ORIGINAL RESEARCH

'Other-wise' Organizing. A Levinasian Approach to Agape in Work and Business Organisations

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Abstract

Humanistic management emphasises the importance of respecting humanity in and through meaningful work within organisations. In this paper we introduce a Levinasian approach to organising. Levinas argues that the Other appeals to us and allows us to take responsibility towards the Other – i.c. an employee, a customer, a supplier, etcetera. In this article our focus is on employees. By taking the Other as a starting point of his reflections, Levinas helps to transform the organisation and management of work and humans in business organisations. Based on the concept of alterity and becoming susceptible to the appeal that comes to us through what Levinas refers to as the 'face of the Other', we argue that the philosopher calls for 'an agapeic turn' to management and organisation. This turn means that the focus on the well-being of the employee – and the needs, interests, ideas, and expectations as perceived by him or her – should be at the core of organising. As a result, this paper calls for an increased focus on self-determination and self-organisation to allow the Other both voice and control over her or his behaviour, actions and contributions to the outputs and outcomes of one's organisational unit. Through our focus on a Levinas approach, we concretize and deepen the traditional understanding of agape, making it more relevant to our functioning in a business setting. As a result, agape is introduced as an analytical concept that guides the structuring and the effectuation of human interaction in and through organisations.

Keywords Levinas · Agape · Self-organisation · Holacracy · Sociocracy · Leadership

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Introduction

In our present-day society, human flourishing and personal well-being depend largely on an individual's contribution to the fulfilling of societal needs in and through their jobs. Arendt's (1958) famous distinction between labour, work and action already makes clear that, to be human, we fully depend on our ability to participate in all three areas. Participation usually takes place through paid jobs – even though flourishing often takes more than just having paid work. Receiving a monthly income is not sufficient to cater for well-being, personal growth, satisfaction, and development. In this article we introduce the concept of *agape* as 'the sustained commitment to well-being and flourishing of individuals as part of social networks and our planet' – in this context that of employees through meaningful work. Upfront, it is already being noticed that we define 'agape' not just as 'love' or 'caring for others', as these terms are too generic to provide guidance to management and employees in the context of a business. Based on what we call a Levinasian turn to agape our definition includes a focus on three elements:

– Agape is a commitment to the well-being of others as they are part of a broader social network – in this case an organisation – and our planet.
– Agape focuses on the well-being and flourishing of others as they themselves perceive this well-being and flourishing.
– Agape goes beyond incidental responses to the well-being of others and to human flourishing by entailing a sustained commitment – both in its duration and structural approach to organisational (inter)action and in its consequences or effects.

As a result, agape is introduced as an analytical concept that guides the structuring and the effectuation of human interaction in and through organisations.

In the disciplines of management and economics, the word agape is virtually unknown. Agape and organisations are often seen as belonging to two different worlds (Tasselli 2019). As a result, with a few exceptions (Sferrazzo 2020; 2021; Kaptein 2021)[1], limited research applies the concept of agape to the development of organisational structures, cultures, and decision-making. Nevertheless, it is this oddity which makes it a promising and important concept when it comes to the design and structuring of organisational decision-making. This is even reinforced by the Levinasian turn towards agape that we introduce in this paper. In short, Levinas does not interpret agape as caring for others *as a result of my perceiving the needs of others*, but as respect and care for others *as they themselves express their needs*. We are aware of the complexity and elasticity of agape as a rather vague concept. Traditionally, agape is referred to as selfless caring for the needs of others (Outka 1972; McCloskey 2006; Benedict XVI, 2009; Argandoña, 2011; Melé 2012b; Bruni 2012; Pope 2013; Barsade and O'Neill 2014; Tasselli 2019; Francis 2020). It is often equated with notions like charity, compassion, empathy, sympathy, and solidarity. This paper approaches agape from a different angle and starts with the needs of others (Ignatieff 1984) as perceived by the needy

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[1] Despite the focus on agape that these articles display, the authors (unfortunately) do not take a Levinasian approach towards agape. They see agape, as is commonly practiced in the field of ethics, economics, and management studies, in line with selfless caring for the needs of other. As a result, their focus is not on building organisations that allow others to be recognised as radically unique and different and to be respected as such.

person herself or himself, inspired by the contribution of the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) and his concepts of the 'face of the Other'[2] and alterity. It is a philosophy of human encounter radically opposing dehumanising trends in society. We make the connection between agape and an ethic of responsibility in the context of organising. This is what we call a Levinasian approach.

The approach, when applied to an organisational context, has implications for the structuring of organisational decision-making, as it challenges the traditional top-down decision-making model. The core question that emerges in this respect is how we can design organisations in ways that focus on the well-being and flourishing of others while taking alterity and the fundamental otherness of others – and most pertinently that of employees – as its starting point. Introducing agape in business organisations requires an environment in which the voice of the other forms the start of organisational activity and transforms organisational executives, managers and other employees into listeners. Hearing what the other has to say and then to include this in collective decision-making often provides a challenge to management, employees, and the organisation. It not only requires a different attitude or culture but, as we will see, different decision-making structures. The paper, therefore, contains a reflection on agape as an organisational decision-making practice. Obviously, the literature contains numerous references to agape, compassion, charity, and so forth, in the practice of organising (Dutton et al. 2006; Frost 2011, Barsade and O'Neill 2014; Simpson et al. 2014, 2015; Worline and Dutton 2017). Nevertheless, only scant attention has been given to the design of organisational decision-making in ways that reflect agape. This paper aims to fill the void. It aims to contribute to the literature and the practice in which respect for others, acknowledging their humanness as distinguished from merely being a means to the organisational objectives and the promotion of human flourishing, are at the heart of the organisation. Agape – as a structured approach to the well-being of others – is too important for employees, business leaders, managers, and organisations to only apply the concept to instances of mutually oriented behaviour, that incidentally occur when the other needs attention, support, love, or care. The aim is to (re)design organisations in ways that allow humans throughout the entire business to flourish. We believe this can be achieved by focusing on the importance of self-organisation (Endenburg 1998; Getz 2009; Laloux 2016; Robertson 2015; Owen and Buck 2020) as an instrument that allows employees to be both themselves and different from others. We will focus on sociocracy (Owen and Buck 2020) and holacracy (Robertson 2015), both leading to organisational decision-making in which humans can flourish.

