



# Organizational Identity Or Esprit De Corps? The Use Of Music In Military And Paramilitary Style Organisations

*Stream 21: Music at Work*

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## Introduction

“As perhaps the oldest and most popular organizational metaphor, the military perspective has left an indelible mark on the structure and function of business practice and theory” (Winsor, 1996: 34).

As noted by Winsor above it is an interesting phenomenon that management writers, gurus and academics alike are often drawn to parallels between business and the military. In his paper, Winsor looked at the adoption of military metaphors to business and management. He uses two perspectives: the first employs a “predominantly strategic or external focus” (1996:34); while the second makes comparisons between “the internal or organizational characteristics of corporate and military organization...either structural...or more commonly leadership” (1996:35).

This paper intends to continue with this theme – that is to draw a parallel between the theoretical concept of *Organizational Identity* and the military inspired concept of *Esprit de Corps*.

This notion of *Esprit de Corps* pertains to both the internal organization and leadership perspectives as defined by Wilson. The term is used often in military and other like organisations such as police services to define a sense of communal purpose – greater than the self – but that which offers some sense of loyalty and manner devoted to the organisation as a whole or to a particular unit within. The concept is often driven by the leadership within the organization and can be deliberately manufactured or manipulated to achieve organizational objectives.

This paper begins by exploring the more traditional management concept of *Organizational Identity* and how that relates to the notion of *Esprit de Corps* in a military and paramilitary context. The paper then draws links between the concepts of identity, esprit de corps and also that of organizational image. It then looks at the role of live music and the use of bands in military style organisations in the Australian context in relation to developing and promoting this organizational identity and image. The paper looks at the cases of the Australian Defence Force Bands in general and The Band of the South Australia Police in particular. The aim is to develop a framework to view the use of professional musicians and understand their role in military and paramilitary organisations.

## Organizational Identity and Image

Albert and Whetten (1985) in their seminal paper defined organizational identity as being what is central, distinctive and enduring to the organization.

Closely related to this concept of organizational identity are the notions of organizational image and organizational culture. While looking at various aspects of organizational life, these three concepts are related and often impact upon each other (Hatch and Schultz, 1997; Scott and Lane, 2000). The perceptions that members hold of their organizations are unique to each individual. A person’s beliefs therefore may or may not match a collective organizational identity that represents the members’ shared beliefs about what is distinctive, central, and enduring about their organization (Albert and Whetten, 1985).

Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) suggest that rather than the organizational identity being “enduring” as Albert and Whetten have defined; it is a constantly evolving and changing set of perceptions. Instead it is the labels and symbols used by the organization to express what they believe the organization to be, which are enduring.

In line with this Hatch and Schultz (1997: 359) note “organizational culture... is founded on a broad-based history that is realized in the material aspects (or artifacts) of the organization (e.g. its name, products, buildings, logos and other symbols, including its top managers).” They conclude that the “way we define and experience ourselves ...is influenced by our activities and beliefs which are grounded in and justified by cultural assumptions and values.” (1997: 360)

Organizational identity describes what its members think about the organization whereas image is about what outsiders think, or more correctly, what organizational members perceive others to think (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994; Marziliano, 1998; Porter, 2001).

Dutton and Dukerich note:

“An organization’s image matters greatly to its members because it represents members’ best guesses at what characteristics others are likely to ascribe to them because of their organizational affiliation. An organization’s image is directly related to the level of collective self-esteem derivable from organizational membership (Crocker and Luhtanen, 1990; Pierce, Gardner, Cummings and Dunham, 1989); individuals’ self-concepts and personal identities are formed and modified in part by how they believe others view the organization for which they work.” (1991: 548)

### **Esprit De Corps**

Houston (2000) in the *Harvard Business Review* presents an article titled “Let’s Put More Esprit in De Corporation”. In this article he discusses what he perceives to be signs of strength and health in a company. Of the various factors he identifies as important to healthy organizations, esprit de corps is at the top of the list.

But what exactly is *Esprit de Corps*? Houston suggests that while there is no similar expression in the USA:

“Esprit de corps is a belief that the rank and file get from the top which makes them feel they are different from and better than other people and that the organization is more important than the individual” (Houston, 2000: 56).

