

What's Love Got to Do with Management?



You may be wondering, “Don’t most organisations have policies against workplace romance?” Yes, many do. Besides, here I focus on a different type of love... the love a person can feel for their work (or position, job or employer) when the conditions are just right.

Love is a peak human emotion associated with feeling our strongest possible appreciation for a relationship, object or experience. Love is powerful. It focuses and energises people like nothing else. Quite literally, it changes us, stimulating hormones and neurotransmitters, creating visceral motivation and extending our capabilities, whether the focus of our love is someone we recently met, a long-desired possession finally acquired, or a job that somehow feels perfect for us.

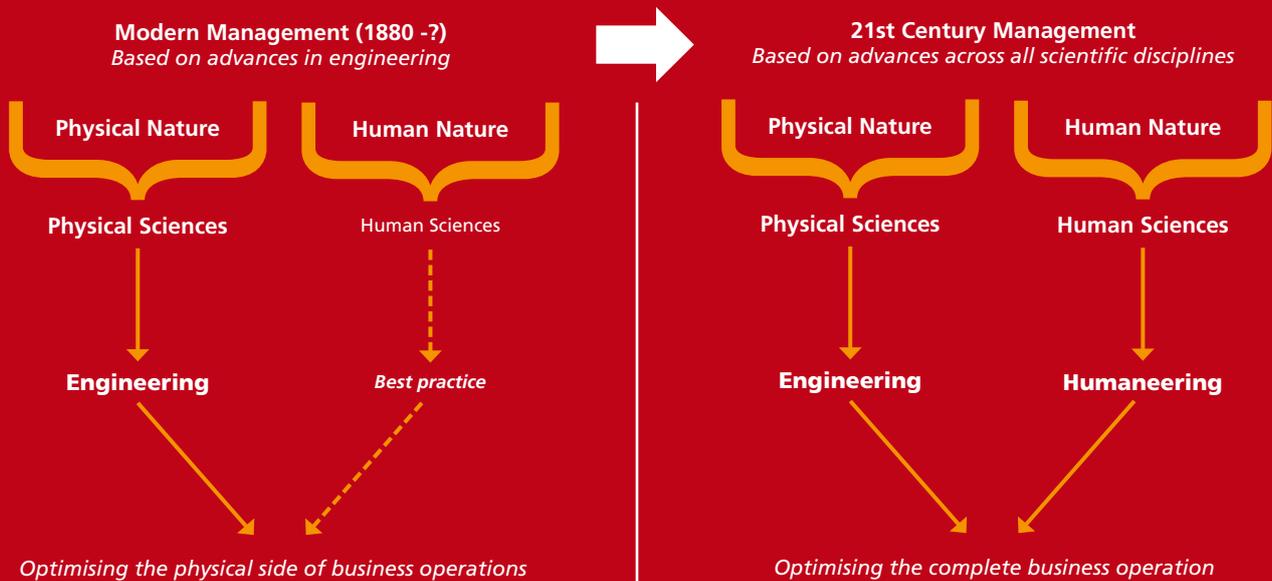
A recent cross-cultural lexical analysis by Tim Lomas of the University of East London, School of Psychology, identifies 14 different ‘flavours’ (or variations) of love, including experiences such as work or a job that generates strong feelings of appreciation¹. It might have us thinking: “I love this job; it’s

bespoke just for me”, as we naturally adapt and intuitively respond to the unique challenges for which we are responsible (able and empowered to respond) and accountable (held to account for the outcome).

Hopefully, you’ve already loved at least one job or work experience during your career. If so, you can relate to this special, almost magical experience and how it affects our attitude, behaviour, and capability for work. And when supported by management, these effects translate into increased work performance and job satisfaction, and the creation of exceptional economic value.

Not only does loving our work feel great, it also transforms us into our most productive self and enables us to better achieve our

Figure 1: Humaneering closes the science-practice gap on the human side of business operations, simplifying the management of human work and increasing the yield on human capital



full potential. Furthermore, this effect is much the same whether our work is discovering disease cures, selling a new product, protecting the public, recruiting new employees, or directly serving customers.

It's not the work each of us performs that matters, as much as it is how well the work provides us with an experience that satisfies enough of our own idiosyncratic biopsychosocial needs, wants and desires. Particularly for knowledge work – work assigned to us as a self-managed responsibility (ie, responsibility; versus as a standardised and elsewhere-controlled task) – loving our work is both cause and effect of higher productivity, and capable of sustaining a virtuous cycle of development.

Understanding the work-performance-maximising phenomenon of 'love' has been one of the more surprising of the hundreds of work-performance related topics researched by the Humaneering Technology Initiative (HTI) during its first 15 years. The development of humaneering, a universal applied human science for public benefit, has focused first on 21st century human work -- asking one more time, but now finally answering, many management questions too complex and transdisciplinary for resolution with only today's management sciences.