The aim of the paper is twofold. First, it presents a new interpretation of and an approach to the agapeic turn as practical wisdom from a Levinasian point of view. This approach starts with the recognition of the other as a self that is unknowable to the other and builds on the respect for the other to her or his needs, interests, ideas, and expectations – as perceived and expressed by the others. Second, the paper translates this understanding of the other as a person that radically differs from myself and unknowable to the self, into an organisational decision-making approach that recognises the other as a self. This approach uses the wisdom and the insights of the other to build and support humane organisational decision-making, the outcomes of which are reflected in policies, practices, and actions. Therefore, the title of this paper: 'other-wise organising'. We deflect from the postulation of universal needs for growth, intrinsic equality, and self-direction (Ryan and Deci 2000; Deci and Ryan 2000), or listening mainly to the other in preconceived settings aiming to promote the interests of the organisation. As an alternative, we present sociocracy and holacracy as decision-making models that are apt to include a more agapeic approach to organising.

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[2] Levinas refers to Others, using both a lower case 'o' and a capital 'O'. With a few exceptions we use the lower case 'o'.

Agape as Practical Wisdom

Research has shown that agape as neighbourly love generates a higher level of trust among workers, job satisfaction, and improved well-being of others (Barsade and O'Neill 2014). Agape is a particular kind of love which we rarely meet in its purest form[3]. It makes us see things differently and it transforms the entire organisation. Yet, the practical challenges to this systemic organisational transition are enormous. On top of that comes a theoretical challenge, which has everything to do with a proper understanding of agape and its relationship to organisations and management. What is agape, being one of many words the Greeks used for love? Classical Greek uses different words for love, and these can be used as different paradigms for love. As a heuristic device we can distinct four types of love: storge – family intimate love; philia – friendship; eros – need love; agape – love for the well-being of the other (Lewis 1958). Like eros, philia is generally (but not universally) understood to be responsive to good qualities in one's beloved. Agape on the contrary generates a power in itself. It is not love of attraction, but a love motivated by giving. Rather than responding to a preconceived, antecedent value in *its object*, agape instead is to recognise the intrinsic value in the other as expressed by *the subject*. We must be aware that human love is based on different, often conflicting motives. Two preliminary remarks are important as we deal with the agapeic turn or 'other-wise-organizing'. First, agape is love that takes shape in justice and thus love that ultimately assumes the needs, interests, and rights of the other. There is no antagonism between love and justice. Agapeic love seeks to promote the flourishing of what the other requires; but it never does less than what justice requires. This love is not gratuitous benevolence overruling justice (Wolterstorff 2008, 2011).[4] Second, we do not present and discuss agape in its purest form in this article. On the contrary, in the context of business we will focus on an agapeic-turn as a form of practical wisdom. It is wisdom that is ingrained in the organisational form, its decision-making processes, its culture, and ultimately in the people and their interactions in and through the organisation. It is a wisdom that starts by listening to the other and recognising the needs, interests, ambitions of the individual as (s)he perceives them and her or his contributions to the organisation. This is what we call the agapeic-turn. This turn does not mean that they employees are now calling the shots in the organisation and that their input must be respected. It only entails that they can voice their needs, interests, ideas, and ambitions and that the organisation will take these into consideration in a serious manner. In addition, it calls for feedback from the organisation what it has done with the input from the employees.

As a result, agape abandons the old modernistic dichotomy between the economy, based on contracts and sometimes on rather superficial forms friendship, and our domestic private lives, in which there is room for respect, love and care for others (Bruni 2012). As a result, we describe agape as a particular type of wisdom (phronesis), which makes us see things differently and changes our daily operational choices. It is a form of care, as

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[3] This is why agape is considered first of all a divine characteristic. Only God 'is' agape (1 John 4:8, 16).

[4] The opposition between ethics of justice and agape has had great influence and has been represented especially by S. Kierkegaard, A. Nygren and R. Niebuhr. The philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff discusses at length what he calls "modern-day agapism," or benevolence agapism which creates a false dualism between human rights thinking and agape love - a view that became dominant in Christian Ethics of the 20th century. Wolterstorff (2011) gives sound philosophical arguments for the unity between justice and agape love. In line with his thesis, we argue for a unity of justice, love, and wise leadership (Nullens 2016).

a practice it is not based on high self-esteem or one's own abilities, but it starts with the needs of others (Ignatieff 1984) as perceived by the needy person herself or himself. As a result, we define the agapeic turn as (the move towards) 'the sustained commitment to well-being and flourishing of individuals as part of social networks and our planet'. Agape alters our professional practice when it is focused on the well-being of others. It transcends contractual reciprocity and is rooted in an awareness of the vulnerability of the other – as well as of ourselves – and the reciprocity of opening up to the needs and interests of others and of giving to each other (Bruni 2012). Work, and the organisation of work, influences the well-being and flourishing of the employees (Fontrodona and Sison 2015). The organisational structure is particularly important as a formal and informal system of relations that influences the ways in which humans socialise, (inter)act, perform, achieve results and flourish as a person (Brickley et al. 2003; Fontrodona and Sison 2015; Melé 2003, 2014, 2016; Bruni 2012; Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). As such, an organisation can be viewed as a 'community of persons' (Melé 2012a; Albert and Perouma 2017). It goes beyond just a mere collection of contracts (Melé 2012b; Argandoña 2011) aimed at achieving a set of common objectives. As Albert and Perouma (2017) demonstrate, this organisation can promote or break down personal development of humans through human interaction, dialogue, collaboration and working towards collective outputs. That particularly counts for business organisations – the heroes of our times in creating economic value. As Bruni (2021) argues, to live well means that "we need to create something other than economic value" alone. Economic and civil life today are facing an "anthropologic deficit" (ibid.:6), that calls for an agapeic turn – explicitly embracing human flourishing and well-being. Currently we are aware that the old homo economicus and the classical calculating manager are too one-sided and do not sufficiently value the wholeness of our humanity. Our understanding of the person in the economic context has become more relational and interdependent with our natural environment (Van Nes and Nullens 2021).

