In the Name of Love: Let's Remember Desire

Anders Bojesen and Sara Louise Muhr

abstract

The discourse of HRM has become subject to a code of love in which the organization expects employees to be fully committed and passionate about their work. This coded language reproduces the idea that there is one best way of managing the employee, only the employee is now expected to exhibit passion by being proactive, take initiative and anticipate the future needs of the organization. The code of love thus suggests an appropriating treatment to ensure the passionate self-managing employee. However, if it is true that passion has become a prerequisite for the working subject then the code of love should be made fragile, giving way to the unmanageable and desiring subject. Such a love would go beyond the beloved. It would not try to heal and appropriate the employee, but see the goodness in exposing the self to critical wounding. Love should therefore not be a striving for the same, but rather maintain the possibility for the beloved to retain a level of alterity. If not, the passion of organising risks falling prey to a state of paternal love and control where ethics is obsolete.

> It is evil to think one person can manage another. And it is certainly evil to think of somebody else as an asset or resource. (Kaulingfreks, 2005: 38)

Introduction

There seems to be an ongoing trend within human resource management to shift its focus from employee control to emotional commitment (Barley and Kunda, 1992; Kunda, 1992; Loehr and Tony, 2003; McGregor, 1960; Walton, 1985). This trend stresses issues like empowerment, self-management and flexibility, which are said to provide greater freedom and recognition for the employee. It is about caring properly for the employee. As Legge (2005) points out, this proper care is said to lead to sufficient self-development and a 'better', 'more efficient' and maybe even 'more healthy' employee. Ultimately HRM is transformed into a discourse of love (Andersen and Born, 2001; 2005; 2007; Bauman, 2003; 2007; Kunda and Van Maanen, 1999) in which "the company's interests and those of its employees are equated" (Legge, 2005: 128). In fact love has become a growing business enterprise. Employees are offered counselling to become happier with the work they do, courses in self-management are

offered, and consultancy firms now sell entire 'love packages', teaching companies how to develop a 'Loving Life', 'Loving Management' and 'Loving Culture'.[1]

The seemingly harmonious state promoted by this HRM discourse can be easily contested. Taking on the role of the devil's advocate one might, with Kaulingfreks (2005), ask: is HRM in this way rather evil than good? In his polemical piece, Kaulingfreks advances the view that evil is common in organizations and that organizations are guided by a profound mistrust and contempt for people. According to Kaulingfreks the wickedness of organizations does not lie in the manipulation and control of the employee, but more in that it is presented as philanthropy and as a concern for human wellbeing: "a whole system conspires to make people think that the only way to fulfil one's existence is to follow the path of the organization" (Kaulingfreks, 2005: 38). The point that Kaulingfreks makes is *not* that management is evil in absolute terms. In fact, he ends up asking: how can we get rid of all this goodness? The point is rather to make us reflect upon the inherent consequences of what certain kinds of labelling and rhetoric do to us. Thus, seeing something (sometimes even unconsciously) as an intrinsic good or evil is according to his view truly bad. With this paper we want to bring about reflection about the inherent goodness in the discourse of love by raising the question: What does it mean when people at work are offered to take part in a discourse of love?

The article echoes Watson (2001) view on management as a 'social and moral activity', but it does so at a conceptual level, thereby calling into question the place and role of ethics in the management of human resources. Is exhibiting love the 'good' treatment that ensures devoted and passionate employees? The first part of the paper, 'Love in HRM', explores how contemporary workplace politics and practice is fuelled by a rhetoric of love and what consequences this rhetoric has for the working subject. This is made probable by investigating recent HRM literature and its critics to see how the discourse of love is constituted as well as questioning the inherent presumptions of love as an act of goodness. As such, we follow Townley (1998) and Steyaert and Janssens (1999) by not beginning our analysis with idealised models (HRM, Ethics, the Human) and go in search for practices, but rather to examine how practices structure social relations, in this case how the employee relates to oneself in the discourse of love. The second part of the paper, 'Making Love Fragile', challenges the traditional definition of the concept of love used in the HRM literature. Based on the moral philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, it attempts to reflect on the discussion of love and consider how love might be linked to desire, alterity and infinity. By making love fragile in its dealing with desire, we aim at providing alternative ways to think love for people at work. By questioning the concept of love, we designate the present 'illness' of turning human beings into loving, caring, unifying assets and resources and hereby call for a bringing back of the human to HRM.

_____

1   The *World in Love Centre for Hearts and Love* is a Danish based company, established in 2005. The Centre holds lectures and arranges seminar series for private as well as professional purposes. In 2005 they drew up "Five promises to your heart" to support people who want their hearts to guide their lives. The five promises to your heart are: "1: To listen to your heart 2: To be faithful to yourself and the truth 3: To live according to your innermost values 4: To live out the meaning of your life 5: To show love whenever you feel it – and to accept it, when it is given to you" (World-in-love, 2007, authors' own translation).

