

Power, Love and Freedom in Companies



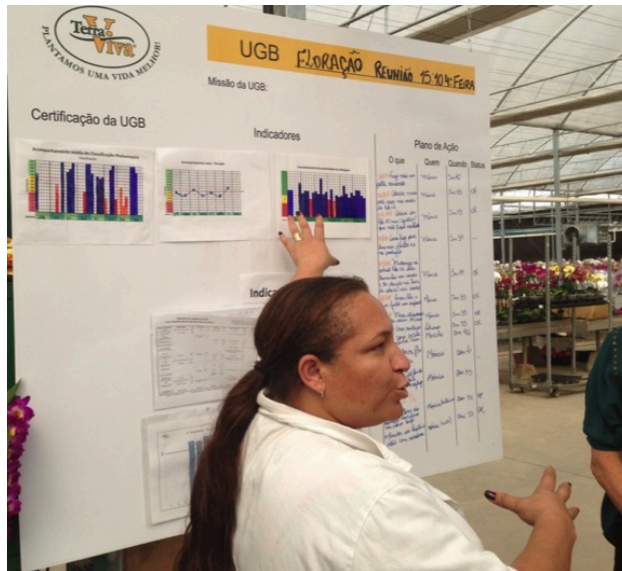
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“Power, Love and Freedom in Companies”

What do these words have to do with development of companies and organisations? The first word – power – arouses a feeling of something inappropriate or indelicate. The second word – love – brings the feeling of something soft and misplaced in the business sphere and the third word – freedom – gives the impression of something contradictory for work processes that have to assure the best result.

But, if we have a closer look, these three words may make sense in the practise of those who are occupied with the development of their company.



Some time ago I came across the book “Love and Power” by Adam Kahane¹ and reading it helped me to discover the deeper sense of power and love. I discovered that we are speaking about two fundamental forces for change to happen, provided that these forces come and work together.

When I saw and read the title of the book for the first time, I was puzzled and curious. Power and love, how can this be? They seem to be two contradictory aspects. Wasn't the

author trying to say ‘power or love’? But then, right in the beginning my doubt dissipated, when the author quoted an inspiring extract from a speech of Martin Luther King, which led him to choose this title:

*“Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change. [...] And one of the great problems of history is that the **concepts of love and power** have usually been contrasted as opposites, polar opposites, so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love. [...]*

Now, we got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anaemic. [...]

It is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our times.”

Martin Luther King Jr., Where do we go from here?²

The message is clear: In order to create new and better social realities, so that we can effectively forge change in organizations, in the private sphere, in the society, in the world, we need to use both power and love, or expressing it better: we need to integrate the two for the following reason:

**“Power without love is reckless and abusive,
and love without power is sentimental and anaemic”**

¹ KAHANE, Adam. “Power and Love: a Theory and Practice of Social Change” Benett Koehler Publishers, San Francisco.

² KING, Martin Luther, Jr. 1967. "Where Do We Go From Here?" Annual Report Delivered at the 11th Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, August 16, Atlanta,

Paul Tillich³ defines “Power” as the “impulse of every living being to realize itself with growing intensity and extensiveness”, in other words, the impulse for each one to reach his/her purpose. And Tillich defines “Love” as the “impulse to unite what is separated”, in other words, reconnect, integrate what is fallen apart. These definitions express the essence of force (impulse) of both and are free from a negative load.

However, both Power and Love have two sides: one generative, constructive side and one degenerative, destructive side.

The **generative power** is the force that is able to produce something of value, and the **degenerative power** is the force that produces value, but oppresses the other and suppresses his/her self-realization.

The **generative love** is the movement that unites and enlivens others, whilst the **degenerative love** wants to unite, but suffocates to the extent that it denies the space and self-realization of the other.

In this view, it is **power** that turns **love generative** and leaves the other free to act. And is **love** that turns **power generative**, directing power for the other instead of power over the other.

In companies these two poles can easily be recognized, when the leader sees himself in the need to take a standpoint, take decisions and initiatives, make interventions and does not know how to keep his co-worker involved and respected as an adult. How can he act without falling in an attitude of ‘over-participation’, which will end up in slowness and lack of definition with negative consequences for the organization? In this case it is “degenerative love”, in other words, an attitude that puts the personal relation above what has to be done, and that makes him retreat into inactivity for not knowing how to create a dialogue of constructive confrontation. A basis that can unite power (generative) and love (generative) is convergence of interests out of a common mission, values and goals, with which the whole community is able to connect itself.

It strikes me that in both cases – generative power and love – the critical point is respect for the freedom of the other to reach his self-realization.

But, what is freedom in a business environment? Obviously, it is not a state of “each one doing what he/she wants to”. The point that can unite both in a company (and in whatever other organization in the economic realm) is what has been mentioned before: its mission, values, goals and finally results to be realized. This means: if we talk about freedom and self-realization of people, the question arises: How can we combine the interests of individuals with those of the organization?

The question of freedom has to go through the following questions:

1. Does the co-worker identify him/herself with what the company wants to realize?
2. Does the co-worker have a space in which he/she can participate and act freely?

The first question is related to the degree in which the co-worker is able to perceive and experience the sense of what he is doing in the organization. Aaron Antonovski⁴ shows that “experiencing sense in what you do” is the main factor between those that provide health and integrity for man. For this reason, it is of fundamental importance that the co-worker not only finds and cultivates common values in those that are practiced in the company, but that he also can work out of a wider consciousness, principally of (the needs of) the client, and also the strategic choices that the company makes and that form the deeper reason behind the processes and activities. Involving and participating in the process of defining strategies and planning contribute to establish this connection. This can be made possible for all co-workers, by adapting the process to the realm where the co-workers act.

³ TILLICH, Paul. *“Love, Power and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications”*. New York, Oxford University Press

⁴ ANTONOVSKY, Aaron. – Professor of medical sociology, created the term “Salutogenesis” (the study of the causes of health) and identified the essential factors to maintain a person healthy.

In this way the leader shows the quality of “inspiring”, one of his essential roles as a horizontal leader⁵.

The second question is about the autonomy with which the co-worker can do his work. For this to happen, two other aspects have to be cared for: The necessary condition to have clearly described processes that are executed and checked. And this requires the quality of “steering” of the horizontal leader.

The condition to guarantee professional competence: the choice, development and evaluation of the co-worker in his function, which requires the quality of “coaching” of the horizontal leader.

The more the processes are clear and guaranteed and the more professional competence is present, the more the leader can delegate and let the co-worker act in an autonomous way. Act out of him/herself, as a free and emancipated human being.

This brings us back to the theme of this article: Power, Love and Freedom. Power has to do with freedom – to be able to act in an autonomous way. Love has to do with the perception of connection, integrated in a wider sense.

The manager or leader who is able to create an environment where Power and Love can live together and integrated, and where the co-worker perceives himself in a free space, contributes simultaneously to the wellbeing of the organization and of the people involved.

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⁵ BEKMAN, Adriaan. *“Horizontaal Leiderschap”*. Uitg. Van Gorcum 2009
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