Levinas, an Ethics of Human Encounter

Traditionally, and particularly in a religious context, love is seen as a general principle and therefore applicable as a form of practical wisdom in a setting of business and work (Melé 2012b; Kaptein 2021). The obligation to love finds its basis in the commandment: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' It is the 'golden rule', promoted by all world religions and many philosophers (Wattles 1996; Templeton 1999). In this respect, implementing more love on the work floor is a consequence of a unique type of a commandment ethic, often a divine commandment ethic. Or it is simple practical wisdom: I treat you the same way as I want to be treated. Despite the good intention to care for the well-being of others, the traditional or superficial golden rule approach often contains and displays an essential flaw of self-reference. We treat others as we want to be treated ourselves. The golden rule emphasises one's functioning as a self-reflective person – taking my ideas about the needs and interests of others as a starting point. However, our love of self is far too defective to serve as paradigm for the love of one's neighbour (Wolterstorff 2008). It is Levinas who reveals the conceptual weakness of the superficial understanding of the golden rule by pointing out that this this rule is based on a form of sameness-thinking. You need what I need, so I know what you need. As we further engage with the ethics of responsibility of Emmanuel Levinas, we want to ask the deeper question of the source of this universal love principle with sufficient attention for the uniqueness of every individual.

Love has its source in the sincere encounter with the other and this defines how we see and apply love in a professional context. In our quest for the essence of love in an economic setting, we join Adam Smith's earlier observations on love as *a sense of natural sympathy* (Smith 1759/2010; Hanley 2014). According to Smith, a flourishing society is a loving society. He observes our natural interdependence (Smith, quoted in Hanley 2014: 28):

> *"Man, who can subsist only in society, was fitted by nature to that situation for which he was made. All the members of human society stand in need of each other's assistance and are likewise exposed to mutual injuries. Where the necessary assistance is reciprocally afforded from love, from gratitude, from friendship, and esteem, the society flourishes and is happy. All the different members of it are bound together by the agreeable bands of love and affection, and are, as it were, drawn to one common centre of mutual good offices."*

Indeed, we are bounded together and motivated by a sense of sympathy. Love is first and foremost existentially rooted in relationality as a human condition. From Martin Buber onward, great interest in the I-Thou relationship versus the I-it relationship emerges. The psychoanalyst Erich Fromm distinguishes two fundamental forms of experience: having and being (Fromm 1976). Both are essential for human flourishing. The idiomatic framing of having looks at people as consumers or producers (human resources). Fortunately, there is also the logic of being to which belongs our ability to love. Levinasian philosophy deals with both having and loving but gives radical primacy to a philosophy of being and the I-Thou encounter. In the context of this contribution, it means that love-thinking precedes economic utilitarian thinking. Agape is not a soft supplement but the primary condition for our well-being.

According to Levinas, human interaction and ethical responsibility starts as a pre-rational appeal of the other person, and not as an application of a particular worldview. Strictly speaking Levinas even does not provide an ethical *theory*. Ethics is rooted in the event of meeting the other person, it is about real live, living together as vulnerable human beings. This encounter of the other person is described using existential and phenomenological categories. His philosophy embraces lived embodiment and deals with phenomena such as home, labour, sleep, desires, and enjoyment. Levinas' central idea is that in my face-to-face encounter with another person, I experience the uniqueness of the Other who appeals to me to act responsibly. Ethics is understood as a relation of infinite responsibility to the Other (Levinas 1990, 2016). The modernistic dominance of 'the self' is put into question. Responsibility towards the other does not start with 'me', or my ideas about good and evil, but with the encounter of the Other (*Autrui*). This can be seen as an agapeic turn. How can an engagement with Levinas help us deepen the concept of agape? We list five contributions here.

Aware of the Dangers of Totalitarianism

Imperative for understanding of Levinas Copernican revolution, is the unique biography of this Jewish Lithuanian (Malka 2006; Critchel and Bernasconi 2008). Although he himself survived German captivity, he lost almost all his family in the Nazi concentration camps. The impact of the Hitler regime on Levinas' life can hardly be overestimated. It marked him as a human being, a Jew, and a critical thinker. He wondered how this terrible evil was possible. Auschwitz itself is a paradigm or exemplar of a much more general and pervasive phenomenon of evil. What characteristics, ideas, philosophies, have set man on this

dreadful path of horrors? What "instincts" make man able and willing to go down this path? Levinas' philosophy is partly an attempt to answer these questions. The question of whether there was perhaps something fundamentally wrong with Western civilisation and Western thought has been one of the important threads of his philosophical development. His main criticism was that Western thought strives for totalitarian thinking, based on ontology, which ultimately led to totalitarian politics. This aversion to totalitarianism made him one of the leading 20th century thinkers on human rights, humanitarianism, and the dangers of ideological systems. Levinas provided the grounding for de-totalising recognition of the Other.