Love in HRM

Most current HRM discourse stresses coaching, developing and empowering in order to do 'good' and care for the 'well-being' of the employees and the company in which they work (Salaman *et al.*, 2005; Storey, 2001). From the company's desire to do good employees are expected to account for themselves. 'Tell me all about you – even the bad stuff – and we will help you. If we know you, and you know yourself, we can plan and manage your work life together' (for popular literature on coaching see e.g. Covey, 1999; Loehr and Tony, 2003; Lundin *et al.*, 2001; Peters, 1997). This view on HRM is explicitly related to a discourse of love by Andersen and Born (2001; 2005; 2007). Kunda and Van Maanen (1999) likewise describe a code of love, but also provide a critical counterpoint to its positive effects or inherent ethical tone: "the imagery of love and marriage fades into obscurity, replaced by short-term affairs and one-night stands" (1999: 73). Without explicitly labelling it 'love', several other authors express a critical voice towards this emphasis on empowerment and self-management being an act of care for the employee's well-being – or love as we call it. It has for example been argued that this approach easily leads to stress (Casey, 1999), burnouts (Barley and Kunda, 1999) and cynicism and scepticism (Van Maanen, 1991). Although this approach has advertised empowerment and greater freedom for the employee, Fleming and Sturdy (2007) claim that it instead amounts to another form of control since it exposes more of the employees' self to the organization. In a similar manner Kunda and Van Maanen (1999) report respondents saying that they feel swallowed by culture.

Legge (1999) also belongs to this line of criticism as she questions the human and inhuman sides of HRM by exploring how organizational life is represented by two different metaphors: the market and the community. In the market metaphor, the human becomes customer, commodity and resource and in the community metaphor the human is portrayed as a member of a team and a family, respectively. These images of organizational life coexist and overlap one another, but with very different ethical consequences. When the organization takes on the role of the family, the discourse of love is given specific propitious conditions. Legge paints a family portrait suggesting the role of the father (fulfilled by management) is to have control over the children (non-managerial employees) and with the HR function playing the motherly image of the man-in-the-middle to reconcile matters and make ends meet. Without discussing the politics of the gendered language further, she recognises this to be a somewhat rigid hierarchical and idealised model of organizational life, albeit still very common (Legge, 1999: 253). While paternalism might prevail, one could ask what this organizational family portrait might look like in today's era of civil partnerships, mass divorce, and single mothers and fathers. Perhaps the question should not be how the self can be contemplated as a family member in organizational life, but how the familiar discourse of love constitutes a subject centred on itself? And what possibilities this subject has in this discourse?

On the downside of being proclaimed as a family member according to Legge is that the employee risks being subordinated to paternal love and control. However, according to Andersen and Born (2007), the supposed advantages of the discourse of love within HRM does not mean that the employee simply loves the organization, as a man would

love his wife or children, but that the conditions for how one can become a (successful and competent) employee are altered.

In a number of texts based on a comprehensive study of archival data from Danish governmental services, Andersen and Born (2001; 2005; 2007) suggest the coming of a 'code of live' as a result of specific changes in the semantics used about the employee. From seeing the human as a public servant taking part in a legal system sustaining themselves as legal persons, the authors argue that employees are today exposed to a discourse of love in which they are expected to value themselves as human material with certain potentials with the aim of becoming specialised generalists. There is a displacement from the juridical subject of the civil servant to the specialised generalist via the import of the employee as human potential. The specialised generalist does not only direct attention inward at the office and employee function but also outwards in a self-managing reflection at the bureau and its place in a larger societal context. A concomitant displacement in content is at play from fidelity for life, loyalty, diligence, and formal qualifications of the civil servant to the flexibility, mobility, and knowledge of the broader societal development of the generalised specialist (Andersen and Born, 2001: 74). This change is installed via a change in semantics evolving with the employee who assumes responsibility via sound judgement, capacity for emotional contact and empathy.

This change in semantics of the employee is not only reflected in the alteration of the self's view of the organization (from inward to outward directed) but also in the coming of a new sense of subjectivity in which the perfect functioning of the organization as a whole (and the role of the subject herein) should work as a lighthouse guiding one's actions. Thus Andersen and Born speak of the responsibility-assuming and responsibility-seeking employee. This desire for development is directed at 'managing' the inner self of the working subject. But it also relies on the human subject to know itself, and display management by special techniques (like coaching, interviews and assessment exercises) in order to be able to give an account of oneself. However, as Judith Butler (2005: 12) points out, to tell a story about oneself is not the same as giving an account of oneself. The account is based on narratives, but also draws upon effects like voice and authority directed towards an external audience with an element of persuasion. Much like Andersen and Born, Butler argues that the process of accounting for oneself opens up an endless field in which norms, technologies and frameworks can be utilised to assess the performance of the subject. But where Butler explores how this process of accounting for oneself can be seen as an ethical question, Andersen and Born seem to neglect this debate, partly due to their theoretical grounding in systems theory in which "there cannot be more or less appropriate engagement and commitment, it is either-or" (Andersen and Born, 2007: 46). We will return to the role of ethics in the next part of the paper, and for now centre on how the discourse of love is said to work and function within HRM practice. In their recent paper, Andersen and Born propose that,

