields where the transpersonal can be integrated with the interpersonal, the psychological, the ontological, social, and cultural dimensions of transformation. Intersubjectivity is used in a variety of disciplines: psychology, sociology, theology, anthropology, and philosophy. De Quincey ([2000](#)) distinguishes three levels of intersubjectivity.

Intersubjectivity 1 (standard meaning): consensual validation between independent subjects via exchange of signals, which relies on exchange of physical signals (*Behavioral, nonverbal*).

Intersubjectivity 2a (weak-experiential meaning): more psychological in focus where mutual engagement and participation between independent people conditions their respective experience and intersubjectivity relies on nonphysical presence as well as the contents of their preexisting subjects.

Intersubjectivity 2b (strong-experiential meaning): mutual co-arising and engagement of interdependent subjects, which creates their respective experience. It is ontological. Strong or ontological intersubjectivity relies on co-creative nonphysical presence (*including the transpersonal*).

According to this “stronger” meaning, intersubjectivity is truly a process of co-creativity, where relationship is “ontologically primary” (De Quincey [2000](#), pp. 137, 138) yet also opens the way for what are referred to as vertical dimensions of transformation (Frizzell and Banner [2018](#); Forster [2010](#)) allowing spirituality to be included as a potential transformative force. Through the lens of Ubuntu, identity is understood to be shaped and fundamentally related to spiritual, secular, and social levels of life. Since identity is relational and because relationship with others foregrounds and shapes who the self is becoming, self emerges out of a participatory integrative humanism, an active engagement with the whole of the Kosmos; “it is... an active, intersubjective element of being in harmony with all other beings” (Forster [2010](#)). Music helps clarify what is emerging in the inter-subjective space and Ubuntu helps what is being co-woven be held in wholeness.

Ubuntu and Music as Forms of Intersubjectivity

Ubuntu, an integral part of the *Finding US in Music* methodology relates to intersubjectivity , in fact, it embodies and enlivens intersubjectivity. Ubuntu, together with the music, calls forth elements of both the weaker and the stronger versions of intersubjectivity – that which exists and is shared between conscious minds and human beings offering the gift of presence to each other.

While much depends on the group itself, experience leads to the suggestion that *within the mixed alchemy of Ubuntu and music lies the catalytic ingredients that co-manufacture the invisible glue that could help to create strong, caring creative groups, communities and organizations.*

Both Ubuntu and music offer the potential to enliven shared insights and develop higher levels of EQ (emotional intelligence) and SQ (spiritual intelligence). The navigation, application, and integration of such qualities are being called for today by an increasing number of theorists and integral practitioners (Frizzell and Banner [2018](#)).

Ubuntu’s Role in the Transformation Process

Integral theories and practices are offering a language and worldview which transforms and re-balances a world suffering from an overly rational, secular, and scientific separateness.

It is interesting to consider the idea that integral theory, as illustrated by Forster ([2010](#)), could both

(a)

Add conceptual rigor to the concept of Ubuntu, and at the same time

(b)

Be enriched by Ubuntu.

Rinaldo Brutoco, co-founder and President of the World Business Academy, published this author’s articles on Ubuntu in 2003 (Nussbaum [2003a, b](#)). At the time Brutoco recognized that Ubuntu embodies a holistic and multilayered framework that is broad enough and sufficiently complex to hold the intersecting and interdependent insights of some of the world’s top futurists:

The shift from self-centeredness to other-centeredness

The move towards a greater commitment to humanness
The shift towards the responsibility for the whole, and to an ethical and more caring
people-centered capitalism

Reframing Integral Approaches to Incorporate the Ancient Wisdom of Ubuntu

Ubuntu is integrative and integral. In line with emerging trends among integral thinkers, educators, and practitioners, Ubuntu incorporates spirituality, the interconnectedness of the “we,” the dignity and the wholeness of the “I” and offers an understanding of how the intersubjective consciousness it calls forth can release transformative impulses in groups and organizations.

What then are ways in which organizational development as a field might begin to reframe and link the ideas of its integral thinkers with the more ancient wisdom of Ubuntu? What is Ubuntu consciousness and how is it similar and different to the “MWe” or “we” spaces currently claimed in the postmodern west?

Lessem ([2017](#)), Vilakati et al. ([2013](#)), and Forster ([2010](#)) offer useful conceptual contributions claiming the originating grounds for integral thinking in the southern hemisphere. In offering the word *Integral Humanism*, Lessem takes integral philosophy, typically informed by eastern philosophy, south to Africa. While acknowledging cultural, political, and religious differences, from Zimbabwe, to Kenya to Ethiopia for Lessem, the whole of black Africa is united in their view in one reasoning method: that is, the logic of integration rather than disintegration, communal congregation rather than self-assertion. In its purest form, inclusive integrative thinking patterns that underscore the inclusive and harmonizing nature of African thinking and being. He describes a way of thinking that is not a black and white, with an either/or frame. But rather thinking is fluid and flexible and includes laws of integrativity: that A and B are both true and that A complements B. He suggests a both/and structure for thinking (Lessem [2017](#)).

Forster synthesizes and integrates how Ubuntu embodies integral theory: the interior dimensions of Ubuntu, and the subtle layers of intersubjective experience, as well as the vertical aspects of spirituality, echoed in Frizzell and Banner’s work. In Forster’s model, the horizontal dimension would relate to interpersonal skills and skill development while the vertical dimension involves the voluntary choice to engage in transformation. Both approaches can include spirituality.

Vilakati et al. ([2013](#)) provide a useful analysis of the components of African Spiritual Consciousness emphasizing the co-creation of identity through authentic relationship with other human beings and all of creation. According to Forster ([2010](#)), Ubuntu is “a relational ontology based on an intersubjective form of consciousness that integrates the objective and subjective components of human existence and reality.” How then can both objective and subjective aspects become more embodied?

Music in Organizations and the Intersubjective Space

Despite many successes and shifts in the practice of “we” space, there exists what Schieffer has called a growing urge, need, and longing to move further beyond a cognitive understanding of integral towards fully fledged “enlivenment and embodiment” of integral life (Schieffer [2016](#)).

Both Ubuntu and music hold the potential to enliven the integral paradigm and embody the lived experience required to fully enter a “we” space, the intersubjective space, with mind, heart, and soul.

Music takes the subjective interior into the collective interior and through feedback within the group and expression of shared meaning. This process of making meaning of the interior through music paints a clearer picture of both the internal interior and collective interior.

By externalizing inner worlds through music, people can re-construct their context to permit deeper understandings and helpful insights and discover intimate language and metaphors which can transform group's conversations and realities.