Dehumanising trends are still a painful reality in the world of corporations. People are treated as replaceable resources for profit, adjuncts to machines, statistical numbers, and 'workforce'. Calculating management control systems still set the tone in a competitive world. Ethics is often reduced to a means of limiting evil by coding and emphasising the importance of compliance, just a little stricter than legal rules. Usually, companies systematise and regulate their responsibility through the implementation of corporate governance and ethical codes, which disregard the uniqueness of the other in favour of universal standards and principles. In contrast, Levinas' ethics criticises the economic and organisational rationality of enlightened self-interest, ego-logy, and codes of conduct, and argues for a sincere interest in the other as a unique person. Conventionally, especially within a work context, the encounter of another person is instrumental, characterised by the reduction of his or her otherness to the same and similar, the impersonal (*il y a*). In this case we perceive the other as a resource, a stakeholder in achieving a common purpose imposed from the top of the organisation. In this mode the singularity and situatedness of the person tends to be ignored. In contrast, in my face-to-face encounter with another person, I experience the primacy of the other who appeals to me and asks to act and behave ethically. Not a set of rules, but the needs as expressed by the other create my moral responsibility.

The Face of the Other and the Uniqueness of the Person

Levinas philosophy is about 'the uniqueness of the face' as a universal phenomenon. Responsibility requires nothing else than the "recognition of the infinity of the Other" and therefore "the fact that, existing for the Other, I exist differently than by existing for myself" (Levinas 1990: 207, 239). The Other is never the object of my knowledge and control but a fundamentally or radically 'other being' who is unknowable, while at the same time calling for ethical behaviour in response to his or her call. The other is not part of my 'construction of the world' because my encounter with the other is an encounter with a fissure, with a being who breaks my rational categories. In the absence of a common homeland the Other disturbs my home (Levinas 1990: 28).

Traditional ethics is characterised by Levinas by reducing all others to the economy of the same, all people are essentially the same, like ourselves. Responsible behaviour based on reciprocity presupposes an illusory sameness. You need what I need. While people are fundamentally equal in the sense that they have equal rights, they are also fundamentally different in the sense that they are unique and therefore incomparable. Ethics cannot be based on any empirical or metaphysical 'sameness' between myself and the other. Any fundamental obligation, by nature, is asymmetrical. It is metaphysical asymmetry, the radical impossibility to see oneself from the outside and to speak in the same sense about and of the others; consequently, also the impossibility of the totalisation (Levinas 1990, 46). The appealing other is experienced by me as coming from above (asymmetry), because he is

evidently able by his presence to command me. On the other hand, he is at the same time a 'lesser than I', for in his need he appeals to me, to my capacity to help. He is the double expression of weakness and demand, a 'begging that is a moral claim'. The face of the Other refers to the condition of the other, to his weakness and his destitution. For Levinas ethical responsiveness does not consist in following ethical rules, norms and values[5]. The experience of the face is pure experience, presence without concept. I cannot subsume the face under my categories or reduce it to my representations and my schemes. The other person escapes me, I cannot grasp and understand him, but only recognise and welcome him in his singularity.

Levinas' radical critique of universal principles makes scholars think rather differently about the applicability of his views in a business context (Byers and Rhodes 2007; Mansell 2008, Blok 2017). However, a Levinasian philosophy is highly relevant for the actual design and management an organisation as it fosters a sensibility to take care for the other without reference to codes, rules and instructions aimed at creating complacent social behaviour aimed at producing economic value. In fact, the face-to-face encounter precedes coding and instructions. The personal experience of being confronted with the needs of the other gives rise to an ethical orientation which subsequently forms the basis for a professional practice. This experience happens before any theoretical considerations are brought in, whether they are within ethics or economics. Codes are merely an a posteriori rationalisation based on true encounters, a sense of responsibility (Mansell 2008), and the values of the organisation – ranging from social, to ethical, environmental and economic values.

The Quality of Life

Agapeic love starts with the needs of others as perceived by the needy person herself or himself. Yet this need is also not completely arbitrary; there is also a certain quality of life that one strives for. According to Levinas, the meaning of life, and thus its quality, lies in both jouissance (*joie de vivre*) and being responsible. These are the two essential conditions of the quality of life. Life is lived in the material world and is about enjoyment and nourishment. "However, our being in-the-world also entails the enjoyment of natural elements and love of life", and "[w]e live from 'good soup', air, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep, etc.… These are not objects of representation. We live from them" (Levinas 1990 114, 112). Work is not solely the aggressive mastery of nature. Levinas sees it positively as the creation of a store of goods thanks to which the other can be welcomed as the Other (Levinas 1990: 157–161). The second element is responsibility for the other which gives meaning to my life. The quality of life is determined by the balance between jouissance and responsibility.

Responsibility Rather Than Love

Strangely enough, Levinas avoids the word agape or love for the other as much as possible. This might be a reason why he is often overlooked in debates about love. Unrightfully so, since his phenomenogical observations are contributing to a profound understanding of agape, despite that

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[5] For this reason, Levinas would object, for instance, to the moral duty to love one's stakeholders as Kaptein (2021) recently argued. It is not a universal duty to love the other, but the other allowing us to take our responsibility that characterizes his ethics.

Levinas consistently refers to the concept of responsibility. Moreover, there is an ethical severity: responsibility is commanded. Afterall, Levinas is a Jewish ethicist. For him law and obedience are essential components of moral behaviour. According to Levinas "responsibility is the harsh name for love". Yet this is misleading, for the responsibility that Levinas speaks of is far beyond what we usually understand by responsibility (Haché and Dubost 2006). It is caring about the needs, concerns, and interests of another and wanting to do something about them. To have the welfare of others in mind is a way that goes beyond selfishness. Levinas' hesitation when it comes to the word "love" is understandable. There are two main reasons for this. First, the face of the other creates an imperative that questions my freedom. It is radical and compelling; love sounds too non-committal. Second, his experience of Nazism was so intense that love seems too soft a response to the radical and destructive evil of totalitarianism. We follow Levinas in part and therefore deliberately choose to retain the word 'agape' and do not simply translate it by the broad word 'love'. Agape includes a radical responsibility to encounter the other as not reducible to my desires and goals. This emphasis on responsibility does not distort the classical meaning of agape, on the contrary it restores it, especially considering the romantic superficiality of love as an emotion. Of course, by consequence one might then ask, why not simply speak of responsibility? The reason is that in the context of business, responsibility is too much of a quasi-legal term and does not sufficiently reflect the important role of personal encounter and the compelling nature of the other as other. Agape precedes responsibility, not vice versa.

