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# Listening with Spirit and the Art of Team Dialogue

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Listening  
with Spirit

61

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This article concerns one of the most visible yet illusive aspects of life in organizations: teams that *click* or have *chemistry* and teams that do not. Everyone has had *magic moments* on teams, whether in sports, drama, families, emergency situations, or task forces and work units. We know at the experiential level what exceptional teamwork feels like. We know less about how to describe this experience or even how to notice it while it is happening. Most often, it just happens, feels good, and bears fruit – a breakthrough idea, creating something new, saving someone, winning or eliciting spontaneous applause or a standing ovation.

Directors, orchestra leaders, mayors, generals, coaches, managers, self-directing teams and collaborative communities often ask the same question (whether they know it or not): “How do we attain and sustain this special state of chemistry, magic, or whatever it is? How do we get into that zone and stay there?”

This article reports findings on an approach that suggests that a connection between *listening with spirit* and *team dialogue* is a skill – learnable and repeatable by teams in the workplace – that often correlates with attaining and sustaining breakthrough creativity, insight and extraordinary performance.

The approach I have been researching and applying takes an alternative approach to small-group interaction as the building block underlying the many change strategies that currently emphasize team-based work. My core research question builds on Peter Senge’s (1990) and David Bohm’s (1990) distinction between dialogue and discussion. Dialogue is the more creative, open-ended activity of a group *thinking together*. It is a conversation for possibility (Flores, 1979). Discussion is about options, actions and choice. It narrows and focuses. It is a conversation for action (Flores, 1979). In *discussion*, people take and hold positions, like in a debate; in *dialogue*, people suspend their positions and probe others for their reasoning to discover new possibilities.

For teams in a learning organization, what counts most is tapping the quality of ideas that are available only to teams composed of members who practise a way of working together that gives the team access to the best of their collective, creative thinking. This is the primary benefit of dialogue, according to Peter Senge. This collective creativity sometimes exhibits the quality of a common spirit revealing itself. The vehicle for receiving these new insights is a quality of detached, *selfless listening* which connects listener, teller and spirit. It can be thought of as *emptying oneself* or *creating a vessel* for receiving or containing spirit. Creating this larger, common vessel for receiving is what truly harnesses the power of the collectivity.

The core of team dialogue is *collectively listening with spirit*. That is: a group of people listens (individually) with selfless receptivity to each other's ideas, thereby emptying themselves to create a common vessel which – shaped by and sustained by the power of the group's *collective listening* – receives and contains a collective spirit.

This article traces the roots of this approach to many disciplines. It explains how it works and what I have learned from using it in research, consultation, and teaching. Finally, it suggests future directions for research and practice.

### **Tools for Dialogue**

Some of the most powerful concepts about organizing and managing in the turbulent 1990s are continuous learning, knowledge, diversity, empowerment, globalization and teaming. All are aimed at important (but lofty) goals like long-term competitiveness and paradigm shift. All presuppose efficient and creative face-to-face communication. Few provide substantive tools or concepts for achieving communication that emphasizes team creativity. Perhaps the closest is Peer Senge's inclusion of "team learning" (based on team dialogue) as one of the five disciplines of the learning organization. This research aims to extend and deepen what Senge calls *team dialogue*.

The dialogue of which Senge writes depends on the courage and ability of individual's to share intuitions and thoughtful musings without feeling the need to perform or impress. An important element of a team process that supports such freedom from judgement is the quality of "listening with spirit" by the other team members individually and, even more important, as a team listening together.

Senge's approach offers some powerful images and some useful general guidelines, but it is thin on tools and skills for attaining and sustaining dialogue. My approach is to argue for and illustrate the centrality of the skill of listening with emphasis on collective listening as a team skill.

### **Contributing Disciplines to Selfless, Receptive Listening**

This approach weaves together and makes tangible four approaches with which I have been working for the past few years. These are:

- (1) The client-centred psychotherapy of Carl Rogers.
- (2) Participation-observation roles of ethnographic fieldworkers.
- (3) Phenomenological observation (Husserl and Heidegger).
- (4) Detached objectivity in the spiritual science of Rudolph Steiner.

#### *The Client-centred Psychotherapy of Carl Rogers*

Carl Rogers' is still an excellent starting point for anyone dealing with the skill of listening. His statement at the beginning of *On Becoming a Person* (1960) and previously stated in *Barriers and Gateways to Communication* (Rogers and Roethlisberger, 1952), reframes listening as a critical and paradoxical skill:

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As I try to listen to myself and the experiencing going on in me, and the more I try to extend that same listening attitude to another person, the more respect I feel for the complex process of life (Rogers, 1960, p. 21).