In addition, other disciplines help us understand the role of music and aesthetics in organizations, offering different lenses through which the transformative potential of music can be viewed. For instance, the field of Organisational Aesthetics, Taylor and Hansen (2005) offer three categories for understanding aesthetics; two are relevant to this chapter: aesthetics as epistemology and aesthetics as connection.

Aesthetics as Epistemology

The case for using music and other arts in organizations builds on the idea of aesthetic epistemology – the concept that a counter understanding to logico-rational approaches to organizational life is offered by aesthetics (Strati 1999).

Challenging the completeness of the dominant, intellectual forms of academic knowledge, Taylor argues that embodied tacit knowledge requires presentational/artistic forms of knowledge. Aesthetic epistemology not only transcends the rational understanding of organizations, but through aesthetic knowing, what becomes more important is the desire for subjective personal truth rather objective truth (Taylor and Hansen 2005).

Ontological and epistemological approaches to music education also make the point that music and other aesthetic experiences enable interpretative understandings of self and personal reality (Arostegui et al. 2004).

Aesthetics as Connection

Aesthetics as connection is relevant to building the “we” spaces in organizations as this focuses on the “belonging to” aspects of a system as opposed to the “separate from” aspects of being in a system (Ramirez 1991), that humans express their feelings of belonging to social groups through aesthetics. Taylor and Hansen acknowledge that the role aesthetics in belonging is not common in traditional western thought, although it is central to many other cultures such as the Cherokee (Taylor and Hansen 2005). The role of aesthetics, and in particular music and dance, is similarly essential to the idea of belonging in African culture (Nussbaum and Impey 1996).

Music as an Entry Point to Belonging and Evolving

In southern African cultures, music facilitates connections both vertically (with God and the ancestors) and horizontally with people in communities. A traditional healer in Zimbabwe once said, “Music are our radios and guitars, without them we cannot hear our ancestors” (Nussbaum and Impey 1996).

Because music (and dance) are intrinsic vehicles for understanding oneself in relation to others in many African and indigenous societies, these arts remain powerful sources for building cohesion and well-being in indigenous African communities. They could assume this more central role in

contemporary contexts as well if the role of the arts was to be reframed in contemporary organizational contexts (Nussbaum and Impey [1996](#); Impey [2008](#)).

In applying the elements of *Finding US in Music*, we see in practice how music provides motivational entry points that help members find belonging within a group. Scholars recognize that centuries-old music and dance rituals have been integral to cohesion of indigenous cultures worldwide. What is being realized today is that contemporary organizations can also benefit by incorporating music and other art forms into their cultures.

A multidisciplinary thinker and evolutionary psychologist for the arts, Ellen Dissanayake ([2000](#)) speaks to the centrality of the arts in human development. Citing the psychobiological roots of musical and other artistic practices, she explains that arts are essential to human growth because the expression lends itself to “transforming, changing and shaping conditions of society.” Dissanayake suggests that “love, intimacy, and close connections to other humans are foundational to aesthetic understanding.” For her, it is through intimacy, love, reciprocity and closeness, and the communicative activity across cultures that the evolution of a species is supported.

Dissanayake’s insights support the assumption of this methodology: music – with the reciprocity, intimacy, and closeness that it affords – creates a sense of belonging for members within a group. At Stellenbosch University (where this system is put into practice), a medical student wrote about his experience: “*I got to have a microscopic view into all of my team members’ souls and understand their narrative and the plot they are trying to establish. I learnt to be aware of intercultural reconciliation.*”

Por ([2015](#)) and Siegel ([2016](#)) are among the increasing number of thinkers speaking about the importance of mindfulness, meditation, and other integrative practices to evolving organizations. They note that evolution in society calls for approaches which will integrate consciousness, create more presence, and open the mind to being more connected to oneself, other people, and the larger world in which we live.

Siegel ([2016](#)) suggests that eastern approaches to meditation are essential for learning to be “present” in life, to be open to things as they are within us and within others. He sees eastern forms of meditation as a portal to integration that creates the intrapersonal and interpersonal conditions at the heart of kindness and compassion. This author’s contention is that music emanating from any culture, combined with skilled facilitation, contemplation, conscious intention, and other-centered attention, could easily become an additional form of shared mindfulness and constitute a new kind of contemplative integrative process that Siegel describes.

Music is an important catalytic aesthetic agent. Depending on the intention with which it is applied, music gives individuals an easy, authentic, and enjoyable way to access their subjective interior, and it simultaneously provides groups with an effective and economical way to develop powerful and meaningful bonds. Music deepens the nature of group engagement by providing extra access to shared experiences and expressions of emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence.

The use of music offers nuanced conscious pathways to multidimensional wholeness. It is an effective integrative practice because each person can access their interior landscape on a visceral, conscious, spiritual, and emotional level. We can claim all of who we are – past, present, future, and belong to a variety of heritages and experiences and choosing what makes sense to entrust to a group at a specific moment in time.

Music as a Healing Art

Jones ([2016](#)) notes that during the Golden Age of Greece (500–300 BCE), Plato recognized that “rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul.” Yet despite Plato’s insights and centuries of philosophers, anthropologists, music educators, and music therapists, it remains enigmatic as to how music moves our hearts and imaginations. The magic of music is both the unknown mystery it gives us and the pathway on which we travel to a familiar place within. Music is different from other inspirational art forms, such as painting, sculpture, photography, or literature. While the visual arts express a more linear, more of a one- and two-dimensional form of matter/energy, music is multidimensional. Music can be understood as a vibration, a state of being; it can be processed holographically by both the right (intuitive) and the left (analytical) hemispheres of the brain (Nissley et al. [2003](#)).

The philosopher and poet William Kindler proclaimed that “of all of the arts, music is the perfect art, because it strikes the soul without the aid of the intellect.” A similar idea is offered by Michael Jones, pianist, composer, and organizational development practitioner. “Musicequips us to tune into the vibration world, one ripe with meaning and insight and one which holds critical information that is not as available to the linear or rational mind” (Jones [2016](#)). For Oran Cohen, singer song writer and CEO of Genius Works (<http://geniusworks.co.za/oran-cohen/>) in South Africa, “...if everything and everything is frequency vibration then music is the way to access those networks of vibration. It is all about consciousness then music is the ultimate tuning (Personal interview, December 2016).”

According to these experts, music is not simply an alternative way to say the same things that human beings say in speech. Music, like other art forms, can express meanings that are not accessible through words and help express them in ways that give listeners more immediate visceral access to emotions, positive or negative. Music helps human beings explore their innermost thoughts and feelings so that each person can become more attuned to the nuances and subtleties of his/her own world.