> a) passion becomes a management medium in the form of an expectation about the passionate employee, b) an organizational semantic is developed in order to make passion observable, c) technologies are developed for the preservation of employees' passion maintenance, d) the employment contracts are changed so that they take on the form of self-contract. (Andersen and Born, 2007: 42; numbering added)

When the family relationship that Legge mentions is turned into an emotional membership in the discourse of love sustained by HRM rhetoric, new management problems arise. As especially Townley (1993; 1994; 1998) has been keen to point out, there is an indissoluble link between the idea of managing the subject at work and issues of power, discipline and subjugation. In a reading that relies heavily on Foucault, she states "power is the desire to know" and the "individual is one of power's prime effects" (Townley, 1993: 521ff). She concludes that "the rationale of HRM is to create the individual as an analysable, describable subject to be assessed, judged, measured and compared" (Townley, 1993: 535). This leads her to quote McGregor saying that no one knows the individual better than itself (which apparently should be a problem to be taken care of by management). We join Butler in arguing quite the contrary: the human subject will never be able to give a full account of itself. In fact, we direct attention to the "ethical importance that follows from the limits that condition any effort one might make to give an account of oneself" (Butler, 2005: 21). What is interesting though is that the discourse of love invokes an image of 'tough love' in which the knowing of oneself and the self-sacrifice for the greater common good is seen as a prerequisite (Legge, 1999: 253; Legge, 2005: 127). As Legge has it, 'care' for the individual appears essentially as a respect for the employee's ability to be developed in ways that the organization deems appropriate. By the use of HRM rhetoric, human care and concern for the employee and the logic of free market forces meet. But isn't this just business? Is this not simply the providing of the best economic opportunities for the wealth and prosperity for both company and individual? As Legge and others show, in the discourse of HRM the company's interest and those of the employee are equated. By the logic of the free market "tough decisions may be made in loving concern for the employees the company wishes to retain, who depends on its survival and growth" (Legge, 2005: 128). This is so even though it implies that inadequate individuals might be seen as an opportunity cost, subject to so-called treatments of 'outplacing', 'downsizing', 'rightsizing', 'manpower transfer', 'headcount reduction' and even 'workforce reprofiling' (Legge, 2005; see also Keenoy and Anthony, 1992). But is this treatment a truly loving care? Is the discourse of love truly good when it can be used to sack people and even further present these actions as both positive and most rational?

Love as the Greatest Evil?

Though until now it has remained unmentioned, the commentators of the discourse of love do acknowledge and address (some of) the ethical issues underpinning HRM rhetoric. Legge (1999) discusses both Kantian and Aristotelian notions of ethics, which she respectively labels individualistic and collectivistic and in Storey (2001) an entire chapter is devoted to the 'place of ethics in HRM'. Nevertheless, the way ethics are dealt with in these texts do little other than make reference to and stress the importance of us bearing in mind the vast body of ethical knowledge. Thus, 'big words' (utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics) and 'big names' (Mill, Kant, Aristotle) are often pointed to, but the consequences not really analysed in detail. As Jones *et al.* (2005: 18) reminds us: "the usefulness of such grand language should not be underestimated, since it can be sufficiently obscure to impress and since it allows the business ethicist to sound fairly clever." Indeed, one could analyse the above notion of

the loving human in HRM as an ethical concept built on Aristotelian virtue ethics (and variations hereof). However, what we want to do is to go beyond these grand categories and *question* the role of ethics and its consequences inherent in the discourse of love in HRM. But before we go any further, let us take a look at the ethical aspect of the love discourse and how it comes to be an ethical problem in the first place. The argument, as presented in the love discourse, goes something like this.

On the one hand. The company defines the virtuous characters of the employees, expects them to manage their development and personal growth themselves and become responsible for their own virtuousness. In a similar way, the organization shows its love for the employees (via techniques of coaching etc.) and inspires them to open up and tell them who they are, how they can be a whole person and make use of that wholeness in the organizational context. In this way, the organization commits itself to behaving ethically and believes to be caring for the employees, and their right to be free, whole persons, responsible for their own life and living. *On the other hand*. The disadvantage of this so-called love is an increased job-insecurity caused by the vast amount of opportunities, job-rotations and employee turnover, as well as an individualised responsibility to fail (see for example Fleming and Sturdy, 2007). On this view, choices are personal and not organizational, which means that the individual is now being held responsible instead of management. This puts pressure on the employees to involve themselves and make the right decisions; a pressure which can provoke anxiety (Casey, 1999; Salecl, 2004). The paradox according to Legge (1999: 256) is that the more organizations in this way value the whole person as a resource, the more it leads to its consumption rather than its development. The pressure to involve one's whole person often leads to stress or a fear of failing (Casey, 1999; Salecl, 2004); employees cannot be developed on this basis but are rather consumed by expectations the company holds of them. Now, what is good and what is bad here (or even evil, as Kaulingfreks would have it)?

