



Roffey
Park
Institute

LEADING FROM LOVE

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Introduction

What part does love play in leadership? If love was at the heart of our leadership, what might be possible? What does 'leading from love' mean? Why is love so problematic for us in the workplace?

In 2019 my research into love in organisations was the winning entry in Roffey Park's Research Competition. All of that research you'll find in this publication. Since then, love has continued to be a focus for me and, alongside my work in leadership and organisational development, my research has continued through:

- a series of workshops on why love matters, what gets in the way of love and what forms of love are needed for the tough times we're in
- three cohorts of a three-month Leading from Love programme, with a range of sectors
- a monthly podcast exploring love from a range of angles, and guesting on many others' podcasts.
- the deeply experiential workshop, The Love Lab, to explore love and experiment with how we create connection and intimacy with people we don't know.
- writing blogs and longer pieces alongside extensive reading and research

This 2023 version of the original report updates each section of the original research with my latest findings and thinking. It also brings you two completely new sections, one suggesting some of the reasons why love can be so difficult for us at work; the other exploring ways we might think about or define love that are helpful and useful for the organisational and leadership context we find ourselves in now.



How it began: 2019

When I started to talk about being interested in exploring love in leadership I noticed a curious response. Instead of 'great idea', generally, people said "you don't mean love, though, do you? You mean compassion or empathy." Erm, no I don't, I mean love. "Well, it's about engagement, I guess". No, I guess it's about love. I sensed a nervousness. Was that their own lack of ease with explicitly using the term love? Or maybe they didn't want me to embarrass myself somehow with a topic that was a bit edgy?

But it got me even more interested in the word and our reactions to it. Why do we want to dilute the word? What's that about? Why does it appear so difficult?

As a leadership development consultant and a coach working with senior leaders in a range of organisations, it's my responsibility to do my own personal development. And I like to go deep. And, no matter where I have been – Findhorn Foundation, Hoffman Process, Celebration of Being, shadow work training, integral coach training – I kept coming back to the same theme. That if we bring more love to a situation – any situation – it makes a huge difference.

I was also coming to see that, while some organisations are building extraordinary communities with purpose and passion and humanity at their heart, even more are becoming less human, less connected. Even more we're asking people to leave parts of themselves at the door. For example, the organisation I worked for whose culture was described as savage and brutal. The company whose policy allowed no compassionate leave for the death of a sister, only a parent. The myriad examples of managers and leaders who treated their teams as if they just were 'bad robots'.

I knew I wanted to see whether the two worlds I was inhabiting – the world of deep and radical personal growth work and the corporate world – might cross over. Could what I was learning and experiencing so powerfully in my personal development be applied to leadership and the way we lead our organisations?

I'm deeply interested in seeing what we need to do to make organisations places of 'psychological safety' – places where we're able to show and employ all of who we are without fear of negative consequence. To counteract the unthinking un-humanness that goes on. To prevent the creeping culture of fear that I experience in so many of our workplaces. But also to explore what might be possible – ambitiously, optimistically – for ourselves and our organisations if we could bring more love into our workplaces. I want us to lead our organisations with more love in our hearts and in our behaviour.

I wanted to know, could the daily practice of love help with the problems that confront us in our organisations?

This is the first part of my ongoing inquiry into that question. I'm sharing here what I learned from some early research, combined with further reading and thinking. I hope it stimulates your own thinking on the topic and encourages you to begin your own inquiry into the (your) relationship between leadership and love. I make some suggestions at the end about how you might begin.

What has changed: 2023

Two key things have changed for me:

- The work I have been doing exploring love in leadership has moved from interest to commitment. I now describe myself as an advocate as well as a researcher; an activist for love, if you like, committed to finding ways to bring love to the fore.
- And that commitment has widened. My core focus is organisations and leadership, and how love contributes to creating organisational cultures that do more good than harm. Working in organisations is how I make my living. But the world has changed a lot since 2019 and I also find myself interested in the role love needs to play beyond organisations in helping us face into what's happening now and the difficulties that are coming our way. If the world is on fire, as some say, then I want to know we can choose to live well together – and how love can help with that, both in and out of organisations.

Something else is notably different too:

- The initial range of reactions to talking about love, which included a great deal of raised eyebrows and some cynicism, has shifted, at least in my experience, to become much more open and accepting. Most people now lean forward with interest and curiosity. And there are more people in the world of organisational culture and change who are openly talking about love in their LinkedIn posts, for example, or who are sharing their views about love more openly.

This is likely to be for several reasons: the post-pandemic move to hybrid working brings with it an inclusion of people's home and wider lives and those parts of our lives invite us to include and explore our humanity; our experiences of Covid has meant many people are deeply questioning whether the way we have constructed our workplaces and the ways we choose to work are good for us, are sustainable, are desired; and the growing isolation and fragmentation of society which was exacerbated by lockdown and distancing may mean that we are seeking greater intimacy and connection with each other. We also now have the climate crisis becoming ever more urgent; in the UK, we have war on our doorstep; and we have many acute social problems. All of these things create the conditions for us to ask: what matters most now? And what role might love play?

Section 1: Love matters (2019)

“Love is what we were born with; fear is what we learned”

Marianne Williamson

‘How important is love in the workplace?’