One of the reasons that music holds such power in in the Western world, where our cues are almost all visual, is that it reawakens our ability to truly hear. And while we can only see one thing at a time, we can hear everything at once. Furthermore, what we see may be dead or inert but to hear something it must be fully alive. So, music itself is a language of life. As we listen, our senses act as a giant ear and the body becomes a symphony, which equips us to respond to the music’s most subtle cues. (Jones [2016](#))

What then are the assumptions and practical applications of *Finding US in Music*?

Methodology and Practical Application of *Finding US in Music*

Assumptions Underlying the *Finding US in Music* Method

Finding US in Music assumes that human beings can contemplate the richness of their interior self by consciously making meaning of a track of music they know and love. The method also embodies the implicit values of caring, nonjudgment, and Ubuntu. Its techniques combine these values with music and appreciative inquiry. The result is that individuals and groups experience an intimate, generative WE space that is safe for exploration and connection.

The music helps the listeners clarify, embody, and enliven their understanding of their inner world. This opens a deeper contemplation of the music itself and gives clarity and emotional texture to their personal narrative, personal qualities, or emerging purpose in life.

When participants are assured of a safely facilitated context in small groups of no more than ten people, they will share deeply and mindfully about the meanings they ascribe to the music. Here, a different quality emerges in the range, texture, and authenticity of their communications. Creativity, vulnerability, self-doubt, and self-mastery are shared with others and blend with communally generated insights and participants emerge, affirmed, understood, witnessed, and appreciated in ways that are profoundly humanizing – even transformative.

Neal et al. ([1998](#)) state that organizational transformation is most often punctuated by unexpected magic, mystery, and grace. These music sessions reaffirm that insight. Because so much of the interaction in the intersubjective space is intangible, the best moments are those which are punctuated by palpable grace.

Once human beings can share the meaning of their inner music, the music can be heard, interpreted, appreciated, and then re-interpreted. Magic happens. Grace happens. Mysterious synchronicities emerge. Students discover that they share any number of themes and experience profound connection as the group unfolds.

Case Study: Stellenbosch University Live, Listen, and Learn Initiative

We need to widen at the base, adding the invisible and inevitable necessity of teaching students' self-discovery. Consciousness studies ought to be a fundamental part of a liberal or a scientific education. All students need to be aware that they are the true spark of the transformation of the world. All students ought to be practical dreamers. Ben Okri ([2002](#))

Finding US in Music Grew from a Need for a New Approach to Social Cohesion

Since 2014, this author has worked with students at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, which has been an invaluable testing space for many of the ideas presented here. Stellenbosch was the intellectual home for the architects of *apartheid*. Yet, during the twenty-first century, and since 2007, Stellenbosch University has emerged as a hub for courageous social architects – pioneers who have been committed to institutional transformation.

The university's approach to transformation is multifaceted and has been initiated in a variety of different nodes within the system. The openness and creativity of such visionary social architects have shaped the context within which the author's own work has been able to take root and flourish.

The department which hosts this author's work has several goals:

- Foster greater personal growth for students
- Build strong student communities
- Encourage opportunities for change agency
- Use knowledge and innovation to create sustainable solutions within South Africa and in the world
- Create co-curricular opportunities for student leaders
- Enable greater social cohesion among the leaders of tomorrow

The *Finding US in Music* approach was initiated as part of an innovative residential program at Stellenbosch – Listen, Live, and Learn (LLL) (<http://www.sun.ac.za/lllbeta/index.php/about-lll>).

In the LLL context, students live with a diverse range of fellow students and are supported in ways that enable them to form long-lasting relationships. The listening/living/learning intention and experience is to create innovative ways to transform the institutional culture at Stellenbosch University, beginning with students living in residence. It also empowers the participating individuals to build bridges and co-create the social glue between diverse groups of students that strengthen relationships across class and race.

The need to build social cohesion is a chronic issue in South African society, and Stellenbosch is exploring innovative solutions to address it such as this Listen, Live, and Learn concept. This program has become the flagship example of the *Finding US in Music* approach.

The Listen, Live, and Learn Sessions

At the outset, the author led LLL residents in regular small group sessions 8–10 people. Later, these sessions were offered in more traditional residential and dorm settings on the campus and requests for sessions are starting to emerge from other nodes in this ecosystem – staff engaged in co-curricular development and leadership development as well as groups of other students, including psychology honors students and the executive committee of the Stellenbosch University Choir.

The first step is to introduce music into the student experience. This is done to introduce the art of listening with focus and intention as a normal experience of daily life.

We explain that the stories of fellow students can be viewed through music as well as through personal narrative. Our goal is to make this experience both an ingrained life skill and a catalyst for individual and group conversation that leads to transformation.

We suggest that from the participant's view, the music becomes a muse that evokes a journey into the truth of each person's unique interior, a mirror of their inner world.

The process involves in contemplating and then presenting one's individual story and then linking the story to music to amplify and illustrate the meaning of a person's narrative.

The experience can be an act of courage, a statement of consciousness, sometimes evoking pride, vulnerability, or both.

Politically volatile and rapidly diversifying student communities in South Africa offer a dynamic landscape for witnessing both social cohesion and fragmentation and for testing out fresh modalities for transforming group narratives.

Interpretations of shifting and static self-definitions are even more layered and vivid when stories are crafted, amplified, and shared through a track of music.

Since music elegantly holds paradoxes and ambiguities, the complexity of lived experience can emerge offering truth and authenticity rather than political correctness. Often, the sharing of musical collages forms bridges of understanding between participants can be built upon later.

Lwazi's Story: Lwazi, a student leader, plays the song Stimela by Hugh Masekela <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPxmmMpfG88>, an iconic South African jazz musician.

In talking about this selection, Lwazi reveals how his early awareness of inequality has shaped his consciousness, his values, and his leadership platform.

The lyrics of Stimela describe the exploitation of workers, boarding trains from Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and various provinces within South Africa to work in the mines of Johannesburg. The words give social and political commentary about the impact of migrant labor on the miners and their families.

This selection helps Lwazi blend his personal memories with his growing awareness of the political context. Lwazi shares his own story as a frame for understanding his own world and the outside world. He remembers his grandfather's stories of boarding trains in Cape Town to work for minimal

wages. He then shares a vivid childhood memory of his mother boarding a train in the large township of Soweto at 6 a.m. to work in an affluent Johannesburg suburb, looking after four children. She returns home at 7 p.m. tired after a long day, working every day but Sunday.

In telling this story, Lwazi's tone is authentic and calm. He uses creative license to say that his mother was not boarding a train to work in a mine like the mineworkers Masekela sings about, but that she was boarding a train to work in an equally exploitative context.