In fact can this self-evident 'goodness' be questioned and turned upside down, mistaken for wickedness instead? In performing what organizations believe to be acts of pure goodness, don't they risk ultimately consuming the employees as individual human beings, leaving them stressed and burned-out? We often take for granted that we can distinguish clearly between good and bad, hero and villain. In turning good and evil upside down and questioning the self-evident goodness we often take for granted, Kaulingfreks (2005: 38) points out that "there has never been so much evil as that which is done in the name of goodness for mankind – in the name of care for the other", and Žižek (2003: 23) follows a similar line when he argues that "the ultimate source of evil is compassion itself".

On this view, we emphasise the importance of questioning and doubt; an act of goodness might very well be an act of evil. So we should question whether the concept of love in HRM really is a self-evident good. In fact, we argue that in this discourse of love, care for the well-being of the employee in a sense might have the potential of becoming the greatest evil. Care for the other is argued for as an act of love, but risks becoming a sign of mistrust and assimilation; employees are supposed to aspire to the needs of the organization and give to it their whole person. However, they might end up experiencing the love shown from the organization as turned into a unifying act of

assimilation – that wants to own you; absorb you, direct you to its needs – all in the name of love.

In this way, we argue along with Andersen and Born that the discourse of love imbues work-life with an intimacy. The loving rhetoric of HRM is installed in order to make the organization flexible, and make the demands of the employee and the organization meet so as to create one, whole, aligned unity. Where we differ from Andersen and Born is that we question love as an extension of oneself and the possibility to tell what is good from what is bad. Andersen and Born (forthcoming) argue that "the system of love" is constituted by "the binary code of love: loves me/loves me not in which it is obviously better to be loved than not to be loved". In this way the exterior world gets internalised and reduced into the one and only perfect love. When confronted with the (in the Christian world so common) idea of the One love, one (sic) should always be open to doubt and questioning. Listen to Kristeva's almost total reversal of the Christian notion of the One love.[2]

> What a violent, all-consuming, impetuous love! It thinks only of itself, lacks interest in anything else, despises all, is satisfied with itself! It confuses stations, disregards manners, knows no bounds. Proprieties, reason, decency, prudence, judgment are defeated and reduced to slavery. (Sermon on the Song of Songs 79:1, in Kristeva, 1987: 151)

Her main message is that love is not necessarily an act of goodness. Love can be violent, narcissistic, consuming the beloved and therefore risks ending up in a form of slavery. Is this the kind of love HRM is looking for? In the following we reflect on the concept of love, make it fragile, and suggest an alternative view on love intertwined with desire, alterity and infinity.

Making Love Fragile

When we think of a happy, harmonious society, we most likely imagine it built on love. Love is said to exalt us, exceed us and bring joy. However, as we learned from Kaulingfreks love is not always necessarily good; love is not always nice and beautiful. Love hurts just as well as brings joy. Indeed, as Kristeva (1987: 2) says, it "never dwells in us without burning us". Kristeva furthermore points out that instead of being associated with understanding, joy and calmness, passionate love can also be equated with the delirium, disengagement, and breach of the same. Inspired by this questioning of the inherent goodness of love, we want to reflect on the concept of love, open it up for discussion, and thus to question the inherent ethical goodness and healing value ascribed to love. In a sense, we want to make the concept fragile, disconnect it from its safe anchoring in care and goodness and make it vulnerable (open to wounding). We now take a brief historical glance at the concept of love, which we use as point of departure for opening up the phenomena.

––––––––––

2   "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (New International Bible, 2007).

Our understanding of love in modern society still to a significant degree rests on the classical perspective of Christian love. The epitome of Christian love is often said to stem from the book of Matthew, where Jesus says: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbour as yourself". These are the two commandments on which all the Law and the Prophets hang (Matthew 22, 36-40). But as Nygren (1982) reminds us, Christian love through God's relationship with mankind can be assembled by two concepts, delivered to us from the ancient Greeks: *Agape* and *Eros*. *Agape* denotes a love given freely, and is based on the character of the one loving rather than any merit in the object of love. *Eros*, on the other hand, typifies the Greek philosophy of Aristotle, Plato and the Gnostics, and denotes an acquisitive love, which responds and aspires to the beauty or finite perfection of its object. Today, Nygren argues, Christians, and Western thought influenced by Christianity, have tended to view love as *Eros*. But whereas in the Greek *polis Eros* aimed at the citizen's happiness, Christian love is a love for all one's fellow men, including not only one's kin and the righteous but also enemies and sinners. It is a love of charity and mercifulness: a sort of disinterested gift where everyone is to be loved as we love ourselves (Kristeva, 1987). This all seems very admirable.

However, we see some problems when modern organising and HRM take up such a concept. In this type of love the self is firmly the centre of reference. The beloved will be loved as one loves oneself and this love of self thereby becomes a prototype of any other love. In this sense loving as oneself rests on notions of proximity and similarity and holds an identifying purpose of sameness. Kristeva goes so far as claiming that there is a sort of narcissism in the ontology of love. After all, often this good and kind love ends up erasing the differences between lovers. In erasing the differences between myself and the Other, the Other is roughly turned into an intermediary for the diffusion of the Other good in myself, of myself into the Other as good (Kristeva, 1987). Kristeva is clearly critical towards this identifying perspective on love and would most likely agree with Badiou (1996: 39), who points out that love is not the "prostration of the same on the altar of the other". On this view, the Other is consumed by my love, and I am consumed by the Other – we become one.

