The Manager and Love: Evoking a Loving Inquiry in a Group Setting

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Abstract

Neuroscientists, psychologists, educators, and management scholars propose that the current emphasis on intellect and reason in education and business over values such as love, connectedness, and compassion are at the root of many business ethical failures and societal problems. They argue not that reason should be abandoned in education and business management but rather that it needs to be balanced with values such as love because these attributes are innately human, enabling wise decision-making. This is a difficult task in the context of the current ethos of intellect and reason that dominates education and management. To correct the imbalance, we must explore ways of preparing future managers to accept the relevance and importance of learning to develop and embody love. Through our research, we provide an experience of community love by creating a caring, receptive, personal container. We engaged in the practice of Collaborative Autoethnography, integrating the Nguni South African concept of Ubuntu, to explore, research, and demonstrate the experience of love in a community setting. To support this practice, we framed it against the background of integrative justice, focusing on authentic engagement without exploitative intent as per Santos and Laczniak's (2015) Integrative Justice Model (IJM) and built upon some common contexts from which love is considered such as Catholic Social Thought (CST) and indigenous cultures. We analyzed why and how love might be implemented in education and management and how Collaborative Autoethnography can be applied in connecting with others to research, learn from, and build upon the experience of love and connectedness.

Keywords Management · Love · Agape · Collaborative autoethnography · Ubuntu

Introduction

For businesses to ethically engage marginalized community members with non-exploitive intent (Zalman 2010) it means loving them by respecting their dignity as human beings to ensure social justice. However, in its current form, business looks to the Enlightenment Age's emphasis on science, reason, and the intellect for its guiding principles. Unfortu-

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nately, this focus assumes that business is more like a physical than social science, where the role of human values and intentionality has been removed from consideration, resulting in "ideologically inspired amoral theories... [which] have actively freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility" (Ghoshal, 2005, p. 76).

Ghoshal argues for a more positive view of the human being, encompassing intentionality and altruistic behavior as fundamental human characteristics (2005). As McGilchrist (2009) points out, the emphasis on compartmentalization, reason, and intellect is a consciousness originating in the brain's left hemisphere, which has overpowered the more holistic consciousness of the right hemisphere. He agrees with Ghoshal in that the current emphasis on business diminishes human attributes of love, compassion, care, and spirituality typical of right hemisphere consciousness with serious negative consequences to society (McGilchrist 2009). Further, he proposes that the left hemisphere dominates and shuts down the right hemisphere because the right is characterized by openness, inclusivity, love, ambiguity, peace, etc.—all attributes that threaten the left hemisphere's orientation (McGilchrist 2009). This came about for several reasons, but it is hypothesized that since the enlightenment, left hemisphere consciousness has been emphasized particularly in academia in the 20th and 21st centuries. Society and culture have the tendency to push us to the left hemisphere of our brain. However, thoughtlessly internalizing the dictates of those in power speaks to laziness on the individual's part and co-produces the will of the majority perspective and goes against the notion of a genuine communal life (Buckley 1996).

Due to the plastic nature of the brain, the capacity in the left hemisphere has been overdeveloped and needs to be counterbalanced by calling on and utilizing right hemisphere consciousness. Overcoming this imbalance requires effort and practices that consciously develop and bring the right hemisphere consciousness into our awareness. It is possible to do this by simply aligning oneself with the attributes of the right hemisphere, which are closely linked to the source of human values. McGilchrist (2009) also points to Asian contemplative practices to engage this consciousness. A self-awareness developed through contemplative practices can provide a vehicle to engage in self-critique, which enables the individual to assume absolute responsibility for their own beliefs (Buckley 1996). Self-critique can create a sense of awareness for the individual that can enable an intentional shift to the right hemisphere consciousness, rather than defaulting to the left hemisphere consciousness, thus potentially stemming the tide of societal influence.

Regarding management, high-profile ethical failures in business such as Volkswagen's Dieselgate, Wells Fargo's amoral sales activity, BP's shortcuts on safety equipment, and the ongoing concern regarding the impact of business activity on the sustainability of communities and the globe have brought an increased focus on the need to enhance the teaching of critical thinking, and the ability to participate in values and ethical decisions in post-secondary business education (Balmer et al. 2011; Laasch et al. 2020; Li et al. 2018; Park and Elsass 2017). Some recognize that ethical business is not just a desired condition but is a prerequisite for a sustainable and prosperous economic model based on mutual respect, sincere concern, and proper rapport among stakeholders (Ramboarisata and Gendron 2019). In this view, business can benefit humans if it prioritizes the importance of interconnectedness in human life over short-term interests, as has been described by Terry Mollner, Rinaldo Brutoco, and other scholars (Nussbaum 2003a).