Masekela's music carries the emotion and passion that Lwazi feels. The lyrics of the song describe a dramatic picture of a stark historical reality which still has a certain relevance in the current context of South Africa. Passionately sung by Masekela, the feelings about inequality and the exploitation of workers are shared by Lwazi, the student. The music and the narrative integrate the personal and the political, the past and the present. The sounds of the train and the frustrations of the workers become alive. The source of Lwazi's leadership commitment becomes clearer as his passion finds voice in his words and the music.

The delivery of Lwazi's story with music lands more with more impact than words alone could do.

The open WE space : This is a crucial aspect of every session. The process of listening in a safe WE space opens up hearts, conversations, frees imagination, and often releases mutual recognition and caring. Students become quiet, they listen attentively to each other, and for several hours, they choose to shift out of their own experiences and enter another's inner world – in the WE space of the music group. They witness each other, generously.

Connections through Lwazi's story and song:

While an uncomfortable truth has been revealed, at the same time the musical collage has become a source for a breakthrough in connecting the other members of the group with the realities of Lwazi's life, his purpose and passion as a leader. Group members, living with privilege, may have never heard Hugh Masekela's song, nor fully faced the impact of their privilege on the lives of others.

Yet, something about hearing Lwazi's story through the music takes the negative charge out of a potentially divisive issue. Lwazi is not raving and ranting, but instead he steps into the magic and intimacy gifted by an open and compassionate "we" space. The privileged student may not change her ideas about outsourcing on campus, which is high on Lwazi's agenda as a student leader, but she may well develop greater compassion for Lwazi and at the same time shift her consciousness of her privilege. Transformation happens in small, radical, subtle ways.

Mmoelo's Story: Mmoelo, studying to be a high school teacher, selects the Whitney Houston song *I Didn't Know My Own Strength* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvRpESH_t-E

Mmoelo is the daughter of farmworker in the Western Cape. Through her song selection, she describes her journey out of poverty and illustrates this with a song and she finds a testimony to her personal mastery.

As Mmoelo presents, she remembers and shares an important transformative moment during her graduation ceremony earlier that year. While she always knew that her motivation to succeed was primarily to please her parents, during her graduation Mmoelo realized that it was SHE who had done the work!

At this moment, Mmoelo reached an important understanding that she could claim and celebrate her own power. The importance of this moment became dramatically visible to the group during her calm presentation of her story. She has clearly reached the inner place, where she was able to narrate her story with authentic confidence. The

powerful melody of the Whitney Houston song, *I didn't know my own strength*, is an accurate mirror of Mmoelo's story.

Her story is beautifully received by her fellow house mates – some are more privileged and some less. All are moved by Mmoelo's inspirational story and all can witness her dignity, her emboldened inner experience affirmed by the words of her song. All are moved by her story, all can witness her dignity, and all can feel the inspiring truth of her journey. Now studying to be a high-school teacher, Mmoelo intends to inspire many students with her own example.

During these *Finding US in Music sessions* Mmoelo, a quiet introverted woman, transformed into a tower of strength before the group's eyes.

The intimate witnessing of another's journey is one of the many gifts this approach gives its students. The articulation of these sparks of personal transformation sows the seeds for changes in the depth and quality of group engagement, taking mutual understanding and connection to a different level. Something in the music helps to make this happen, but there is a magic to it and a mystery, sensed in a moment in time. Each person remembers and is remembered, energy quickens, resonances are felt, and the group holds with greater empathy and compassion both the brokenness and the wholeness that lie within this microcosm of the whole society.

Other song selections:

A student radical chooses her song from an alternative Afrikaans rock group. The words of the song affirm her confidence and her refusal to have her identity curtailed by the singular narrative that being a traditional Afrikaaner prescribes. Clearly, loudly, strongly, she affirms that she shines anyway, as her own unique self.

Yet another student affirms and values her Afrikaans identity, sharing a worship song that has been part of her family's heritage for four generations.

Another student selects a contemporary choral song to claim his love for nature, for music, and his desire to create harmony between people through his involvement in one of the many student choirs in the university.

Session Characteristics

As one student said: "*It is remarkable to realise that my entire narrative can be expressed in 6 minutes of music. It's like having my story recorded in a safe space.*"

A *Finding US in Music* session is characterized by these qualities:

The gathering is:

A **co-creative** process, including **co-sensing**: Co-sensing asks group members to sense deeply into what others are saying and to listen for what emerges in the whole <https://www.presencing.com/tools/sensing-journey> other (Scharmer [2007](#)).

An invitation for co-presencing which about engaging together with communal choice to feel emotionally and spiritually present with and for the other.

A carefully designed **listening** process invites empathic listening and generative conversation

A **meaning making** process asks individuals to give voice to their inner most selves, remembering and witnessing each other.

The **group participates** in the meaning making process, supporting the growth of the individual and each other

A **humanizing** quality emerges within the group because music liberates empathy and Ubuntu is the container for the mutuality of feeling. Improvising on the words of African philosopher, Leopold Senghor through the music, *I see the other, I hear the other, therefore I am and therefore We are*

Techniques include **appreciative inquiry** which fosters mutual affirmation and transforms and releases new narratives evokes collective wisdom

The **music choice** guides an individual meaning making process where inner qualities, inspirations, and aspirations are woven together and then approached with shared mindfulness, inspiring shared and sometimes transformative insights from the group.

A process invites **mutual vulnerability and shared humanity**. One Stellenbosch student wrote : “ *I appreciated most the bareness and openness we showed to one another. The true essence of humanity came through. Vulnerability is not weakness, it’s the cornerstone of humanity and we learn and grow the most when we are vulnerable.*” Vulnerability often quickens the bonds within the we-space.

The process **rekindles generosity** of our human compassion and expands the richness of our imagination

Music **choices reveal** what personal, family, community cultural influences have shaped each person; past influences, present realities our future aspirations can be understood by others

Music **transcends and includes**: music can be interpreted to give vivid testimony, reflecting how each person has included and/or transcended the past and re-shapes who they are becoming. The music indicates what personal and cultural narratives are being learned or unlearned and transformed.

The **collective musical collage** reveals both the unique qualities of each person in the group as well as the common themes emerging in their lives.

Music with narrative enables a more **fully embodied rendering of emotions**, pain and joy, perceived internal limitations and growth, fears and aspirations, and internal barriers and inspirations.

The modality **invites all people to go beyond the limitations** of wearing a safe “mask” and to express what is most authentic and core to each person. People are often attracted to music which represents an existing, emergent, or aspirational quality of being and the music helps them to recognize, intuitively, consciously, or unconsciously, that the music takes people “home” to their core self.