Following Kristeva, we don't see love as a kind of final stage of purified affect, but rather as a much more violent concept; love ruptures, it jolts you. To love another must also be to recognise the beloved's differences, to be open to the differences the beloved holds and, most importantly, to be ready to be changed by the encounter with this difference. Love should not only be viewed as an extension of love for myself, as a feeling that identifies, assembles and accumulates. Instead, "in the rapture of love, the limits of one's own identity vanish, at the same time that the precision of reference and meaning becomes blurred in love's discourse" (Levinas, 1987a: 2). Love is an interruption; it changes the person that loves. Isn't it just as Žižek says, "When I fall violently and passionately in love, my balance is disturbed, the course of my life is derailed" (Žižek, 2003: 113).

In other words, the unifying love of *Eros* might entail devotion, but leaves out that which jolts, interrupts, and disturbs. Such a love that jolts, interrupts and disturbs would rather be based on infinite desire, not with the aim of finite perfection. Bataille among others reminds us of the importance of desire in a discourse of love. Where Christian

love makes you want to preserve the moment, desire is the opposite, that is, it always implies a certain disorder (Bataille, 1986: 170). On this view desire would be what interrupts love, makes it fragile and introduce difference into identity. But what is love without desire?

What is Love without Desire?

O'Shea (2002: 931) differentiates between negative and productive desire by stating that "[productive] desire is an opening up to difference; it is the capacity to affect and be affected that offers potential for social improvement and progress and is thus affirmative". We will argue that this affirmative notion of desire is capable of making love in HRM fragile, make it tremble and fill it with fear, and thereby capable of rupturing our world. In this sense rapture and rupture are linked, rapture might lead to rupture. Though more interested in Bataille, O'Shea (2002) acknowledges the importance of the work of Levinas in relation to a productive and affirmative discussion of desire. We will take up this idea especially because Levinas treats desire in an ethical perspective, which makes it possible for us to reconnect the discussion on love and desire to ethics and the acts of care and goodness, which was our initial point of departure. Levinas' work reveals an affirmative desire that places the subject of desire into a relationship with an Other. Levinasian desire thereby confronts two subjects in an encounter and acknowledges that both become other and therefore altered through the experience of desire. In fact, desire for Levinas is exactly a longing for an ethical encounter with the Other.

Through his reflection on desire, Levinas also questions the stable connotation many concepts of love hold. Levinas calls most traditional views on love for "the most egoist and cruellest of needs" (1961: 254), as love on these views turns into a search for an unobtainable fulfilment, which is doomed to failure. If it is ever satisfied, the desired object is lost. If love in this way is focused only on the lover and the beloved uniting as the long lost one, it comes to exist as though they were alone in the world. In this sense, love makes us blind to the respect towards the third person (Levinas, 1987a: 31). Even though similarities are rarely found, here Žižek in fact says something similar, which supports Levinas' point: "The only way to have an intense and fulfilling personal (sexual) relationship is not for the couple to look into each other's eyes, forgetting about the world around them, but, while holding hands, to look together outside, at a third point" (Žižek, 2003: 38). Badiou (1996: 38) also rejects love as a fusion, as love for him does not make a One out of a structured relationship between two. Because love is never limited to the two becoming a one, it is not even an experience of the Other; it is rather an experience of the world. In this sense the experience of the loving subject, never constitutes a specific knowledge of what love is.

Over all, it can be said that in a Levinasian approach, love goes beyond the beloved (Levinas, 1961: 254). A love that goes beyond the beloved holds the possibility for the Other to be loved and to be an object of a need while still retaining a level of alterity. In fact, it is a desire for what is not yet, and thereby exactly not only about the two in love, the couple, but about a third point, that which is not yet, which can be said to be the

very idea of personal development. The ethical responsibility therefore always reminds me of every other Other, and makes me look to the third (Levinas, 1993: 181ff). For Levinas it becomes a matter of desire for what the Other's otherness can bring about in me.

> Otherness challenges me, empties me of myself and keeps on emptying me by showing me ever new resources. I did not know I was so rich, but I don't have the right to keep anything anymore. Is the Desire for Others appetite or generosity? (Levinas, 2003: 30)

In this quote, Levinas not only tells us that otherness challenges the self, but also that it empties the self. Opening up to the Other's world makes me richer in thought than ever, but is frustrating, since the thoughts are not mine to keep. In the ethical encounter with the Other, I am not acquiring the Other's person; the Other cannot even give it to me out of love. Levinas, therefore, asks the rather rhetorical question, whether the ethical encounter is based on generosity or appetite. For Levinas I may be fulfilling a need simultaneously with desiring the infinity of the Other, that is, the very ungraspability of the Other. The question therefore insinuates that the ethical relation with the Other is not only about morally serving the Other, it is also about my desire for the Other's otherness. To show genuine interest in the Other's otherness with the purpose of being inspired and renewed – inseminated with new thought (Levinas, 1961: 219). Therefore, in answering Levinas' question, the ethical encounter is bound to start as generosity. If it started as appetite, it would be reduced to pure egoism, a longing to possess what is inside the Other's head. Instead generosity stems from a genuine ethical response to the Other's face – a welcoming of otherness based on a desire for infinity – not to consume the other's thoughts.