Ubuntu is a South African word which expresses the lived commitment to our common humanity, can help to foster in the business community the human qualities of humility

over arrogance, cooperation over domination, and generosity over greed. As a practice, it can help to place inclusive dialogue and conversation at the heart of the strategic agenda, political, economic, or otherwise. According to Ubuntu, "The process is the product" creates inclusive dialogue within and between companies, governments, and their relations with marginalized stakeholders in less wealthy countries. World Business Academy Fellow Terry Mollner believes that a mature form of capitalism "must loosen the straitjacket of capriciousness and provide the survival kit for a mature and humane future for the good of all" (Mollner 2001). Capitalism infused with Ubuntu could help to foster nations that are truly united through a generous, cooperative consciousness, which recognizes as much the commonality of groups as the sovereignty of the individual. Mark Luyckx said at the World Business Academy meeting in October 2002, "There needs to be an evolution away from entity and structure and a move towards a focus on individuals, groups, and people as the primary focus" (Nussbaum 2003b; p. 24). He called for business leaders to connect, not just individuals, but to foster the connection among groups and to link relation to our shared purpose. "We've been moving this way for thousands of years but have not noticed" (Nussbaum 2003b; p. 25).

For this, businesspeople are expected to be mindful of their accountability, callings, and the needs of others (Lam et al. 2018). The language used here parallels closely that of the language used by McGilchrist (2009) to describe right hemisphere consciousness, which is experienced as: "changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings within the context of the lived world, but in the nature of things never fully graspable, always imperfectly known- and to this world it exists in a relationship of care" (McGilchrist 2009; p. 174). For business leaders to make a broader impact to ensure their own success and the success of their organization, taking a collaborative approach instead of being territorial is critical (Fernandez et al., 2024). Otherwise, the leader or their organization may not be operating at their full potential. For instance, organizational leaders who force employees back into the office, after allowing them to work remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, to ensure employee productivity can potentially hinder economic growth for their companies (Royle, 2023; Tsipursky, 2023). Achieving a shift in mindset requires enhancing self-awareness, understanding one's emotions, and soliciting viewpoints from others (Fernandez et al., 2024). Being aware of one's biases and reflecting on them can begin to open leaders to working with others, rather than only prioritizing their own interests, to ensure their success and that of their company's.

Ultimately, promoting love in organizations requires an integration of the grammar of business (e.g., the need to achieve organizational goals, such as returning a profit) and the grammar of love (e.g., commitment to the wellbeing of various stakeholders) so that a balance is struck between being operationally and financially successful and being caring towards the organization's stakeholders (Hummels et al. 2021). Unfortunately, if organizational leaders are unable to express love skillfully, they risk causing disengagement and burnout in organizational members (Lee 2022). To create a genuine sense of community within an organization, where stakeholders can be accepted even when they are different, means a willingness to engage in self-critique and to have absolute self-responsibility for one's thoughts and actions (Buckley 1996). Conscious engagement with others to create a sense of community also means that through dialogue, a person welcomes vulnerability such that they are receptive to the influence of others (Buckley 1996). Following this line of thinking, we explore how engaging in collaborative autoethnography can be a loving prac-

tice that facilitates relationships that build interpersonal connection, social well-being, and trust within organizations, contributing to financial performance (Helliwell 2003). Through this process of loving interaction, we seek to discover, hold, and develop innate human abilities (Culham and Lin 2020) to generate authentic engagement without exploitative intent.

Integrative Justice Model

The Integrative Justice Model is a conceptual framework that aims to address the social and economic inequalities faced by marginalized and impoverished communities by creating fair and ethical marketing strategies that empower and uplift these communities rather than exploiting them for profit (Zalman 2010). The model emphasizes the importance of recognizing the rights and dignity of impoverished individuals and seeks to promote their inclusion in the market economy, calling for a shift in traditional marketing approaches that often exploit their vulnerabilities. IJM advocates for strategies that promote long-term sustainability and social responsibility through fair, ethical, and innovative marketing to people experiencing poverty (Santos and Laczniak 2009).

One of the fundamental principles of the Integrative Justice Model involves engaging with the target population to understand their needs, aspirations, and cultural values to co-create products and services that are tailored to their specific requirements and to provide them with opportunities for skill development, entrepreneurship, and economic mobility (Deutsch 2023). This can be achieved through initiatives such as microfinance programs, vocational training, or cooperative ventures that enable individuals to participate actively in the market (Hassan and Ashraf 2010).

Furthermore, the Integrative Justice Model highlights the need for transparent and ethical business practices (Nussbaum 2003b). It encourages the development of inclusive business models that leverage digital platforms, mobile technology, and other innovative solutions to overcome barriers to market access and improve the overall well-being of people with low incomes (Santos and Laczniak, 2015).