The Third Party and Rationality

The starting point of a responsible interaction in a working environment is the personal encounter. But what about our responsibility to humanity? The appeal of the other puts me in connection with all people. Thus, in our relationship of responsibility, the other and I are not just the two of us, even when empirically speaking we are. For the face immediately represents the whole of humanity. With the arrival of the third person, responsibility becomes more complex. I even lose track of the consequences of my actions. My well-intentioned actions towards one may harm the third party, which I therefore have to place in the broader context. I must pursue justice as the third party introduces conflicting needs and interests and may result in violence against another person. It calls on me to protect the weaker person.

The third is not a neutral entity mediated by institutions and human rights, but experienced immediate in the face of the other: "the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity." (Levinas 1969/2005: 213).[6]

Conclusion

The core characteristics of Levinas' account of responsibility requires us to rethink the meaning of agape for the world of corporations. If agape is to mean anything, it calls on

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[6] Levinas emphasizes personal ethics; subjective experience is the basis of responsibility. Levinas' significance for political ethics is debated (Fagan 2009; Simmons in Morgan 2018). But again, it is about the primacy of the encounter and the political construction is a derivative of the subjective. J. Aaron Simmons summarizes this well: "There are a range of options available for moral life, but ultimately Levinas's essential insight is that unless subjectivity itself is constituted by the responsibility inaugurated by the encounter with the Other, moral life risks being not much more than a matter of assuaging and navigating the fundamental egoism that structures selfhood and the social relations that emerge as a result." (Morgan 2018: 281).

business to acknowledge the other as a unique being, and sustainably commit the organisation to enhancing human flourishing. That flourishing of the individual entails – at a minimum – that the other can express herself or himself. In addition, humanising business in a Levinasian sense requires the leadership to go beyond incidental responses to the well-being of others and to human flourishing. Corporate leaders and managers are in a position in which they can create the social and environmental context in which the other can flourish as a unique individual and experience well-being through the encounter with others. This, we argue, provides the foundation for a new definition of agape as "a sustained commitment to the well-being and flourishing of individuals as part of social networks and our planet".

If encountering the other is at the core of the agapeic turn, then what do the qualitative requirements mentioned in this section mean for the study of agape in business organisations? It means that we have to analyse the extent to which the design of organisations, their processes and decision-making:

– approach the other from the perspective from that of the other,
– allow, enable and encourage the other to express her or his uniqueness,
– open up to and care about the needs, concerns and interests of others as the latter perceive them,
– promote co-creation of collective results to which the individual can meaningfully contribute,
– is aware of potential negative externalities on third parties.

In the next section we will elaborate the meaning of the concept of agape for the practice of organising and more in particular for organisational design.

Agape as an 'Other-wise' Organisational Practice

In "Agape as Practical Wisdom" section we defined agape as 'the sustained commitment to well-being and flourishing of individuals as part of social networks and our planet'. This means that agape goes beyond charity, compassion, sympathy, empathy, or comparable concepts that ask for virtuous or values-driven behaviour. Despite the importance of individuals showing sympathy and compassion whenever the occasion calls for such a demonstration of companionate love, it often depends on personal sensitivity and virtue whether people care for each other within an organisation (Barsade and O'Neill 2014), instead of organisational decision-making structures and processes that create and endorse other-oriented behaviour. Against a background of a Levinasian account of agape as we described in the previous section, an important question is "how we design organizations so as to allow for (…) personal growth among the people working in them" (Fontrodona and Sison 2015: 701). In this section we focus on different approaches to implement a commitment to well-being and flourishing.

Beyond Meaningful Work

What is needed in an organisational context that "aims to establish the conditions that enable people to live lives of meaning and fulfilment?", Spencer asks (2015: 682). An

employee should be able 'to work as a human, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers' (Nussbaum 1999: 235). This requires organisational structures and processes that allow employees freedom in and through the work (Sen 1999). Over time, and based on insights about the value and meaning of work, the promotion of human flourishing in organisations has called for enlarging worker autonomy (Van Eijnatten 1991; Pasmore et al. 2019), improving participation in decision-making (Naughton et al. 1995; Collier and Esteban 1999; Kaler 1999; Cludts 1999; Felicetti 2018; Baker and Lee 2020), promoting teamwork (Salas et al. 2008; Hu and Liden 2015) and increasing 'meaningful work' (Michaelson 2010; Michaelson et al. 2014; Yeoman 2014). These improvements enable employees to develop their knowledge, skills, networks, and other faculties, helping them to flourish and advance (in) the organisation.

