

# Soundings

The Newsletter of Sound Strategies



Dec 2007

[info@sound-strategies.co.uk](mailto:info@sound-strategies.co.uk)

[www.sound-strategies.co.uk](http://www.sound-strategies.co.uk)

<http://sound-strategies.typepad.com>

Music in the workplace and a Christmas download from **classical.com** and check out Sound Strategies on [The Engaging Brand](#) podcast.

More topical comment on sound from Sound Strategies and its associates.

## [What's New?](#)

['Just Whistle while you work'](#) - Music in the workplace

[Links](#)

For more information on Sound Strategies contact Michael at [michael.spencer@sound-strategies.co.uk](mailto:michael.spencer@sound-strategies.co.uk)

---

## What's New?

Walmart, Nokia, Facebook, Saga, all jumping on the musical merry-go-round to give us more music and sound to populate our day...I hesitate to use the word enrich.

At rush hour, people with white cords coming out of their ears apparently oblivious to the world around them. But is this really the case?

Some initial findings from a research project at Keele University into the ways in which we listen to music suggest that it can heighten our perception of the world around us.

On the other hand, Dr. Michael Bull in 'Sounding out the City' shows how people use personal stereos as a bulwark against the unwanted sounds that are hurled at them each day.

The situation is by no means clear. And despite pressure groups such as '[No Music Day](#)' and '[Pipedown](#)' to limit the sounds around us, in particular those over which we have little control, a BBC survey in 2006 concluded that most externally chosen music is not rated negatively, and over a quarter of it is rated positively.

With this in mind, Bernard Carey is joined by Anneli Beronius Haake from the University of Sheffield in an article looking at music in the workplace. Would our arid office spaces benefit from a change in ambience? Is music an aid to productivity or a disruption? Do we need to create our own personal office spaces and can sound help us with this? What might management's reactions be to this, bear in mind that at one time you could be fined for whistling at work.

As you read the article below take the opportunity to listen to a free download provided by one of our clients, [classical.com](#), as a pre Christmas treat. [Click here](#)

Have a great Christmas,

---

---

Michael

Blog comments to <http://sound-strategies.typepad.com>

---

## 'Just whistle while you work' – music in the workplace

Much of my career has been spent working for large manufacturing companies, and in total I think I have visited over 300 factories and as many offices. Nothing compared to some people, but enough to notice the strange and contrasting rules that applied to the use of music in the workplace.

In some, the noise of machinery would in any case have drowned out other sounds; in others, there were historic agreements, often the subject of strenuous trades union/management negotiation on whether the 'pop' radio station would be played in the morning and the 'smooth' music in the afternoon or vice-versa.

In some countries, company songs and anthems are sung each day before the shift begins, and in the old Soviet Union, stirring patriotic music was often played to encourage hard work and dedication to the cause.

But did and does any of this work and to what effect?

- Does classic rock aid concentration or would companies do better streaming classical genres?
- How do people experience music in the workplace?
- Could music help people to relax at work?
- Does music at work help reduce stress, known to be a core cause of absenteeism and mental illness?

There is much evidence available from neurological, psychological, other medical and consumer research to show that music has a clear effect on people's **mood, behaviour, wellbeing** and **performance**.

The general conclusion is that the right kind of music in the workplace can lift the spirits and improve productivity, but it depends on many different contextual circumstances. And what is the right kind of music?

### Music and Well Being

The bulk of research into music in the workplace concerns production work, in factories and in repetitive processes. In these environments, music has been shown to improve morale amongst employees.

Today, many employees, particularly in offices, can listen to music individually through using iPods and listening online.

A small number of studies have begun to explore the influence of music on well-being at work, following evidence that group music listening can enhance productivity and morale, and that people use music listening to manage their well-being in daily life.

Given that stress at work is a major problem for many organisations today, music listening and its effects in the workplace is an area needing much more work and can now be supplemented by current knowledge from studies in neurology, psychology and sociology.

---

---

Various research projects in the last 50 years (some from organisations with an interest in the use of music) suggest the following outcomes of the positive application of music in the workplace;

- Improved productivity in jobs that are repetitive, mundane or undemanding
- Improve performance in physically demanding jobs
- Raised employee morale
- Improved employees' physical health (through reducing stress, thus potentially reducing absenteeism)
- Improved employees' willingness to co-operate with one another and be helpful

### **Music affects**

To understand whether or not music has an effect on individuals in the workplace, one must understand that music can have an effect (both positive and negative) on anyone in any environment.

Classical music is being used in public spaces in some countries to induce calm and inhibit vandalism.

Many studies have been completed that highlight the effects of music upon the long-term educational process, and the effects of music listening and the types of music listened to on adults and children in many different circumstances.