This was my first question. And 94.4% of respondents felt that love at work was either very important (47.2%) or important (47.2%) They said:

- *‘humans work best in a loving environment – love is a core human need’*
- *‘if love is important in life, why wouldn’t it also be important in the workplace’*
- *‘that love helps us feel safe and when we feel safe we are able to be ourselves and take risks. We can do what needs to be done rather than what we need to do to keep safe’*
- *‘the challenges we face as a human race require a connection to something deeper and real and in our hearts for new responses to emerge’*
- *‘because we need to counter balance the Victorian work approach of making money, the focus on processes and systems and the scientific underpinning of work that requires us to be emotionless’*

As Adam Kahane describes it in Power and Love (2010), he says that organisations have become all about, power that is the drive for realisation that can produce furiously competitive commercial creativity and growth. And that drive is vitally important, for sure. But at the expense of emotions? At the expense of our humanity, and our hearts? Risking us becoming disconnected with ourselves and with other people? Cauterised from our feelings?

It seems that the way we’re working today sets us up to have no space for emotional connection. We’ve become willing to sacrifice emotional connection in order to get the job done says bell hooks in the Will to Change (2004).

But my data seems to indicate that we want something different.

‘What would it be like if love were present?’

I asked, wanting to know what might be the rewards or benefits. There were four key themes:

1 The first related to Self with comments like:

- *‘I’d shine more brightly’ and ‘be the best version of myself’*
- *‘I’d have personal joy and satisfaction’*
- *‘I’d look after myself a bit more’*

2 The second was Others with respondents feeling strongly that our connections with other people would be deeper and stronger, more meaningful and more open.

They described it as contributing to a real sense of community and tribe:

- *‘less competitiveness with each other’*
- *‘there would be a ‘tribe’ feel to work’*
- *‘more enriching connections with others’*
- *‘more trust, more sharing, more giving’*

3 The third theme pointed directly to Business. It was ‘the differentiator in high performance’, with:

- *‘braver decisions’*
- *‘unusual responses to pervasive and complex challenges would emerge’*
- *‘sustainable change towards people and the environment and away from mechanistic thinking’*

4 Finally, respondents had a feeling that it would be contagious and that we’d see our behaviours mirrored back to us with more people being role models for love – and perhaps resulting in ‘an infectious spread of affection for what we do that we call work’.

So firstly, there seems to be a clear recognition in the data that love is core human need. As Thomas Lewis says in *A General Theory of Love*, (2007) as human beings we are driven by our limbic system and hard-wired for love and connection. And yet, in our current work context, he can see 'we feel we have triumphed if we have subjugated our emotions'. Work has become about getting things done, creating things and changing things, about productivity and efficiency.

But if we need love as human beings, then we also need it at work, right? Why would that not follow?

Secondly, some of the data also chimes with critical management theory that suggests that organisations are too powerful not to play a social role in our lives, and demands organisations to put purpose and sustainability above profit. My respondents know that our organisations can be so much more than they are if more love was present. Maybe even that more love means better business.

So love appears to provide a counterbalance – good medicine and strong medicine, if you like – to stories of the inhumanity of some of our working practices. We hear about these at some of our major retailers or in the gig economy all of which have been described as the new 'satanic mills' of our generation. Corporate austerity policies ask us to do 'more with less' and we pay a high price in levels of stress, mental health and wellbeing. In the search for ever greater rationality, efficiency, productivity, and competitive advantage we squeeze out our humanity.

As a coach and through running leadership development programmes across all sectors, I see up close and personal the price people are paying for this way of working. Anxiety and depression, stress and burnout, shut down and cut off from their feelings, anger ...and the physical symptoms that go along with those. Their stuff becomes my stuff, for a short while. And it's not good. I don't want that for my clients. For anyone. No one deserves to pay such a high price for organisational efficiency. I think love can help.

Love matters: 2023

The 2019 research seems to land with people. In the workshops and events run over the last 4 years, it is recognised, it appears valid. People tell me it matches their own experience. People understand that we are hardwired for love, that it is a core human need. They know that, with more love present (and we will look again at what we mean by love later on) that they can be 'them on a good day' more often. They know that we will work better and more collaboratively together with love present. And they have a strong sense that things might be better all round with more love. There appears to be a compelling case for love.

That said, of course, the people who come along to the workshops I run, as with those people who completed the 2019 research, are a self-selected group of people, who are already open to talking about and expanding love in the world.

In 2023, I would include 4 additional things that appear to provide a compelling case for why 'love matters':