Being goal-driven, many business organisations have a tendency to be 'ego-logic' (Kaulingfreks and Ten Bos 2007). They approach the world from the viewpoint of the 'self' (Levinas 1969), even though they may acknowledge the need for others to achieve their objectives. This recognition mostly takes place in a 'totalising' and instrumental fashion. The other is seen from the perspective of the executive or manager and is often approached as a means towards corporate ends. To achieve these ends – but also because enlightened executives and managers are aware of their needs and interests – organisations care about employees. Business organisations reward employees for their efforts, offer them opportunities to develop themselves and make promotion, give them a voice through the works council, and allow them to engage with colleagues, clients, and others. Put differently, many organisations have implemented a sense of 'integral human development' based on neighbourly love (Melé and Dierksmeier 2012; Melé 2014) – but mostly to thrive the business. The employee is seen as a generalised other who is treated in a generic and often uniform way – instead of being recognised as a unique individual with specific ideas, needs, interests, et cetera. As a result, many firms miss the point that an employee is a 'self' that opposes the organisation. This opposition is not hostile, as Kaulingfreks and Ten Bos (2007: 307) remark, but the other is simply not "a thing (…) that can be understood in a system of knowledge or in a system of relations" (ibid.:307). Seeing the other as a person whose uniqueness deserves to be acknowledged, calls for reflection on the freedom of the business organisation to affect the lives of the other (Hill 2020). Furthermore, the business can create an environment in which to listen "to what the other has previously said, which requires a certain responsibility and fidelity to the other's expression" (Hill 2020: 8). This means that business organisations should give people a *place*, rather than merely tolerating their presence in organisational *space* and ''has nothing but the Other himself (sic.) as its motive. This is a concern with the Other for the Other's benefit'' (Bauman 1993: 12, 13)[7].

Facilitating Well-being Through Organisational (re)design

Over the last half century several attempts have been made to (re)design organisations in ways that promote human flourishing and well-being in a dynamic environment. Both the environment in which the organisation operates is rapidly changing, while also the internal organisation is due to adapt to rising complexity and change (Kasl et al. 1997; Pasmore et al. 2019; Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). More in particular and due to their ability to effectively respond to the dynamic and complex changes in the organisational context, working

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[7] Bauman takes this concern for the Other to mean that it ''must be simultaneously an unconcern with the subject's own comfort, pleasure or welfare'' (Bauman 1993: 13). That, we hold, is not a necessity in a business context, nor will it be the case.

in teams has become a prevalent answer to deal with the challenges of the organisation (Hu and Liden 2015). This development started in the early 1950s. Using Lewin's (1946) concept of action research, researchers from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations studied the organisational and technological design in UK coal mines (Trist and Bamforth 1951). They found that work systems could be devised in ways that allow employees greater control over their (tech-enhanced) work to achieve organisational results while experiencing social and psychological benefits. Gradually, the focus shifted from redesigning production systems and work processes to "integral organisational renewal" (IOR) (De Sitter et al. 1990, Van Eijnatten and De Zwaan 1998)[8] to adapt to rapidly changing business environments and emerging technologies (Van Eijnatten 1991; Pasmore et al. 2019). The rationale for changing work processes that would benefit employees and stimulate human flourishing rested, therefore, primarily in economic motives. At the same time, this systems approach was rooted in a broader development towards industrial democratisation (Emery et al. 1969; Thorsrud 1970; Davis and Cherns 1975). Just like their predecessors, recent trends in organisational design, like self-organisation (Laloux 2016); sociocracy (Endenburg 1998; Buck and Villines 2017; Owen and Buck 2020), holacracy (Robertson 2007, 2015; Romme 2015), or liberating companies (Carney and Getz 2015; Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021) continue to emphasise the importance of economic performance. This performance is seen, however, as the result of a properly functioning, self-organising company. As Laloux (2016) points out, self-organising firms often have no targets. They are geared towards promoting optimum outputs and outcomes in line with the mission and goals of the organisation by creating a context in which employees thrive. What distinguishes these new, alternative forms of organising from their predecessors is that the latter were mainly concentrated on designing work in ways that would lead to an improved quality of working life (Grote and Guest 2017; Warhurst and Knox 2020). Even though this is still important in the new approaches, they go beyond just designing high-quality workspaces and jobs.

Twentieth century initiatives, like sociotechnical systems design (STSD) and business process reengineering, were driven by a top-down approach. They were controlled by management and supported by experts but involved workers in the design of their work processes (Matthews 1997). Recent approaches, like sociocracy, holacracy, teal organising, or liberating company design, stress the importance of employee freedom and autonomy in the workplace and are, as a result, driven by a bottom-up leadership and organisational approach. Among these 'new forms of work organisations' (Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021: 333) a distinction can be made between approaches that focus on decision-making structures within organisations for human flourishing and well-being, and those that emphasise the importance of leadership, values, and organisational culture. In the following, we briefly outline the distinctive features of both approaches.

Decision-making Structures Facilitating Human Flourishing

Sociocracy and holacracy aim to structure organisational decision-making processes in ways that are tailored towards the needs of individual members of the organisation. Sociocracy emerged in the 1970s. The term was coined by Auguste Comte and means 'rule by the

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[8] The Sociotechnical Systems Design movement was part of a wider trend of business reengineering (Hammer 1990; Hammer and Champy 1993) and 'continuous improvement' of work processes and the organisation (Womack et al. 1991).

socios' (Buck and Endenburg 2010). It was introduced in the practice of management by a Dutch Quaker, Gerard Endenburg. Based on Quaker principles of (organisational) democracy and consensus – which he transformed into the principle of consent (Romme 1995) – and inspired by humanist social scientists like Likert (1967), Argyris and Schön (1978), the electrical engineering entrepreneur created a system allowing employees to influence their work processes and organisational decision-making. The Sociocratic Circle-Organization Method (SCM) consists of four principles (Endenburg 1998; Owen and Buck 2020):

a) Decisions are made based on the principle of consent.

It all starts with the recognition that every member of the organisation should be free and empowered to contribute to organisational decision-making on strategy, policy development, personnel issues, et cetera. Policy decisions influence the organisational processes and flow of power. Organisational members can influence organisational policy-making through their right to withhold consent. Consent means that "a proposal becomes a decision when there is no articulated and paramount objection to it. In other words, a policy decision can only be made if nobody in the circle has a reasoned objection to it that would impede accomplishment of the circle's aim, including each person's ability to perform his or her work with integrity" (Owen and Buck 2020: 789). In several rounds of discussion, the facilitator asks each member of the team or the organisation whether (s)he feels that the decision, when taken, would be (extraordinary) harmful to the person in question, the group (s)he belongs to, or the organisation as a whole. Organisational decision making, therefore, takes the form of "a kind of parliament that sets the rules for the day-to-day operations" (ibid:789). In matters of policy implementation, however, no consent is needed, and managers make decisions in more traditional ways.

b) Organisation are made up of circles.