According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*:

*Esprit* is defined as "spirit, mind", a French adjective derived from the Latin *spiritus* dated at 1591. (Little, Fowler & Coulson, 1959: 633)

*Corps* is defined in a military sense as “A division of an army, forming a tactical unit; a body of troops regularly organized; a body of men assigned to a special service - 1711.” (Little et al, 1959: 398). It goes further to define “A body of persons associated in a common organization, or acting under a common direction -1730” (Little et al, 1959: 398)

*Esprit de corps* is then defined as a phrase being:

“A spirit of jealous regard for the corporate honour and interests, and for those of each member of the Body as belonging to it.” (Little et al, 1959: 633)

Upon further investigation, *Esprit de corps* is defined in the *Collins Dictionary* as:

“...consciousness of and pride in belonging to a particular group; the sense of shared purpose and fellowship” (Wilkes & Krebs, 1988: 381)

This suggests that the body or group described is greater than the individuals that make it up, and that there are both shared bonds between the individual and the organization as well as between the individuals themselves. These bonds exist purely because of the fact that the individuals concerned are members of that body. This notion is often the foundation on which concepts such as loyalty and devotion to the organisation are based – for example, the notions of “honour and glory” – and can remain with members even on leaving the organization.

Esprit de corps is based around a group of individuals belonging to a *special* group or body, and having strength in the knowledge that it forms part of what they stand for or believe in, how others (outsiders) perceive them, and how they relate to fellow members (insiders). Clearly there are parallels between what is being described here and what is embodied in the concepts of organizational identity and image.

### **Organizational Commitment**

Farrell (1999) in developing a model of the antecedents and consequences of a learning orientation in organizations concluded that the results showed support for the notion that “a learning orientation has a positive effect on organizational commitment and esprit de corps, and on organizational innovativeness” (1999: 38). Farrell notes that:

“Thus, the results indicate that a learning orientation may foster a learning environment and further strengthen the alliance between the individual and the organization, in the form of greater organizational commitment and esprit de corps” (1999: 44)

This suggests a direct relationship between the concepts of organizational commitment and esprit de corps. Literature on organizational commitment has also noted a link to organizational identity, although the exact nature of this relationship is not always clear. Some studies suggest that a strong belief and commitment to the goals and values of the organization, (as in the concept of organizational identity) is an integral part of organizational commitment (see for example Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian, 1974), while others suggest that organizational identification is a function of developing organizational commitment (see Siegel & Sisaye, 1997).

Much research has been undertaken in regards to the notion of organizational commitment (OC) and the relevance to organizational managers. Baruch (1998) when undertaking a critical assessment of the current relevance of organizational commitment noted:

“At the time [early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century] it was a revelation that employees’ have feelings towards the organisation, including identification with the aims and goals of their work-place. The nature and notion of the OC concept is that a person has a sense of commitment to the organization he/she works for. This may involve identification with, tendency to stay in, and willingness to exert efforts for the organization” (1998, 135).

Organizational commitment can take a number of forms and can impact on the organization in many ways. Research has shown that committed employees will contribute more positively to the organization than others, through outcomes such as a desire to remain with the organization, lower absenteeism and increased job performance (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982; Beck and Wilson, 2000; Metcalfe & Dick, 2001).

Meyer and Allen (1990) propose that there are three components to organizational commitment: affective, continuance and normative. Affective commitment relates to affective attachment to the organization and is defined as relating to “the way individuals view their employment relationship, and how far their “mind sets” are congruent with the goals and values of the organization” (Metcalf & Dick, 2001: 403).

The notion of affective commitment is directly related to that of organizational identity, but it should be noted that members of professional organizations could have multiple commitments such as to the profession itself or a related association (Siegel & Sisay, 1997; Metcalfe & Dick, 2001).

It is true that organisations are made up of individuals and any concept of what the organisation is about must also incorporate the concept of those that make up this organisation – the concept of self. A person’s self-concept can be constructed from a variety of identities, each of which evolves from membership in different social groups, such as those based on nationality or gender. However due to the increasing complexity and fragmentation of social patterns many of these traditional moorings of identity are being eroded and therefore the sense of belonging to the work organisation has become increasingly important (Dutton J., J. Dukerich and C. Harquail, 1994, Alvesson, 2000).