- Love is something that is in our direct control. When things are worrying, and even terrifying, whether at a local or a global level, it can be difficult to know what to do, how to make a difference. What is our part to play? many ask. How can I effect change? What impact can I possibly have? In the workshops I run, we often discuss how, if we can't have an impact on a global level, we can definitely have an impact on a local level. We CAN make a huge difference to our team, our children, our neighbours if we are intentional about, for example, creating a loving climate around us. And the choice to be loving is one that is in our control. The psychologist Erich Fromm talks about how love is an intentional practice, it's a choice that we each have. We can choose love.
- The need to cultivate our deep humanity. The once-slow-and-now-very-fast rise of AI means that much of what do in our work has the potential to be done by an intelligence that is artificial, to be replaced by algorithmic responses. We cannot yet see the extent to which that will be a good thing, and potentially also a bad thing. But we can see that the territory of machines is not territory we need to contest or claim. We can't. It will always be better than us, in some ways. But what we can claim, fully and intentionally, is the domain that tech is unlikely to do well, if at all. And that's our humanness – our humanity, our empathy, our ethics, our happiness and creativity. And our love. It's what Gerd Leonhard calls our andrithms (2016) – the human essences that are largely unnoticed and ephemeral. We need to invest as much in protecting and cultivating our deep humanity as we do in developing our wonderful tech solutions. Cultivating our capacity to love seems an essential way to maintain our deepest humanity.
- The need to supporting our mental health. We have a growing data set that tells us we have a mental health crisis. We see this a problem for children and young people, exacerbated by the pandemic and by social media. And we are coming to understand it better in adults too, in the recognition that between 40-60% of adults experienced some form of slow trauma, of Adverse Childhood Experiences, as a child. So the growth in trauma-informed coaching, for example, and trauma-informed leadership is very much an approach based in compassion and love and one that should be actively encouraged in our organisations.
- As a way to deal with the climate and environmental crisis we are facing: Increasingly we are hearing about the impact that the climate crisis is having on our mental health and the rise of eco-anxiety. When times are tough, says Judith Hemming (in conversation at a recent event), we need super-resources and often from wider realms than we might ordinarily consider. Alongside compassion, grief, reverence, wisdom, courage and humility, she mentions two in particular, love and clarity. Professor Jem Bendell also, in his writings on how we learn to adapt to the climate catastrophe, argues that we need to enable loving responses to our predicament. He says: 'as we see more pain in the world, and sense that it will get worse, it is possible that we will shrink from it. But the suffering of others presents us with an opportunity to feel and express love and compassion. This arises from a loving mindset, where we experience universal compassion to all beings. It is the love that our climate predicament invites us to connect with'.

But it's not straightforward...

Section 2: Love matters – but it's problematic (2019)

'How comfortable are you talking about love at work?'

Despite the strong message that love is important in work, 30.3% said they felt either very uncomfortable (5.5%) or uncomfortable (24.7%) talking about love at work. Reasons people gave included:

- *'Doing so would make me appear weak – that love is generally viewed as weakness and weakness doesn't belong in the workplace'*
- *'I would be judged and misunderstood'*
- *'It feels flaky and unprofessional'*
- *'It might undermine what I'm trying to achieve at work'*
- It's *'too personal and intimate'* and *'over the line'* of what's acceptable in the workplace
- That the *'place for love is firmly at home and not work'*

As I said in the introduction, people seemed to want to steer me away from doing a piece of research on love, per se, in the first place. And this data appears to match those responses. I often quote the actor Steve Coogan at this point, who said in an interview... *'my adage is that the edgiest word to use at the moment isn't f**k, piss or shit. It's love. That's what really makes people's buttocks clench'*.

I think that's true. We find it a very difficult word to use and I'm interested in that.

I'm reminded what Bob Marshak says about what goes underground in organisations, what rarely gets spoken about. In *Covert Process in Organisations* (2006), he names several things that are taboo subjects... emotions, our fears, hidden agendas. And also aspirations – it's somehow not acceptable to talk about our hopes and dreams, and what we long for. If it's true of aspirations, I imagine that the same goes for love, even though it's not expressly on Marshak's list.

I then asked, 'what blocks you from leading from love?' and that included:

- *'judging that others will be dismissive'*
- *'my need to fit in with others'*
- *'others not being comfortable'*
- *'afraid to reveal my true self' and 'my own insecurities'*
- *'my fear of what love demands of me'*

Through the comments, some themes emerge:

Fear was a key issue and, specifically, fear of being judged by others and also the fear of our own vulnerability.

I don't think that the opposite of love is hate. Well, it is in one sense, for sure. But I think a more meaningful opposite is fear. And I see a lot of fear in the organisations I work in and in the people I work with. Fear of not belonging or of not being liked. Fear of being found out and of getting it wrong. Fear of just being wrong. Of being judged and found wanting. Fear of someone discovering 'what we're really like'.

In fact, one colleague I talked to recently, in line with author Marianne Williamson's thinking (1996), thought it was more than fear – he thought that many of the people he met were terrified.

It's paralysing to be in fear – it shuts down all of our creativity and our ability to connect and reach out, our willingness to take risks. It means we separate ourselves and pull up our drawbridges to protect ourselves. We are so full of cortisol we can't function as a whole human being. I'm with Williamson when she says, 'when love is absent, fear steps in'. And no good can come of that.

And fear underpins some of these responses above. That we might be seen as vulnerable and weak for expressing or demonstrating love – or even talking about it. That we will be judged and thought odd and different. And more – that we will be kicked out, side-lined, ostracised, with our power, influence and currency taken away from us. Surely that's our core fear, that we will be abandoned by our tribe. Terrifying, in fact.

A second theme was appropriateness. That work is just not the place for love. I mean, I do get it – finding that line between what's appropriate and what's not. And didn't Kenneth Williams once say 'love is the most awful intrusion of privacy'? But still. We see this separation a lot. This split between home and work. I was working with a team a couple of years ago and two people who had worked together a long time didn't know that they each had a 16-year-old daughter.

Another example, just the other week. As part of a leadership development programme, a module that focused on 'self' had so many people saying they had never spoken about themselves with their work colleagues like they were doing with us. And they were asking 'really, is it ok to do that?'.

Yes, it really is. Because it's not ok to believe that we need to leave part of ourselves at the door when we come to work – and mostly our emotional life. How come I can't show you all of who I am? Including my love. What harm must we be doing to ourselves to keep parts of us so walled up from the people we spend most of our working hours with?