An organisation usually consists of a hierarchy of circles (Romme 1995; Endenburg 1998), each circle having their own aim. Everyone, being member of an organisational circle, has certain roles and (individual and collective) responsibilities to contribute to the achievement of the circle's aim. This is done by continuous processes of leading, doing, and measuring creating system steering mechanisms based on feedback and feedforward loops.

c) Circles are connected through double linkages,

Traditionally, organisations have a linear, top-down design, often resulting in power clashes and hampering performance. Living systems, however, continuously adapt to environmental change – requiring dynamic feedback capabilities to adjust. When a hierarchy of circles exist, each circle is represented in the next super- and sub-circle by its functional leader (elected by the super circle) and by a circle representative (chosen by the members of her or his circle). The notion of double linking was, until then, uncommon in management literature. It provides a richer flow of information between super and sub circles due to the different perspectives and roles of the representatives. However, as Romme (1995:214) argues "these two fundamentally different links cannot be combined because they demand completely different personalities and skills".

d) Representatives of each circle are elected by the members of that circle.

Every circle appoints members for functions and tasks requiring representation on behalf of the collective. Members are first asked to propose a member for a specific function – potentially including oneself. Ultimately, the decision is made on the basis of consent. This is done to secure that elected members have sufficient mandate and support from her or his fellow circle members.

Sociocracy was not particularly known outside The Netherlands until the release of Buck and Vallines' (2007) *We the people*. Around that same time Roberson (2008) adapted and elaborated several SCM elements and supported it with a software to facilitate decision-making processes. He called it 'holacracy'. Nevertheless, "sociocracy is the main building block of holacracy" (Eckstein 2016: 5). Holacracy moves beyond its predecessor by introducing a constitution that outlines the rules of the game. Also, it introduces governance meetings as distinguished from tactical meetings. Governance meetings enable circle members to proactively introduce or alter roles in their own circle or elsewhere in the organisation. Daily meetings are structured based on always the same protocol: in the morning to discuss the agenda for the day and in the afternoon to evaluate the day. Most importantly, holacracy explicitly asks all participants to address the tensions they're experiencing. The objective is "to resolve that person's tension (…) and not to resolve the general issue at hand. This also means to not look for buy-in from all participants, but for the resolution of the person's tension" (Eckstein 2016: 5). In other words, holacracy creates a context in which employees can express their needs and interests and others listen to what they say. By design, every member has the right to define new roles that (s)he deems necessary for the team or the organisation. At the same time, if a member no longer wants to conduct a role, (s)he can give it back to the circle as long as it does not risk the continuance of the work processes. These are key elements in what presents itself as a very structured and disciplined approach to organisational decision-making and human flourishing (Robertson 2015; Priest et al. 2021). This decision-making is supported by enterprise software that help the organisation to codify the purpose, assign accountability and decision rights to circles and roles and makes information accessible throughout the organisation – and often even to outsiders[9].

One of the best-known companies to adopt holacracy is Zappos – a company with some 1750 employees[10]. The size of Zappos demonstrates that self-organisation is not only valuable for SMEs. Since the introduction in 2014 the company has successfully integrated holacratic self-management in its business processes. It evolved from a company with 150 departments to one with 500 circles (Bernstein et al. 2016), allowing them greater flexibility and adaptability to changes in the environment.

Leadership and Culture Facilitating Human Flourishing and Well-being

"Management is the least efficient activity in your organization", thus proclaims Hamel (2011: 50). Due to flexibility, innovativeness, and cost benefits Hamel expects self-organisation to become an important trend in the future – resulting in more self-motivated and proactive employees. An important current in this trend is the emergence of liberating companies (Carney and Getz 2015; Getz 2009; Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021). Through the development of (the capabilities of) employees they experience more extended work and organisation related freedoms. One of the core freedoms is the opportunity to choose what constitutes a flourishing (work) life and to be able to influence the work life one values. Following Sen's capabilities approach (1999), Sferrazzo and Ruffini (2021: 331) hold that "for Sen, it is important that people have freedoms or capabilities to lead the kind of lives they want to lead, to do what they want to do

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[9] Examples of software systems that are used are GlassFrog and holaSpirit.

[10] Companies like Vattenfall (batteries), Sanofi, bol.com have embraced holacracy – although it does not specify where and to what extent. See https://www.holacracy.org/whos-practicing-holacracy.

and to be the person they want to be." The idea of freedom in business organisations is developed by Carney and Getz (2015) in their study of what they have called 'corporate liberation'. The authors do not present an approach, with clear guidance or rules, but a mere liberation philosophy. Unlike structural sociocratic and holacratic approaches, the core of the liberation management consists of "liberating leadership" (Getz 2009). This leadership consists of a set of four principles (Getz 2009; Carney and Getz 2015; Sferrazzo and Ruffini 2021):

1. Stop telling and start listening – and remove obstacles that prevent employees to feel intrinsically equal. Corporate leaders have to lose their ego and trust their employees to provide answers to the challenges they face. In addition, they have to ask their team what's in their way and whether any organisational practice or structural element is mistrusting their intelligence, limiting their growth, or hampering their self-direction. If yes, the team should be asked to redesign it.
2. Share your vision of the company – and make sure that everyone in the organisation adopts and starts sharing the same vision.
3. Stop motivating people – but create an environment that enables employees to self-direct and motivate themselves. "[T]hey need to know why they're doing what they're doing—so they can do it better." (Carney and Getz 2015:6).
4. Stay alert – leaders should become guardians of the liberated company. The price of freedom is ever-lasting vigilance.

