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LOVE, COMPASSION AND SPIRITUALITY: A TRULY RELEVANT ETHOS IN MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS ORGANISATIONS

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ABSTRACT

In business and organisations 'love' and/or 'spirituality' mean genuine compassion for humankind, with all that this implies. We are not talking about romance. Nor are we referring to god or religion, because while love and spirituality have to a degree been adopted by various religious organisations and beliefs, here love and spirituality do not imply or require a religious component or affiliation at all. Far from it anyone can love other people. And everyone is in their own way spiritual. Given that love (or spirituality, whatever your preference) particularly encompasses compassion and consideration for other people, it follows that spoiling the world somewhere, or spoiling the world for future generations, is not acceptable and is not a loving thing to do. Love in business and work means making decisions and conducting oneself in a way that cares for people and the world we live in. So why is love (or spirituality) such a neglected concept in business? It hasn't always been so (of which more later). There are increasing numbers of writers, gurus and now even a few business leaders who advocate greater love, compassion and spirituality in corporations. There are also various interpretations of these ideas about love and ethics, about compassion and spirituality. This is fine. It's normal for any significant concept to have several interpretations, and these reflect the different ways of applying the concept in different situations. Some interpretations have a compassionate or spiritual foundation; others are quite rightly incorporated within wider issues of corporate social responsibility and ethical business. Other ideas approach the concept from the environmental angle, or sustainability, or 'fair trade'. The challenge for modern managers and leaders to develop an interpretation of love and spirituality that will work for your own organisational situation

KEYWORDS

ethos in management, business organisation.

INTRODUCTION

Compassion for humankind - and other ethical reference points for good leadership and management in business and organisations "No cord or cable can so forcibly draw, or hold so fast, as love can do with a twined thread." Love is a strange word to use in the context of business and management, but it shouldn't be. Love is a normal concept in fields where compassion is second-nature; for example in healthcare and teaching. For those who maybe find the concept of 'love' too emotive or sentimental, the word 'spirituality' is a useful alternative. Spirituality is a perspective in its own right, and it also represents ideas central to love as applied to business and organisations, i.e., the quality of human existence, personal values and beliefs, our relationships with others, our connection to the natural world, and beyond. Some people see love and spirituality as separate things; others see love and spirituality as the same thing. Either view is fine. In business and organisations 'love' and/or 'spirituality' mean genuine compassion for humankind, with all that this implies. We are not talking about romance. Nor are we referring to god or religion, because while love and spirituality have to a degree been adopted by various religious organisations and beliefs, here love and spirituality do not imply or require a religious component or affiliation at all. Far from it, anyone can love other people. And everyone is in their own way spiritual. Given that love (or spirituality, whatever your preference) particularly encompasses compassion and consideration for other people, it follows that spoiling the world somewhere, or spoiling the world for future generations, is not acceptable and is not a loving thing to do. Love in business and work means making decisions and conducting oneself in a way that cares for people and the world we live in. So why is love (or spirituality) such a neglected concept in business? It hasn't always been so (of which more later).

HOW LOVE, COMPASSION AND SPIRITUALITY BECAME UNFASHIONABLE IN CORPORATIONS

Leaving to one side the obvious associations with office romance and sexual harassment (if you run a session on this you will need to get any nervous giggles and innuendos out of the way first), it's likely that love and spirituality became something of a taboo in corporations because 20th century business was largely concerned with 'left-side brain' perspectives, for example: performance management, critical reasoning, total quality, strategic planning, financial results, profit, etc. These are necessary aspects of good business and management, but they are fundamentally dispassionate. Also they tend to be 'male-oriented' areas. Not always, but they tend to be so, probably because men are generally more prone towards left-side-brain thinking and working. Historically men dominated the business landscape, and still do today to an extent. Not surprisingly then male-oriented ideas and priorities - especially dispassionate left-side-brain factors - have tended to dominate business and organisations. Conversely love, compassion and spirituality are generally perceived to be female traits. Men are less likely than women to demonstrate loving, compassionate, spiritual behaviour because of cultural and social expectations, especially when reinforced by the business traditions already mentioned. Additionally, in some cases successful business people owe much of their success to a personal drive borne of insecurity - the motivation to fill a gap or want, which can manifest as relatively unloving, dispassionate behaviour. Some successful people seem to suppress their spirituality, and to actively resist love to the point that they cannot even discuss it. Where unloving dispassionate behaviour exists in a business leader, whatever its cause, this unavoidably sets the tone for the whole organisation to be unloving and uncaring, and devoid of spiritual awareness. If this situation is replicated across very many large organisations, as arguably it has been during the 20th century, then inevitably business and work as a whole tends to be characterised in the same way - as unloving and uncaring, and certainly not spiritual. I'm not saying that the western world is run by a load of emotionally insecure mentally dysfunctional ruthless men (although I bet we've all worked for at least one of them in our time), but arguably there are certain correlations between aggressive results-driven male behaviour, the short-term business success demanded by western economic systems, and the organisational and economic cultures that arose and endured from 'successful', dispassionate anti-spiritual (and mostly male) leadership. I should also make the point that dispassionate results-driven behaviour is not the exclusive domain of men. Many successful women in business (and politics) have had to wear the trousers, if not full the battledress, to beat the men; at a man's game, in a man's world. Let's acknowledge also the reality that a methodology based on cold-hearted logic and dispassionate decision-making can produce very effective results, especially short-term, and where clinical leadership is required to overcome great challenge or difficulty. Moreover tyrants and bullies sometimes succeed. Some even achieve long-term success (according to their own definition of the word success). And arguably certain dispassionate methods, where people and environment are not affected, are a perfectly appropriate part of the business management mix.