Desire and Infinity

Following Linstead (2005), we argue that a Levinasian notion of desire raises the question of relational ethics and generosity instead of self-identity and self-management, learning and development instead of domination and consumption. Desire is, in a Levinasian style, a desire for the infinity of the Other. That is, desire consists in thinking more than is thought, where the Other's status as ungraspable and unassimilable is maintained (Levinas, 2003). The alterity of the infinite is thereby not cancelled; it is not erased in the thought that thinks it. "In thinking infinity, the I from the first *thinks more than it thinks*. Infinity does not enter into the *idea* of infinity, is not grasped, this idea is not a concept. The infinite is the radically, absolutely, Other" (Levinas, 1987a: 54). In this way the conversion of ontological infinity into ethical infinity broadens the meaning of infinity. It signifies my infinite separation from the other; the fact that the Other infinitely surpasses my idea of the other. In contrast, an object we attempt to know is integrated into the identity of the same, that is in assimilation I make of the other a theme, and it becomes a property or a victim (Levinas, 1987a: 54ff). What Levinas teaches us here is that in treating the Other ethically, the Other can never be thematised and turned into a property or appropriated through a discourse of love. To be ethical is to leave room for differences, undecidability, absurdity and play. In fact, ethicality is not subjection and consumption, but rather interruption and change.

According to Levinas, the ethical act is always an interruption, a disturbance and a calling into question of common sense (Levinas, 1961: 43). Ethics is therefore not accomplished as loving the other as oneself. The notion of loving the other as oneself and the identifying practices inherent therein cannot be ethical at all because it has nothing to do with our original experience of the other as Other. Instead, the notion of desire and its relation with infinity becomes of great importance in our discussion of the ethicality of the discourse of love. The relation between desire and infinity has the potential to broaden the concept of love. In a desire for infinity there has to be a thought that is more than it understands, more than its capacity. "To understand more than one understands, to think more than one thinks, to think of what withdraws from thought, is to desire" (Levinas, 1987a: 72). A desire for infinity is a desire renewed in the encounter with the desirable; it is productive. Even though desire is some kind of absence it is an absence other than the void of an abstract nothingness (Levinas, 1961: 256), instead it refers to the not yet – the future. Desire, in a Levinasian sense therefore permits itself to be appealed to by the absolutely irreducible exteriority of the Other, and because of the irreducible exteriority of the other it can never be satisfied. This desire without satisfaction acknowledges exactly the alterity of the Other. Moral consciousness is therefore essentially unsatisfied, or again is always desire. In fact 'unsatisfaction' of conscience concurs with desire. "The desire for infinity does not have the sentimental complacency of love, but the rigor of moral exigency" (Levinas, 1987a: 59).

With this notion of a productive desire, love crosses the barrier of what both Badiou (1996: 47) and Kristeva (1987) refer to as narcissism. "It is firstly at the point of desire that love fractures the One in order that the supposition of the Two might occur" (Badiou, 1996: 47). That is, if we allow narcissistic love to be interrupted by the infinity of desire we open up for a more productive concept. This is a form of love that does not try to heal and appropriate the employee, but one that sees goodness in exposing the self to critical wounding (Levinas, 1974: 49). It is a concept that allows for the subjectification of the employee to happen exactly in the paradox of ethics. And to follow Badiou (1996) love does not relieve this paradox it lives from it. It is a love where the desire for the unknowable Other is a moral responsibility.

Concluding Discussion

We began by discussing what it means when employees are offered to take part in a discourse of love. We have shown how this discourse works and how it is strengthened with the rhetoric of HRM. The rationale of HRM is to form the employee as an analysable, describable subject to be assessed, judged, measured and compared (Townley, 1993: 535). But it goes further: through a discourse of love this creation is justified as ethical. 'Love' for the employee becomes a respect for the employees' ability to be developed in ways that the organization deems appropriate. We have raised the question of whether this love for the other is good. Through a questioning of the attempt to differentiate sharply between good and evil, we claim that the ongoing discourse of love in HRM is not necessarily an act of goodness, as it easily invokes an

image of 'tough love' in which self sacrifice for the greater good of the community is seen as a prerequisite.

