

The Biology of Business

II. Love Expands Intelligence

Humberto Maturana Romesin and Pille Bunnell

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In the second essay I will talk about something that is usually considered inappropriate in a business context, I will talk about emotions. You will see that emotions are fundamental to what happens in all our doings, including our businesses.

There is something peculiar about human beings: we are loving animals. I know that we kill each other and do all those horrible things, but if you look at any story of corporate transformation where everything begins to go well, innovations appear, and people are happy to be there, you will see that it is a story of love. Most problems in companies are not solved through competition, not through fighting, not through authority. They are solved through the only emotion that expands intelligent behavior. They were solved through the only emotion that expands creativity, as in this emotion there is freedom for creativity. This emotion is love. Love expands intelligence, and enables creativity. Love returns autonomy, and as it returns autonomy, it returns responsibility and the experience of freedom.

We are loving animals

Once in a lecture I said that we are loving animals, and a question arose... "Are we animals?" I answered, "Yes, we are animals, but we are *loving* animals." Most animals are loving animals to some extent. What is peculiar about us human animals is that we have expanded this emotion in our manner of living.

All mammals live in a loving relationship with their mothers during their infancy. Our distant ancestors began to orient their manner of living around extending this mammalian mother-child relationship. In enjoying and conserving the pleasure of this intimacy, our ancestors found themselves living in small close groups that were centered around the mother-child bond. By conserving the pleasure of intimacy with each other, they extended the domains and the duration in which consensual behaviour took place. Occasionally our ancestors would use sounds and gestures as a part of this consensuality, and sometimes, the sounds and gestures became the ground for further coordinations, and a minimal operation in the form of language would arise. When such operations began to be conserved from generation to generation through the

learning of the children, then the foundations for languaging as a way of living were laid.

Language evolved in us humans because we began to live in the pleasure of intimacy in a way that conserved this way of living. We developed language because we became the loving animals. Humans are those animals that have expanded living in love. We have become dependent on love in the sense that we become ill of body and soul if love is interfered with. Sometimes conditions arise in our culture so that some bad ideas persist in spite of their badness: I think competition is one of those bad ideas that is destructive, and yet it persists.

Love is ordinary

Now I am going to tell you what love is, not as a definition, but as an abstraction of the coherences of our living - and I pretend that this is all that one needs to know.

Love is the domain of those relational behaviours through which another (a person, being, or thing) arises as a legitimate other in coexistence with oneself.

The dynamics I have abstracted is how we act, whether or not we reflect on it. Suppose that you are walking in the countryside, and you encounter a spider. What if you exclaim "A spider!?" and immediately stomp on it, making sure it is thoroughly squashed. What would your companion comment? Something like "You don't love spiders" or "You don't love animals" or "You hate spiders, don't you!" And all those expressions belong to the negation of love; the spider does not arise as a legitimate other in coexistence with you.

Aggression is that domain of relational behaviours in which another is negated as a legitimate other in coexistence with oneself.

But if you say in wonder "A spider! Look at it! Let's be careful not to step on this beautiful spider" your companion might comment "You sure love animals! Even spiders!" You don't have to take it into bed with you to love it. Taking the spider to bed would not be loving it. The fact that you let the spider be a spider where spiders live shows that you love it. You let the other arise as a legitimate other through your behaviour. It is your behaviour that makes it so that you move around the spider so it can co-exist with you.

We talk about love as if it were special and rare, something difficult to achieve - but it is a really ordinary thing. But it is special in a different way. When the emotion of love is there, then vision expands. Many, many, many years ago I was walking with one of my sons, Alejandro, who was about seven then. We were going through a field of thistles and I was opening a space with my stick by batting the thistles aside. Suddenly my son asked "Father, why don't you love thistles?" and there I was, stopped, suddenly seeing what I was doing. And when I stopped being aggressive towards the thistles, I saw them, beautiful violet flowers! I could see a path between them without destroying

them. But the point is that at seven, Alejandro knew exactly the nature of love as a relational behavior. So we learn this as children - we don't need philosophy or science, or anything.

Emotions characterize action

If you think about what happens in your daily life (remember, this is biology, not philosophy) you will notice that we normally use the word emotion to connote a domain of relational behaviour. Emotions specify kinds of relational behaviours. If you say somebody is angry, you know immediately what kinds of relational behaviours this person can participate in, and what kinds he or she is incapable of while angry. If you say someone is ambitious, you know immediately what kinds of relational behaviours he or she can and cannot participate in. We all know this; we are experts in detecting emotions whether or not we are consciously aware of this.