Potential Benefits for Individual Participants

Finding US in Music offers a variety of benefits for participants. And although most groups have been conducted in a university setting with students as the attendees, this work has successfully been applied to business organizations with older adults. It has been used in the USA, the Netherlands, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

In work with students, *Finding US in Music* has been found to provide a fresh space to develop the nuances and layers of participant identities. Participants in general moved beyond describing themselves in association with the subjects they are studying such as law, engineering, drama, creative writing, or sciences. Instead, the fluidity, complexity, paradoxes, and ambiguities that comprise a student’s identity can be expressed and contained in a track of music. Thus, the invitation to select a personal narrative through music frees the student to draw on the creativity, well-defined and nuanced

emotions (positive and negative) lyrics and emotional mastery of millions of artists, songwriters, and composers from diverse genres.

In this process, students are given free rein in choosing a track of music, so that the global music world becomes their oyster. No one's imagination need be confined by rigid definitions of race, class, culture, or ethnicity. Heavy metal is a valued choice for students of all classes and races to express their anger, whether personal or political. Instrumental music can be chosen or music drawn from movies, many cultures, and languages. The students demonstrate remarkable patience and openness with the sheer variety of music played: choral gospel works, Disney movie tracks, heavy metal, rap, Beyonce, Katy Perry, Louis Armstrong, Pink Floyd, John Lennon, gospel, jazz, classical music, traditional and alternative Afrikaans folk and rock, and African music of all genres (traditional and contemporary) are all part of the diverse musical landscape painted by Stellenbosch students.

The power of music through the ages is that it has the capacity not only to reflect the beauty, truth, sadness, and myriad textures and complexity of individual experience but also to embody, describe, or call forth social changes. As such, musical choices, married with conscious intention and Ubuntu, offer an additional language – one which offers a shared space to feel, to describe, and to frame shifting identities. The *Finding US in Music* approach invites people to acknowledge and *celebrate their sources of inner power and inner diversity and layers of richness and complexity*. In the group sessions, selected music is played, presented, discussed, and interpreted with respect and generous intention from the group. This process leads to self-acceptance, self-awareness, and self-confidence. It helps integrate the whole self – the personal and the professional, the interior and exterior, aspects of self. This process provides the potential for personal transformation and the involvement of the group through their attention, imagination, and empathy contributes to this transformative process.

The use of music offers conscious pathways to such multidimensional wholeness. It is effective because *each person can access their interior landscape on a visceral, conscious, spiritual, and emotional level*. Each student claims all of who he/she is. The group as a whole are people on a journey together traversing complex and joyful pasts as they enjoy their varied solidarities, heritages, and sources of difference and belonging.

Through this work, students learn how to listen to music differently. They learn to listen to music with intentional, directed, and flexible consciousness.

Music can be a distraction or when used with intention, it can be transformative. *Finding US in Music* enables people to listen to music so that music becomes purposeful and supports personal growth. As music can also be the language of the spirit, for the many people who enjoy music, it becomes a nonthreatening way to engage with the language of spirituality in a fresh way.

Through this approach, music can be used as a lens/framework/kaleidoscope for tuning in to the authentic self, the larger self, the higher self, and the spiritual self. Once trained in this method, students often share their spiritual journeys with others using these techniques. This methodology helps more introverted people express and externalize what is inside and it helps more extroverted person find a way to reflect more and journey inwards to reflect deeply on who they are.

Students are able better to embody and express their own internal realities, understand others, and become positive agents of transformation (Swart [2015](#)). They begin to hone their own participation in describing, shaping, and communicating their lived experiences and affirming on another's strengths (Swart [2015](#)).

The transformative potential of this work is that music takes people beyond class, rank, race, prejudice, and educational level to a deep place of soulful connection that lasts for a long time after the session.

Potential Benefits for the Group

Reflecting the experiences of university students, the *Finding US in Music* work has provided benefits to the group in these sessions. Because the culture of every session is nonjudgmental and generous in spirit, they become a safe environment in which to open one's heart and explore sensitive subjects. It helps diverse people build what one student called "invisible bridges of understanding" and communication.

The facilitation style used in this approach stresses compassion over confrontation, while still inviting in depth and authenticity. The work trains participants in conscious and patient listening. More than ever, in the shifting and contested space that underlie South African universities, these skills help students understand and transform their own narrative as they witness and to begin to understand the inner worlds of their fellow students.

Music thus becomes a flexible bridge offering a stable pathway across a river of dynamic change. One student wrote: *The thing that struck me about everyone was the human-ness and how each person really appreciated being valued/looked at on a deeper level.*

Another wrote: *It is difficult to quantify the benefits of the music session. The tangible benefits lie in how it affects relationships in the house. The intangible benefits are very valuable. At the core, the session lays the foundation for mutual understanding which is the building block foundation of future cooperation.*

Another student wrote: *The space invited me to suspend prior impressions and be open to experiencing my fellow housemates in a completely different way. Learning about what brings them hope, joy, sadness and fear has definitely enriched my understanding of each of them.*

This group transformation process creates a **democratic space** for all participants. Whether students are introverts or extroverts; whatever the level of privilege or lack of privilege they have historically held, and whatever race or class they are from, the structure and process of the workshop reduces power dynamics. Each student is given equal air time and the same amount of attention from the group.

The structure and process of the music session **evokes mutual understanding** by inviting students to listen in an intentional, respectful, and engaged way to the other. *"The workshop honestly gave me a deeper understanding of where my team come from; I understood that everyone on the team is as complex as I am." "The perceptions of others about me is often accurate when they listen to my music."*

The access to emotion provided by songs helps to free empathy and increase **empathy** for the other and the experience of music contributes to the possibility of transformation. As people feel seen and heard by others, their sense of being affirmed changes and recognizing their own potential becomes easier. *The music enables me to feel more open to my housemates to a great degree as I felt more connected to them in a way a conversation could not allow.*

Group transformation can occur because of the process of shared meaning making, seeing and hearing the other, and co-sense making and catalyzes a form of **group agency**. One student team leader explained: *"There are resounding recurrent themes in the heart of my team. Now my team walks away with one heart. Our spirits have been exposed to each other. We are revealed in our truest selves. All that we do now will be TRUE."*

The music **clarifies passion and purpose**. One student wrote: *"If we want our houses to be led by leaders passionately and purposefully, then we need to invest in opportunities like these music sessions, that draw out our passions and our purpose."*

The shared space where students listen to each other's story through music **contributes to a sense of intimacy and belonging and** offers team leaders to understand their team members. *"Listening to my*

committee through the lens of music was transformational for my view of the team. Seeing them being vulnerable has inspired me to open more to them.”

The permission to express emotion and spirituality scales up the intimacy within the session and creates the possibilities for **greater belonging**. What happens in the group can often spill over into interactions in the residential house or student committee, well after the workshop.