Santos and Laczniak (2015) introduce prescriptive components of the IJM as follows: (1) authentic engagement without exploitative intent; (2) co-creation of value with customers; (3) investment in future consumption without endangering the environment; (4) genuine interest representation; and (5) focus on long-term profit management. These principles are meant to capture the ethical dimensions necessary to nurture just exchanges with vulnerable consumers. As such, the IJM makes the moral dimension explicit and, unlike most of the mainstream marketing models, is about justice (not exploitation), honesty (not deception), and long-term sustainable operations (not short-term profit-focused operations).

The Integrative Justice Model emphasizes the importance of authentic engagement with disadvantaged consumers without intending to exploit them. This principle is supported by several theories that provide a normative foundation. Catholic social teaching highlights the inherent and inviolable dignity of the human person (Van Tongeren 2013; Heyer 2005). Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative, precisely the second formulation (White 2004; Rollin 1976), emphasizes that people should never be treated as mere means to an end. Ross's theory of duties includes beneficence, which suggests assisting those in need when reasonable (Lee at al., 2014; Knapp and VandeCreek 2004). Service-dominant (S-D) logic emphasizes distributive justice in the form of active participation from customers such that

the exchange process is a balanced one (Merz et al., 2009; Payne et al. 2008; Vargo et al. 2006). Virtue ethics underscores the role of values in shaping behavior (Mejia and Skorburg 2022; Tsoukas 2017). These frameworks advocate for treating customers, especially impoverished and vulnerable ones, fairly and without exploitation (Santos and Laczniak, 2012).

We will not go into further depth of the IJM as it does not constitute the core of our contribution. Still, we argue that we can co-generate authentic engagement without exploitative intent by evoking love through loving inquiry and creating a caring, receptive container as per Santos and Laczniak's (2015) Integrative Justice Model.

Framing of Love

One aspect of love is that it serves as the "supreme emotion" that allows us "to see another person, holistically with care, concern and compassion" is love (Culham and Lin 2020; Fredrickson, as cited in Miller 2018; p. 7). Educating the person holistically, including the heart (Culham 2013), the body, and the spirit, "within the context of an interconnected world" (Miller 2019; p. 5), stands in contrast to Western education, which primarily attends to the education of the mind. Miller (2018) recommends that we overcome the embarrassment and fear we have in including love; and, in turn, prepare managers of the future to accept the relevance and importance of learning how to develop and embody unconditional love. The importance of love is clear to all and exercised constantly in the family, the church, and the community (Bruni and Stanca 2008), yet the significance of love has been slow to take hold in business education (Culham and Lin 2020). However, exploring the idea of love, or bringing love into management or the classroom is receiving more focus recently both in academia and in the mainstream (Chapman and Sisodia 2015; Cook 2022; Hummels et al. 2021; Pirson 2022; VanderWeele 2023).

Love in the Context of Christianity

St. Paul described love as that force which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:14). Love is patient and kind; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist in its way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians. 13:4–7). Moreover, no true virtue can arise without charity (1 Corinthians. 13:3), a virtue that encourages the emergence of other virtues (Sferrazzo 2019).

In Franciscan sources, love is tied to the concept of caritas, the Christian love of humankind (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The term charity derives from the Latin *caritas*, which has two meanings: dear price, and affection, love (Occhialini 1965). The Latins used it to speak of noble love veneration (that for the gods or the homeland). The difference is that "charity has only an active connotation, while love also has a passive conception" (Barsotti 1982). Love is always God, but insofar as it lives in man. Man is the term of this love: he returns the love received by the "One who first loved us" by loving God, nature, and his brother (Temperini 1995: 77). Others are just like us insofar as we are all in the image of God (Borsato 2018; Nigri et al. 2020). This is consistent with the Quaker belief that there is a light within implanted by God in every person (Rediehs 2016). In search of a Latin word to translate love-*agape*, too close to the Greek *eros*, Christians found the solution in *chari-*

tas, translating the two Greek words on which *christianitas* was based: *agape* and *charis*, or love and gratuitousness (Bruni 2015; Melé 2012). The Christian notion of agape thus became the main precept of Christian ethics, linking the conception of love to virtues (Sferrazzo 2020). In the Christian tradition, agape represents God's unconditional love for all of creation, including people, and by extension, is an ideal model for the love of people for one another. Agape is unmotivated, not based on merit but on love as God's nature. Its very presence creates value in the loved. In human interaction, agape does not depend on the characteristics of the loved one and is not reason-dependent (Helm 2017). Through the lens of Christianity, love is developed by practicing our ability to recognize that we and our ego are not the center of the universe: the first law is to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and the second is similarly to love your neighbor (Matthew 22:37–39). Other religious traditions affirm the Christian understanding that "God is love" (1 John 7:16) and that "Love bears all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). Gandhi's Hindu perspective argued that "God is truth and love," (Lee 2022) while some versions of Buddhism emphasize the cultivation of a compassionate and loving "warm heart" as the "source of everything positive in the world" (Kongtrul 2018; p. 16).

