

From rigidity to reso- nance

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Personal development is a critical aspect of talent management and human wellness made increasingly important by technology driven information overload, and the growing pace of climate change and resource scarcity. So too is the ability to apply a multi-perspective understanding to human interactions and our place in the world. Resonance offers a unique way of looking at the wealth of existing theories and insights into self-development in the spheres of rhythm, neuroscience, physics, and sociology, while also countering the limiting effect of resistance to change or rigidity. Resonance is a lived approach that heightens self-awareness in an uncertain world by applying a fresh lens that taps into nature, universal rhythm, and innate human behaviour.

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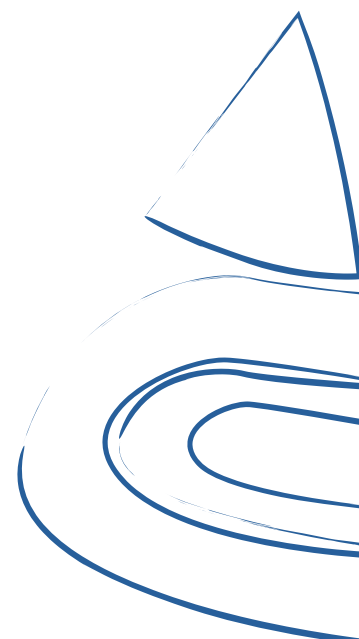
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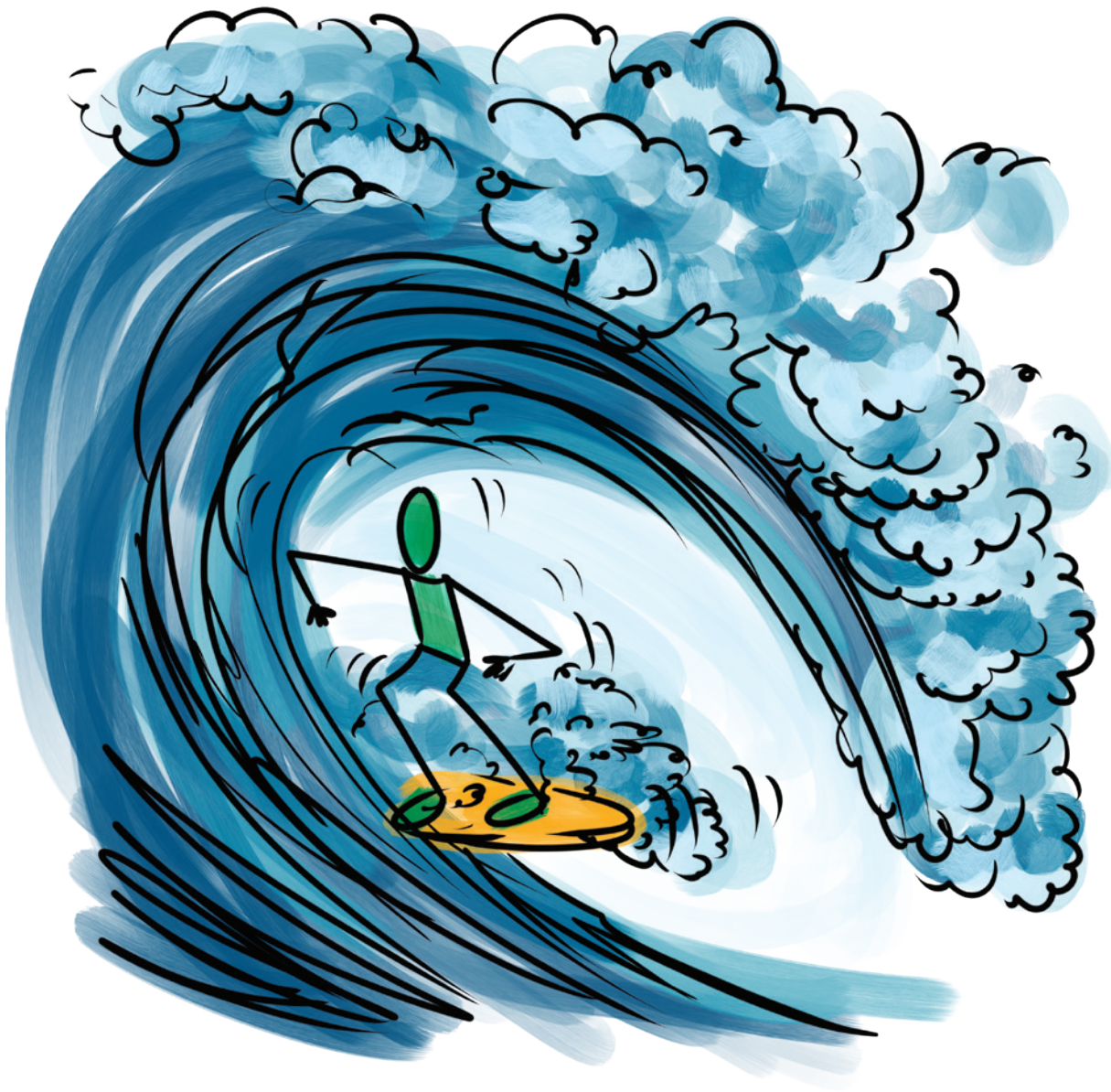
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Abstract

Groove is a state of flow that is truly universal. Groove is achieved when the world is in sync and in resonance with itself. A team can be in the groove. Moreover, an inventor can be in the groove, or a surfer riding a perfect wave might feel this sense of connection. While being in the groove may feel like an intangible concept, the pattern and process can be understood and harnessed by applying the *ICE framework*, which comprises three interlinked layers: *Individual*, *Community*, and *Environment*. The terms used to describe this model are deliberately linked to the language of music, to highlight the connection and natural rhythm we associate with a free-flowing jazz quartet, the flow of a Nigerian percussion ensemble or the energy of a Cuban rumba band in full flight.

The ICE framework is best envisaged by looking down on a cymbal that, when struck, vibrates across the centre, the midway, and the edge of the instrument. A perfect strike radiates a sound that resonates within us at a deep and primal level.