The music work offers an **accessible and powerful commentary on social justice issues** – the students can name and frame political and economic issues that are part of the structural violence that occurs in South Africa. Music easily contains social commentary and has the effect of softening hearts in relation to a specific issue. There are many spaces for dialogue and there is some fatigue among students for verbal dialogue. The music offers a fresh space. The music is also de-colonized, freeing each person to express what is true and comfortable, without adherence to a specific tradition (This is important in the South African context, but may have relevance in other countries.)

The methodology helps to **deepen the lived experience of what diversity feels like** – not as an intellectual concept, but with a layered and nuanced portrayal of lived experienced through music. All diversities come through gender, race, class, economic, and cultural.

The Practitioner Experience and Guidance for Practitioners

Future Challenges for Organization Transformation Practitioners

Margaret Wheatley ([2002](#)) counsels that when diminishing control exists, as in contemporary paradigms of organizational change, the best way to become a catalyst is through the power of one’s relationships.

Organization development professionals who help clients build relationships through methodologies such as *Finding US in Music* are likely to be more in demand and more valued as the fragmentation in world intensifies. In this age, practitioners of organizational health need not only to show up differently, but they also need to hone their way of being, to incorporate the greater call for personal presence.

Increasingly, practitioners will be asked to leverage the human glue, the intangible assets of teams that exist within groups and communities inside organizations. Trained practitioners will be asked (perhaps not in these exact words) to intertwine the interests of “I” with those of the “other” to build a “we-centeredness.” For organizations to thrive in the twenty-first century, participatory consciousness may become essential to achieve their overall performance goals.

The *Finding US in Music* methodology provides a respectful, soulful, democratic, and participatory process where music combines with *Ubuntu* in ways that enable people to see, affirm, and appreciate others. Both the individual contemplative experience and the group feedback in this process cultivate the potential for personal transformation and group transformation sorely needed in business, government, social, and other forms of organizations.

The guidelines offered here outline practical steps and include awareness of organizational steps. These help to:

- Prepare individuals with contemplative background before participating in a workshop
- Create an enabling the environment that evokes authentic group engagement
- Cultivate the positive inner attitude of the practitioner/facilitator

Bring reverence into the session's dynamics
Provide practical organizational steps for facilitators
Facilitate deeper listening
Facilitate participant feedback

Organizational Steps for Facilitators

Group size: Small groups of 8–10 are ideal and the time required is 3 h.

Maturity of group: This methodology works best in a group where the members have lived together or worked together for at least a month so that they have some basis for giving feedback.

Participation agreement: Groups should only be convened when the group has made the choice to participate in the group. That groups intended to engage with each other in the service of transformation is affirmed by Frizzell and Banner ([2018](#)).

Tone: The facilitator sets the tone for a safe and appreciative environment in the introduction to the session

Attitude: The facilitator's inner attitude and presence is key. Embody Ubuntu, respect, reverence for all, show up

Safety and Intimacy: Create a safe space that is also a generative space and gently invite in intimate connection so that group members can surface personal stories without fear.

Inner Preparation by the Facilitator: Personal Orientation and Presentation

The *Finding US in Music* approach advocates that practitioners cultivate a personal quality of attention and an inner orientation that enables and encourages them to work from ever deepening levels and wholeness *of their own being*.

Be Aware of Ego

A critical skill for a facilitator is to be aware of one's own egoic responses to music. The facilitator should truly listen to and for the interpretations of the other as much as possible. This ability takes time to nurture and develop. It requires purposeful training. It is so easy to be trapped into a highly subjective interpretation of music and successful facilitation should guard against this tendency.

Invite in the Essence of Others

An important skill for facilitators is the ability to invite into the group the essence of each person who is participating. This intentional invitation helps participants discern and distil their own being and experience a sense of the self through the music.

Invite Intention and Reverence into the Group Setting

Setting the tone is key.

A small circle of limited duration that is intentional about its process will have a deeper, more life-giving impact than a large, ongoing community that is shaped by the norms of conventional culture. (Palmer [2009](#), p. 75)

The best practitioners apply their own form of sacred commitment to this work, bringing into the space a reverence and appreciation for the profound process that is occurring within the group. Some even use words such as “soul” and “reverence” when describing themselves in connection to their facilitation.

I have used this invitational image set the tone:

Each of you is a unique human being. So, when you present your story and share your music – each of you is drawing a frame around your unique inner landscape for us. And then you are painting, through your music and your words, the color and textures, small and large nuances and narrative of your story.

The angle you select for your story is your chosen frame, defined by your own perspective, and crafted with your own paintbrush making your own creative interpretations and leaps. Once we have heard your story and listened to your music, each of us then becomes a co-artist- and a co-creator – adding our insights and strokes to your picture, through our own paintbrushes. So, each of us will add colours shapes and textures, insights and meaning to your landscape or portrait.

Music can stimulate strong personal images in each listener. Be sure to find the balance between freeing your imagination but listening for how you can bring about a clearer and deeper understanding of your fellow house member, or team member. So, if this is your painting, choose to listen and let in our insights and the new colours we offer to your picture, but in the end, you will have the final say, and will be put the final touches on the landscape of your life – as the final maker of meaning of your own life.

We are all here to understand who you are, to add to your understanding and then to add to our group’s understanding of you want to become.

Whatever the style of the facilitator, at the very beginning the facilitator must establish trust within the group and a sense of safety and sacredness. Ubuntu is grounded in this sense of sacredness. This workshop is a way to live and embody Ubuntu in all that this concept means – with presence, sensitivity, language, style, and tone of facilitation.

Once group intention is invited into the collective experience of the group, participants engage authentically and sincerely in the process (with very few exceptions).

Por ([2015](#)) offers useful language about the preparation of the inner being required for entering a group noting that inner attitude is conducive to the emergence of a potent intersubjective field of “shared mindfulness.”

An inner attitude allows practitioners to sense what is happening more accurately, think more clearly, act more coherently, and achieve greater collective results. Accurate sensing is a key competence that must also be cultivated. It is as important as accurate mirroring. How questions are framed and how feedback is given is framed by sensing and mirroring.

Por adds that instead of talking *about* mindfulness, it is important to talk “ *from* and *to* mindfulness, from mine to yours, from yours to mine.” When two or more people are gifting their conversation and their interpersonal relationship with an intentional attention, the space created between them becomes a space of shared mindfulness. Such a practice enables a deeper sense of connection and “adds more presence and significance to the experience of each participant.”