Love in the Context of Indigenous Cultures

The kind of love that inspired Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and was described by Don Miguel Ruiz (Ruiz and Mills 2004), a carrier of Toltec indigenous wisdom, lies at the core of the universe and ought to be central to holistic education, not peripheral (Miller 2006, 2019). Indigenous cultures have a role in complementing the lived experience of virtue and in integrating and embodying more deeply the principles of love, connectedness, and wholeness. Miller acknowledges the potential role of indigenous education in enabling this deeper embodiment and integration (Miller and Arrows 2013; pp. 9–10).

Ubuntu is a social philosophy, a way of being and it calls forth the practical embodiment of connectedness with others. It is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community with justice and mutual caring (Nussbaum, 2003a). According to the South African Bishop Dandala "*Ubuntu* is not a concept easily distilled into a methodological procedure. It is rather a bedrock of a specific lifestyle or culture that seeks to honor human relationships as primary in any social, communal or corporate activity." *Ubuntu* becomes a fountain from which actions and attitudes flow. Consciousness of what one is able to give and/or receive becomes equally important. The saying *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person because of others) becomes a statement that levels all people. It essentially states that no one can be self-sufficient and that interdependence is a reality for all." (Nussbaum, 2003a, p. 2). "Ubuntu is consciousness of our natural desire to affirm our fellow human beings and to work and act towards each other with the communal good in the forefront of our minds." (Nussbaum, 2003a, p. 2).

Ubuntu requires individuals to live from and experience a generous ontology towards others (Forster 2010; p. 7). Implicit in this way of being, whether presence or awareness, is not just awareness but embodiment, or what Miller calls movement and action (Miller 2006; p. 61). Such a movement calls forth the need to cultivate personal "response-ability" and the desire to show up in service of the community. In Africa, the original cradle of humankind, "humans first evolved our need for belonging and learned how to develop a sense of com-

munity" (Nussbaum et al. 2010). Ubuntu is about becoming more human in a social context and entails a lived spiritual commitment to communal growth (Guenther 2022; Nussbaum 2018).

Ubuntu and love involve artful presence, artful being, and embodied, caring, and other-centered communication. However, neither Ubuntu nor Love are easily distilled into concise scientific concepts. Both can be ephemeral and intangible, yet they are palpable when you experience the affirming impact of another person's loving and caring presence. To provide a greater understanding of these palpable effects, research on the determinants and outcomes of love is currently underway (see https://www.templeton.org/grant/the-construct-and-assessment-of-interpersonal-love).

Love and Organizations

In companies, employees are influenced by their company's aim to make a profit but are also guided by their emotions, feelings, and other irrational elements (Nugent and Abolafia 2006; Simon 1955; Thaler 2016) that cannot be easily quantified or measured such as generosity, humanity, kindness, compassion, help for others, and mercy (Sferrazzo 2019). Interpersonal relationships (Chater and Loewenstein 2016; Karlsson et al. 2004; Rosso et al. 2010) bind people together (Dokko et al., 2013; Garrett et al. 2017) based on spiritual considerations, personal affinities, and love (Pirson 2017a, b; Tasselli 2018). While interpersonal relationships can be deemed unproductive, they can lay the foundations of social cohesion and belonging (Sferrazzo 2020) necessary for any relational experience (Becchetti et al. 2008).

Bringing the energy of loving emotion into the classroom or organization requires the instructor/manager to develop the capacity to manage their emotional response to the diverse situations and student or employee emotions that may arise in the classroom or work setting. Moreover, the instructor or manager will need to cultivate skills to create a loving space as outlined by Miller's (2018) eight types of love: (1) self-love, (2) personal love, (3) impartial love or compassion, (4) love of learning, (5) love of beauty, (6) love as non-violent action, (7) presence, which is love as a way of being, and (8) universal love. Miller argues that these facets have a distinct role in holistic learning and education; we claim they are involved in managing whether one acknowledges it or not. Paradoxically, it is impossible to be an effective classroom or organizational facilitator of love without engaging all the levels of love Miller identifies. It is the selfless, non-judgmental love applied that is the antidote to the attachment arising from the other forms of love (Culham and Lin 2020). Developing a presence in this space requires practice much more than intellectual learning.

Apart from the individual bringing love into an organization, the norms, artifacts, values, and assumptions of an organization can signal the appropriateness of expressing certain emotions (O'Neill, 2018). When feeling rules allow for "affection, compassion, caring, and tenderness for others", a strong culture emerges because employees within the dyadic and group interactions frequently show this care and affection towards each other (Barsade and O'Neill, 2014, p. 552). Love can serve as a living grammar, organizing group interactions to express beneficial love in a manner that enriches both self and others (Hummels et al. 2021).