In effect, humaneering closes the science-practice gap for people-dependent business operations. It improves the design and simplifies the management of work performed by people, while increasing the productivity of knowledge work. (See Figure 1)

To produce these new answers, humaneering's development began with translation and synthesis of more than 200 science disciplines (ie equivalent to any organisation's vertical knowledge silos) in search of answers to every organisation manager's greater challenges. The resulting knowledge was then subjected to field experiments across diverse industries, people-dependent operations, unique organisations and varied situations, thus creating 'real-world evidence' (RWE)², to guide the further development of new and more powerful, human-centred management principles, methods and tools.

Taking a human-centred approach to designing and managing

work performed by people sounds like an obvious approach, yet is rarely found in even today's youthful high-tech organisations. A human-centred approach accomplishes the same work but at higher productivity levels, in part because the design is driven by the needs of people for best performing their work, rather than an industrial model or how things have always been done.

Best-job-ever activity

This article draws on that real-world evidence to provide you with step-by-step instructions for a one-hour performance-development activity you can have facilitated with one or more groups from your own organisation. Doing so will provide you with actionable knowledge for assessing and increasing the 'love' your organisation members have for their work or job.

Our hope is you will apply this guidance wisely (eg, improve recruiting and retention, increase performance and productivity, reduce people issues and disappointments), and let us know what it helps you achieve.

First, let's review several context-setting principles to guide the overall activity.

1. Facilitator – A capable and respectable facilitator with no political affiliation should lead the activity (ie no bosses).
2. Group size – The activity has been successful with groups from teams of six to conferences of 2000, though keep in mind that larger groups (>100) require exceptional space, A/V and logistical support.
3. Group representation – The results will reflect the makeup of the group, so when seeking role/position-specific results it's best to work solely with members holding that role/position.
4. Volunteer participants – Invite targeted organisation members, yet allow them to volunteer (or opt out), and avoid requiring any organisation members to attend and/or participate.
5. Authentic experience – The facilitator should follow the provided instruction's intent closely, yet act naturally and

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speaking in their own words, making the experience authentic for everyone involved.

6. Expected follow-up – This activity creates expectations in the minds of participants of follow-up activity and feedback, so don't use if not willing to follow through and meet this reasonable expectation.
7. Best-job-ever – You will be completely honest with organisation members when you indicate the activity's focus on their 'best-job-ever' (see Twitter #bestjobever), a widely used term with appropriate connotations.
8. Later discussion – Do not mention that this activity reveals insights into the potential for organisation members to 'love' their work, as this is a secondary insight that requires a higher level of relationship intimacy to discuss effectively (eg, one-to-one after trust established).

Activity walkthrough

The words in italics are the intended comments of a facilitator.

Step 1. Welcome

Welcome everyone. We are here to conduct an activity that will help us identify some more important ways management can support your work. The activity is pre-planned, so I'll appreciate your attention and responsiveness as we complete the steps involved. I think you will find the activity enjoyable and the results interesting.

Is there anyone else who you know planned to be here, and would someone call or get them so we can get started? Once we start, no one will be allowed to join us later.

You will need a piece of paper and something with which to write. (Pass out single sheets of paper and pens to each person indicating the need.)

Step 2. Recall best-job-ever

I want you to think back to all the jobs you've ever performed and decide which one was your favourite. Which job is the best job you've ever had? It's okay to take a couple minutes to think back to each one and think about what you liked and didn't like about them, in which you were more productive, most enjoyed yourself, really developed yourself, liked the manager, or whatever criteria you consider more important.

This could be your current job, or it could be your very first job, a summer job, a part-time job . . . you decide which of the jobs you've worked was your best job ever.

When you decide, write the job on your piece of paper and look up here at me, so I know you are ready to proceed.

Step 3. Recall characteristics

Now, I want you to think about the job you selected as your best job ever and remember what characteristics of the situation made it your best job ever. Why this one and not some other job? What features of the situation made it so right for you?

Please list at least four, five or more of these characteristics on your piece of paper.



When you finish, please look up here at me so I know you are ready to proceed.

Step 4. Share experience

Pair up with someone seated near you, and take turns sharing your lists and related experiences describing your best jobs ever. Take about five minutes each to share.

Step 5. Observe similarity

When comparing, what did you notice about the characteristics of your best job experience?

Prompt if needed. Did you notice any similarity?

Considered topically (minus personalising detail), several characteristics are the same, or even identical. What might we conclude from this similarity? The same topics (ie, characteristics minus personalising detail) are important to most people.

As an example of similar topics with different personalising detail, consider that two participants may list 'my manager's support', with one referring to emotional support (eg, more than normal encouragement, advice) and the other referring to advancement support (eg, money and time for a course to qualify for internal promotion).

Step 6. Prepare to compile

Now I need one person who is willing to share with us their list of characteristics, so I can write them on the board. Do I have a volunteer? Select.