However, it is not necessarily the actual music that always creates an effect, but rather the **associations** that individuals have to that music, and how they use particular music in **particular situations** in order to achieve their individual goals.

Own **choice** has been shown to be important, and it is likely to be more about the music preference of an individual, rather than about specific genres of music.

Even though the studies are not entirely conclusive, they have provided evidence that music, the right music (for an individual) at the right volume, can help people relax, focus more intently upon their tasks, absorb material and information at a higher rate and, in general, be more productive.

### **No music?...it all depends!**

The problem is that what is and is not conducive to work environments, depends wholly on the type of work being done, the personalities of the workers and the level of flexibility offered by the employer in relation to listening to of music while at work.

It depends on the social environment, physical environment, current mood and so on.

But what we can derive from the various studies is that in most businesses that do not require their workers to be in a constant state of intense communication (that requires full attention for give and take in the conversation, i.e. phone service related employees), the provision of music access in the workplace can improve workers' mood and concentration.

There is a caveat that it depends on the music and how the individual uses it, as to whether or not shared listening is appropriate or if individualised music listening is better (headphones or at desk). **Lack of choice** (for example piped-in music) has

---

---

recently been shown to actually produce **negative effects**, including stress and irritation.

Use of MP3 players tends to vary with job type. Eighty percent of technical and creative workers listen to music more than 20% of their working hours, according to research done in the US on MP3 use by CIMI, a Voorhees, N.J. based research and technology assessment firm.

At the management level, the proportion of workers listening to music more than a fifth of the time drops to 20%.

About 40% of clerical workers listen to music more than 20% of their working day.

Some disadvantages of allowing the use of headphones and iPods could be safety, network security and social/communication exclusion.

However, recognising the 'ear bud phenomenon' can have benefits. Some employers, such as Capital One in the US, are using iPods as part of audio training programmes for employees, by putting training onto Podcasts. Then employees can listen to the Podcast on their commute or at home.

### **In the Office**

One recent study (by PhD candidate Anneli Beronius Haake see [www.musicatwork.net](http://www.musicatwork.net) ), using people who listened to music at work, aimed to shed light on the use of music in office-based working environments and to provide exploratory data on the experiences of music in offices.

Many of the respondents used music listening for relaxation and mood-management, but also for concentration and distraction from monotonous tasks. Particularly emphasized in the office setting was to use headphones to block out distractions, and achieve concentration that way.

Although further empirical research is underway to clarify this claim, the results from this study support previous research suggesting that employee well-being and concentration is being enhanced through music on a daily basis.

Comments by the respondents suggest that self-selected music is an important element in improving both well-being and work performance, and statistical analysis indicates that headphone use can further enhance some of the functions that music has at work. The results also indicate that music listening can influence social interaction at work by providing a talking point, but also decrease social interaction when people using headphones become withdrawn from their colleagues.

In summary, research shows that we can claim that, with certain qualifications, music can improve mood and therefore efficiency and productivity in the workplace. It can help reduce stress and conflict, help teambuilding and bring employees closer together.

Bernard Carey

**Blog comments to** <http://sound-strategies.typepad.com>

---

---

### **Our Expertise**

Sound Strategies conducts rigorous analysis of the impact of sound in corporate and brand communications enabling clients to make effective and sustainable decisions that reinforce corporate identity. We design and deliver bespoke training workshops for brand teams.

If you would like to discuss how you could use sound and music to make your company more productive, please contact Michael at <mailto:michael.spencer@sound-strategies.co.uk>

---

### **Links connected with this Newsletter**

Anneli Beronius Haake  
[www.musicatwork.net](http://www.musicatwork.net)

Classical.com  
[classical.com](http://classical.com)

The Engaging Brand  
[http://theengagingbrand.typepad.com/the\\_engaging\\_brand\\_/2007/12/show-129---soun.html](http://theengagingbrand.typepad.com/the_engaging_brand_/2007/12/show-129---soun.html)

No music day  
<http://www.nomusicday.com/>

Pipedown  
<http://www.pipedown.info/>

### **Other Interesting links**

Elias Arts  
[www.eliasarts.com](http://www.eliasarts.com)  
Open Ear Music  
[www.openearmusic.net](http://www.openearmusic.net)

For back editions of Soundings click [here](#)

If you wish to opt out from this newsletter please send a response to: [soundings@sound-strategies.co.uk](mailto:soundings@sound-strategies.co.uk) Including OPT OUT in the subject line.

Management Board: Michael Spencer (MD), Bernard Carey (Chm), Dr. Reginald Watts, Ronna Porter, Edward Freeborn (Fin Dr)

Advisory Board: Dr. Michael Bull, David Bowen, Andrew Peggie

Registered Office: The Lodge, Little Hickmotts, Marden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 9DB. Company Reg. No. 557977

---