Rather, the HRM discourse of love has the opposite effect of the one it is intended to have. HRM sets up the goal of freedom and empowerment, but ends up performing a unifying control – what Fleming and Sturdy (2007) call neo-normative control. Recent critiques of the discourse of love (Andersen, 2001; 2005; 2007; Bauman, 2003; 2007) foresee a world of resentment, in which not much free space, if any, is given to the employee. Thus, if we are to take the message of discourse of love in HRM seriously, and to see it as more than yet another attempt to control and manipulate the employee, it should be possible to be passionate and show one's enthusiasm in multiple ways. The discourse in HRM needs to get beyond the Christian claim that one should "love thy neighbour as yourself". If love is a consciousness of the other, the other is identifiable in consciousness as the same – not an Other. In this process of sameness, the beloved will be loved as one loves oneself and this love of self thereby becomes a prototype of any other love; the 'Oneself' is stretched out to also include neighbours, foreigners and even sinners. What would it mean for HRM if we opened up the discourse of love to a much more violent concept; a concept where love ruptures. Love is never a fusion; love does not make a 'one' out of a structured relationship between two. Love is not a striving for a same. Love instead signifies a paradox; a paradox not relieved by management – especially if management is evil.

To open up the discussion of love in HRM – and seek a concept that does not have the same assimilating and unifying connotation as Christian love – we introduce Levinasian desire. Desire, following Levinas, is a desire for the infinity of the Other, where the Other's status as ungraspable and inassimilable is maintained. Love, in this status of infinity, holds the possibility for the Other to be loved and to be an object of a need while still retaining a level of alterity. In fact, ethical responsibility to the Other is the origin for every desire for what is not yet, for that which is not yet, which can be said to be the very idea of personal development. By reflecting on the concept of love utilised in HRM, we have opened it up for a discussion that has questioned the inherent ethical goodness and healing value inherent in the HRM discourse of love. We follow Levinas and argue that to be truly ethical we should dare to leave our shelter and expose ourselves to critical wounding. Love should not unify, it should also expose our vulnerability.

It is therefore not love's ethical responsibility to heal the wound. Instead, it is the ethical responsibility of desire to always keep the wound open. After all, productivity happens exactly in the exposure of the wound; not in the closure of healing. This is why, we, on behalf of the discourse of love in HRM, still dare to have high hopes, joyfully proclaiming: In the name of love let's remember desire. But as Levinas (2000: 174) asks: "how is a *suffering* possible as a *passion*?" How can HRM justify its transformation into a discourse that instead of relying on words like 'love', 'freedom', 'empowerment', 'self-management' and 'flexibility' relies on words like 'vulnerability', 'wounding', 'infinity' and 'desire'? The answer is that through my passion I can make my vulnerability constructive. Employees are not rational beings, whose passions are to be managed by the organization. Instead, through my openness to the call of the Other, I can allow the wound to be constructive, because only by exposing myself and allowing

for wounding can I truly change. The wound doesn't stop me, doesn't limit my endeavour. The minute the wound is closed, I settle, I deny interruption, I deny the Other.

In this way, HRM needs to keep its wound open, that is, acknowledge the limits to full accountability and the impossibility of fully managing and controlling its employees. As Keenoy (2007) has argued: "HRM emerged more than 20 years ago on an agenda of thinking the employee relationship differently: promoting emancipation, freedom and progress, today the employment relationship has disappeared as a theoretical focus within HRM." Our aim with this paper was to bring back the *human* to human resource management, this time in the shape of the irreducible, unassimilable Other. Perhaps HRM will no longer be able to know itself, if it took on the Levinasian critique. But if so, our aim with this paper has been successful. With this paper we suggest a theorisation of the employee relationship that breaks with what has become HRM tradition: the shared interest between company and employee. We have shown that the discourse of love can just as well be evil as good. To make it good, the infinite difference of the other must be remembered. We propose to inject a bit of vulnerability into HRM. Only in keeping the wound open and remembering the impossibility of achieving freedom through unity can HRM become truly ethical and open to the Other. The Other can never be reduced to my consciousness of the Other's passions. The Other is always before my consciousness of the existence of the Other, and that is before my own consciousness. The Other, who is always before rules, who always already haunts me, calls me into question. This is why HRM in its endeavour to be ethical should abandon the sentimental concept of a unifying love and open up to the rigorousness of infinite desire.

references

Andersen, N.Å. and A. Born (2001) *Kærlighed og omstilling.* Copenhagen: New Social Science Monographs.

Andersen, N.Å. and A. Born (2005) 'Kærlig ledelse', *Nordiske Organisasjonsstudier,* 7(3-4): 161-186.

Andersen, N.Å. and A. Born (2007) 'Emotional identity feelings as communicative artefacts in organizations', *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion*, 2(1): 35-48.

Andersen, N. and A. Born (forthcoming) 'The employee in the sign of love', forthcoming in *Culture and Organization*.

Badiou, A. (1996) 'What is Love?', *Umbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious*, 1: 37-53.

Barley, S. R. and G. Kunda (1992) 'Design and devotion: surges of rational and normative ideologies of control in managerial discourse', *Administratively Science Quarterly*, 37(3): 363-399.

Bauman, Z. (2007) *Consuming Life.* Cambridge: Polity.

Bauman, Z. (2003) *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds.* Cambridge: Polity.

Butler, J. (2005) *Giving an Account of Oneself.* Ashland, Ohio: Fordham University Press.