Develop the Practitioner’s Personal Listening Skills

Practitioners may want to focus developing and honing their own competencies for listening to music in a conscious, compassionate, layered, and creative way. It is important that the facilitator personally experience listening to music flexibly and fluidly in ways that extend his/her own being and imagination. With this personal knowledge and awareness, the facilitator can accurately mirror feedback with full awareness of the distortions of one's own music preferences or ego.

Thomas Hübl's course in Transparent Communication is an excellent resource to help refine the competencies to listen to others with more conscious awareness and to show up with greater presence (<https://thomashublonline.com/courses/transparentcommunication/>). The Finding Us in Music method calls for an ability to be *changed by the process of deep listening* to the words and the music on different levels, to the essence of the music. Attuning to how the students are making sense of their own lives through the music can also be informed by Hübl's approach (<http://www.thomasubl.com/en/approach-methods.html>).

The Hübl practice and the concomitant skills can be integrated into facilitator practices when conducting workshops with the *Finding US in Music* approach. This involves taking participants to levels of awareness where they begin to experience music with greater attention.

This happens by holding a clear intention and openness to each person in the group and by bringing, presence, knowledge, and imagination to that intention. Then, the leader can apply musical, emotional, and spiritual intelligence to listening and group facilitation. From the foundation of a clear and receptive inner attitude, the leader is a role model of presence and artful inquiry. This example helps each student enter a soulful place as they listen to music.

In addition to Hübl, many gifted coaches and facilitators are available worldwide. Any practice that refines the capacity to use music as the foreground for conversation, awareness, and personal growth is helpful. Appropriate training is also necessary, as music can evoke profound emotion and to successfully facilitate this requires a mix of well-developed competencies. While this work may sound simple, music evokes profound responses and it is essential that facilitators are well trained so they can manage their subjectivity in relation to music and to respond to the emotion that the integration of story and music can release.

Facilitate Deeper Levels of Listening by Each Participant

A central aspect of this approach is to foster a more conscious, subtle, and refined way to listen – by all group members.

The invitation to listen with whatever dominant intelligence emerges naturally (visual, musical, verbal, kinaesthetic, interpersonal, interpersonal) is another way simply to refine awareness of how they listen. Invite in creativity and intuition, so that each listener becomes a co-artist. The quality of consciousness for listening helps to transform the consciousness of the listener.

Role-modelling conscious listening is an important part of the process. Otto Scharmer's model describing the levels of listening is particularly instructive. The *Finding US in Music* approach discourages listening at the level of 1 and 2 – listening as simply downloading. It encourages listening from level 3 (empathic listening from the heart) and 4 – listening from the future – in a more generative way.

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Facilitate Engagement During Feedback Conversations

Personal narratives are enlivened, illustrated, and embodied by musical choices. One’s story is augmented by the music choices one makes. The challenge of linking music, narrative, and meaning inspires insightful levels of presentation of the self by the individual narrator.

As described above, empathic and generative listening is given by the other group members. Then a further layer of interpretation and meaning-making takes place as members of the group provide their insights and feedback to the narrator about his/her track of music.

For practitioners, because listening to music can be such a subjective process, the approach explicitly relies on being able to hold and guide sensitive sharing of insights and other-centered feedback process. Insights from different group members build on one another, so that meaning is interpreted, refined, re-interpreted, and re-integrated.

With useful feedback by others, the narrator can discern what is most helpful to his/her self-understanding and can then re-make meaning with the added benefit of the collective wisdom in the group.

The facilitator holds the responsibility to generate optimal group engagement. The following page builds on and adapts a very useful table in an article by Chene Swart ([2015](#)) whose book, *Reauthoring the World* (Swart [2013](#)), is an excellent resource for biographical storytelling as a transformative modality in organizations. **Table 1**

Guidelines for listeners and facilitators (Adapted from Swart [2015](#))

Listeners are invited to	Encourage the listeners to avoid
Listen to understand the person’s music and suspend judgment about the genre of the music	Judging and evaluating the genre of the music
Listen with respect and with reverence	Criticism of the person
Listen with openness and creative license. See which intelligences naturally are evoked as you listen to the music – visual images, insights, and memories	Listening with a narrow mind Listening in one dimension
Trust your intuition and imagination – there are no wrong answers	Worry about being wrong
Use your lived experience of the person whose music it is to offer an appreciative comment or insight about the person	
Use your creative listening and knowledge of the person to link your insights to the person, the narrator	Offering feedback that is mainly about you the listener – don’t get stuck in the I
Listen to understand the other Focus on the person’s music and story – listen through their eyes and ears as primary and then add your insights as secondary but complementary commentary	Describing a response to the person offering a track of music in the third person

Listen with an open heart and mind. Offer generous listening and speak directly to the person narrating his/her story through music. Use I/thou. I hear or I notice this about you in the music	Speaking too much about your own personal journey when you hear the music Speaking about the person in the third person
Offer insights that come from a place of authentic knowing and experiences	Speaking in-authentically or in a politically correct way
Listen with respect and reverence	Imposing judgment
Be okay with not being sure about your insights, and take an intuitive creative leap to offer an interpretation to add to the meaning making process	
Offer discerning, authentic, and generous feedback that shifts the narrative	Being critical
Be humble in the way that you offer feedback	Being arrogant

General Tips for Practitioners

Appreciative inquiry and other qualities of conversation: focus the conversation by inviting members of the group to participate in inquiry that is appreciative, not confrontational, and invite in creativity, honesty, humility, imagination, listening with all senses, and use of all one's intelligences – visual, verbal, kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal (Gardner [2011](#)).

Modelling and feedback: role model how to share from the depths of one's person. Role model generative questions, gentle appreciative inquiry, deep listening, nonjudgment. Give accurate affirming feedback humbly but clearly.

Pace and Content: keep attention fluid and flexible. Expect anything to emerge – political values, social concerns, personal trauma, spirituality, vulnerabilities, and self-mastery issues may come up. Real and aspirational visions of the future can be articulated.

Humility: stay humble, aware that knowledge and insights about each person is co-created and becomes a shared and communal process. The facilitator's voice becomes just one voice within the collective.

Caring: recognize that as group members co-create their mutual understanding, they become more sensitive to each other and often opt to demonstrate both caring and greater generosity; this becomes a kind form of accountability to each other.

Creativity: be in touch with your own intuition and creativity as a facilitator, and hone the ability to integrate music and narrative in the way you process what is unfolding.

As the session progresses, the quality of sharing fosters human connectedness; vulnerability is welcomed, and generative questions are asked to deepen the meaning making process. Tissues may be called for, although they are not always needed.

Comments on the Impact a Skilled Facilitator May Have on Others

These suggested guidelines for practitioners and facilitators are designed to shape and shift the quality of the consciousness and behavior of the listeners and participants in a *Finding US in Music* workshop.