If I can listen to what he can tell me, if I can understand how it seems to him, if I can see its personal meaning for him, if I can sense the emotional flavor which it has for him, then I will be releasing potent forces of change in him (Rogers and Roethlisberger, 1952, p. 3).

It is a very paradoxical thing – that to the degree that each one of us is willing to be himself, then he finds not only himself changing; but he finds that other people to whom he relates are also changing (Rogers, 1960, p. 22).

This is a psychological (rather psychotherapeutic) model involving one-to-one communication in which Rogers discovers the paradox that forces of action and change are stirred up or released by active listening. The *changing* also happens to both parties.

#### *Participation-observation Roles of Ethnographic Fieldworkers*

A similar notion of listening receptively is central to ethnographic observation and interviewing. The reversal of expert and teacher role is fundamental to understanding and describing a culture. James Spradley (1979) says of the skid-row bums who were his informants: “I listened, watched, and allowed these men to become my teachers”. A key practice of ethnographic field work is allowing informants to tell their stories in their ways while the ethnographer temporarily suspends the cultural categories and cultural meanings which he/she has brought with him/her to the field. Analogous to the forces of change unleashed via Rogers’ psychotherapeutic model is the informant’s increased access to implicit, tacit knowledge about the cultural meaning of her actions, feelings, and thoughts.

In short, via the psychological and ethnographic approaches to listening, what was previously inaccessible or inexpressible is made available and can be expressed and/or acted on.

#### *Phenomenological Observation (Husserl and Heidegger)*

Phenomenological observation exhibits a paradoxical reversal (like Rogers and ethnographic observation) but in philosophical terms which stress that object (or idea) or phenomenon should be allowed to reveal itself. By framing or *bracketing* (in Husserl’s term) the phenomenon and then *varying* it, the phenomenon reveals its true nature (Savage, 1973). Heidegger goes further, radically reconnecting the observer with the observed and applying hermeneutic cycles to knowing phenomena (Winograd and Flores, 1986). This means that even as a phenomenon is revealing itself, it is also concealing some portion of itself. That concealed self may become revealed in a future hermeneutic cycle, which will again conceal as well. The main point for our purpose is to approach the object of perception with receptivity, not with hypotheses to test or categorize to verify. In this way, the phenomenon is allowed to reveal itself.

#### *Detached Objectivity in the Spiritual Science of Rudolph Steiner*

The final approach that has influenced my ideas about listening is the spiritual science (anthroposophy) of Rudolph Steiner as applied to group, organization

and human development via a community of consultants beginning in the 1950s with Bernard Lievegoed (1972, 1973, 1991) in The Netherlands and, more recently, Christopher Schaefer and Tijno Voors (1986) in the US. Employing Steiner's approach to listening and to group work, the art of listening is a spiritual act connecting listener, teller and spirit. The stance of the listener is one of selfless openness, objectivity, and detachment – allowing the spirit in the teller's telling to speak to the listener. The teller practises the same objectivity and detachment, allowing the spirit to speak through him.

As we move from Rogers to Steiner, from a psychotherapy model to one based on spiritual science, a couple of patterns emerge. First, listening itself becomes less literal and more metaphorical an activity. That is, I am listening through your words, feelings, and thoughts to the soul within you that is also within me. In this sense, auditory listening is only an approximate way of describing the quality of my receptivity to you, and likewise with the group's quality of engaging with your "ideas." Lievegoed (1972) captures this in saying:

to be able to understand the other person – there must be quietness in one's heart. One's soul must be quiet so that one can perceive what is going on in the other soul (p. 63).

Second, this form of receptive listening moves beyond the empathy of Rogers' helping stance, beyond ethnography's goal of obtaining cultural knowledge about a community, and beyond the phenomenological goal of allowing the phenomenon to reveal its true nature.

### **Applying the Spiritual Approach to Groups**

Using this framework, group creativity appears to exhibit a common spirit revealing itself. The vehicle for receiving this insight or *connecting with spirit*, is a quality of detached, selfless openness. It is like emptying oneself or creating a vessel for receiving and containing spirit. This process is common to many spiritual disciplines including the practice of Chinese medicine, the governance of some episcopal organizations, Zen and healing approaches like 12-step recovery programmes.