Casey, C. (1999) 'Come join our family: discipline and integration in corporate organizational culture', *Human Relations,* 52(2): 155-178.

Covey, S. (1999) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Fleming, P. and A. Sturdy (2007) ''Just be yourself' – Towards neo-normative control in organizations?', working paper, Cambridge University.

Jones, C., M. Parker and R. ten Bos (2005) *For Business Ethics*. London: Routledge.

Kaulingfreks, R. (2005) 'Evil', in C. Jones and D. O'Doherty (eds) *Manifestos for the Business School of Tomorrow*. Åbo: Dvalin.

Keenoy, T. and P. Anthony (1992) 'HRM: Metaphor, Meaning and Morality', in P.W. Turnbull and P. Blyton (eds) *Reassessing Human Resource Management: Conflicts and Contradictions.* London: Sage.

Keenoy, T. (2007) 'Overcoming HRM: from Weber to Weick', inaugural lecture, University of Leicester, UK, March 27.

Kristeva, J. (1987) *Tales of Love.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Kunda, G. (1992) *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Kunda, G and J. Van Maanen (1999) 'Changing scripts at work: managers and professionals', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 561: 64-80.

Legge, K. (2005) *Human Resource Management: Rhetorics and Realities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Legge, K. (1999) 'Representing people at work', *Organization,* 6(2): 247-264.

Levinas, E. (1961) *Totality and Infinity – An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Levinas, E. (1974) *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Levinas, E. (1987a) *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Dordrecht: Matinus Nijhoff Publishers.

Levinas, E. (1987b) *Time and the Other*. Pittsburgh,: Duquesne University Press.

Levinas, E. (1993) *God, Death and Time*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Levinas, E. (2003) *Humanism of the Other*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Linstead, S. (2005) 'Desire' in C. Jones and D. O'Doherty (eds) *Manifestos for the Business School of Tomorrow*, Åbo: Dvalin.

Loehr, J. and S. Tony (2003). *The Power of Full Engagement: Making Energy, Not Time, is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal*. New York: Free Press.

Lundin, S. et al. (2001) *Fish!* Abingdon: Hodder Mobius.

McGregor, D. (1960) *The Human Side of Enterprise*. New York: Harper & Row.

New International Bible (2007) '1 Corinthians 13, 4-7' [http://www.biblegateway.com].

Nygren, A. (1982) *Agape and Eros. Part I. A study of the Christian idea of love. Part II. The history of the Christian idea of love.* London: SPCK.

O'Shea, A. (2002) 'Desiring desire: how desire makes us human, all too human', *Sociology,* 36(4): 925-940.

Peters, T. (1997) *The Circle of Excellence*. New York: Knopf.

Roberts, J. (2005) 'The power of the imaginary in disciplinary processes', *Organization*, 12(5): 619-642.

Salaman, G., J. Storey and J. Billsberry (2005) *Strategic Human Resource Management: A Reader,* 2nd edition. London: Sage.

Salecl, R. (2004) *On Anxiety*. London: Routledge.

Steyaert, C. and M. Janssens (1999) 'Human and inhuman resource management: saving the subject of HRM', *Organization*, 6(2): 181-198.

Storey, J. (2001) *Human Resource Management: A Critical Text,* 2nd edition. London: Thomson Learning.

Townley, B. (1998) 'Beyond good and evil: depth and division in the management of human resources', in A. McKinlay and K. Starkey (eds) *Foucault, Management and Organization Theory from Panopticon to Technologies of Self*. London: Sage.

Townley, B. (1994) *Reframing Human Resource Management*. London: Sage.

Townley, B. (1993) 'Foucault, Power/Knowledge, and its Relevance for Human Resource Management', *Academy of Management Review*, 18(3): 518-545.

Van Maanen, J. 1991. 'The smile factory: work at Disney Land', in P. Frost, L. Moore, M. Lewis, C. Lumberg, and J. Martin (eds) *Reframing Organizational Culture*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Walton, R. E. (1985) 'From control to commitment in the workplace', *Harward Busines Review,* 63(2), 76-84.

Watson, T.J. (2001) *In search of Management: Culture, Chaos and Control in Managerial Work,* revised edition. London: Thomson Learning.

World-in-love (2007) 'Welcome to a loving world' [http://www.world-in-love.com].

Žižek, S. (2003) *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge: MIT press.

the authors   Anders Bojesen's doctorate from the Copenhagen Business School focuses on competence and subjectivity in organizational analysis and modern work life. Alongside an interest in poststructuralist ideas of organization studies he is studying the prospects of a 'Healthy Resource Management'. To address the latter he has recently undertaken work at the National Research Centre for the Working Environment, Lersø Parkallé 105, DK-2100 Copenhagen, Denmark
E-mail: abo@nrcwe.dk

Sara Louise Muhr is currently completing a doctorate in organization theory subjecting the themes of ethics, identity and the works of Emmanuel Levinas to diversity management. New research interests include gender studies and the issues of love and desire in organization studies.
Address: Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Porcelænshaven 18A, DK-2000 Frederiksberg, Denmark
E-mail: slm.lpf@cbs.dk