“Members vary in how much they identify with their work organization. When they identify strongly with the organization, the attributes they use to define the organization also define them...When a person’s self-concept contains the same attributes as those in the perceived organizational identity, we define this cognitive connection as organizational identification.” (Dutton J., J. Dukerich and C. Harquail, 1994: 239)

It is here that we can see the link between organizational identity and that of the members. It is noted that the amount members actually identify with their work organization can vary and when they identify strongly with the organization, the attributes they use to define the organization also define them. Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail define this cognitive connection as:

“Organizational identification is the degree to which a member defines him- or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization.” (1994: 239)

Albert, Ashforth and Dutton note that understanding the dynamics of identity are essential due to the impact such notions have on “how and what one values, thinks, feels and does in all social domains, including organizations” (2000:14). They go on to emphasize the importance the work place can have on one’s individual notion of identity stating, “By internalizing the group or organizational identity as a (partial) definition of self, the individual gains a sense of meaningfulness and connection” (2000:14).

Some question, however, the existence of esprit de corps within military groups. Sorensen (1994) in his analysis of the debate surrounding the Institution/Organisation (I/O) model and esprit de corps of military organisations discounts the concept entirely. In developing a new model of the military organisation he cites a Danish study that found no statistical evidence to support the existence of esprit de corps within the Officer Corps of the Danish Army, using Huntington’s definition of “common shared feelings”, stating:

“It is more likely to assume common feelings to exist among officers based upon characteristics such as function, service, and age, as is the case in Denmark” (1994: 604)

There is much support for the existence of distinct correlations between individual identity and self-concept and the concept of organizational identity and it is important for leaders of organizations to understand the relationships between identity and image and how the culture of an organization impacts upon the individuals within. Managing these interrelationships is an ongoing process and many different methods can and are used to this end. Military organizations utilize many methods such as rituals, traditions, symbols of rank and ceremonial occasions to enhance both the internal identity and external image of their organizations and to actively promote a sense of *esprit de corps*. One powerful vehicle for enhancing many of these functions is through the use of music and the military band.

### **Military Bands**

Military bands have been in existence for many centuries, for example they have existed in some form in various regiments of the British Army since about 1678 (Sargent, 1999). Bands of drums and fifes, bugles and bagpipes have been used to drill soldiers, lead armies to battle, signal strategic and tactical maneuvers on the battlefield as well as support the more traditional aspects of service life. Contemporary military bands are now sophisticated musical ensembles that undertake a myriad of tasks including public relations activities and education along with the more traditional roles of promoting *esprit de corps* within their organizations.

There are many professional musicians employed across the world fulltime in military style bands in services such as the army, navy, marines and air force as well as para-military organisations such as police services and the coast guards to name a few. Managements of these organizations continue to dedicate significant resources not only to maintaining these bands but training them and also touring them around the country and the world.

These bands perform important roles within the organisation for formal parades, functions and ceremonies, entertaining troops as well as acting as public relations vehicles to promote the image of the organisation to the outside world. As an example, the famous *Edinburgh Tattoo* is watched by thousands of spectators live each year during the *Edinburgh Festival* and by many millions via television broadcasts.

In addition, many amateur musicians give their time to play in organizationally sponsored military style concert and brass bands, the Salvation Army and the colliery bands of the United Kingdom being obvious examples. One of the most successful and internationally recognizable of these would be in the portrayal in the film *“Brassed Off”* and the performances of the Grimethorpe Colliery Band.

The fact that so many resources are invested in maintaining these musical ensembles raises a number of intriguing questions. What role do they play in the development and promotion of organizational identity and *esprit de corps* within the organisation, and how are these bands employed to promote particular images to those external to the organisation?

### **The Australian Experience**

“...the bands – with their ceremonial music, colorful dress, shining instruments and precision marching and drill – are central to the spectacle of

military and civic pomp and circumstance. Military bands – and their civilian counterparts, the community brass and concert bands – are valued for their contribution in military and civilian settings in Australian cities and towns” (Bannister, 1994: 33).