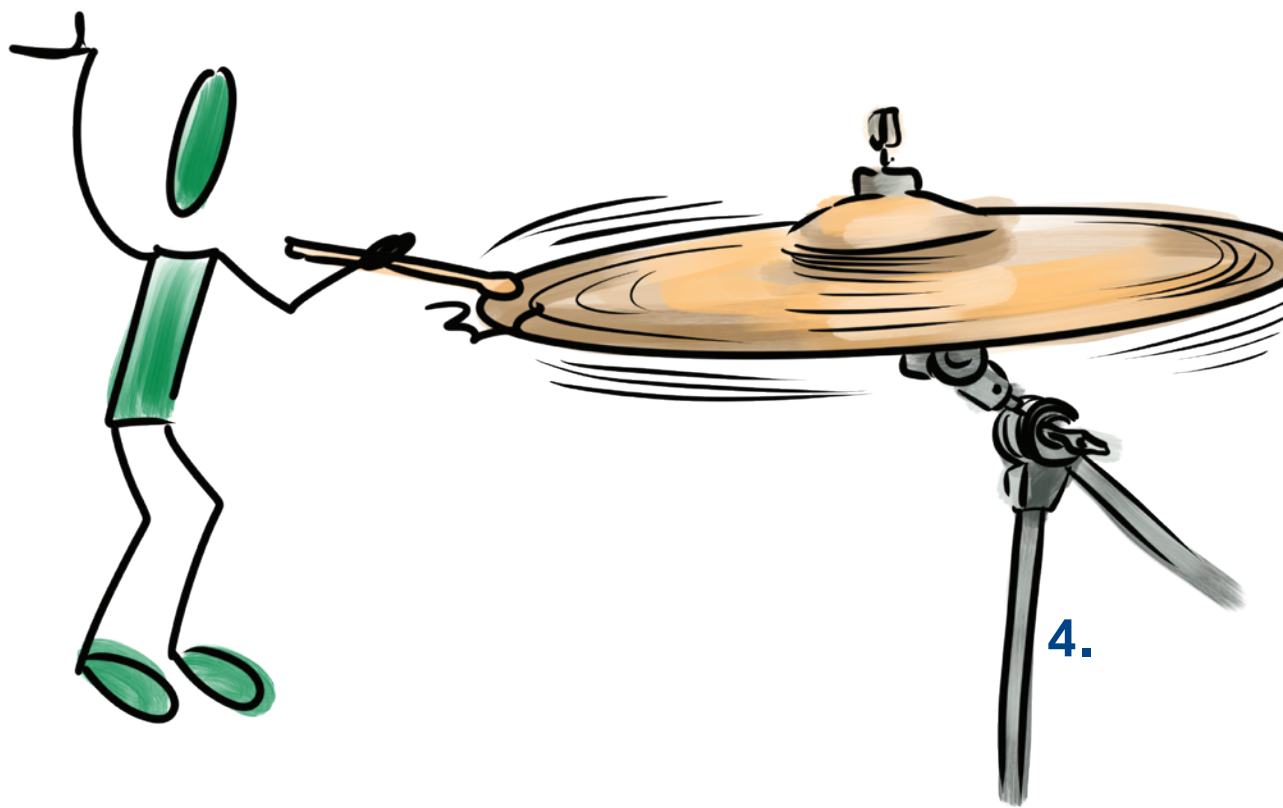
Introduction

People can learn to be fluid and adaptable, just like water. This creates a state of resonance. Alternatively, people can be rigid and unmovable like a piece of iron – a state of resistance or rigidity. How we exist and how we interact with others within our environment is a deliberate choice that has profound implications for our productivity, creativity, wellness, and state of mind. The one extreme builds fear and blinkered thinking, while the other promotes curiosity, open-mindedness, and innovation.

Using the innate language of natural music – and drawing on our implicit ability to tap into a deeply harmonious 'groove' state in the manner achieved by intuitive juju musicians in Nigeria, Venda drummers in South Africa or conga players in Puerto Rico – it is possible to demonstrate how human rhythms can achieve a resonance that goes beyond the tightly bound, metronomically perfect music of the Western world. Efrain Toro (cited in

Drum Channel, 2021), one of the world's authorities on rhythm, described the flow or optimal experience achieved by natural musicians as being 'void of straightjackets.... They can move with a musical sound and pulse, which we usually refer to as rhythm ... yet studied musicians can't do that'.

Natural music is a form of expression that embraces the notion of improvisation and agility and, when harnessed effectively, can serve as a valuable tool in the journey towards personal and organisational harmony. The great singer-songwriter Joan Armatrading, who penned and performed the song 'Natural rhythm' in 2021, is a perfect example of resonance in action. With her unique and distinct voice and guitar-playing style, Armatrading injects soul into all she does. Nothing Armatrading does jars in a way that we are accustomed to, or expect. It is truly authentic and in sync with the world. This defines the state of 'groove'.





The predicament

Even before the game-changing events of 2020 and the global pandemic, many people were at odds with the changes impacting the world (Berinato, 2020). Pain points included fast-paced digital changes to the disrupted rise of the knowledge economy (World Economic Forum, 2020), as well as increased global nationalism and conflict (Repucci and Slipowitz, 2021). As a foil to the dominance of institutional and organisational rigidity built into increasingly outdated Industrial Revolution-style structures (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007), alongside

rising levels of burnout and feeling overwhelmed by the rate of change, increased attention is now being paid to the innate human abilities needed to navigate a changing world, including creativity, empathy, natural improvisation, and adaptability (Hagel et al., 2019).

Many organisations and individuals that were able to align with evolving human and systemic vibrations found a new lease of life (Clift and Court, 2020), despite the pandemic. However, statistics from the World Health Organization (2022) show a significant 25% increase in the 'global prevalence of anxiety and depression', which have been linked to stressors like loneliness, bereavement, financial worries, and exhaustion. This human response draws attention to the human cost of a changing world and how out of sync we are with these widespread changes.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that personal wellness and self-development have become pertinent buzzwords that speak to people's individual understanding of their rhythms and cycles. Considerations, such as sleep, nutrition, and exercise, are now firmly on the radar, alongside an emerging awareness that these core ingredients are essential for all beings living in a human skin (Newsom, 2022).

At an organisational and group level, this sense of being overwhelmed by the unpredictability of events is directly linked to the work-at-home, life-at-work conundrum (Crosbie and Moore, 2004). This paradox is driving human talent professionals and corporate leaders alike to consider how best to align an organisation's strategic resonance with that of the teams and individuals in its ranks.