HOWEVER, UNLOVING UNCARING METHODS, WHICH TEND TO PREDOMINATE IN ORGANISATIONS AND TO BE PASSED ON THROUGH SUCCESSIVE LEADERSHIP GENERATIONS, ARE NOT THE ENTIRE AND ONLY WAY TO RUN A BUSINESS OR ORGANISATION.

Compounding the situation, the historical prevalence of dispassionate leadership, unloving ideas, and uncaring behaviour in organisations has tended to determine that reward systems and training and development methodologies have been correspondingly dispassionate, (staff and suppliers basically do as they are told after all), and so the whole selfish cycle reinforces itself. Not surprisingly therefore, ideas about loving people, being compassionate and spirituality are unlikely to appear in many management training manuals or training courses. Nor are the principles of genuine tolerance and selfless giving, or the values of forgiveness, or of nurturing your own spirit, because after all we must love ourselves before we can unconditionally love everyone else, and what's the point of loving yourself if the idea of loving anyone else is a totally alien concept in the conventional corporate world? People who extol the virtues of love and

spirituality in organisations have until recently largely been regarded as cranks - not because love and spirituality doesn't work - but because organisations, and also the developed western economic world, have evolved to ignore and exclude the deepest of human feelings and needs. Which when you think about what we actually all are, and what we actually all need as people, is a bit strange and a bit daft. Work and organisations in recent times have simply not aligned with some of humankind's most basic needs - to be loved, and to find our own purpose and meaningful connections in life, which often brings us full circle to loving and helping others. For a hundred years or more, millions upon millions of people who need love and spiritual meaning like they need food and drink, are denied these basic life requirements at a place that occupies the majority of their useful existence (their work), because love and spirituality (and all that these words represent) seemingly don't feature on the corporate agenda. However..Yes. However. As we know, things are changing. People are most certainly now seeking more meaning from their work and from their lives. People in far flung exploited parts of the world now have a voice, a stage, and an audience, largely enabled by technology and the worldwide web. Customers, informed by the increasing transparency and availability of information, are demanding that organisations behave more responsibly and sensitively. Increasing numbers of people are fed up with the traditionally selfish character of corporations and organisations and the way they conduct the themselves. The growing transparency of corporate behaviour in the modern world is creating a new real accountability - for the organisations which hitherto have protected the self-interests of the few to the detriment of everyone and everything else. Now, very many people - staff, customers, everyone - demand and expect change. Leaders need now to care properly for people and the future of the planet, not just to make a profit and to extract personal gain. And so businesses and corporations are beginning to realise that genuinely caring for people everywhere is actually quite a sensible thing to do. It is now more than ever necessary for corporations to make room for love and spirituality - to care for people and the world - alongside the need to make a profit. Love, compassion, and spirituality - consideration for people and the world we live in - whatever you choose to call it - is now a truly relevant ethos in business and organisations.

THE CONCEPT OF LOVE AND SPIRITUALITY IN BUSINESS IS NOT A NEW ONE

Love, compassion, spirituality, and real ethical principles (to some a modern interpretation of the preceding concepts), actually provided the platform for the formation and success of many very large and famous corporations. Dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries some very big businesses were originally founded on loving and spiritual principles. For example the early huge Cadbury and Row tree British enterprises were founded by Quakers and run on far more compassionate principles than we would consider normal in business today. High finance and loving principles rarely appear in the same sentence now, but many regional banks, long since swallowed by the multi-nationals, were once Quaker businesses, run on caring principles. The Pease Company which effectively pioneered the railway industry was also a caring Quaker business. This is not a soapbox or a recruiting post for the Quaker movement - not least because certain Quaker-founded organisations very quickly sacrificed their caring principles in the quest for greed and power. It just happens that some parts of Quaker business history provide good examples of managing corporations successfully, while at the same time leading and managing and making decisions with love, compassion and great care for the world. We can also look to longstanding examples of co-operatives, employee ownership organisations, mutual and credit unions becoming increasingly successful in modern times. Many of these organisations openly advocate and support more caring and sharing ideals that place people and ethics ahead of profit, and significantly some are now beginning to demonstrate that a more caring philosophy can translate into competitive advantage, and better commercial performance. More will appear on this page in due course about how these ideas are being adapted for the modern age. In particular, the extension of the principles beyond any religious association - especially into areas of co-operatives and employee ownership organisations - because as already stated, being loving and spiritual is not dependent on being religious or believing in a god of any sort. Love, compassion, spirituality and ethics in business are not dependent on membership of a group or section. Anyone can be loving, compassionate, spiritual and ethical; in fact most people are - it's just that big corporations have tended to require people not to be. Then as now - in fact even more so now - you don't need to go to church or to be a member of a particular religion in order to love other people, to act ethically and honestly, and to consider the needs of other people while you pursue (quite reasonably) what you need yourself. This includes loving yourself and striving to be a loving compassionate forgiving person, even if the organisation around you hasn't yet seen the light. Be assured, it soon will do. As we know, management ideas tend to be cyclical, and this is a case in point: Love and Spirituality are back in business.

CONCLUSION

There are increasing numbers of writers, gurus and now even a few business leaders who advocate greater love, compassion and spirituality in corporations. There are also various interpretations of these ideas about love and ethics, about compassion and spirituality. This is fine. It's normal for any significant concept to have several interpretations, and these reflect the different ways of applying the concept in different situations. Some interpretations have a compassionate or spiritual foundation; others are quite rightly incorporated within wider issues of corporate social responsibility and ethical business. Other ideas approach the concept from the environmental angle, or sustainability, or 'fair trade'. The challenge for modern managers and leaders to develop an interpretation of love and spirituality that will work for your own organisational situation.

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