Military bands have played an important part of the musical and ceremonial aspects of Australian life since white settlement in 1788. In fact the first recorded performance of a band performance in Australia was at the Governor’s New Year’s Day dinner of 1 January 1789 (Sargent, 1999).

As regiments were stationed in New South Wales and Van Diemens Land (now Tasmania) they brought with them their bands. The bands of music of the regiments were an integral part of military life of the period. On joining a regiment an officer was obliged to pay “a subscription of 20 days pay in support of the band and an annual contribution not exceeding twelve days pay” (Regulations of 1811, cited in Sargent, 1999).

The bands were important to the officers of the regiments as they not only supplied music for the Officers’ Mess functions, they also helped to maintain the culture and lifestyle of home in these far away postings. A good band was a valuable social asset to the officers and as such they were well supported and good musicians were highly prized (Colborne-Veel, 1999). By 1824 there were two bands stationed in Sydney and one in Hobart and by 1836 there were four regimental bands in Sydney – the 4<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> (Colborne-Veel, 2000; Sargent, 1999).

These regimental bands did not perform their traditional roles – “to lighten the march of the foot soldier and to support his morale in battle” (Sargent, 1999) instead playing an important role in the broader musical life of colonial Australia, performing at Vice Regal functions, public concerts and church services. An indication of the importance of the regimental bands in early Colonial Australia can be found in an advertisement in the Sydney Gazette of April 28, 1825 advising that a set of “Quadrilles for Australia” had been composed by the Band Master of the 40<sup>th</sup> Regiment Band – arguably “the first music ‘composed’ in the colony” (Colborne-Veel, 2000).

### **Contemporary Australian Defence Force Bands**

This tradition of military bands in Australia has continued to today and arguably the Australian Defence Force could be considered the single largest employer of fulltime professional musicians in Australia.

The Australian Army (AA) has six fulltime Military or Concert Bands and five part-time (Reserves) bands in the Band Corps. The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) both have two fulltime bands each and the RAN has another six part-time Reserve bands. In addition there are a number of other bands, including Pipe Bands, attached to battalions and regiments of the Australian Army Reserve.

These bands are predominantly defined as being Military Bands or Concert Bands and comprise woodwind, brass and percussion instruments. A number of musicians also perform on instruments such as guitar, bass guitar, keyboards and vocals. This breadth of musical talents allows the bands to perform in a variety of ensemble configurations including the full Concert Band, the traditional Parade Band, Big Bands, Jazz Ensembles, Rock Bands and Chamber Groups such as Wind or Brass Quintets.

The role of bands in Australian Defence Forces is varied and differs slightly between services but many comparisons can be made between them.

According to the official website of the Australia Defence Force ([www.defence.gov.au](http://www.defence.gov.au)) the following references to roles of the bands can be gleaned:

AA – “The Australian Army Band Corps (AABC) primary role is to provide musical support for the Australian Army on ceremonial occasions, to contribute to the maintenance of morale of soldiers and to assist in the recruiting programme”

RAN – “They [the Naval Bands] deploy throughout Australia in support of naval ceremonial and public relations interests

RAAF – “The role of the RAAF Central Band is to provide musical support for Air Force occasions, *esprit de corps* activities and to assist Air Force Recruiting. The band also provides the Air Force with a powerful public relations medium”

The Job Descriptions of service musicians also provides clues to the role of the bands (see [www.defencejobs.gov.au](http://www.defencejobs.gov.au)):

AA – “Bands are a key component of the Army’s public relations programme...support Army and Australian Defence Force ceremonial occasions as well as upholding their operational role to entertain deployed troops”

RAN – “Musicians (MUSN) are responsible for promoting the image of the Navy throughout Australia and overseas...”

RAAF – “Air Force Musicians are employed to perform...music for Air Force ceremonial occasions...Musicians also assist in promoting the image of the Air Force...”