In short, wisdom, insight, change and action come not from better thinking, testing and strategizing, but from letting go, receiving and listening. Moreover, the act of collectively letting go and thereby creating a larger, common vessel for receiving is what truly harnesses the power of the collectivity in ways that the collaborative participation ideals of even the most effective human relations approaches do not.

### **Steiner's Spiritual Science and Senge's Dialogue – The Spiritual Connection**

Perhaps most important for our purpose of establishing a connection between listening and dialogue is the striking similarity between this notion of allowing the spirit of the group to speak and Senge's description of team dialogue. He says the purpose of dialogue for teams in a learning organization (committed first and foremost to the production and widespread use of innovation) is tapping the

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quality of ideas that are available only to teams composed of members who practise a way of working together that gives them access to the best of their collective thinking. Reaping the benefits of teamness requires more than having the right people; more than developing vision, norms, roles and agenda; and more than excellent human relations skills.

This *more* is what I strive for in my current research and consulting and is based on the similarity between the benefits of dialogue according to Senge and the selfless listening approach of Rudolf Steiner and his follower, Marjorie Spock. Senge (1990) describes dialogue as a “free-flowing of meaning through a group, allowing the group to discover insights not attainable individually” (p. 10). He also writes, quoting David Bohm: “Part of the vision of dialogue is the assumption of a ‘larger pool of meaning’ accessible only to a group” (p. 239).

By comparison, Steiner (1947) speaks about achieving this larger access and free-flowing of meaning using terms like soul, silence, and selflessness. He describes it as: “...listening...to one’s colleagues in exactly the way one would listen to the spiritual world...making one’s own soul a seedbed for others’ germinal ideas” (p. 46). He says, “When the inner self is absolutely silent... (and you) listen to the words of others quite selflessly...then (you) hear through the words into the soul of the other” (p. 47). This connection, he says, is available only to those “who by selfless listening, train themselves to be really receptive from within, in stillness” (p. 48).

Marjorie Spock (1983a) extends Steiner’s listening approach to groups. She makes a clear distinction between discussion and conversation; she calls it “Goethean conversation”. This sounds just like Senge/Bohm’s dialogue/discussion, but with an explicit inclusion of the spiritual dimension. This added dimension is made clear via Spock’s use of words such as vessel, grail cup, and shared meditation. It is my thesis that these metaphors accurately describe what really occurs when groups do achieve access to the larger truths possible in the group dialogue of which Bohm speaks. (Conversely, they describe what is absent when groups do not access larger truths.) That groups may neither be aware of this spiritual component nor use this language for describing what is happening does not affect whether or not they have access to the larger truths.

Spock (1983a) eloquently describes what occurs in these shared meditations in which a group makes itself into a vessel for receiving spiritual truth. She uses the metaphor of going to the boundary, a threshold, the border of another country to describe this senses of group movement and receptivity. She writes:

It is vital to distinguish between discussions and conversations. Intellects active in discussion typically *make straight for the mark* of a conclusion; they penetrate fact as though with mental arrows, unaware that the fact may be a living thing that dies when so approached and becomes nothing more than a taxidermist’s specimen. Whereas those who engage in conversations see their function as a group-process of inviting truth exactly as they would invite a human guest, and making the atmosphere receptive to it.

But they do not expect thoughts to come to them in the physical world. They must go out to the world of thought to see and shape their understanding to the shape of truth. It is as though they take themselves to the border of where the truth lives and there make of their souls a dwelling suited to receive and entertain the question. Or it could be said that a Grail Cup is

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fashioned in a communal exercise of intuition and held up to receive the precious essence of the living thought (p. 30).

The vehicle for this journey and the clay for shaping this vessel is the art of communally receptive listening. Spock (1983a) says:

If listening is the art of opening oneself to what lives in another's spirit, dialogue or conversation on the same high level adds the communal art of shaping the life evoked by listening and, through group effort, bringing out its fuller possibilities (p. 19).

### **A Framework for Observation and Intervention**

Using this framework for understanding team dialogue, I have observed teams seeking breakthrough ideas and intervened with teams using these metaphors and descriptions of team creativity. I have also intervened by holding these images within my own consciousness (and with co-facilitators) as a guiding image for more conventional interventions in group dynamics.

The following examples illustrate some of my findings. Data collected are all from informal personal observation. These represent a first step in a more formal research process to correlate group breakthroughs in the work context with collective, spiritual listening. Possible next steps are discussed in a later section on opportunities for future research.

### **Global Integration Research Team**

In five years as an internal organizational development (OD) consultant with Digital Equipment Corporation, I had opportunities to work with teams at different levels and functions within the corporation. Some of those teams were project-related phases of management development programmes. The story of one team in a global executive development programme on enterprise-wide integration illustrates the impact of listening and learning on team creativity and cohesion.