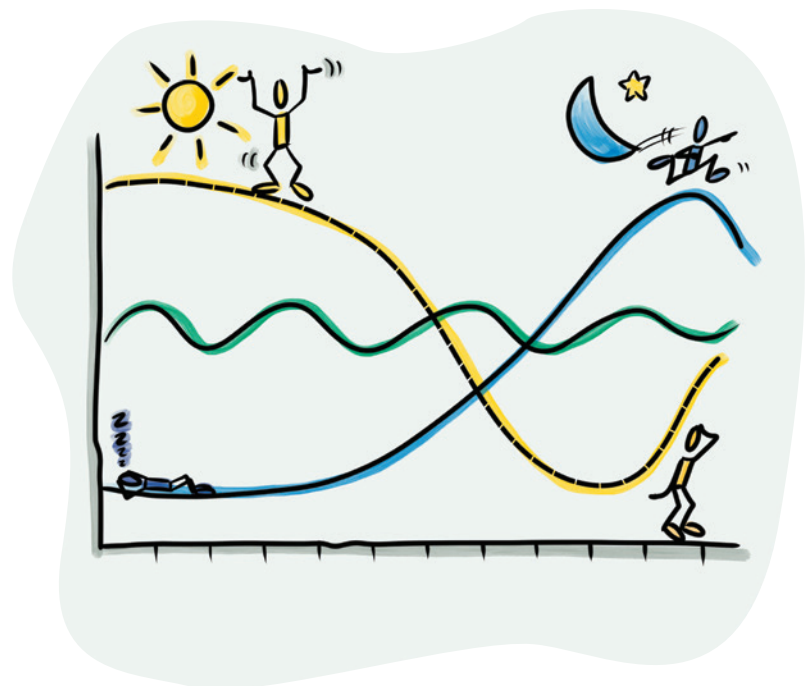
Rhythms, timing, and chronobiology

Chronobiology is a robust field of research into biological systems that spans disciplines from biology and medicine to psychology, and delves into the 'master biological clock' or circadian rhythm that 'controls daily rhythms', such as psychomotor functions, mood, and our sleep-activity cycles (Çaliyurt, 2017: 514). Moreover, chronobiology is the underpinning rigour behind the inner, Individual circle of *the ICE framework*.

In 2015, *the Harvard Business Review* published an article by Christopher M. Barnes that explained how each person's internal body clock, chronobiology or circadian rhythm was impacted when they were at their most productive, alert, energetic, and creative. Author and commentator Daniel H. Pink (2018) categorised the bulk of humanity into three groups: larks (i.e., morning people), owls (i.e., night-time people), and so-called third birds (i.e., people who fall in the middle). Depending on an individual's chronotype, or natural rhythm, certain tasks might be better tackled at different times of the day. For instance, a lark is naturally equipped to make decisions in the early morning, while an owl should focus on decision-making in the late afternoon or evening, and a third bird either early morning or mid-morning (Pink, 2018).

According to Pink (2018: 41), 'Simply knowing that you're operating at a sub-optimal time can be helpful because you can correct for your chronotype in small but powerful ways'. He noted that the world is largely configured to suit the rhythms of larks and third birds, and not the owls.

The problem with this compartmentalised approach is that coaxing creativity out of owls first thing in the morning will be a challenge and a waste of their energy. Similarly, expecting larks to ideate with flair late in the evening will not yield positive results, since their natural timing processes are not in sync with this sort of output. Conversely, if innate chronobiology – the natural imprint that likely stays with us for life – is aligned with demand for high-intensity creative work, then productivity goes off the radar. The simplified view of the incredible body of work around chronobiology is that if you can work to your strengths and recognise your weaknesses by factoring in natural energy level fluctuations, it can change your life.



Adopting a new way of working

Since the late 1960s, accelerating through the 1990s, the world has been morphing from a manufacturing structure to a 'knowledge economy' (Zapp, 2022). This transition has brought with it new approaches to work that aim to align work time and space with individual preferences to increase well-being as well as productivity. Flexitime, the gig economy, and working remotely are examples of this paradigm shift (Hasija et al., 2020). Silicon Valley's tech giants have been active in creating flexible work environments to create the best conditions for success in the innovation race (English-Lueck and Avery, 2017). However, this more autonomous and less rigid environment also adds new pressures. Lack of boundaries or clear expectations and increased uncertainty are examples of factors contributing to an overwhelming sense of burnout (Haas, 2019).

Intellectually, many of us might have a theoretical understanding of these shifts, but looking at it from the perspective of rhythm and resonance is new. This thinking requires us to step away from preconceived, manufacture-era views of human beings as cogs in a machine or bytes in a code, and broaden our thinking to view people as part of a changing universe where personal rhythm is impacted by and supportive of the many individual, group, and environmental rhythms around us.

Where does resonance fit in?

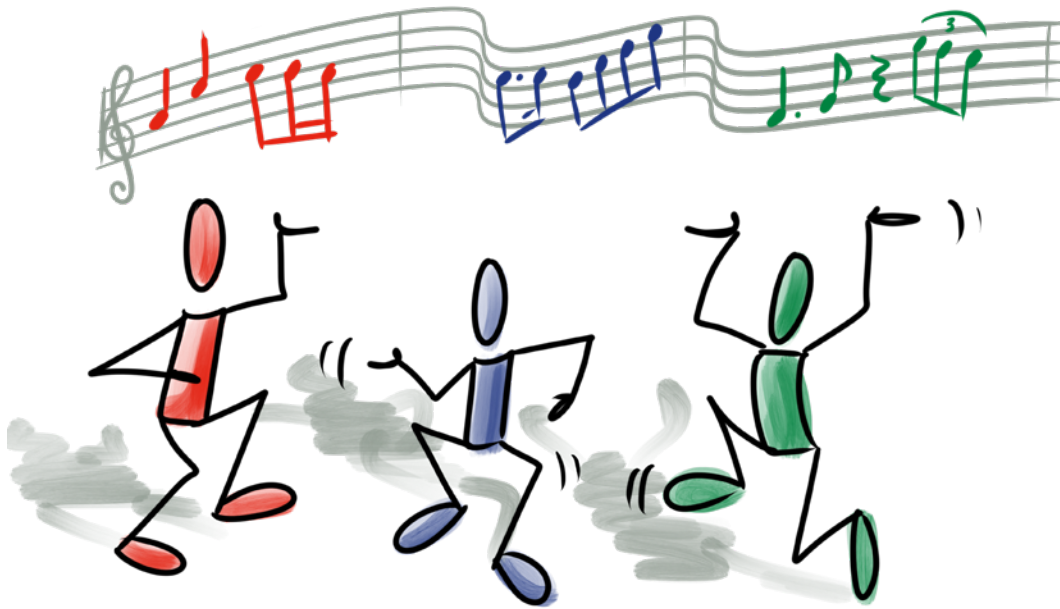
In neuroscience, resonance talks to the patterns of 'synchronization, harmonization, vibrations' (Hunt and Schooler, 2019: 1) that form part of the living consciousness. Increasingly, researchers like the late physicist Richard Feynman, himself a passionate drummer, worked to understand how the natural resonance of all things can combine to create a shared resonance (Hunt and Schooler, 2019).