At the cultural narratives and individual experiences level, such love should primarily manifest as effective action, echoing Sorokin's notion of adequacy (1954, p. 6). It ought to embody wisdom and bestow virtuous benefits that facilitate profound personal and collective development (Lee 2022). Healthy, mature love that can be applied in an organiza-

tional context must be developed through a growth journey. It entails effectively nurturing development through profound I-Thou relationships, acknowledging the inherent worth of the self and others without exceptions (Lee 2022). Love, whether perceived as a noun or a verb, transcends individual feelings or actions, evolving into a broader, all-encompassing experience.

To foster a more effective and expansive caring ethos, guide others towards the same awareness, and collectively act upon it, leaders must recognize the reality of globally interconnected ecosystems (Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013, p. 111). A sense of interconnectedness is crucial for fostering holistic value creation and promoting (re)generative processes (Reed, 2007) through a love-centered framework (Hummels et al. 2021). The aim of fostering a sense of interconnectedness is to elevate consciousness and advocate for creating environments where love is actively practiced for the betterment of businesses, individuals involved, and the broader human and natural environment. Love serves as a lens through which we perceive reality and a guiding principle for action, facilitating its adoption and implementation in daily operations.

Following Hummels et al.'s (2021) definition of agape as an "agenda for growth and affirmation of people and the environment", as a unified application of Miller's love-levels, we provide a virtuous real-life example through CAE of "how" the relevance of love can be brought about in processes of meaningful organizing by evoking a loving inquiry. We explore and define why and in what way love could be an essential ingredient of a shifting paradigm that not only gives management a more human face through authentic engagement with non-exploitive intent but also goes further to shape a new understanding of love as a lived and embodied experience cultivated through spiritual discipline to promote it as a practice that fosters human flourishing and the thriving of our natural world (Hummels et al. 2021).

Methodology

One of the main problems of expressing love is that resistance is everywhere (and nowhere) (Rudrum and Stavris 2015; p. 76). To overcome this resistance, we have set up a community-based, community-sustaining, and community-serving (Lather 2013) experiment to enquire about the possibilities of embodying unconditional love through authentic engagement with non-exploitive intent, using Collaborative Autoethnography (CAE) and a methodology of loving inquiry. CAE is modeled in a safe group setting by integrating and embodying Ubuntu through guidelines created for a loving inquiry (Appendix 1).

When using CAE, a group of researchers (at least two) share personal experiences related to an agreed-upon topic and analyze the collective data. "By allowing researchers to explore the self in the presence of others, CAE enables scholars to gain a collective understanding of their shared experiences" (Belkhir et al. 2019; p. 265). This process helps to link language, landscape, and cultures (Lather 2013) and to interpret the meanings of personal experiences within the socio-cultural contexts of the participants (Roegman et al. 2020). CAE reflects on difference, otherness, and disparity, producing new terms of belonging by "being-acting-feeling together" (Maclellan and Talpalaru 2011). By evoking a loving inquiry, we ask an individual to share a story about what love means to them to enhance our understanding of what love means to us and how we can best facilitate it within the group.

The researchers have worked individually, as a group, and as an extended community to develop competence with CAE in a loving circle. It is crucial to work and practice in a group for two reasons: first, it is consistent with embodied learning, as noted above, and second, classes and organizations function in group settings where it is often necessary to address issues at the moment (Macedonia 2019). Working in a group setting allows sharing and learning from peers' experiences and practicing right hemisphere consciousness attributes of love, compassion, care, and nurturance in a safe and supportive group (Lutz et al. 2008). This allows authentic engagement with non-exploitive intent because these groups interact with awareness, showing love and care for each other.

Since education and society in general emphasize left hemisphere consciousness, a concerted effort must be made to overcome left hemisphere consciousness due to its self-serving and narrow perspective that excludes other views including that of the right hemisphere (McGilchrist, 2021). The left and right hemispheres of the brain express distinct consciousnesses which become clear when one or the other is shut down for medical purposes or due to illness such as a stroke. This is different from the usual neuroscience language that describes functional attributes of brain areas such as sight and language processing etc. Second, the left hemisphere's epistemology or way of knowing is through abstraction or representation. That is, the left hemisphere is not in direct contact with lived experience and believes due to its narrow view that its representation is reality (e.g., assuming that the menu of a restaurant is equivalent to the experience of eating the meal). On the other hand, the epistemology of the right hemisphere is lived experience that is embodied, open, can be intuitive or prereflective knowledge, and is experienced moment to moment (Culham 2024; McGilchrist, 2021). Third, the right hemisphere is the source of knowledge that the left hemisphere depends on, but it paradoxically denies this truth because it is a threat to its structured fixed way of seeing the world. McGilchrist's (2009) first book *The Master and his Emissary* sums up his view that the right hemisphere is the Master because without it the Emissary, the left hemisphere, would have nothing to represent and none of the wonder that is available through lived experience (e.g., experience of listening to moving music or watching the sunset).