The global team of eight members included one from Puerto Rico and one from Geneva. Members were senior executives with worldwide responsibilities in sales and marketing functions. Meetings were held monthly, with regular conference calls every two weeks. Often, someone attended via conference call.

The team's topic was strategic alliances with partners for whom the lines of competition were not clear. They used the term "co-opetition". They interviewed 30 members of a major competitor/collaborator in the systems integration business and 30 employees of Digital. The purpose of meetings was sorting and condensing the data they had collected for presentation to a larger meeting of five executive teams working on similar projects. I was their consultant.

The team never discussed listening or spirituality. This group always worked effectively, even before I got involved. What was apparent in my first few meetings with them was their openness to learning. By the end, this team was rated the highest of 15 teams at placing group learning as the highest priority.

Two months after my initial contract with them and after three meetings in which we organized the data, a final session for model building was held. We knew we wanted a concise, accessible visual to capture our best learning about forming and managing strategic alliances. No one was on conference call. Five

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of us were packed into a small room with white board and flipchart. One key member was absent.

For bursts of sometimes more than an hour at a time, this group exhibited a spontaneity and simultaneity of dialogue via experimentation on flipcharts, whiteboards and side conversations, which is rare in my experience. People championed different content and pictures, but (in Senge's terms) "held their positions lightly". The speed with which ideas were presented, shifted and merged was exhilarating. This is one of the ways I know that listening was taking place. The effort exhibited to incorporate others' ideas was genuine and constant. Requests for explanation of the reasoning behind suggestions and their assumptions came naturally.

The group exhibited the ability and willingness to hold itself in this state of simultaneous, multiple, merging ideas without needing resolution. It was in this holding of possibilities that I felt a powerful collective listening. Then, and now, I am awed by the way in which they integrated (without compromising) major ideas from more than five different models. The leadership revolved, everyone felt that their ideas were included. The breakthrough product was clearly a result of this collective process.

In short, this is an example of a clear connection between the dialogue process and breakthrough discovery. This is also an example of how collective listening and spiritual listening can operate independent of consciousness about them.

### **Contributing to Breakthrough Creativity in Work Redesign**

Another example of the listening/dialogue process is illustrated by the experience of Rhonda in an information systems work design team of eight people. Involved with each other for intense three-day blocks of work redesign of the information systems design and delivery process, this group struggled quite a bit during the first two three-day blocks. They had been severely stuck and created some personal damage and insecurity as a result. They had responded twice to consultation, once from me, once from my partner.

We challenged them to seek a breakthrough to avoid redesigning the same system they currently had, but this group had extreme difficulty allowing themselves to innovate. In one instance, the group appeared to have achieved consensus around an innovation, but Rhonda was in disagreement.

During a 20-minute period, I actively coached them to stay with Rhonda and coached Rhonda to stay with her concerns and objections. What emerged was a courageous act for Rhonda and the other members. They listened collectively and openly to Rhonda's continual thinking out loud, despite her repeatedly saying: "I don't know how to say what I mean", and "I guess I'm just being stubborn" and "I guess I just don't get it". The group's courage was in relaxing their judgement of her and letting go of their need for closure to trust that Rhonda was on to something useful to their innovation but with which she had not yet made clear contact. Rhonda's courage was believing in herself despite pressure from the group.

The group tried the non-intuitive alternative of creating a vessel, holding the space for Rhonda to work through and discover her own thinking. In the process, Rhonda felt safe enough to find clearer articulation of her concerns. The group found out what was really at the bottom of Rhonda's concerns and the group's innovation was strengthened by Rhonda's holding out.

This became a breakthrough lesson in breakthrough. With listening collectively as an alternative to stuckness, they learned that this kind of obstacle is often an opportunity for breakthrough. They also learned a tool and approach to finding the breakthrough in the breakdown – collective stilling, emptiness instead of a flurry of suggestions, observations, questions and solutions.

Some powerful learning for me was the following:

- they were not able to repeat this without further help; and
- they were able to recognize the benefit even though Rhonda did *not* come around or get them to change their position.

Rather, they consciously acknowledged that agreement to disagree was a valuable outcome of the process because they better understood the thinking and feeling behind different positions. Rhonda's truth was represented in the final design of the work system, with the team's full support.

### **Teaching and Testing these Ideas at Conference Workshops**

Another setting in which I have experimented with dialogue and listening are a variety of workshops on the subject. In these workshops, I have conducted an experiential exercise on collective, spiritual listening.