Mathematician Steven Strogatz (2004) described large schools of fish moving in flow with one another, which is achieved by a singular focus rooted in absolute present time. This is another way of describing resonance. Feynman (cited in Tantillo, 2019) colourfully described the same phenomenon as the 'jiggings and wiggings of atoms' in an object when movement was introduced, using the example of water perfectly moulding around a submerged hand.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman (2005) referred to non-verbal communication when observing certain people in conversation (on

video with the audio muted) moving together in perfect synchronicity, as an indication of 'flow' or hyper-present time. Martial arts expert Bruce Lee developed his 'be like water' strategy (McBride, 2013) for reacting to opponents as a path to resonance and flow.

The notion of 'flow' was first introduced in the 1970s by Hungarian psychologist and academic Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as a mental state characterised by energised focus, joy, and purpose (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009; Elhanafi, 2019). This was a state that psychologist Doug Newburg would go on to term 'resonance' in his resonance performance model that focused on the process through which high-calibre performers became experts in their field (Newburg et al., 2002).



Toro, the acclaimed educator, drummer, and thinker, prefers the concept of groove to the more common reference to flow when he describes the deep musical state of resonance, which can be applied to a great surfer riding the waves, or Lionel Messi making magic on the soccer pitch or a team of developers in a design sprint for a powerful new app. Toro once described this state as:

Non-pattern, non-technical, just pure harmonic groove in essence. It is the way with natural musicians and humans that find their nature to do things at this level just like Einstein or DaVinci or Mandela and Angelou and many others.¹

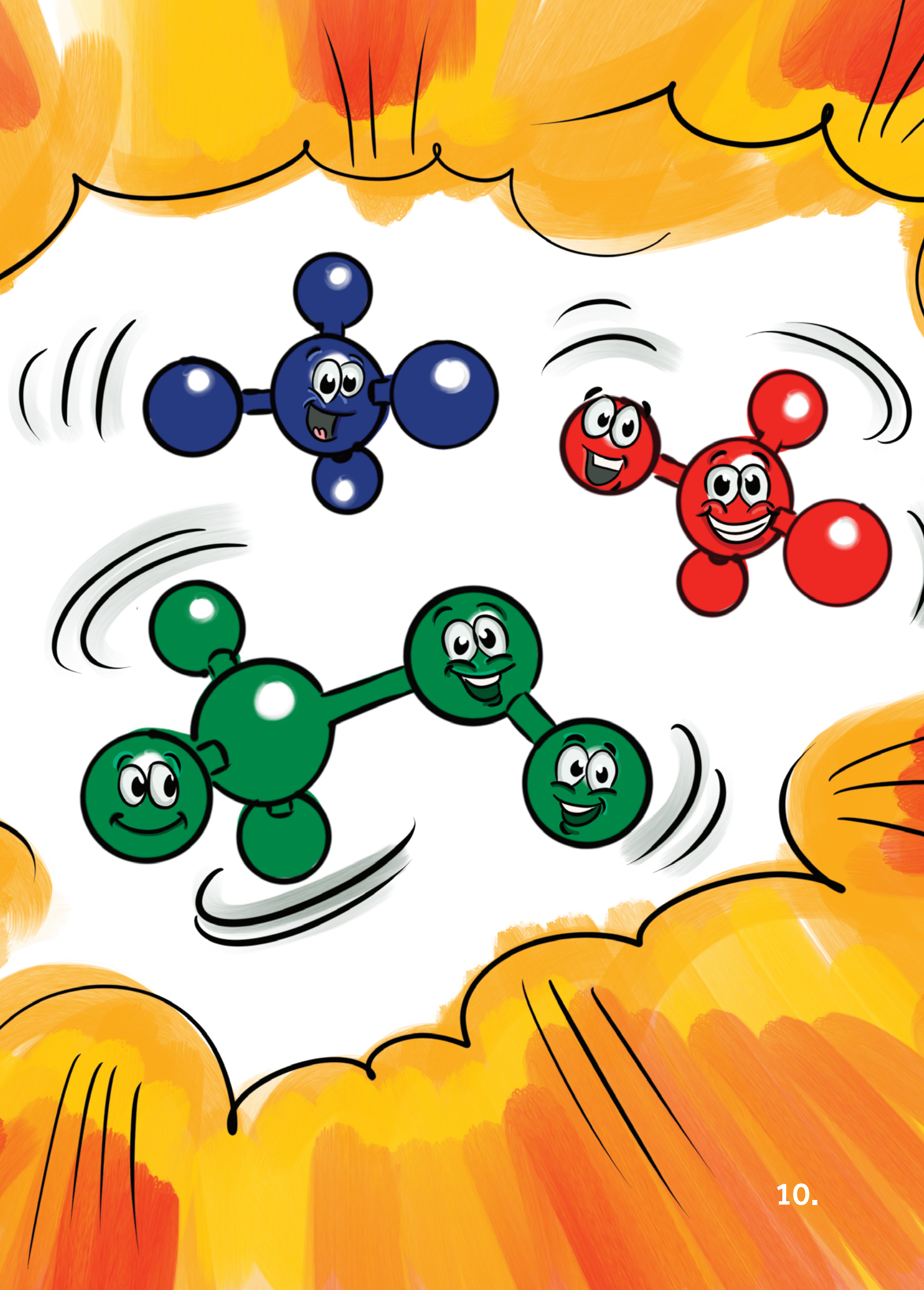
Being in the groove does not imply perfection. Nevertheless, it does refer to a state in which a group of individuals are irrefutably in sync. At a more personal level, resonance can be harnessed to change how we see ourselves, how we understand the world, and how to find our best fit in the world. Viewed from a sociological lens,

resonance aims to improve personal performance by studying our unique internal rhythms and the cycles and trends – big and small – that shape our external environment.

Resonance uses physics, biology, psychology, and sociology to achieve synchronicity in ourselves, with others, and within our world. According to sociologist Hartmut Rosa, who focused on the notion that resonance was the interplay between the individual and the world, resonance is a response relationship in which ‘the subject and world touch and transform each other’ (Kappler et al., 2018: 79).

