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The influence of music sharing at work on social relationships between colleagues

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Johannes Nikorowitsch

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of music sharing at work on social relationships between colleagues. Music sharing has been proven to facilitate friendship and maintenance in various social environments (Brown, Sellen, & Geelhoed, 2001; Voida, Grinter, & Ducheneaut, 2006). However, music sharing at work in its influence on friendships between colleagues has never been explored, even though establishing and strengthening social relationships within the workplace have become increasingly important within organisations (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002). Informal relationships are beneficial for the overall well-being of an organisation as they increase the exchange of resources between colleagues. For the individual workers these relationships satisfy their need for social interaction.

The study applied a mixed methods approach involving quantitative as well as qualitative methods. Twenty-nine employees from design agencies throughout New Zealand participated in an online survey and seven in semi-structured interviews. Both online survey and interviews were used in combination in order to achieve complementarily and triangulation between quantitative and qualitative data.

The results suggest that music sharing contributes to the development of social bonding that occurs in the workplace. On the basis of the music that was shared through various technologies colleagues appeared to form impressions of each other. This involved determining each others' music preferences and associating other personality aspects with those music preferences. It appeared that the more similarly colleagues perceived each others' musical tastes, the more likely they were to become friends and/or to form informal music taste groups at work. The degree of reciprocity of music predicted the degree of intimacy between colleagues. When colleagues who were friends shared music with each other, they were much more concerned about reciprocating the music adequately than when they shared with colleagues they knew only superficially.

The findings of this study are relevant for employers who want to promote relationship development between colleagues in a work environment where employees are passionate about music.

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