Is LOVE an important ingredient in organisations?
(a reflection piece by Mee-Yan)

I have gathered some insights in the past few years that have propelled me to write about the subject of love in organisations and OD practice.

FIRST insight:

Sometime back, I was asked to be an external examiner of a PhD thesis on **"The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Love as 'a Choice to Will the Highest Good' using the Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ)"**. The title was so intriguing that I quickly agreed. When I finished ploughing through the 306 pages, I was struck by: (1) how much more academic literature there are around this topic, and (2) how in times like this, LOVE is such an important subject that we must scheme to restore it in organisational life.

SECOND insight:

In the past few years, I have come across more and more people who have either lost their "skip" to work or are in a semi-permanent state of dissatisfaction about their work experience, regardless of their ranks. The BOTTOM people blame their managers for making life difficult by being so production driven; the MIDDLE managers blame their ineffective leaders for failing to connect with them. The TOP leaders are distressed by unrealistic expectations from board members, shareholders and their own vulnerability in the face of a merciless public media world. Somehow, the sense of joy, fun, deep fulfilment, and calling to live an impactful life have been lost, replaced with a sense of fatalism that has moved in to stay.

THIRD insight:

The deep dissatisfaction at work is caused by a myriad of factors, but the key one is the continuous over capacitated state people are in, leaving them without any energy to invest in relationships and to build communities at work. This state of "I need to look out for myself and my survival" is further reinforced by an over dominance of silo working culture.

The stewing effects of these insights drove me to ask: are (a) the current strong focus in doing more engagement work and (b) the current types of interventions we OD practitioners use sufficient and effective to help restore **love**, **relationships**, an **affiliative** culture and the concept of work **community** back to the organisation?

What is Love? – a psychological construct? a behaviour?

The study of love came from two key strands: the psychological field and leadership literature.

Love as a construct has existed in psychological literature for decades, and many psychologists (Allport, 1983) believe that such behaviours can be cognitively mapped. This means that the concept of "love" as a psychological dimension can be studied, especially in most robust leadership questionnaires – e.g., the Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (TLQ), the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), the Leadership Profiles Inventory (LPA), etc.

In the field of leadership study, Kouzes and Posner (1987) had a hunch that "love is a vital aspect of exemplary leadership". After numerous interviews and case analyses, they came to the conclusion that most the exemplary leaders have something in common, i.e. they love their products, people, customers, and their work – hence they conclude that love is the best kept secret of exemplary leadership.

After many years of studying transformational leaders, Burns defines transformational leaders as follows:
> "The transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower.   The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents." (1987:4)

In this definition, Burns focused on the intention leaders have in identifying broad psychological benefits to the followers based on specific actions of themselves as leaders.

Then Boulding (1989) came along and espoused the theory of love as an integrating power. He defined love as "***having a genuine concern for others within a relationship organisation context, demonstrated via behaviour sourced from clear intentionality of the leaders, and having an integrative power***".

This converges with Burn's definition. Both of them see the psychological benefits to the followers not based on inappropriate paternalistic or hierarchical control, but based on leaders having "genuine concern" for their followers, which results in a mutual stimulation and elevation.in that relationship.

So when Miller (2004) pulled these **love** constructs – "consideration", "encouraging the heart", "genuine concern for others", and "choice to will the highest good", she defined that ***"love could be viewed as 'a choice to will the highest good of other'"***.

The one thing all the authors have in common is that they believe such behaviour must exist in the perception of the followers and not so much from the self-reporting of the leaders.

Why is LOVE such a key ingredient in organisational life?

I am not sure we need to turn to researches to answer this question, even though there is literature especially in the area in high performing organisations. I prefer to be guided by the generative imagery of what organisation will be like if "LOVE behaviour" is the norm.

Let's just imagine that when people who work in the complex world of work begin to accept that they cannot solve most issues by their sheer intelligence alone, they will know that the level of interdependence to get things done is high. They then choose to behave in a considerate way towards others by putting themselves in other people's positions and thinking through what others may need from them. They would also be motivated to encourage colleagues who are finding life tough and voluntarily show concern for others. And when the support for others grows challenging, they deliberately choose to do what will benefit others the best.

So, if leaders, with the help of OD and HR practitioners, make it their goal to **build an environment to enable 'LOVE clusters" to become the behavioural norm within an organisation**, then the

climate of the work place will be nurturing, warm and supportive; one with members not just thinking of the well-being and welfare of others, but consistently **choosing to will and do the highest good for others** – customers/patients/colleagues. The organisation will then become an inspirational place for us to skip to work to.

Also, just imagine when people's own values are operating actively to aim for collective success – the quality of the interface between people will be soul-building and affirmative. Maybe with levels of safety up, people will own their developmental needs, aim for the greater good, and find that being decent and wonderful colleagues to one another is a most satisfying thing. Then we can truly say we have done what we can to grow the innate desire of most people who go to work because they want to:

- Collaborate, as human nature is fundamentally relational;
- Be given opportunities to serve others, as most people want to put themselves out to contribute and achieve;
- Achieve something larger than who they are, and are hence eager to build networks to achieve something greater than what they can accomplish by themselves; and
- Take part in bringing completion to the virtuous cycle of interdependence, interconnectedness and strongly networked and bonded work community.

The challenge we have is that most individuals need a bit of help to know how to demonstrate these love clusters:

- They need developmental interventions to show them how to turn these intentions into behavioural dimensions;
- They need positive role models from upwards and sideways – colleagues to show them how to participate in building the conditions; and
- They need to be supported to stay affiliated and connected with people while functioning in the overbearing and result driven culture in which they work – they need to be shown how to build capacity to spread goodwill around.

This is why we HR/OD practitioners have major role to play in introducing love back to the work place. So can we do better?

What are the implications for HR/OD practitioners?

There are many, but to begin, the following are here to stimulate your own thinking about what you will need to do – play and experiment with them:

1. Cultivate our own desire to embrace those behavioural clusters of love so that as we work with clients, we will demonstrate what loving behaviours are within the work context.

2. Rethink the design of different types of intervention to help system members, particularly leaders, to know how to "will the highest good" for their staff, colleagues, board and customers. This may require us to make a radical turn in our current development interventions.

3. Think creatively about how to help system members to grow their "love cluster" behaviours – especially in formulating cross boundary teams, or within intact teams.

4. Learn how to be a fitter "gelling agent" – do more conveying, connecting, building-alignment types of interventions. Learn how to grow the confidence and trust between units by evoking positive emotions they have for each other and be an explicit peacemaker.

5. Incorporate the "love cluster" behaviours in in-house leadership development programmes – especially since the **love** aspect of transformation leadership has been well established by literature. Use it.

6. Learn to not just concentrate on the "hard core" task-focus type of leadership behaviours – e.g. strategic formulation, audit, advanced project management programmes, etc. But include the key aspects of building culture that will engender trust, love, support, interconnectedness, interdependence, etc. in your core leadership development programmes – starting from entry induction, to first-line supervisor to middle management training.

7. Invent creative systemic experiential interventions to build not just competency, but a new mental model, new behaviours, a new "character" within the organisation.

The above is not an exhaustive list of issues and I encourage you to get together with colleagues to dialogue about how to make loving behaviour real in the work place. There must be an innovative way to go about growing the clusters of **"love behaviours"** in organisations, in leaders, and in general staff.

Maybe we can start now by sending someone a thank you card, or telling them they are a value team member, etc. I would like to thank all of you for working hard in bringing humanity back to the work place. Please have a happy valentine "year".