Given this context, CAE is a helpful in that it requires a dialectic of right hemisphere consciousness by recalling critical incidents and being in lived experience, such as being vulnerable while in dialogue with others, and left hemisphere consciousness by preparing culturegrams and writing about one's experience. The important point is to balance left and right hemisphere modalities and make sure that one is not overwhelmed by language, rationality and structure, which are attributes of left hemisphere consciousness and favored by academics. These approaches will be discussed further in the next section.

Analysis Technique

CAE "invites communities to investigate shared stories and balances the individual narrative with the greater collective experiences" (Blalock and Akehi, 2018, p. 94). Thus, the dialogue among the team is reflective of shared experiences on a topic. (e.g., in our case Love). It focuses on self-interrogation but does so collectively within a team of researchers (Roy 2020).

To frame our different backgrounds and set out intentions, we prepared culturegrams (Chang, 2018). Culturegrams are concept maps visually presenting who we self-identify

with and the priority we give to socio-identity markers, for example, race/ethnicity, gender, profession, marital status, perspectives on love, religious and spiritual beliefs, and practices (Hernandez et al. 2017; Chang 2013). As part of this phase, we prepared recollections of essential incidents in our lives in response to the following prompt: "What are some critical incidents that have shaped our understanding of gender, cultural ethnicity, love, and leadership experiences in our upbringing influenced by our native national culture and in our current context."

We then conducted 7 group discussions and 4 Professional Development Workshops (PDWs) on the theme of love personally as applied in management and/or education (Appendix 2). This was done by listening and speaking from a deep, loving place and setting up a specific framework from where to speak and listen (Nussbaum 2018). The sessions were recorded, and a scribe noted key points for later reference.

Findings

By evoking a loving inquiry in a researcher/practitioner managerial context, we bring emotions back into management through the systematic and intentional pursuit of an understanding of the self within a socio-cultural context, recording interpretations as the experience unfolds (Fox 2008; Ngunjiri et al. 2010). In the quote below, Richard shares a story with the CAE group members of his experience with an exercise from a different cultural context to create a sense of openness between people. This anecdote suggests that when a group member shares his/her life experience regarding how interactions can be shaped to foster non-exploitive intent, it can help increase the collective capacity of the group for love because group members can learn from the story.

> So often, we avoid people; instead of trying to include them, we shut them off. It leads to many discriminatory practices, "you're not as good as I am," or "I don't want to expose myself to you" situations, and what have you. The exercise I learned in meditation centers in Brazil and India is quite simple. Two people who do not know each other will stand face to face. And one person will say to the other, I hate you. And the other person instantly responds, I love you. And this goes back and forth with increasing intensity for maybe three or four minutes. And then they switch. So, the person who was the 'aggressor' changes with the person who was much more of a soothsayer. After this two-part exercise, which takes less than 10 min, they breathe, embrace, and say nothing. Just embrace. It does beautiful things in large groups, one on one, but it does remarkable things to change that whole environment in a meeting. But again, it's done as a meditation practice. So, an inquiry is something of this nature of interest (Richard, CAE, Nov. 5, 2020).

If love is considered a virtue, its influence will extend to all aspects of our lives. It will manifest in our words and actions, shaping the way we interact with others. While we may be unable to change those around us, we can always control our behavior. Love, when embraced as a virtue, can foster tranquility and serenity within us, urging us to become more receptive and open-minded. It teaches us to accept ourselves and embrace the circumstances that unfold around us, fostering an attitude of openness and acceptance (van Dierendonck

and Patterson, 2015). As part of reflecting on the culturegrams, group members sometimes shared stories when their own cultural influence caused them to behave less than lovingly (Giorgia). We suggest that these stories of struggle with love humanize each member and facilitate an opening to each other.

> I attended an international private Anglo-Saxon school located in Rome, Italy. Cultural diversity was a natural part of my upbringing at our school, but not all students came from affluent families. Our school had a little boutique where families could donate their used belongings. One day, at the age of nine, I remember casually remarking, "Who would buy anything from that store? It's all our old clothes and used stuff." [.] Standing beside us was a girl from Pakistan, wearing an oversized turquoise sweater adorned with embroidered ponies. She chimed in, "Oh, we go there all the time. They have some nice stuff. I bought this sweater there. Do you think it's ugly?" At that moment, my heart sank. It was a turning point, the exact moment I could have continued down a path of self-centeredness and insensitivity. Instead, thanks to her gentle but powerful reminder, I began to change for the better. Love has a remarkable way of shaping our character, and that day it helped me choose a different path (Giorgia, culturegram notes, April 20, 2021).

When group members shared their stories, they also discussed barriers to love they encountered. Societal pressures may narrow one's view of love and how to enact it in one's life. Giorgia's quote illustrates the societal constraints placed on her regarding her freedom to love and be loved. Her fiancé understood this constraint and demonstrated his love for her by giving her an engagement ring to free her from societal pressures and without expecting anything in return. This story revealed a personal account of engaging with others without exploitive intent.