From a human development perspective, resonance is an easy-to-understand and instantly useable process with the potential to unlock dormant abilities. Unlike other performance-building programmes, by understanding the three levels of resonance outlined in the *ICE framework*, it is possible to find practical and interactive ways to encourage greater resonance between teams of high performers, be they musicians, sporting professionals, entrepreneurs, creatives or corporates. The practical process of helping resonance to flow starts with the elements that make up the individual (physical, mental, and spiritual), and then reverberates through each subsequent layer of resonance with the environment, from the micro to the macro.

¹Efrain Toro (personal communication, 28 October 2000)



The ICE framework™

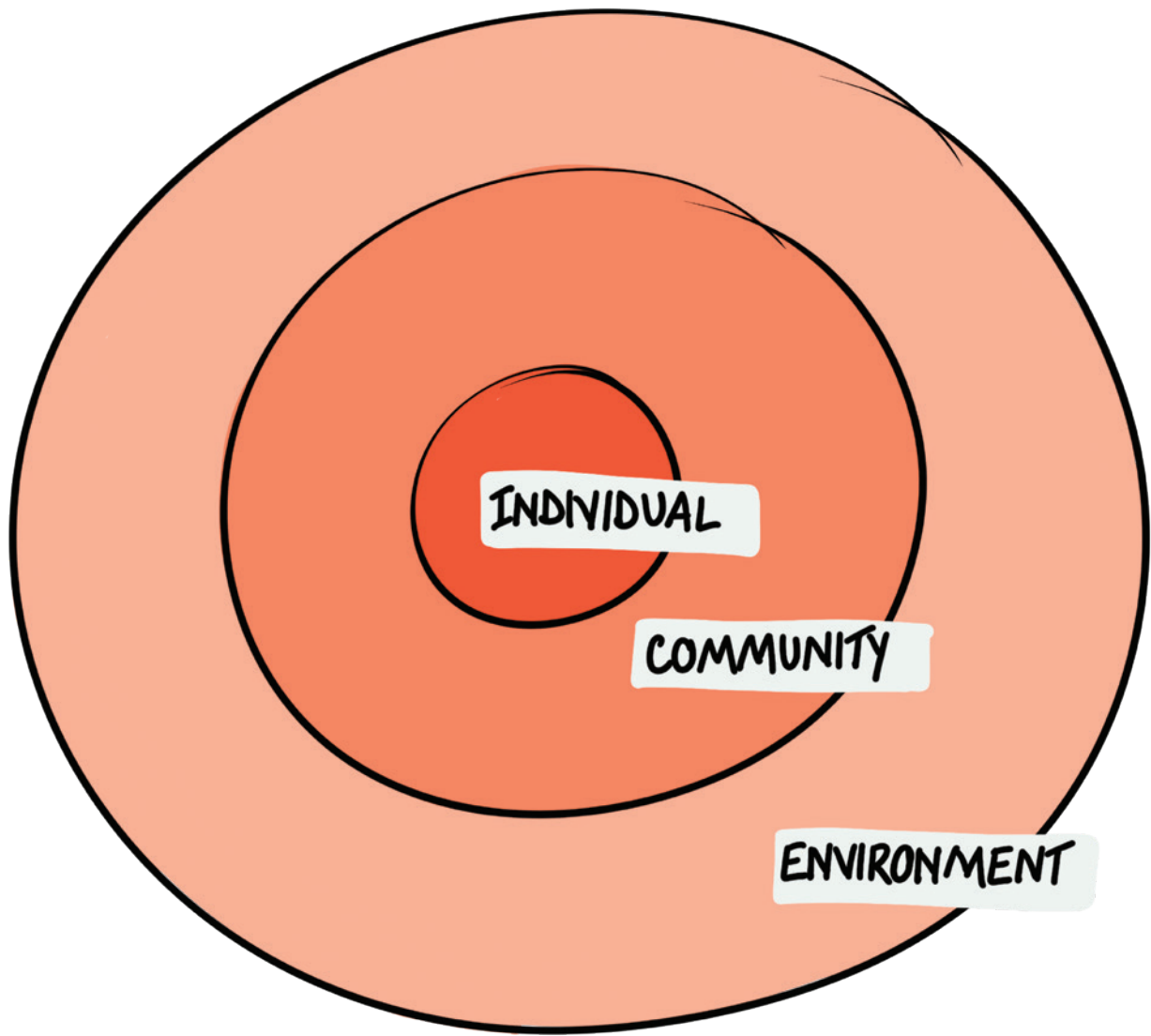


Figure 1: The ICE framework*

Source: Author's own design

The principle

Many leaders show an affinity for the instinctive, for taking the plunge when something 'feels right' or when their 'gut' points to a clear direction. However, many people become despondent when it comes to explaining the inner workings of this instinctive mental process. The ICE framework provides the missing link between intuitive knowing and strategic intent.

*Frameworks and models assume a rational and non-disruptive world, and so are simply a start point to guide one's thinking. The ICE framework represents water frozen as a snapshot for inspection and understanding, while of course not being fully representative of the flowing water of reality.

- The **individual groove** layer embraces personal resonance in the form of self-care, personal mastery, and a deep awareness of innate rhythms. It implies personal resonance, indicating how individuals oscillate in a manner that is the best fit for their personal rhythm. Without these basics, internal harmony cannot be achieved, and the ability to work in accord with others becomes compromised.
- The **community groove** level radiates from both the individual and the group to embrace the immediate space in which we operate, from our family and friends to teams, groups, and the organisations for which we work or through which we study and learn. Operating on the group level necessitates that we each work on developing the muscles necessary for effective engagements, such as open-mindedness and empathy, and the ability to understand another's feelings, thoughts, emotions, and perspective.
- The outermost layer, **environmental groove**, zooms us out to the point where each individual is more clearly seen as an essential part of a complex and well-coordinated system that is continually influenced by changing global cycles. This system is defined as the universal environment in which individuals and groups operate, encompassing towns, cities, countries, continents, and the world. In this outer ring, the bigger picture of trends, geopolitical developments, and mindset shifts become clearer, highlighting how these external vibrations impact our own reverberations, even as we are expected to operate in sync with others.