A third theme was being too stressed and busy, under pressure to deliver under pacesetting leadership. Being on autopilot and being sucked into transactional rather than relational work.

I see this in me. I can get so caught up in my own stuff that I forget to look up and connect with others. For Adam Kahane, love is 'connection and opening up ...to ourselves, to each other and to the context and what's needed of us'. And it's hard to do that when we have our heads down the whole time.

Blocks to love: 2023

From the 2019 research, the underlying sense of there being undercurrent of fear in our organisations still remains. In 2023, I also hear other fears, wider than in the organisational domain including a deep worry about the state of the world, and a very specific rising fear about increasing conflict, and the climate and environmental crisis. With those two things comes also a sense of powerlessness and a concern that we cannot change it and we don't know what to do to make a difference.

Alongside that, as I mention in the earlier section, I am noticing much more openness and curiosity about love, a great acceptance that it matters in organisations and a willingness to really explore what that might mean in practice. Fewer people than in 2019 are surprised when I talk about love. More people tell me: 'yes, we need more love'. I am wondering if these two things are connected and if people feel that if the world is in trouble, then love might be worth exploring as a way to help things feel better.

The sense of busyness remains, and seems even more intense, now that we are more likely to work online and at home, where our boundaries can become blurred, and I often talk with people who are regularly working 12-15 hour days. The pressure on us from the system of 'extractive capitalism' that we work within seems to be creating an even greater sense of 'do more, do all of it, do it faster'. US pastor John Mark Comer (2019) says that you can't be a hurried person and also be a loving person and it does seem as if this might need some attention.

In 2023, I want to talk about three additional ways that help us see how introducing love into the workplace is problematic.

1. Trauma

We have a growing understanding of how many people have experienced trauma as children, and how that still plays out for us as adults. Childhood trauma is often retriggered by organisational change (Stuart, 1996). What's the connection with love? Well, one of the impacts of trauma is that we learn to not feel certain things, in order to keep us safe. We put in place, at an unconscious level, solid protections so that we are never hurt again. And this can mean that we cannot connect easily or sometimes at all with love – we may not be able to feel it, receive it, let love in. And so we need to be very careful in assuming that 'everyone can be more loving', it may not be true.

In UK organisations, we have particular forms of trauma that disproportionately impacts the leadership of many of our public and private institutions. That's something named Boarding School Survivor Syndrome, which is especially pronounced in 'early boarders', those who boarded as young as 8 years old (Schaverien, 2015). Her research shows that in order to survive, many young children cauterised certain feelings to cope with the ABC of boarding school – abandonment, bereavement and captivity and the dissociation that resulted means a disconnection with aspects of giving and receiving love.

The growth in trauma-informed coaching and trauma-informed leadership will hopefully enable us to work more consciously and skilfully with trauma at work. But for many of us, our limited capacity to feel and express love, means that introducing love into the workplace needs much care and consideration.

2. The way love is gendered

Love in organisations is problematic because care, kindness and compassion are seen as women's work (Bunting, 2020). During the 19th century these qualities came to be seen as something soft and emotional, and associated with femininity, while men were expected to be public spirited. These qualities became the pursuit of women and were marginalised in public and professional life.

Care is not really seen as work, but has been framed as instinctive, biological, natural and moral – and so it's not work in the narrow sense as traditionally understood by economists.

The world of work has been shaped by men, to whom care did not traditionally fall – it was historically outsourced to women – and so it is rarely given a legitimate role or space in the workplace. Our approach to management is too often based on competition, drive, goals and focus which creates a very narrow a field of attention and squeezes out the capacity for the more expansive, expressive qualities such as kindness and compassion.

And as Bunting also says, first and second wave feminism naturally wanted to distance itself from 'women as carers' because women had been boxed in by that for too long. And so there's an argument that if women entering the workplace perhaps understandably stayed away from a caring role and men automatically weren't picking up that role ... then no one is claiming 'love as care' in the workplace. For different reasons, men and women both want to NOT identify themselves with care. And this makes it difficult for love to find its rightful place in organisations.

3. Our own relationship with love

First, is something that is reflected time and time again in the workshops I run: the fact that we can only be loving with others if we learn to be loving to ourselves. Even when I don't explore self-love directly in my sessions, the groups take me there regardless. We talk about how difficult it is to manage our inner critic, and to learn to love those parts of ourselves that we don't like very much. We explore how guilt gets in the way of putting ourselves first and of treating ourselves with love. We talk about how our own internal relationship with love – what it means, and how we learned about love from our primary caregivers – laid down a template for our love as adults.

Secondly, love is also problematic because each of us learned about love in a particular way. As a consequence of the particular parenting we had, the context we were raised in, the things we were taught either explicitly or implicitly, we each have our own version of what love is – what it feels like, looks like and sounds like. This is tricky because a behaviour I believe to be loving is one that you might have come to know as deeply unloving. We cannot assume to know what love means to someone else, and that requires thoughtfulness as we introduce love into the workplace.



Section 3: How do we define love? (2019)

'Love is the only emotion that expands intelligence.'

Herbert Maturano

Another theme for respondents was not knowing how we might lead from love for lack of a clear sense of what it looks like in practice. This is what I'll write more about soon.

But what do we even mean by love? How do we define it? Do we need to find a definition that's fitting for the workplace? Or is love just love wherever it goes? I intentionally didn't provide a definition in the research, preferring to build a picture from respondents.