The various functions described above can be divided into four main areas, that of:

1. Providing musical support for the service’s and State ceremonies
2. Contribute to the morale and *esprit de corps* of the service personnel
3. Assist in recruiting programs
4. Public relations for the service

These various functions fall within two perspectives: that for supporting internally focused organizational objectives (such as ceremonial support and contributing to morale and *esprit de corps*); and for externally focused objectives (recruiting and public relations). The internal objectives are designed to help promote a strong sense of *organizational identity* and support for the members of the organization while those more externally focused help promote a positive *organizational image* of the service to the wider community. The main role of the bands is to promote both these concepts and they do this through supporting and promoting a culture of *esprit de corps* within the membership of their organizations.

### **The Band of the SA Police**

In addition to the Army, Navy and Air Force bands there are also fulltime bands employed in many of the state police forces in Australia. The state police forces of South Australia and New South Wales have fulltime Concert Bands within their organisations, while Queensland and Western Australia employ Pipe Bands. The Victoria Police has both a Concert Band and Pipe Band and the Tasmania Police operates a volunteer Pipe Band.

The Band of the South Australia Police (SAPOL Band) employs thirty-six fulltime professional musicians. The State Government of South Australia funds the band through the SAPOL budget. The main band is the Concert Band and musicians include woodwind, brass and percussion players, but as with other contemporary service bands a number also perform as vocalists and “rhythm section” musicians.

The SAPOL Band was formed in 1884, when 14 members of the Adelaide Metropolitan Foot Police created a volunteer brass band. The members were given a bonus of sixpence per day and allowed to up to four hours per week during their normal duties to attend practice. Early performances by the band included entertaining the young colony at outdoor events and Vice Regal functions, as well as leading the monthly “Pay Parades” where members of the Police Force marched through the streets of Adelaide to collect their pay. In 1957 the band became a fulltime unit of SAPOL and in 1974 it changed instrumentation from a Brass Band to its current format (SAPOL, [www.bandsapolic.com](http://www.bandsapolic.com)).

Up until 1957 the band was a volunteer organisation, drawing its members from within the ranks of the general police population. When the band was made a fulltime unit, the members were taken out of their current police duties and redeployed to the band unit. In its initial years as a professional unit, the band members undertook three days band duties and two days police support duties. Many of these duties have since been outsourced and now band members perform 100 per cent band duties. Over time recruitment into the band shifted focus from within SAPOL to outside, as members were specially recruited from civilian life to the organisation for their musical expertise.

Like many modern military bands, musicians are now selected for entry to the SAPOL Band by formal musical audition and short listed candidates are then processed through normal police recruiting channels. Successful recruits are then inducted directly into the band on their first day as police officers. Band recruits are already fully trained, professional musicians before they enter the band.

According the SAPOL official website:

“The role of the Band is to reduce crime through the support of operational crime prevention and community safety initiatives. The Band’s function also serves to enhance police public relations and participate in State and ceremonial occasions” (SAPOL, [www.sapol.sa.gov.au](http://www.sapol.sa.gov.au)).

Another indication of the role of the SAPOL Band can be found in their statement of objectives ([www.bandsapolic.com](http://www.bandsapolic.com)). Of particular interest to this study are the first two objectives:

1. To contribute to the effective and efficient operation of the police service by maintaining, strengthening and expanding lines of communication and public relations between police and the public and provide ceremonial support as required.
2. To promote esprit de corps within the South Australian Police and be involved in the promotion of good community relations by undertaking community policing programs developed throughout the State by the South Australia police.

The band performs a number of engagements directly for SAPOL as well as for the State generally; however the main functions of the SAPOL Band can be categorized under three headings, those of:

1. Furthering crime prevention strategies;
2. Public Relations for SAPOL;
3. Providing ceremonial support and contributing to esprit de corps for SAPOL in particular and the state of South Australia in general.

This first function of the SAPOL Band is perhaps a unique role and one that distinguishes it from the service bands of the Defence Force. Here SAPOL sees the role of the band, not only as a support for promoting the organizational image and identity (points 2 and 3 above, respectively), but to actively participate in what the organization is working to achieve operationally. By presenting a skillfully blended package of music and crime prevention/public safety messages, the band is able to contribute towards the overall strategic goals and objectives of SAPOL.