If we accept that performance is enhanced when 'there is a seamless fit between their [high-calibre performers'] internal self and their external environment' (Newburg et al., 2002: 249), then it makes sense to start the ICE journey by focusing on personal resonance. This encompasses not only issues of wellness, health, and mental well-being, but also the natural cycles and rhythms we all have hardwired into us and which affect our energy and creative levels throughout any given day.

To achieve system-wide resonance, the three layers that comprise the ICE framework must vibrate in harmony, much as a cymbal in a drum kit does when struck cleanly and neatly.

Individual groove: personal resonance

Jazz musician Charlie Parker (cited in McCrorie, 2021: 69) is credited with saying, 'You've got to learn your instrument. Then, you practice, practice, practice. And then, when you finally get up there on the bandstand, forget all that and just wail'. In 2002, this premise was expanded on by Rosamund Stone Zander and her husband, Benjamin Zander, the highly regarded English conductor, who highlighted the value of personal alignment and how this enables leaders to better contribute to – and orchestrate – the world around them by harnessing the power of innovation and invention. Zander (2008) described resonance with an audience as a 'shining eyes' moment, where all around you are looks of inspiration and passion. This definition can be used to guide every aspect of our lives: only when individuals have mastered their own instrument can they expect to harmonise effectively with others.

The individual groove core of the ICE framework is completely within the control of the individual. It hinges on self-awareness, mindset, and openness to the world around us, which all combine to make it easier for us to navigate a changing world. Developing internal resonance is something we can all work on and develop by taking care of the basic elements of rest, nutrition, and exercise, which help us be present and energised by virtue of positively supporting our brain function (Gómez-Pinilla, 2008). With these fundamentals in place, personal resonance ripples outwards to our engagements with family, friends, and colleagues, and at a broader level to our wider networks as well as the physical environment.

Consequently, the roots of resonance do not lie in grand teamwork exercises and external motivations – although these definitely have their place – but within ourselves. We are the foundation of systemic resonance.

13.



Community groove: group resonance

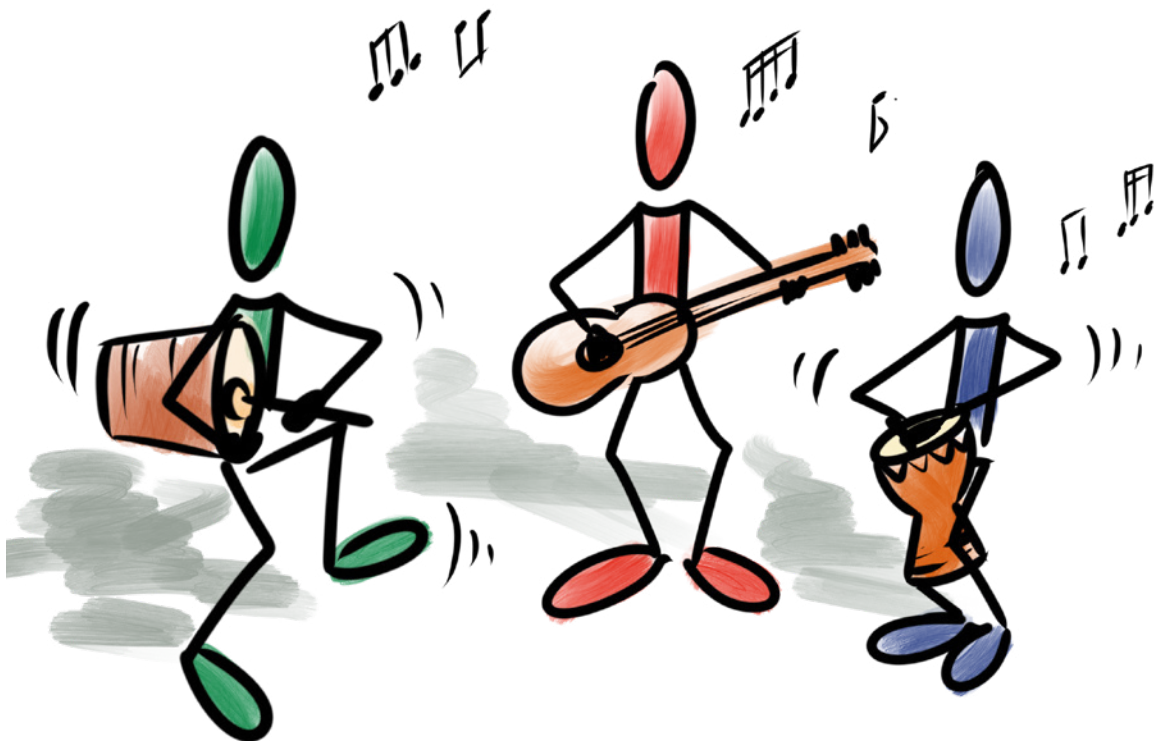
Once the core ingredients for personal resonance are in place, we can expand into the second circle. This concerns how we fit into our immediate surroundings, be it our family, friends, teams, groups, and the organisations for which we work or through which we learn. To align our personal resonance with communal resonance, the focus turns to developing the muscles necessary for effective engagements, such as deep listening, communication, empathy, open-mindedness, and understanding other people's points of view without the pressure of agreeing – much as you might see playing out when a traditional percussion ensemble is in the groove.

Ray Dalio (2017), the man behind the world's largest hedge fund, Bridgewater Associates, often uses the analogy of a jazz quartet to describe the power of achieving natural harmony and by being in sync with one another and the world around us. Dalio (2017: 368) explained:



In jazz, there's no script. You have to figure things out as you go along. Sometimes you need to sit back and let others drive things; other times, you blare it out yourself. To do the right thing at the right moment you need to really listen to the people you're playing with so that you can understand where they are going. All great creative collaborations should feel the same way.

The community level explores how to create and innovate at the interpersonal level, working in teams, groups, friendship circles, and families, as well as individually. The primary focus of this level is working effectively in teams by slotting what you do in harmony into an equally resonant team community. While we can control our own reactivity, we have no control over others. So, as our energy and attention shift outside of ourselves, personal control decreases. Nevertheless, some elements linked to our personal relationships still require our attention, including how we manage ourselves in a group context.