The exercise requires four roles (Schaefer and Voors, 1986). The teller has a problem and tells three others. The three others listen from different perspectives. Rudolph Steiner's approach to human consciousness consists of three elements: head, heart and will. Each requires a different quality of listening. The exercise illustrates how distinct these listening modes can be. It also illustrates what happens to the *gestalt* of the listening team when its members consciously segment their roles and trust each other to do their respective listening jobs. Finally, it illustrates what happens to the teller when her story is told via objective details and the listeners hold her story in the silent, still, emptiness of spiritual receptivity. The result has been heightened telling and listening in which – after the listeners report what they heard and the teller responds – results in a collectivity in which the segmentation of roles serves to create a common vessel and/or spiritual journeying rather than a separation and segmentation.

This non-intuitive reversal – separating and focusing to achieve greater coherence and cohesion – has been reported to me at every workshop as a profound and pleasant surprise. Although only one approach to enabling groups to experience spiritual, collective listening, this one has always worked. What becomes clear is the collective joy of having such an experience and the almost visceral nature of journeying, as if to another country “where the truth lives” (Spock, 1983a, p. 30). There are many ways to achieve this intense connection and creativity. What is common among them is people's desire and need to get to that place and



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to hold onto that feeling. This is because there is something natural and missed about it. We rarely reach that place and feel those feelings in modern life, especially in the work context.

When groups gather for what groups can do best as groups (that is, think aloud together to merge the best of each member's contribution) then open, receptive dialogue can result. Collective listening is one of the key vehicles for attaining and sustaining that receptive team creativity.

### **Strategic Future Search Conferences – Where Is the Magic?**

Search conferences, brought to this country by Fred Emery and popularized by Marvin Weisbord in his recent book, *Discovering Common Ground* (Weisbord, 1992), offer large groups a structured way to create common futures via what Weisbord calls “getting the whole system in the room”.

What makes these elegantly simple meeting designs work to: discover common futures; disable old conflicts from disrupting the meetings; and enable highly diverse stakeholders to experience similar emotions? They create the opportunity for collective, spiritual listening.

Weisbord does not theorize about what makes search conferences work. When you read about them in his book or in reports from participants, it is difficult to become excited. The meeting technology appears to be so basic that it is hard to imagine the consistent breakthrough that Weisbord promises. This is true of a whole class of meetings which consultant David Roitman (1992) calls “minimalist design”. These designs are not loose, unstructured or soft; they are robust and carefully shaped.

Weisbord frames the need for search conferences with the following challenge:

As long as you do what you always did  
with the people who always did it,  
you always get  
what you always got.

With this in mind, I analysed why search conferences worked as part of my consulting for Digital Equipment Corporation in 1992. I was benchmarking search conferences as input to a large-scale educational intervention intended to create a very great performance improvement at Digital. Although able to specify important attributes and productive comparisons between the Digital programme and search conferences, I could still not resolve the key question: Why does this work? My hypothesis – tested in part at a workshop on search conferences in the form of a search conference – is that the discipline of tasks, groundrules and stakeholders provides an invitation and structure to listen collectively.

Two aspects of the search, both of which I experienced at the conference, fit this thesis. They also had the feel of a spiritual energy coming to the group only because a space or vessel had been emptied via the collective efforts of the group to receive it. Clearly, this must be about trust and love; but here is an important irony. The task-focused presentation of data and explicitly *not* working on relationship building would appear to ensure a more linear, instrumental ethos.

Rather, by moving beyond relationship, beyond psychological and social exchange, to a receptive, creative spiritual connection (much like that which Steiner and Spock describe and which Senge and Bohm imply but leave unstated) this disciplined task focus is precisely what enables the spiritual aspect of the group's life to emerge.

It is this emergence at the spiritual level that accounts for my two experiences:

- (1) the shift from "this is probably not possible" to the feeling that everyone and everything we need to create the preferred future is here in the room; and
- (2) containing the pressure of past data and (in some cases, shame) of current behaviours and then releasing it (usually in the afternoon of day two) with the result of unleashing positive, forceful, commitment to creating the preferred future.

In short, what the intervention appears to manage beautifully is enabling the will to emerge. What that means in Steiner's terms is that the collective intention, commitment and courage reveals itself. It is future oriented, as if the future were pulling us towards it.