Firstly the band works actively to create opportunities to utilize their activities to further SAPOL objectives. Concerts in schools are used to promote road safety or anti- drug messages, while senior citizens concerts promote home and personal safety. Many communities both urban and regional are visited with the local police officers to help foster greater collaboration between all sectors of the community.

SAPOL Band members have been quite proactive in incorporating police related issues into their performances. For example, programs for schools including the School Beat Bands for primary schools and Rock Patrol performances for high schools have been very successful. Band members provide information on personal safety and other current issues and work to involve local police officers in developing these presentations.

Secondly the band can be viewed from a public relations perspective. Here the band is seen as a vehicle not only for promoting SAPOL to the wider community, but also to break down barriers with members of the public and facilitate greater communication. Even though the focus on performances here is on the music and entertainment value offered, all members wear police uniform during the concerts and this helps to promote a positive image of SAPOL to the wider community.

Thirdly the band performs at formal SAPOL functions providing support in the more traditional military style aspects of the organization. Graduation parades, church services, funerals and medal parades are all formal aspects that highlight the military roots of the organization. Here the band provides ceremonial support and assists in promoting esprit de corps with the force.

Outside of the SAPOL environment, there is the wider State perspective, which sees the SAPOL Band as the *State Band of South Australia*. Here the band performs for a variety of external stakeholders including Vice Regal occasions; formal State occasions such as the Opening of Parliament or for visiting dignitaries; major sporting, tourism or arts events; and regional, national and international tours.

Each of these performances places a different perspective on the role of the SAPOL Band and as such adds to the complex mix of identities it carries. Again, like the Defence Force Bands, activities undertaken are focused on both internal and external organizational objectives. The internally focused objectives support the more traditional aspects of the Police service through contributing to ceremonial functions and *esprit de corps* and help to promote a strong *organizational identity* within the membership. Promoting a positive external *image* of the organisation is achieved both through public relations type activities as well as those designed for furthering the community policing strategies. Through their performances the band is able to

present a friendly and “fun” image of police officers to the audience members. The strength of the band’s operations is based on the belief that if members of the public perceive the police to be non-threatening (even human), they are more likely to cooperate with police officers at other times.

## **Conclusion**

Why are bands so often used by such organisations and what makes them such effective tools for promoting emotionally based organizational objectives? Music is a powerful medium and forms an integral part of many rituals, ceremonies and celebrations across all cultures. In all types of occasions from Religious to Regal to Social – music often plays an important part in underpinning the event. Part of the importance of music is its ability to reinforce the emotional subtext that is being conveyed to the participants (Bannister, 1994).

Military type organisations are steeped in tradition and ritualistic representations. The military band provides the musical support to these events enhancing the visual aspects of parades and other ceremonial events. In addition the music performed adds a powerful emotional element that is immediately felt by the participants and audience viewers.

The context in which the music is experienced is an important aspect to understanding the connections made by the audience and can affect the overall experience. Bannister notes this when recounting an interview with Lieutenant-Colonel Sillcock, Commanding Officer and Musical Director of the Australian Army Band, talking about the 75<sup>th</sup> ANZAC Ceremony at Gallipoli:

“At Gallipoli, very familiar – for some, “hackneyed” would not be too strong a word – hymns and marches become “beautiful” (Bannister, 1994: 36)

Here in the poignant setting of Anzac Cove at dawn, the music performed can bring such powerful emotive responses from those involved that may not occur if performed at another time and place – or with another group of participants.

The military band brings together a number of elements to any ceremonial occasion – or any occasion for that matter - with its combination of colour, movement and sounds. It is able to evoke an emotional response from the audience members whether they are part of the organisation or not. Whether it is the solemnity of the Lone Piper upon the parapet of Edinburgh Castle or the sheer splendor of the massed Pipes and Drums formed across the parade ground, the combination of music, instruments, uniforms and precision movements is a powerful spectacle that is unique to the military organization and enjoyed by members and civilians alike.

The use of the bands in an organizational context can be directed internally or externally and is used to enhance both organizational identity and organizational image. In a military and paramilitary context these perspectives, both internal and external, can perhaps be molded into one simple phrase - “*Esprit de Corps*”.

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