The facilitator is always role-modelling discerning yet caring feedback in an authentic natural way and always using powerful positive questions according to appreciative inquiry principles such as

How can we hear you in the music?

What shall we listen for in the music to know you better?

As the group feedback unfolds, often one insight builds on another so that a fuller, larger picture of each person emerges – the collective wisdom almost always comes through. The quality of group attention, together with the feedback the narrators receive, extends and can transform the self-understanding.

The experience of being seen is both affirmative and sometimes can be transformative. It is not uncommon that a group member offers an insight that captures the essence of the narrator's larger story and is immediately recognized as true by the narrator, but not previously known. This can be an extremely moving moment, enabling the narrator to re-integrate or transform their self-understanding in a profound way. Frequently, in feedback forms, students say that they had no idea that they were so well known or understood by fellow students.

A principle drawn from the Zulu Maxim *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – a person becomes a person through other people – is an accurate description for the generous ontology of Ubuntu that not only creates intimacy, but affirms connection through relationship. During a transformative moment, which has arisen through shared insights, it may be helpful to even say these words, *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, when in a South African setting.

There is something magical about the emotional moment when a student feels so appreciated and understood that words are difficult to find. The transformative potential of powerful insights that have arisen in the group are profoundly moving. These are the fleeting, powerful ineffable moments where people feel seen and the mutual recognition in the shared discovery shifts the energy in the group. The presence of Ubuntu is sometimes explicitly mentioned. One student wrote: "*we are all good people; each person in our house loves and cares about the greater good of the house.*"

The new language, the more substantial sense of self and the webs of mutual understanding offer a gentle transformative push. What emerges in the music process is not seen as an end but at a beginning of a process. Peter Gabel names this "desire for mutual recognition as a social force that radiates throughout and across the social fabric of the world, as a vector emerging (as a force and a longing) out from the centre of each person as a pole of social being toward each other person" (Gabel [2018](#)). This is where the yearnings for connection, the strengths and the challenges of each team member, the similarities and differences between group members often become clarified and sometimes transformed. Bonding occurs within the group and in the words of the students, "*invisible bridges are built between us*"; "*people got to know each other's hearts in the priceless purity of the moment.*" People in the group discover what Gabel ([2018](#)) calls "the beauty of our co-present collective humanity, not as a collection of individuals, but as an interconnected unity of differentiated social being."

As discovered from focus group discussions, written feedback forms and anecdotal evidence, this methodology is shown to humanize and change group relationships. After the session, the group often retains the transformative spark which stimulates new insights, interactions, and group behavior. The process of seeing each other as human beings helps students understand the implications of what has been shared. The bonding that occurs can and does transformed relationships in the groups. Each group, of course, is different and has its own unique dynamic.

Conclusion

Discipline, hard work, rationality, and calculation can get us only so far; and in time will become the norm. But with this only, we will produce efficient but mediocre citizens. These are tools that can be used for good or ill. But the science of intuition – the mysterious spark that separates the great discoverers and philosophers and artists from the nearly great – this will one day have to be studied and used for the common good. (Ben Okri [2002](#))

The creativity and co-creative ethos of *Finding US in Music* offers an important animating process within which to find the kind of spark that Okri refers to in his quote.

In the new soils of the rocky twenty-first-century terrain, whether you are in South Africa or South Carolina, universities and organizations will need to increase the investment in social technologies that promote individual and collective organizational health. Such opportunities for individual and group offer the potential for transformation, one person at a time, one group at a time.

Organizational development approaches will need to build stronger adhesives that strengthen mutual understanding in organizations for them to face and deal with increasingly complex challenges and social fragmentation.

In *The Secret Lives of Plants* (Tomkins and Bird [1989](#)), a character plays classical music to the cacti in his home. As a result, the cacti start shedding their own thorns. We live in a world where we cannot afford to continue to hurt each other with our thorns. In a world that is simultaneously polarizing and waking up to our mutual connectedness, the metaphor that music could help to shed thorns in the flowering of our own collective consciousness offers an image of hope.

Music has the potential to dissolve and transform the hardness of the heart and create the possibility for human beings to own the paradoxes, the ambiguities, the dreams, and the fears in their lives to engage in profound connection. It is in the offering of self through music in a relational setting that the wounds that still hurt can be owned and shared and be transformed.

Music is a language which is large and generous enough to hold the spiritual and the secular, dissonance and harmony, and paradox and ambiguity. Music expresses the universal, the sacred and the profane, the revolutionary and the conservative, power and vulnerability, the sublime and the ridiculous, the gross and the subtle, and the beautiful and the ugly. As a mirror of life music is profoundly accurate and the potential for the truth it offers in sowing the seeds for transformation is relevant to organizations.

Our collective journey depends on whether we can co-evolve within organizations and in society at large.

An evolving culture within organizations and within societies requires critical and creative impulses of renewal from within and without. Music can become one of those positive impulses. This process helps to enliven and reactivate meaning, opening reservoirs of meaning that music and spirituality can give on all levels – the individual, the organization community, and society.

The combination of music, Ubuntu, and appreciative inquiry offers us an integral humanism that resonates with the emerging need to enliven and enrich the “we” spaces in twenty-first-century organizations. We need to release the creative potential that lies in the interaction between individuals and between groups, whether on campuses or in business organizations where diverse cultures and spiritualities meet.

Organizational development theory and practice has been dominated by western paradigms. It is time to harvest the gifts that other parts of the world offer. It is time to embrace the gifts of the southern hemisphere, of Africa, and of Ubuntu. We need to find a way to communicate with each other, re-

humanize each other, and transform each other. One song at a time. One group at a time. One organization at a time.

Since organizations require creative impulses of renewal from within and without. As Michael Jones ([2016](#)) says music should be seen not only as a side note playing in background or serving as entertainment – but also as an aid that has the potential to become a significant force for healing, change, and transformation.

The educational theorist Maxine Greene ([1995](#)) argued that the arts can no longer be extras, or nice to have; they need to assume a more central place among organizational initiatives.

Our collective transformation in organizations and in societies depends on whether we can merge personal transformation in a group context and co-evolve with each other. If we can keep group engagement alive through a process of mutual respect and purposeful co-evolution, our collective potential to renew ourselves as organizations and as one big tribe who artfully cares about our common humanity can be released.

Cross-References

[Activating the Corporate Soul](#)

[Collective Virtuosity: Lessons in Personal and Small Group Transformation from Classical Chamber Musicians](#)

[Global Transformation: Visions of an Imminent Future](#)

[It's Not What You Do, It's Who You Are](#)

[Leader Self-Development, Psychological Maturation, and Meditation: Elements of a Transformative Journey](#)

[Whole System Transformation with Music](#)

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