> This shaped my understanding of relationships. Armando bought me a ring after six months of dating, so I looked "normal." In Italy, past 27, something is wrong with you if you are not in a relationship (Giorgia, Culturegram, Dec. 15, 2021).

The use of culturegrams helped to frame group members' stories regarding societal roles and expectations of how they were expected to love or what roles they were expected to perform in their relationships. Our group's reflection regarding cultural influences also included workplace culture. The question arises in the realm of work relationships: is love necessary? Perhaps not in the conventional sense, as expecting everyone to genuinely like each other is unrealistic. Some group members shared stories of barriers to love in the workplace and how their understanding of love evolved over time (Tom). We suggest this sharing helped group members see what love might look like in the workplace, which can facilitate interaction with coworkers with non-exploitive intent.

> Throughout my business career, I thought love did not belong in the workplace because I viewed it as only romantic. However, through my Ph.D. education and coming to know companies such as Cordon Bleu in Montreal, which Mother Theresa inspired to run their business humanely, I saw love as an expression of care for others that had nothing to do with romance. Rather, it was an acceptance of the other person

as intrinsically valuable for their own sake, regardless of their performance (Tom, reflections on love extracted from culturagram, July 7, 2023).

As philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre suggests, love should be separated from passion, acknowledging that emotions are essential but must be educated and balanced (Mendham, 2007). Listening to each other's cultural stories of love and creating culturegrams prompted group members to self-reflect on their own cultural influences regarding love. We suggest that it enabled group members to self-reflect on potential barriers to embodying love in their own lives. Thus, this self-reflection may inspire an individual to remove impediments to loving themselves and others, increasing one's ability to interact with others with non-exploitive intent.

> The CAE journey prompted me to explore the role of love in my personal, professional, and communal life with greater consciousness and intention. Throughout the collaborative inquiry process, my biases and judgments slowly melted away. [.] Initially, I had some resistance to the concept of self-love, but as time passed, I embraced it. I came to appreciate the value of this idea through the influence and inspiration of others. This reframe wasn't just an intellectual exercise; it significantly impacted my behaviors and adaptations (Barbara, culturegram notes, Oct. 6, 2022, revised Sept. 3, 2023).

Overall, using culturegrams to frame some reflections regarding love highlighted the diverse understandings of love of each group member. Using the culturegram as a prompt, the intentional practice of sharing thoughts regarding cultural influences on love served as a window into each other's hearts to potentially accelerate deeper connections (Angela). We suggest that connecting more profoundly to coworkers or other stakeholders may help engender authentic and non-exploitative interactions in the workplace.

> Through CAE, I gained a deeper understanding of love by hearing team members' stories of their formative experiences and influences. Despite our diverse backgrounds, we connect deeper and learn from each other. We share highs and lows without judgment, creating a self-managed team driven by exploration and mutual respect. The loving inquiry process has helped me appreciate my colleagues, see their inner light, and learn to love strangers or colleagues more quickly than in regular interactions. It's a practice that fosters deep connections and understanding among us (Angela, reflections on love extracted from culturegram, June 21, 2023).

It is important to note that love is not a quick fix or a solution to our problems. It often introduces complexities and challenges into our lives. However, love does play a significant role by providing strength and fortitude to pursue what truly matters to us and aligning with our values. The Hawaiian practice of Ho'oponopono (Bodin et al. 2016) teaches us that life presents us with experiences, both positive and negative, for a reason. Every circumstance is an opportunity to learn and grow; we are encouraged to embrace them with love (Scribe Notes, Nov. 5, 2020).

Discussion

Authentic engagement is a significant and genuine connection that transcends superficial interactions (Johnsen 2023). It involves being fully present, sincere, and open in our interactions with others, whether in personal relationships, work collaborations, or community involvement. It requires active listening, empathy, and a willingness to understand and appreciate the perspectives and feelings of others, marked by honesty, vulnerability, and a commitment to mutual growth and shared goals (Herrington et al. 2003). When we authentically engage with others, we create spaces where trust, respect, and authenticity can flourish, fostering deeper connections and more meaningful experiences (Gardner et al. 2005).

To evoke a loving inquiry and to support the CAE process, we co-create the conditions for people to bring a caring shared intention. We build invisible architecture for a loving space. The more we can show up for each other with a whole heart and a clear mind, the more we shape the conditions for a receptive communal experience (Bill et al. 2007). Like authentic engagement, it requires an ongoing dialogue that promotes empathy, trust, and mutual respect.

