



Canadian Centre for Advanced Leadership
Haskayne School of Business, University of Calgary

LEADERSHIP DRUM CIRCLE: Research and Pedagogical Background

Across cultures since ancient times humans beings have participated in rhythmic musical activities, such as drumming, that are fundamental for communication and social interaction throughout human development (Fuji and Wan, 2014). Drumming, African style Djembe drumming in particular, may enhance cardiovascular health and is associated with decreased stress and anxiety levels indicating improvement in physical and mental health, and general quality of life requisite to the busy schedules of modern people (Smith, Viljoen, and McGeachie, 2014). Group drumming over time has correlated with sustained reductions in pro-inflammatory immune response and the shift towards anti-inflammatory immune profiles along with reductions in anxiety and depression as well as improvement in social resilience and wellbeing (Fancourt et al. 2016). Group drumming has been found to be therapeutically effective for youth at risk (Wood et al. 2013) and people suffering from persistent PTSD (Carr et al. 2012). Reduction in soldiers' PTSD symptoms was observed following group drumming with an increased sense of openness, togetherness, intimacy and belonging (Bensimon, Amir and Wolf, 2008). Communal drumming activities may also enhance rehabilitation from substance abuse introducing a spiritual dimension to the healing process with altered states of consciousness similar to meditation that reduce tension and anxiety while facilitating social bonding and cognitive–emotional integration (Winkelman, 2003). Recreational drumming has also been found to provide a cost effective group strategy for reducing burnout while improving the emotional state of professionals in high stress work environments (Bittman et al., 2003).

Drumming circles have been useful as team building, organizational and leadership development exercises. For management education, including MBA and executive learning, the African drum circle offers an engaging access into experiencing the movement from an individual actor to collaborating as part of a wider network using relational principles and metaphor (O'Malley and Ryan, 2006). Drum circles have transformative emotional effects producing a range of evocative and actionable heuristic insights generated through collective reflection and learning with direct relevance to management education (Moore and Ryan, 2006). Playing one's part in a collective rhythm while maintaining awareness and respect for the rhythms of others, and the group as a whole, evokes important lessons for other learning environments. In this way, playing in drum circles emphasizes the importance of active listening emulating the interdependence often associated with healthy community (Moore and Ryan, 2006).

CCAL's Leadership Drum Circle uses mindful coaching and active listening with group debriefing and reflective learning to explore themes of advanced leadership hinging on authenticity and centeredness, relational awareness and healthy group culture for high quality performance. Partnering with Calgary's One World Drum Company participants receive instruction in basic rhythms and hand technique of West African and Afro-Cuban drumming in a series of Drum Circle workshops over eight weeks culminating in a public group performance for the Haskayne School of Business. Find your place in the rhythm of life exploring team building and authentic leadership through African drumming in a high performance culture of creativity, communication and trust at the Leadership Drum Circle.

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