How did people define it?

This is what came back:

- Care was the word used most often. Again, that's a word that could probably use a definition, but interesting to see it top of the list.
- Listening came a close second. Can there be anything much more valuable than putting aside your own stuff to really listen? Don't then all want/long to be heard? I think it's possibly the greatest gift we can give people.
- Then empathy and compassion and the ability to see something through someone else's eyes and experiences. Even 'hyper empathy', for one respondent.
- Being genuinely interested in all of who people are' and 'giving people undivided attention'. This isn't leadership as 'performance art' but as genuine interest in others.
- There was a cluster of words or phrases that equated to really seeing and accepting people for who they are, warts and all, no matter what. No matter what. That's a huge ask, isn't it?
- The final theme was setting high standards. Holding 'yourself accountable first' but also holding high expectations of others ...and then having the courage to hold them to that and having the difficult conversations when necessary. This is the part of love that is about saying no, holding boundaries and being clear and direct.

Defining love: 2023

There is no doubt that the list of six things that my 2019 research respondents most identified with love have felt deeply accurate and resonant during these last four years. In particular, people have commented on how much they value their practical and tangible nature, on the lines of 'if you can see it, you can be it'. The two on the list that usually generated most discussion was the value of deep listening, which speaks to people's need to feel 'seen' and 'got' and perhaps recognises how our attention is so often pulled away from the person in front of us. And secondly, the need to hold ourselves or others to a standard or to set a boundary, which many people said they recognised as a form of love but not one that is usually spoken about or seen as that

That said, we have also had discussions in workshops about whether this list was too reductive, concern that there might be an assumption that if people only did these things then there would be more love. Some people felt that was nowhere near enough. Instead, they said, love was much less about behaviour and much more about an internal attitude, a core belief, with the need for people to find a way to realise that 'we ARE love' rather than 'I am DOING love'. Some felt it was more about having an attitude of love towards the whole world, towards all beings and seeing that we are 'beings of love', and that our work is about recovering a sense of connection to a deeper, more profound and all-encompassing love. A more spiritual than practical take on it, perhaps.

In this section, updated for 2023, I am building and expanding on these dimensions of love, as my thinking continues to grow and change. I have become interested in the questions of what forms of love are needed in these tough times?

Based on my ongoing research, here are 7 ways to reimagine love for the times we're in:

1. Love as HOPE

In times and at moments when things feel hopeless, it is an act of love to offer hope. It is a loving act to show that there might be options, possibilities that we cannot yet see. That there is a 'better' version of yourself that we might have lost sight of. Rebecca Solnit (2016) says that hope is not the belief that everything was, is or will be fine. That is a naive optimism. Rather, 'hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act'. I would also add there is room to imagine. Because as Solnit also reminds us: 'ideas at first considered outrageous or ridiculous or extreme gradually become what people think they've always believed'.

Holding out a vision of what might be possible, even (especially) in the face of the hard reality, is a form of love.

As a leader, what is your relationship with hope, and how do you cultivate it within your teams and organisation?

2. Love as RADICAL INCLUSION

Building on the research that showed that love means accepting people for who they are 'warts and all', I now go further.

At a time of increasing fragmentation and alienation, at time of increasing loneliness, there is a powerful need to include. To bring everyone inside the tent – and to make that tent as large possible to enable us to do that. No-one can be left behind.

In current times where there is arguably a growing tendency to 'other' people and to cancel them if we feel they don't agree with us, there is an essential need to help people feel that they belong, for each of us to find that place for ourselves, to include others rather than exclude.

At times of global crisis, it's worth remembering the African proverb: if you want to go fast go alone; if you want to go far, go together.

Radical Inclusion also means looking in the eye the things we find difficult. If we want to change something, then we have to create a climate where all voices are heard and everything is recognised and no one or nothing is excluded. That will include looking at and including all the things that we find difficult, that have been hidden or kept secret, that are dark or disturbing, that are social taboos. As James Baldwin says: 'Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced'.

And why the word 'radical'? It's added to a lot of things, for dramatic effect, these days. Is it important here? I believe it is. Because we each of us know how very difficult it is to forgive, accept and even welcome someone who has hurt us. To listen to someone with views completely different to our own, and whose values seem to be completely at odds with what we think is important. To find compassion for someone who has started a war, or who is responsible for appalling conditions that someone lives in. More often than not we find it too difficult. So it's a radical act to find it in ourselves to include when we naturally want to exclude.

Finding ways to include and even welcome everything – that is a form of love.

As a leader, what or who are you choosing to exclude that you might risk including?

3. Love as ANGER

In my workshops, I also explore anger and its relationship with love.

Largely, we're an anger-averse society. It's generally not considered acceptable for us – for neither men nor women – to express our anger and so we've also come to think it's also not ok to feel it.

This isn't good at any level, not least because when we learn to suppress one emotion we suppress them all. Our systems are not sophisticated enough to dial down anger without also dialling down joy, or elation or grief. But it's also not good because anger is really useful.

Anger is a way that we know that an injustice has been done, that something has been taken away from us or that someone has deprived us of something that matters. It's an alarm, an early warning system, and it's telling us that something is wrong. It's telling us that our heart has been hurt, that we or someone has been wronged, that a core value has been breached or that justice has been denied. It shows us what really matters to us. It shows us what we love.