What makes possible this access to group-will is the listening quality in small and large groups throughout the (ironically) very visual tasks. Note that this is not being presented as a skill nor is it about exchange or being understood, but listening as emptying, as creating and as honouring. What is most powerful in search conferences is the idea that the collective listening power – that is the size of the possible vessel created – is greater because of the pure size of the group. Even though the traditional group dynamics of aligning larger groups in this way requires a longer and steeper curve of investment, the benefit is a significantly more powerful "antenna" for receiving and ultimately attracting spirit to make a home in the collective. In short, the entire process and set of tasks becomes a vehicle for pooling the collective power of listening in a way that makes contact – person-to-person and group-to-spiritual world.

This extraordinary connection may often be felt by participants, but is rarely related to the efficacy of the intervention. It is just a nice feeling, or an added benefit. Rather, I contend, this kind of opening, connection and receptivity is precisely what does the work of organizational change and development because it operates at the level of forward-moving will energy. The structure of tasks and the exchanges that build human relationships are the vehicles for discovering and unleashing the will-force of the collective.

### **Benefits of this Research for Organizational Change**

There are three major benefits to enabling productive organizational change in what I have discovered so far in my research and some key next steps for validating and applying these observations. First, the notion that a type of Hawthorne effect is often operating across a wide range of change activities – from QFDs to strategic planning tools to T-groups to work design – is both presumptive and a bit disturbing. It says something which is too obvious to notice really accounts for

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successful change, much the way the attention of the researchers accounted for productivity gains at the Hawthorne plant in 1927.

For a tangible example, consider the knowledge base in use when you spin the car radio dial and stick or move according to hearing an instant of music. I suspect we could construct a rational theory of what you hear that prompts you to stick or move; however, I think the real reason would employ a kind of knowledge which appears invisible, but is the true driver of your decision making. Similarly, the will or spirit is the true decider or driver in groups. What I am calling “collectively listening with spirit” is but one way of making contact.

Other ways abound and are receiving increasing attention in business and in the business of change. This issue of *JOCM* brings a few of them together in one place. For example, Frost and Egri (1994) refer to a shamanic impulse of self-healing and unblocking energy. The mythological approaches of McQuinney and Batiste (1988) and Leaver (1993) operate on similar levels beyond the rational and the psychological. Winograd and Flores (1986) uses Heidegger’s language philosophy. Boje (1991) uses storytelling. Ethnographic approaches to organizations (Akin and Hopelain, 1986; Levine, 1991; Linde, 1992), and appreciative approaches (Shrivastva and Cooperrider, 1990) all appear to have in common the non-intuitive notion that what enables contact with the core spirit of an enterprise or community is a process of honouring, not altering.

The first benefit of this Hawthorne effect idea is that any and all of these approaches can work extremely well. This is also good news for understanding why interventions work. It is important for consultants and change agents to recognize that any path that gets an organization to contact and unleash its will-forces is a successful intervention.

The second benefit of this approach is that it builds on a popular and well-defined distinction between dialogue and discussion. It goes further, however, and offers some greater specifics about how to get into and stay in the dialogue.

The third benefit of this approach is that it gives consultants some additional guidance about what they are really doing when they consult with groups. It provides some tools, measures and images for guiding their own self-management and also assessing where groups are in a change process.

### **Directions for the Future**

In considering the future of this research, I am aware that the empirical mode of experimentation and collection of conventional data will probably never validate my assertions and my thesis. I proceed enthusiastically, however, for two reasons:

- (1) I am certain of what I have seen and felt, and know others have seen and felt these things too.
- (2) When I tell people what I see and feel and how this notion of collective spiritual listening seems to account for heightened moments of creativity and productivity, their facial expressions light up.

I visualize these will-level approaches as a form of organizational acupuncture – using a model or organization which emphasizes flow of energy rather than

functional organs. This means that change/health is achieved by facilitating the natural flows rather than by removing local blockages and adjusting the pieces.

The next challenge is systematic observation combined with interviews with people about their experiences. One thread of research is objectively looking at what makes teams able to create chemistry, then validating this against what members say afterwards. The other stream is action research – doing the teaching, making the listening interventions and checking for impact on creativity improvement in the opinions of both observers and participants. On the one hand, this research is still in its infancy. On the other, what I hope I am tapping is a dimension of what all groups know in their invisible hearts so deeply that when it is present, they have little need to rationalize it. When it is not present, they simply have not yet learned together how to contact it and provide a living home for spirit.

I am excited about this approach because it enriches and shifts the consultant's role in a challenging and important way. This shift, when it occurs, is central to making a difference in the way change does or does not happen in organizations.

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