When you distinguish a particular behaviour, you distinguish the emotion. If you want to know the emotion, you look at the behaviour. If you want to know what kind of behaviour it is, you look at the emotion. Behaviour and emotion are both ways of pointing at relational dynamics; they entail different looks, different ways of grasping these dynamics. As we speak of this dynamic we do what language enables us to do; that is, we make an object of either the emotion or the behaviour, and having done so we can look at it. But you do not have to think about this, you already practice it in daily life - you know when your friends are angry, when they are joyful, sad, or indifferent. And you know immediately either by looking at the behaviour, or by looking at the person. We are expert at seeing emotions. It is because it comes so easily to us that we do not see that this is the case - there is usually nothing that triggers us to reflect on the relational dynamics of emotioning.

When we talk about emotions we usually refer to the way we feel under different emotions, rather than what we do. Our bodies do have different configurations in different emotions. We can "touch" ourselves and refer to how we find ourselves under the different emotions as different feelings. Thus we easily characterize emotions by the feelings that accompany the particular body dynamics that specify what we can do and what we cannot do. This does not mean that the emotions are body dynamics, or that they take place in the body. Emotions take place in the domain in which they occur, and where they occur is in the relation.

Emotions determine intelligence

Different emotions take us along different paths; we live different histories according to our emotions. There is a book called "Emotional Intelligence"¹ that speaks of emotions as a particular kind of intelligence, and, in a way, emotions are related to intelligence. I think intelligence is something very basic, a particular kind of phenomenon that has to do with the plasticity for participation in changing behaviour and changing relations. Rigid behaviour, behaviour that does not flow with evolving circumstances does not appear intelligent. It is the plasticity of consensual flow that we refer to when we speak about an intelligent being. For example, when we say that an animal is intelligent we are saying that it has entered into a flow of consensuality, a flow of plastic behaviour,

with us. When we say a person is intelligent, we refer to the plastic flow of whatever relationship the person is participating in, including relationships in various conceptual domains. Of course intelligence requires a central nervous system to take place, but it does not take place in the brain, it takes place in behaviour.

Intelligence is a basic phenomenon that has to do with the plasticity for participation in changing relations.

How emotions relate to intelligence is that emotions change the possible expanse of intelligent behavior. Fear restricts intelligence to a very narrow view; it concentrates attention in a particular way, and constrains the relationship to a particular orientation. Similarly, ambition and competition restrict attention, vision, and intelligence. Forgive me for saying so, but if you think about it bit, you will see that this is indeed so.

We are equally intelligent

I claim that from a biological point of view we humans are all equally intelligent, and this is the case because we live in language. The fundamental neuronal plasticity needed for living in language is so gigantic that we are fundamentally equally intelligent. This plasticity is not at all the same sort of thing that computers have - the computers we use are computing machines, not intelligent machines. They do not have the plasticity for participation in changing behaviour and changing relations that comprises intelligence. Our languaging brain is enormously plastic, able to generate endless recursions in language, creating endlessly new domains of living. Sure, there are individual variations in realizing this fundamental plasticity according to whether we have had some malnutrition in our development, or brain damage or disease, or whether we have lived a life that has put us in situations of constraint, despair, or rejection.

Our cultural belief that intelligence is something that some people have, and others lack, limits what we can do together. Sometimes a parent, a teacher, a manager or a CEO will realize this. If a manager acts in the premise that "people are competent" he or she immediately initiates a change. If you want to achieve something that involves other people, you have to accept that we are all equally intelligent, or you will not trust that the others will act competently. If you want autonomous and coherent behaviour, you need only open a space of love, and intelligence appears there. You don't have to do anything but accepting that the other is equally intelligent as you, even as he or she has a different experience, lives in a different way, or has different preferences.

Love is visionary

How is it that love expands intelligence? It has to do with vision - not eyesight, but that which we mean when we exclaim, "I see!" Let me give you an example from daily life. You may have heard something like this enacted in a play, or you may have lived it yourself. A man comes home from work and after a little while his wife complains "You don't love me anymore! You didn't notice that I've done my hair!" What is her

complaint? Her complaint doesn't have to do with her hair or her beauty; it has to do with not being seen, not arising in the legitimacy of her existence with the other.

By the way this business of the legitimacy of the existence of the other does not mean you have to like, or want to be near the person, being, or circumstance to love it-- it means that you have to let it be, to see it.