I think our capacity to change something is directly related to our capacity to love because we only protect what we love. We need to let ourselves connect with and listen to our anger and discover what we love enough to do something to protect it.

So anger may simply be telling us that we love something and we don't want to lose it. If we give it the chance and know how to sit with it, we can welcome our anger. It can put us in contact with our grief and sadness. We can use our anger to help connect us with our true feelings about what's happening to our world, and for many of us that means connecting with grief and sadness for what we see happening around us.

It's entirely fitting and appropriate that we would feel angry when we contemplate (say) how minority groups are treated, when someone is disparaging or insulting, when someone's actions harm others, when a policy or procedure discriminates, when someone whose job it is to protect us hurts us instead. Not ok. Not ok. Not ok.

We may need to connect with our righteous anger – intentionally – because it's a powerful fuel for getting us to act. It's a catalyst and it wakes us up. Anger in the face of abuse is a healthy, regenerative and healing response. We may need to rage and cry and scream and enable others to do the same. And yes, of course, we need to choose how we want to express that anger. But first we need to feel it. And talk about it. And know it's ok to do that.

Anger is a legitimate form of love.

As a leader in your organisation or wider community what makes you angry enough to want to take action on?

4. Love as ACTIVISM

In many fields like coaching, for example, we are encouraged to take a neutral stance and see all sides. In senior roles in organisations, those roles traditionally considered leadership, I see people trying not to rock the boat too much, not to stand out, make a fuss, be balanced and objective. Some of that is for good reason.

But I wonder if in organisations we need to find a different kind of leadership energy now – an activist energy, a provoker, and a catalysing energy? An energy that draws on Jung's Warrior archetype or the Goddess Kali – a fierce protector energy? Don't we now need to speak up – shout out and not shut up – find our voice and help others to find theirs? And to do that, don't we need to get out of the Googlebox and take action of some sort? It feels time for action now, for acts of leadership. Valarie Kaur (2020) believes that all revolutionary change has love at its heart and, if we can take love to be either a deep passion for something or a fierce protection of something, the link with what's needed at these times is clear.

Activism is a form of love in action. And it belongs in leadership.

What difference do you want to make as a leader, and where might you begin?

5. Love as GRIEF

Grief is a form of love that's very relevant for us today and leads directly from exploring anger as a form of love.

Anger is considered a secondary emotion, meaning that it's often protecting other emotions, and ones that are maybe too painful to bear. We may resort to anger in order to protect ourselves from or cover up these other vulnerable feelings – maybe shame and embarrassment but also loss, grief and fear. These are often too painful for us to let ourselves feel and so we sometimes find anger a less painful emotion.

Also, everything we love we will lose. This isn't gloom-and-doom, or nihilistic thinking but a reality of our lives, a painful truth but one we need to accept if we are to live on life's terms. Francis Weller calls this realisation the 'first gate of grief'. For him the links between grief and love are clear because 'it's the broken heart, the part that knows sorrow, that is capable of genuine love'.

So anger can tell us what we fear losing. It brings us directly in contact with what we love because it shows us all that we and the next generations have to lose. Perhaps it's only through getting in much closer contact with our feelings of loss and grief that we will find what it takes to change.

Activists like Joanna Macy (Macy and Brown, 2014) are very clear on this and advocate intentionally turning towards the pain in the world, including it and acknowledging it, is honouring and respecting it.

Allowing ourselves to feel grief and loss is a form of love.

As a leader, how do you create space in your organisation for people to explore their feelings toward what they are losing?

6. Love as DISTANCE

The founder of Systemic Constellations work, Bert Hellinger, said, 'love = seeing + distance – judgement'.

He implies that distance can help us be less judgemental and more loving. Distance is a form of love, and coming up-and-out of a situation can help us access greater compassion and love. For example, it is loving when we are able to put ourselves in someone else's shoes and see the world through their lived experience; it is loving when we can understand what has happened to this person through the story of their life, and even their parents' lives.

Also, when we can see the historical, societal and political context in which something is set and start to understand that people may not have had much, if any agency, control or influence over something then that deeper understanding opens the door to greater compassion and from there, love. The author Deborah Rowland tells us that 'all action makes perfect sense when we can see the system in which they are situated'.

Distance allows love in.

As a leader, how do you create enough perspective to allow love in?

7. Love as JOY

When we are facing things that are difficult, demanding, dark, confusing or stressful we need to actively seek particular medicines as a counterbalance. One thing that repeatedly arises through my workshops as important medicine for these times is joy.

An HBR article suggest we have a 'joy gap' in work (Liu, 2022). My workshop participants would regularly point out that at times it feels it applies to so much more than work.

In the 2019 research respondents said that more love in the workplace would be contagious, that it would spread. If one person was more loving, then others would be. It's said that joy is the most contagious emotion, and that joy connects people. Joy connects people more powerfully than almost any other human experience, says that HBR article. I suppose we only have to watch something on YouTube where people are convulsed with laughter to know the truth of that.

Joy is often talked about alongside awe, gratitude and wonder and many people make the case for these four sisters being forms of love.

Writers and thinkers like Professor Jem Bendell and Joanna Macy mentioned earlier all believe in the importance that joy and love play even, as each of these writers think, we are beyond the point of no return in a collapsing world. In the face of existential fears, we actively need to seek out joy, beauty and love.