Environmental groove: systemic resonance

The outer circle of the model – environmental resonance – is completely out of our control. It concerns our connection to the world and what the late David Bohm (1980), the acclaimed theoretical physicist, called the implicate order. Bohm (1990, cited in Roemmele, 2018) explained his view as follows:

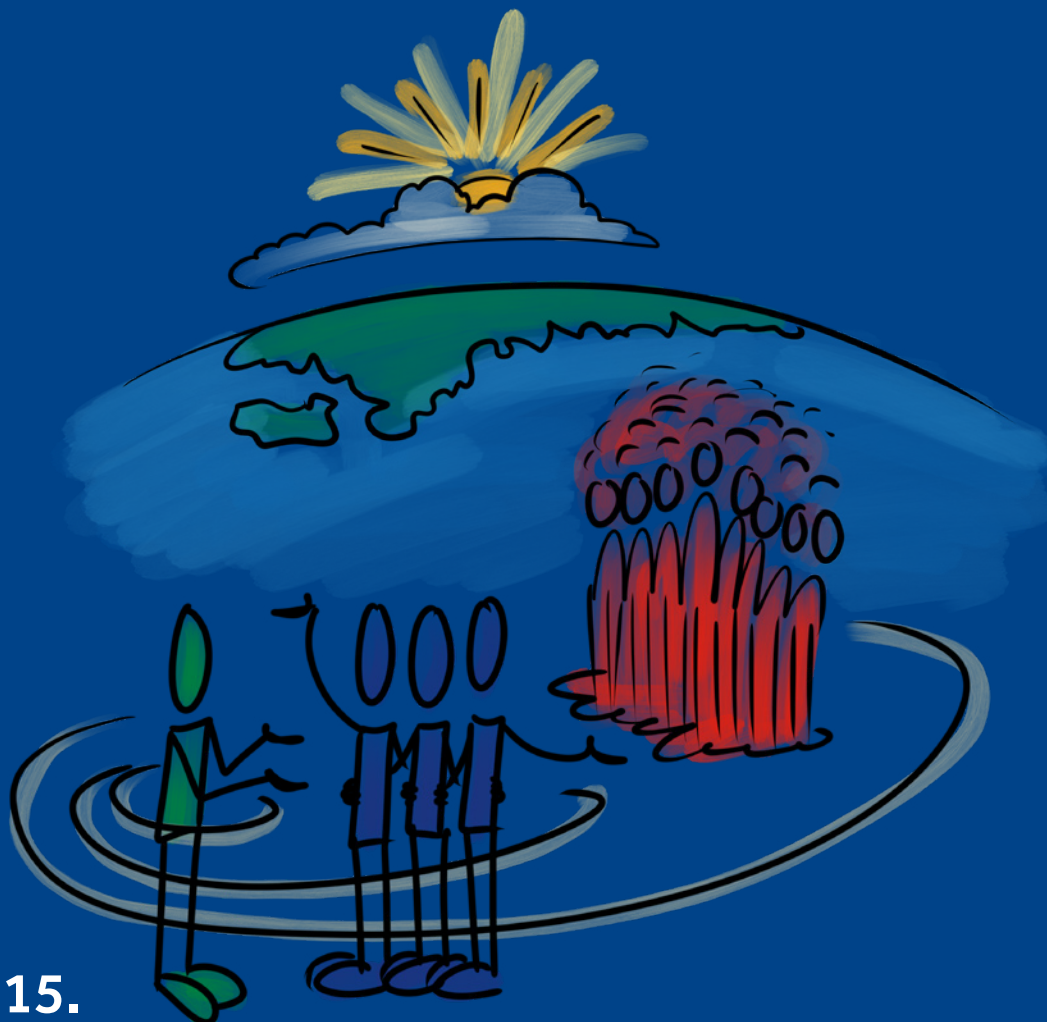
We are internally related to everything, not externally related. Consciousness is an internal relationship to the whole. We take in the whole and we act towards the whole. Whatever we have taken in determines, basically, what we are.

The influence of Chinese philosophical writings known as Taoism feature extensively in the appreciation of yinyang, flow, simplicity, and harmony (Wang and Wang, 2020). This was elegantly captured by Watts (1975: xiv), who described Taoism as 'man's cooperation with

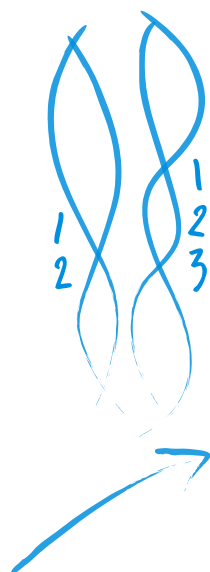
the course or trend of the natural world'. Bohm (1980: 1) held that the fragmentation inherent in how we live our modern lives was leading to 'a kind of general confusion of the mind, which creates an endless series of problems and interferes with our clarity of perception so seriously as to prevent us from being able to solve most of them'.

Drawing these fragments together is crucial at an individual, community, and environmental level, and for developing the ability to see and solve problems by appreciating the cycles around us and how we are all connected. This calls us to be fully aware of global cycles, trends, geopolitical developments, and mindset shifts. Whether we like it or not, whether we feel able to exercise some influence on our universe or not, we are connected to the rest of the world and must be aware of and in tune with those reverberations. If we apply awareness, alertness, learning, and curiosity, reality can be a best friend, provided that we develop our individual core to filter out the unimportant noise and develop the ability to focus on the important influences. Tactics for achieving this include using the PESTEL analysis framework, first-principles thinking, and Dalio's problem-solving model.

The final environmental ring asks us to adopt a drone's eye view of the world from a distance to more completely understand our environment. We need to assess how our resonance fits in with global rhythms to determine if we are a systemic fit. If not, we may be compelled to reflect on our views and beliefs and determine if the organisation we work in or the country or community we call home are in tune with our personal 'jiggles and wiggles'.



Working together: the '2 against 3' rhythm of nature



Achieving resonance, as depicted in Figure 1, requires a holistic approach and an understanding of perspective. Perspective or point of view is described in physics – much as it is when using the musical analogy of rhythm – by the three ICE positions (i.e., individual, community, and environmental), which vibrate through to all other areas of our work and social lives.

The so-called '1, 2, and 3' relationship is represented in physics, nature, musical rhythm, and human behaviour – where the 1 (or +) represents one point of view or position; the 2 (or -) indicates another point of view or position; and the 3 (or +/-) represents the big picture perspective or superposition. Current computer algorithms deal only with two positions (- or +), although the future of quantum computing is built on all three positions, which reflects a systemic approach (Matsuura et al., 2019).

