

Sector Connector

Music in the workplace



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If you're human, you're musical.

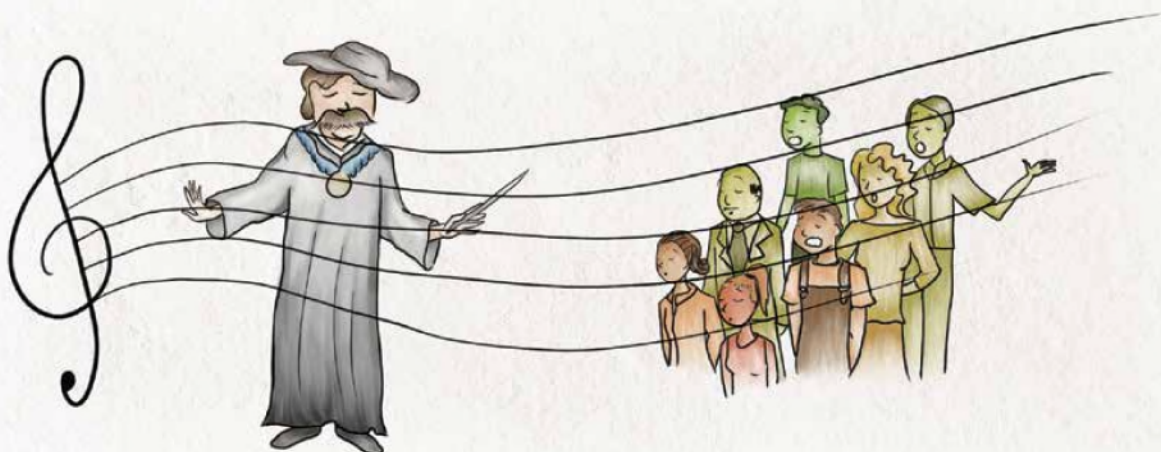
It's a defining feature of our species, invoked for as many reasons as there are audible notes, which by the way is around 120.

As musical as your human self is, you may not play an instrument or keep a rhythm very well. But if you can walk, talk, scream, whisper and laugh, you can sing.

The benefits of singing are both obvious and subtle. Benefits for the individual include better breathing, exercising the mind and body to work as a unit and, because singing is a focused activity, stray thoughts disappear for a while, one of the principles behind meditation of course.

The subtle benefits are in how singing (and music generally) bonds, defines and gives identity to relationships and human groups. Ask any community choir member why they do it and they're likely to talk about social life, the fun of rehearsals and when performing, the joy of tribal achievement.

I worked many years with a council where musicality and workplace singing rated quite highly with staff, managers and councillors alike. This was a coincidence of a corporate culture keen to be innovative with employee and organisational development, a CEO who understood the value of singing together for wellbeing and goodwill, and the municipal context of a traditionally creative and musical community



(the creative epicentre being Melbourne's playground, St Kilda).

The workplace was often in song, including a long standing staff choir that performed at civic events and community celebrations, even taking the idea to the council's Japanese sister city to jointly form their Sister City Singers.

What enabled all this? It was an acknowledgement that workplace singing could fulfil some organisational development objectives. Musical activities gained direct support with a budget for hiring those choir masters, musicians and producers who can get the best out of people who say 'oh, I can't sing'.

Effectively an incentive.

Then there was the innovative part. Recognising that a corporate act (staff singers) publicly performing corporate songs (eg familiar melodies with lyrics rewritten to be municipally relevant) could be a great way of showing council's human face and building reputation among constituents. For a few years, this is exactly what happened.

Reflecting on this, I wondered what place music and singing have in workplaces now. A straw poll of colleagues in communications and organisation development roles revealed very little. The most

common examples are staff getting together to sing at Christmas and special occasions, and talent 'show and tell' events. Examples of sustained singing activity are far and few between, and I'd guess that corporate support for such programs even rarer. Put me right if you can.

Seems to me that singing is good for human groups who must cooperate, coordinate and collaborate to fulfil their purpose. A budget for singing and musical activity would be a fine investment in workplace wellbeing, on par with subsidised massages and gym passes I'd suggest. **■**