This plays a vital role within organizations, especially when framing it against the Integrative Justice Model, since they both seek to create a more equitable and just society at a personal and systems level. In this model, authentic engagement goes beyond mere participation; it embodies a commitment to understanding and addressing all stakeholders' diverse needs and perspectives. Authentic engagement within integrative justice means actively involving marginalized voices, valuing their lived experiences, and co-creating solutions responsive to their unique challenges. This is only possible by creating a space where people can show up with their vulnerability (Hammond 2014).

Limitations and Conclusion

This paper is part of a 4-year research process and is the first of a research line. It sets the basis for our coding and data analysis, which we are currently working on through the love lab. Our findings contribute to existing humanistic management theory by expanding the dialogue on how to engender spheres where people feel more comfortable expressing personal facets of their lives and experiences, increasing a sense of purpose within their station (Hummels and van der Put 2023). Humanistic management promotes valuing inherent human dignity over economic gain (Hummels et al. 2021). Respect for people due to their intrinsic value, rather than how well they fulfill a role, is prioritized by including human emotion, especially love, in business.

This research demonstrates the merit of disclosing stories that may not typically be shared in a work or academic setting. With the aid of culturegrams, participants shared their experiences of being in an emotionally closed environment and the negative feelings arising from upholding norms stifling expressing love. However, when they shared personal experiences about how they shunned these traditionally sterile environments, they were met with receptivity and increased openness by the group members who witnessed their stories. Within a co-created non-judgmental climate where authenticity was encouraged and valued, over time iterative witnessing, and the experience of being seen and heard in a loving way, contributed to the evolving experience of ease and comfort.

We suggest that our findings can be used to enhance how leaders manage their organizations. It is the norm that many organizations stifle vulnerability and emotional expression particularly negative emotions and often negative information (O'Toole and Bennis, 2009). However, it is possible to change this and there are benefits in doing so. Leaders can contribute to firm performance and trust within the organization by building a culture of candor (Bennis 2018; Helliwell 2003). Leaders can support this by admitting mistakes (an important form of vulnerability and example setting for others) and by providing organizational structure that supports truth telling such as "open-door policies, ombudsmen, protection for whistle-blowers, and internal blogs that give voice to those at the bottom of the hierarchy" (O'Toole and Bennis, 2009, p. 7). This is an important foundation towards supporting an environment where employees can feel open to express themselves fully. To build on this an organization would need to create a safe space where employees can practice being more open and vulnerable in their day-to-day jobs. Training in teamwork and experiencing the positive aspect of resolving team conflict through problem solving, compromising, and yielding (which are forms of critical thinking and vulnerability) would provide a further support for more openness (Todorova et al. 2022). With foundations such as this, an organization can then take a further step of creating a loving culture as discussed in this paper.

Several attributes of the CAE process experienced by our research collaboration are suggested to help this succeed. Establishing groups of the same people who participate in vulnerable discussions over an extended period, supported by a skilled facilitator independent of the firm, is important. Specifically, the next step might involve initially using a culture-gram to draw out background information on the group participants. This would be followed by creating an open space where employees can share and ask questions of each other to learn about their perspective on love and what might be restricting their ability to love and care. Guidelines for evoking loving inquiry such as the ones we used in our research, can be developed by group members. Once internalized, the guidelines shift the tone of the shared understanding to agree to invite a more loving culture into each group. Finally, the group could determine how the revelations from their discussions might shape how they interact with each other in the future to engender more care and love. It would be ideal if this were applied to the leadership of the firm first to set an example for employees. Once leadership role-models and embodies this behavior, other teams could co-create similar non-judgmental norms where authenticity is encouraged and valued. Over time, iterative witnessing, and the experience of being seen and heard in a loving way, can contribute to the evolving experience of ease and comfort in companies who choose to shift their culture in this way.

In the Integrative Justice Model context, love plays a pivotal role in fostering authentic engagement within organizations. This model emphasizes inclusivity, empathy, and fairness. Vulnerability has been cited as a significant factor that shifts groups towards connection and resonance (Brown 2016; Levi 2003). Love, in this sense, signifies a genuine concern for the well-being and growth of every individual within the workplace (Nussbaum 2005). This authentic engagement leads to a relational collective environment where people are given permission to contribute their best, creating a culture that allows individuals to feel safe in their vulnerability. When leaders and colleagues demonstrate and embody love, employees are more likely to feel psychologically safe and motivated to engage authentically.

In our research collaboration, we explored using CAE to structure sharing personal reflections on love to gain a collective understanding. Through these series of interactions over time, we brought about and maintained loving interactions with each other. We dem-

onstrated that using CAE as a vehicle to authentically engage with all community members may enable the application of the Integrative Justice Model to forge connections and foster a sense of collective responsibility to dismantle systemic barriers and address social inequalities. In his autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom, Mandela (2008) wrote: "I have always known that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin or his background or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite…Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished." As societies and workplaces face increasing polarization, the case for the power and importance of expanding the capacity for love, is embodied in the words of Nelson Mandela.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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