In most natural music forms, a '2 against 3' polyrhythm (two or more cycles occurring in the same space, with the same start and end points, and in harmony) exists and represents this harmonic pattern of 1, 2, and 3. Like any learning, it takes time and effort for a musician to 'hear' these patterns, which initially are perceived as chaos. This coded rhythmic grouping is embedded in African

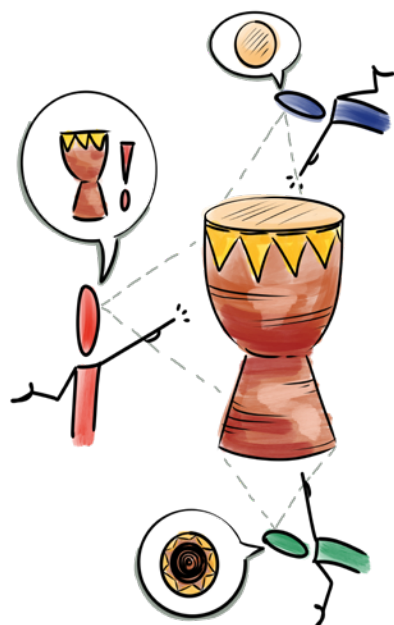
music, underpinning all contemporary music that we now recognise as soul, hip-hop, rock, jazz, or blues, and where natural harmonic rhythms have their best and most innate expression. In essence, this '2 against 3' pattern could be described as the rhythm of nature, showing us that it is possible for small or large groups to be perfectly aligned and to operate in harmony. Similarly, resonance of this type can be applied to the shared purpose within complex systems to achieve flow.

One could say that normal perception has blind spots because it generally focuses on the individual's level of reality. However, increased consciousness enables humans to see, not only their point of view, but also the views of others (group view) by applying empathy and deep listening. Big picture mental models take this further and enable a universal point of view and superposition understanding. This systems thinking approach, as coined by systems scientist Barry Richmond in the 1980s, spans the words of art and science uses this multi-thinking effort to make 'reliable inferences about behaviour by developing an increasingly deep understanding of underlying structure' (Arnold and Wade, 2015: 671). Over the years, researchers like Peter Senge, Linda Sweeney, John Sterman, and Jay Forrester have built on this notion of systems thinking to expand accepted thinking to encompass 'interconnections, the understanding of dynamic behaviour' and 'the idea of seeing systems as wholes rather than parts' (Arnold and Wade, 2015: 674).

When describing the end result of achieving rhythm and synchronicity in life, Toro (2019: 11) stated:

When it is a groove, the whole world appears to be rosy, meaning that the feeling is a good or positive one so we want to be in a groove as much as possible.... This is what it is to experience rhythm. It is the flow of many events in time, but you aren't aware of time, and it all just happens and you just ride this wave.

Toro (2019: 11) added that, 'The interesting thing is that rhythm is not always possible as it can get interrupted, but if you practice this good feeling you will try to get into rhythm no matter what the situation is because it is better to be in rhythm than out of it.'



Creativity, flow, and connection

Flow, being in the groove and natural rhythm, is the required state for innovation and creative problem-solving. Using the ICE framework, it is possible for individuals to better understand the role of resonance in their own lives. There are also learnings at the corporate level, specifically around the need for teams and organisations to be mindful of the natural, encoded cycles of individual employees. Only by doing so can business expect to unlock maximum impact from their so-called human capital (Pink, 2018).

Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy referenced the then MD of Sony South Africa, Matthew Lang, in their 2007 *Harvard Business Review* article on how to effectively manage energy rather than putting in longer hours at work. Lang (now the international MD of technology group Vestel in the UK) shared his routine of taking a 20-minute walk in the afternoons to give his mind a break from active thinking. During this minibreak, Lang found that he came up with his most creative ideas, had better clarity about the environment around him, and was able to let his imagination fire (Schwartz and McCarthy,

2007). This is a perfect illustration of how the Taoist philosophy and form of meditative practice (Watts, 1975) can be an effective hack for the new world of work.

Paradigm-shifting innovations come out of the very periods of flow that Lang (Schwartz and McCarthy, 2007) was able to achieve by tapping into his personal rhythms, and which enabled him to resonate with the environment around him and enter 'slowed down' present time.

The game of anchoring one's self in present time is a simple and effective way to find flow when needed. For example, think of a time when you were acutely and memorably 'in flow' – maybe time stood still while you were enjoying an effortless sunset run, or you were delivering an impactful keynote presentation to a captive audience. Perhaps it was while you were playing with your kids in the back garden. Once you can pinpoint an anchor, it is possible to create a reminder of that moment of energised focus by deploying a ritual, such as touching your left ear lobe or rubbing the palm of your hand, to visualise yourself back into that state.

By understanding the mechanisms that anchor you back in a state of creativity, flow, and connection, it is possible to match your ICE framework with those of others in your life or work teams, and build the internal and external resonance necessary to create the best conditions for sustained success.

The final groove

Until recently, the notion of resonance in business largely centred on employee development and getting the most out of teams – focusing on the 'I' and the 'C' layers of the ICE framework. At a strategic level, resonance remained the realm of marketing and branding efforts in an attempt to connect with employees, clients, and stakeholders by ensuring consistency of marketing efforts and public relations output (Stones, 2019). To truly resonate with individuals and create the harmony required for effective teams – or percussion ensembles – to perform at a high level, companies and individuals need to focus across all the layers of synchronicity.



Using universal metaphors from music tells us that imperfect chaos will indeed sound imperfect, unless you raise your awareness, understand your own role within the larger system of which you are a part, and become connected to the whole.

The points indicated in this white paper, and their impact on individuals and organisations when trying to realign themselves in a changing world, call for the shifting of corporate strategies in line with a widespread move towards ethical business and leadership practices, sustainable thinking, and a more inclusive and diverse world.

In essence, applying the ICE framework supports:

- Evolving workplace structures and increased flexibility that are chronobiologically tuned;
- Developing personally resonant employees;
- Building connected teams capable of working well together;
- Fostering conditions for creativity and innovation to flourish; and
- Embedding business practices and strategy that are in harmony with current world trends and thinking.

Strategic intent that resonates across these multiple levels not only supports human development through times of change and transition, but also ensures the success of future-fit organisations to be confidently capable of operating in the groove.

By implementing *the ICE framework* as a way to conduct yourself and interact with others, individuals and organisations can develop a systems-based approach to resonance that encourages personal mastery and development with the same consistency as it seeks to improve team dynamics. The upshot is *better communication, a sense of well-being, increased open-mindedness, improved creativity, openness, responsiveness, innovation and flow, as well as enhanced intrinsic motivation levels* (Ruthven, 2020).



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