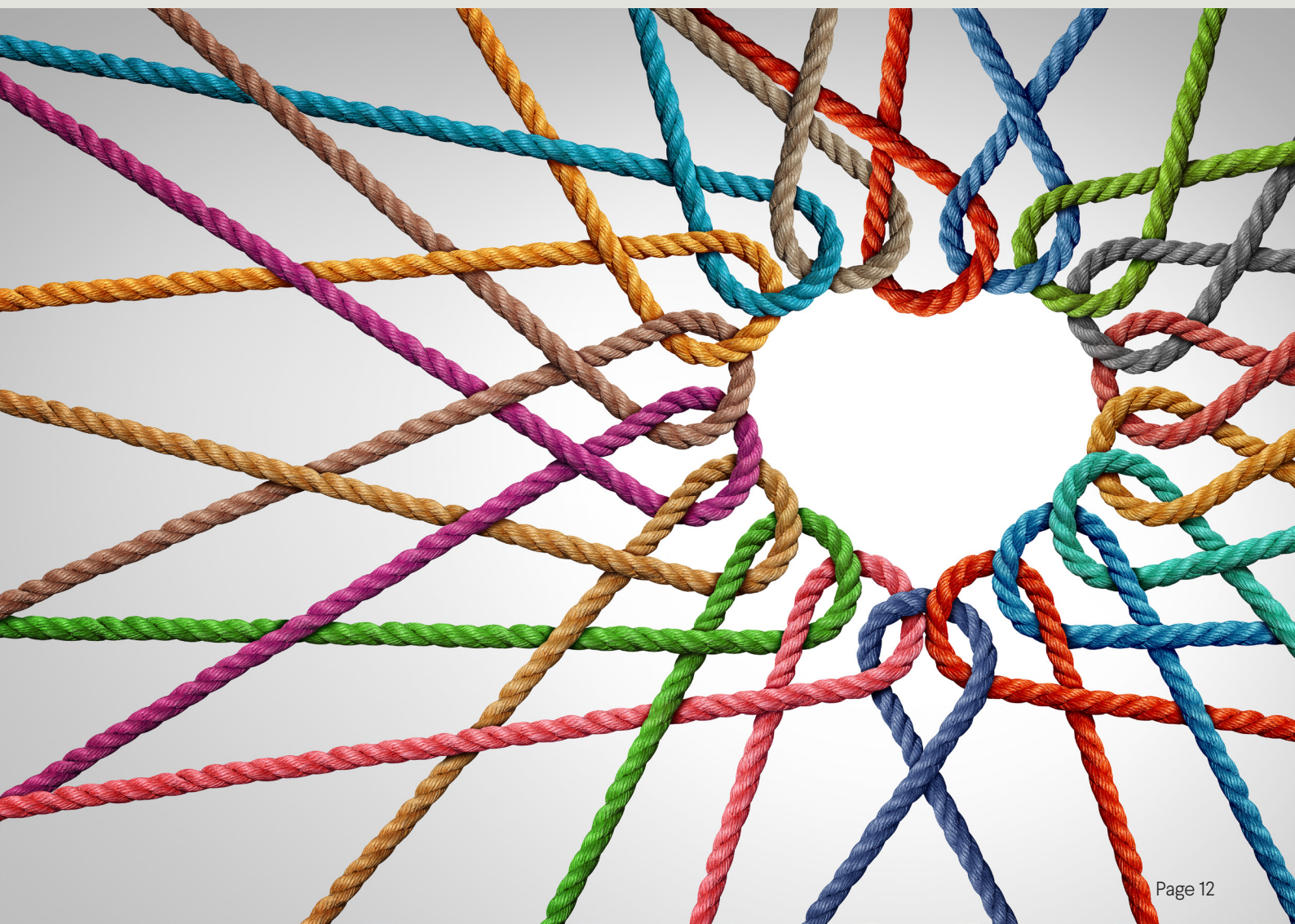
Workshop participants talk about how intentionally seeking out these things is a form of love because they recognised that connecting to what is joyful allow us to fall in love with the world, to connect with what brings us alive. And how that really matters when organisational life is often less soulful than is good for us.

In the field of Shadow Work (Massi, 2022), joy is said to be the gateway emotion to our inner sovereign, the part of us that is wisest, generous and expansive, affirming and nurturing, most loving. Joy helps us get there.

Poet Wendell Berry says: 'Be joyful. Though you have considered all the facts' (Berry, 2014). So it is an act of love – and of leadership – to help people connect with what is joyful, even while many things are not.

Joy is a core part of love.

In your leadership, what is the culture you're creating and is it one that has space for joy?



Section 4 What's Next? (2019)

I'm a practitioner at heart. I want to make what I do useful for people managing and leading. I'm working toward writing more on this but, for now, in the meantime, I want to know what we can do. What steps can each of us take, starting now?

I'm suggesting three things and they are all based on this assumption: that love is a choice. In fact, says activist Valerie Kaur, 'love is a choice that we make over and over again'. Whether we think of love as a verb, a noun or an adjective, love 'isn't something that suddenly strikes us... but it's an act of will' and 'an intentional disposition towards another person'. You know that story about the two wolves fighting?

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life:

"A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego."

He continued, "The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."

We can also choose. We can choose to adopt a loving mindset. And we can choose a loving action.