There is an interesting television series called "McGyver", you may have seen it. McGyver is the hero in this series; he knows many things, like all of us do. He knows some physics, chemistry, anthropology, architecture... all sorts of things. And in several episodes he finds himself trapped somewhere with a companion. They may be in a cave, or in a barn that is about to be burned down, something like that, the point is they are trapped. His companion may have the same kind of knowledge about physics, chemistry, etc., but is frightened and despairs "My goodness, we are trapped, we're going to run out of air!" or "The bandits are going to come and kill us!". But McGyver, no, McGyver is not frightened, he fully accepts his situation as legitimate. He loves his situation and thus he can see, and as he can see he can see this little wire here, and this little thing there, and all his knowledge is at hand to make something that opens an escape. If you are fearful, you cannot see; your knowledge is not available, and your intelligent behavior is diminished.

I could have said, "McGyver respects his situation", and you could think of it that way. But you might see that with respect McGyver might remain a little more aloof, and would not as easily engage with all the little details that become the tools for his escape. To respect something means that there is a particular relational domain that you accept as legitimate, but you are not necessarily open to the legitimacy of all the relational domains which that person or being or circumstance entails.

What I have just said you can check in your own daily life. We continuously live change in the availability of our knowledge, change in our possibilities of plasticity in our relations as modulated through our emotions. I do not think there are different kinds of intelligence. I think emotions modulate the domains of intelligent behavior in which we can operate, and hence our intelligence is expanded or diminished according to our emotions.

The only emotion that broadens vision and expands intelligent behavior is love.

Interfering with vision

McGyver could see his situation as he let it be whatever it was. To see, one must let it be. But this is not always easy as we live in a particular human culture. A culture is both a rich domain of human living in the present, and a historic domain of human living in which some things have been hidden as others have arisen. The problem with culture is inherent in another peculiar human thing: language. As language began to be lived, we began to live in language by constituting objects, and categories of objects (a new object), and relationships (another kind of object) between objects. With all this we could begin to reflect (as we made of our circumstances an object) and we could invent

purposes and intentions (yet another kind of object). This doesn't take place as just a mental exercise, it happens as a lived world; we live this world of objects and relationships among objects as our human world, our culture. As long as we live the purposes and intentions we have created as a plastic participation in various relationships in a way that does not distort what we do, it does not matter. If we make these rigid and demand that everything we do fit the rigid structure we have devised, or if we focus our attention on the purpose too closely, we distort our ability to live that which we desired when we distinguished what we wanted as a purpose.

This is again a biological discussion, not a philosophical one. This matter of attention resulting in distortion is based in the operation of the nervous system. The nervous system is a network of neuronal elements which operates on excitations and inhibitions. Every movement we make entails excitations and inhibitions. In the most simple way, if I contract a muscle other muscles (the antagonists) are inhibited. Further, there is inhibition within the process of contraction of any given muscle. The point is that this play between excitation and inhibition happens in every movement - every movement is being inhibited as it occurs. This is why, if you are learning karate and you want to break a brick, you have to aim below the brick. If you aim at the brick the force of the blow will be diminished because inhibition takes place before the intended movement is completed.

The coordination of excitation and inhibition is involved in all neuronal activities, including what we call thinking. It is in our neurobiology that attention on what we do inhibits what we do. This is why learning a task involves relaxation - not in terms of becoming limp or falling asleep, but in terms of relaxing your attention, your intent of controlling what you are doing. As you relax your attention on the doing, but proceed in an understanding of what you do, you allow the actual doing to take place in a manner that uses the circumstances as a reference that guides what you are doing. As you become more relaxed, your doing becomes more fluid, and as it becomes more fluid it becomes more pristine, and as it becomes more pristine it becomes more beautiful, more comfortable and more perfect.

As notions such as purpose, intention, or aim arise, they become part of what we do. As they become part of what we do and we begin to attend to them as if they had a concrete existence, this dynamics of interfering with our doing through our attention to what we do takes place -- to a greater or smaller degree.

Envy, fear, ambition, and competition narrow our attention and our vision and thus restrict intelligent behavior.

As I said earlier, and will elaborate further in the next essay in this series, sometimes conditions arise in our culture so that some bad ideas persist in spite of their badness. This is because we humans live in a network of conversations, and what we say changes what we become. Words are never trivial. Language, and all that has come from language, all our culture and all our technology, all this began when love began to be conserved as our grounding emotion. And it is still the case that the only emotion that broadens vision and expands intelligent behavior is love.

¹ Daniel Goleman, 1995. Emotional Intelligence