Thanks for your courage. Here are the rules for sharing.

- Please individually tell me the characteristics on your list in the order you wrote them.
- When I record them, I may omit some personalising details, so the topic is clear, but please don't let me lose the meaning you intended.
- Please share your list in order, and do not add any additional characteristics.
- After we list your characteristics on the board, I will ask if anyone else will share any characteristics from their list

that are not already on the board.

- We'll stop after three to five people have shared, or when we reach 15 characteristics on the board.

Step 7. Compile list on board

Record one characteristic at a time, asking for clarification when helpful to reduce personalised comment into a broader topic that others may also have on their list. Others in the group will get involved in working through this clarification and generalisation activity.

When the first volunteer's list is represented on the board, then select another volunteer and continue the process until you have compiled a list of 15 characteristics or heard from five volunteers.

Step 8. Consider the list

The facilitator should step aside to see the full list, and then ask the participants what sense they make of the list. What can we conclude from this list?

Any comment from participants is acceptable, though the facilitator might ask the participants if they reach the same conclusion. Can others see this?

If not otherwise mentioned, the facilitator should add this question. *Have we just compiled a list of characteristics needed for high-performance work? Just imagine. If you worked in a job that had all these characteristics, wouldn't you be able to do your best work?*

(Note: If working with a sharp group that is engaged in this activity, the facilitator may choose to share the following advanced observation. Otherwise, proceed to Step 9.)

If having a job with all these characteristics would result in you doing your best work, what happens if we start to remove these characteristics from the job? Let's see.

Let's write 100% to indicate your performance with all the characteristics, and now let's begin to remove these characteristics one by one to see the impact on your performance.

Let's remove the first item on the list (ie, draw line through it), and say you no longer have this as part of your job. By how much will this reduce your performance? Listen for several percentages and average. Then subtract from 100% and write alongside the first characteristic.

As an example, the typical first characteristics listed are clear objectives, inspiring leadership, important purpose or sufficient resources. If anyone of these is removed as the first characteristic, then the participants need to imagine a job where this characteristic is absent and estimate how much its absence would reduce their job performance. People will see this differently, yet a reasonable estimate for any item is in the 10% to 50% range. Accept this and proceed.

Now repeat this process for the second item on the list. Draw line through. Ask about the impact of removing both the first and second characteristics listed. How will this reduce your

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potential to do your best in a job?

After removing three or four characteristics, the balance of their performance potential should be less than 30%. Stop here and ask what the dynamics of these characteristics is telling them.

Management too should be interested in this compounding influence of deficiencies in the design of work and jobs.

Step 9. Grade current-job characteristics

Working from the premise that the characteristics represent conditions that altogether enable people to perform at their highest level (ie, when they love their work), now have the participants shift their focus to their current work or job, and ask them to assess the relative need/opportunity for improvement to each characteristic. Ask the participants to assign a school grade (ie, C+, A-) to each characteristic, reflecting its current level of sufficiency.

This data can be collected in two ways. (1) If the group represents a diverse range of work or jobs, such that averaging grades for characteristics will lose important detail concerning variances throughout the organisation, then participants should be asked to copy the list from the board and individually assign grades to each characteristic. Anonymity is encouraged, yet some identifier for each type of work or job will be necessary for the grades to be accurately tabulated. (2) If the group of participants more or less perform the same work, have the same job, or work for the same organisation unit, then it is faster to capture and tally the grading of characteristics as a group (see list at the top of the next column).

Now, let's focus on your current work or job, and use this list to ask ourselves how the organisation is doing in meeting your preferences for these characteristics. Let's do this with a simple school grade, such as C+, A- and so on. Let's take each characteristic, this time starting at the bottom of the list, and for each please call out the grade you give this characteristic for your current work or job. You can help me calculate an

approximate average of your responses.

The results can be expected to look something like this:

Clear objective and challenging goal	B-
Sufficient resources to do the job right	C
Needed responsibility and authority	A-
Genuine trust and support of manager	C
Great team of focused people	A+
Frequent helpful feedback	D
Have the knowledge and skills needed	A-
Fair compensation and incentives	B
Job is important to the company	F

This data can be helpful to managers who are seeking priorities for improving their organisation's performance. Managers can choose to work directly at improving some of these characteristics, or they can assign each characteristic to a small team of participants with the charge to talk to other participants and prepare an improvement plan for the manager. A secondary benefit of continuing to involve the participants is the resulting temporary 'Hawthorne effect' (the alteration of behaviour by the subjects of a study due to their awareness of being observed) and enhanced readiness to lead and support change.

Even small improvements to just a few characteristics will begin to reveal the love organisation members can have for their work, job and organisation. Larger improvements to more characteristics will develop and deepen that love even more.

References

1. Lomas T. *The flavours of love: A cross-cultural lexical analysis.* *J Theory Soc Behav.* 2018;48:134-152. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/jtsb.12158>
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