And so my invitations are that we each:

- Begin our own inquiry into our relationship with love. Maybe we take a 'depth' look at love – through journaling or reflection: where did we first experience love; how does it show up in our life now; who taught me most about love; when do I connect most to a feeling of love? Or, we keep a diary – like a gratitude practice – and at the end of each day jot down three things we did that were loving. Whatever works. But the point here is that we make a conscious choice to be interested in it for ourselves. Love is an inside job, after all.
- Start talking about love. We bring it out of the shadow. The activist George Monbiot says that if something matters to us then we need to overcome our own reticence and risk upsetting people, that we have a duty to break the awkward silence and talk about what other people want to avoid (Monbiot, 2018). I'm with him. I want an organisational world where we can talk about love as freely as we do performance management. So, go on. Stir the pot a little. Start a conversation. Invite someone out for coffee. Or bring it up at your next team meeting. Maybe using my research questions as your starting point.
- Experiment with acts of love. You choose. Whatever feels loving to you. It might be small or mighty. And in any domain of your life. The only requirement is that it's a behaviour and therefore could be evidenced in some way. Yes, love is a mindset and an inside job. But love is primarily a verb (in my opinion) and it requires that we act. What might you be willing to experiment with doing – and what might you learn about leading from love in the process?

And, if you're up for it, please do let me know how you get on and where your exploration takes you.

So what is next? (2023)

When I started to write this update, I imagined I might be changing these three suggestions for action. I'm not. They still stand as foundational ways to explore love for yourself and for your organisation. I'd put more emphasis, perhaps on the second one – encouraged by the growing openness I am now experiencing for people to explore love as the medicine we will need more of in these times ahead.

For me now and looking ahead to the next few years of continuing research, find my attention turning to these questions: How do we treat each other when we are scared? What is needed to support the deepest humanity in our workplaces? How might we shift the focus from what we achieve to how we relate to each other? And how can we cultivate the conditions for more love in all that we do?

If Roffey Park commissions an update for 2026, let's see what I might be able to add then.

Until then, with love

Helena x

"When you love, you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve."

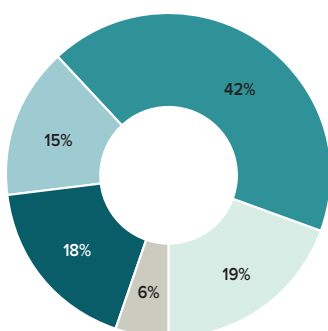
Ernest Hemingway

Research Survey (2019)

Based on 6 in depth interviews to 'map the field', I asked the following questions:

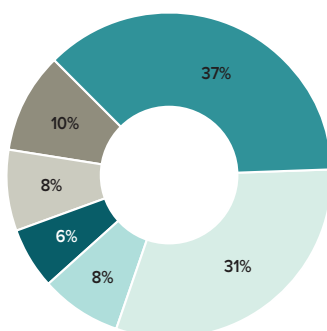
- How comfortable do you feel talking about love at work? And why do you say that?
- How important is love in the workplace? And why do you say that?
- In your opinion, what leadership behaviours demonstrate love?
- Have you ever worked anywhere where the leaders 'led from love?' How did this feel?
- What enables you to lead from love? And if you did more often, what would be the outcome?
- What blocks you from leading from love at work?

What level is your role?



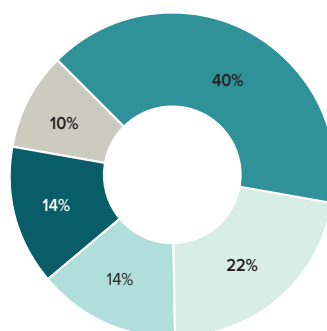
Other director/Senior manager 42%
Middle manager 19%
Board director 15%
Non-manager/Freelance 18%
Junior manager 6%

How many people does your organisation employ?



Up to 50 31%
51-100 8%
101-250 6%
251-1000 8%
1001-5000 10%
5001+ 37%

What type of organisation do you work for?



Private services 40%
Public services 22%
Production and manufacturing 14%
Not-for-profit 14%
Other 10%

About the Author



Helena Clayton - Leadership Development: coach, facilitator, consultant, writer

Helena Clayton is a leadership and organisational development consultant, and a coach, with over 25 years of experience across all UK sectors. She designs and runs innovative leadership development programmes that make a real difference for participants and their organisations, working with a range of organisations as diverse as the UK Civil Service and Jaguar Land Rover. She is a coach, thinking partner and critical friend for leaders. She works with senior teams to help them work more effectively and have the conversations they don't normally have. And is, of course, researching love, especially as it relates to leadership. Her website is www.helenaclayton.co.uk.

About Roffey Park Institute

Roffey Park Institute enables people and organisations to fulfil their potential by developing the skills, behaviours and culture for sustainable, high-performing and inclusive workplaces.

Through distance, digital, blended and face-to-face learning, supported through coaching, diagnostics, action learning, OD consultancy and research, we enable you to develop your leaders, managers, teams and organisation.

Our high impact programmes and postgraduate qualifications span leadership and management development, change and resilience, organisational learning, organisational development and HR. All are underpinned by research with a focus on practice and impact.

Our range of services are available to you at every point of your own journey or that of your organisation:

- Customised programmes for your organisation
- Open programmes for individuals
- In-house short programmes for your team
- Executive and team coaching through our international network of coaches
- Postgraduate qualifications validated by the University of Sussex
- Strategic organisational development consultancy

To find out how we can help you,
and your organisation, make a
difference contact us today.



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