As a result, the leader may expect that the employees "will be willing to come to work every day to do their best", that their managers "will spend their days revealing employee potential", and that they themselves "will enjoy dinner every night with [their] family knowing that [their] business is succeeding" (Carney and Getz 2015:6).

The authors do not provide a methodology, a manual, or a set of rules and regulations to set the company free. Their inductive research highlights examples of companies that – upon further analysis – have a Freedom-form or F-form: "an organizational form in which employees have complete freedom and responsibility to take actions that they, not their bosses, decide are best." (Getz 2009: 34) Examples are Michelin, USAA, Decathlon, W.L. Gore & Associates, Sun Hydraulics, FAVI, and Harley Davidson – showing "family resemblances" (Wittgenstein 1953) in having no time clocks, organisational charts, long-term planning departments. In addition, some have no managers, while others have eliminated their HR department or their Finance department.

Over time, Laloux (2016) argues, organisations have moved from having one single strong leader, to stable hierarchies, to meritocracies, to values-driven organisations, to finally embrace self-organisation. The latest stage, which he calls 'teal', brings together intrinsically motivated individuals for an evolutionary purpose extending beyond themselves. Employees engage with the organisation and their colleagues from 'an inner wholeness' as if they found themselves at home or with friends. They can influence their work and their collaboration with others ('self-organisation'). As such, Laloux' reinventing organisations are more conceptual and theory-driven than Carney and Getz 'corporate liberation', while also exceeding it by emphasising the 'evolutionary purpose' of teal organisations, which evolves over time. The latter distinction should not be overstated. Organisations like Buurtzorg, a Dutch home care nursery organisation, FAVI, a French copper-alloy foundry, or Morning Star, a US food processing company, have a purpose that is largely comparable to those of their competitors (cf. De Morree 2018). What differs is the way

in which the purpose is enacted in and by the organisation. Teal and liberating organisations have much in common, including keeping the ego of the leader in check, extensive onboarding processes, sharing of a common purpose, a work environment that allows employees to be authentic, strategic decision-making everywhere in the organisation[11], and organisational change that organically emerges from within the organisation. At the core is what Laloux calls 'sensing and responding'. He uses this phrase referencing Robertson's holacratic approach. In this respect both approaches have in common that employees, working in teams, are the main source for successful, adaptive companies. Laloux also adopts other elements from the sociocratic/holacratic tradition, like total information transparency or team members having the freedom to propose and define new roles (if no one has a reasoned objection). It does not adopt, however, the constitution or the decision-making procedures that structure the interaction between the organisation and its constituent teams and between teams and constituent members.

Critique

Several arguments can be made against all these approaches – not so much from a principled but from a practical point of view. An important objection that arose against holacracy and sociocracy relates to the radical change that the methodology induces. Elements of the model are valuable, scholars argue (Bernstein et al. 2016; Eckstein 2016), but implementing the entire approach might become counter-productive. As Bernstein writes, role fragmentation may lead to suboptimal outcomes and suboptimal well-being. Also, working in different roles complicates a just and transparent system of financial and non-financial compensation[12]. And third, finding the right people for the right roles is sometimes difficult. Furthermore, as Lam (2016) points out, not everyone flourishes in a holacratic or sociocratic environment. As a result of Zappos' full-blown implementation of holacracy in 2015, it saw it annual employee turnover rate increase from 20 to 30 per cent.

Setting workers free through liberating leadership or teal organising has advantages for both organisation and employees. However, corporate liberation and self-organisation comes at a price, Martella (2019) observes. Employees become responsible for identifying the tasks to advance the organisational objectives. As such they must exhibit more proactivity and personal initiative than what is required in traditional organisations. In addition, employees must have considerable skills in conflict resolution and confronting colleagues not fulfilling their tasks. Just like Zappos, when it introduced a holacratic organisational design, liberating and teal organisations require careful selection of their employees. To select the right person for the roles and tasks, involving incumbent employees is essential in the selection of new recruits and determining the fit between the recruits and those already on the team. The downside of this involvement, as Felin (2015) argues, is the surging risk of co-optation, group think and narrow-mindedness. Furthermore, there is a risk of an emerging informal hierarchy that reintroduces a lack of perceived freedom and respect

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[11]   Lee and Edmondson (2017) find that individuals and teams may become too invested in their own subtasks to see the wider picture of the organization and its goals. As a result, firm strategy is a dimension that tends not to be – and sometimes should not be – decentralized within self-managing organisations (see also Bernstein et al. 2016). This critique applies to all forms of self-organisation, including holacratic and sociocratic organisations.

[12]   For this reason, Viisi, a holacratic medium-sized mortgage advisory firm, introduced a traditional bureaucratic reward system with periodic salary increases. If the market value of employees' roles is (significantly) higher than Viisi's estimation, the salary will be adapted to the level of the market.

for the individual other (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998). Finally, extensive forms of freedom may not work in every sector or industry (Hummels et al. 2022), for instance due to strict safety regulations.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this contribution we have redefined the concept of agape in line with Levinas' account of responsibility. It required us to rethink the meaning of agape for the world of corporations. If agape is to mean anything, we wrote, it calls on business to acknowledge the other as a unique being, and sustainably commit the organisation to enhancing human flourishing. Humanising business in a Levinasian sense requires corporate leaders and managers to create an organisational context in which unique individuals can flourish and experience well-being through the encounter with others. This focus on de-totalisation, we argue, provides the foundation for a new definition of agape as "a sustained commitment to the well-being and flourishing of individuals as part of social networks and our planet". In order to create such a context business leaders are invited to consider developing decision-making structures that allow 'the other' to express herself or himself. It is not the corporate executive's perception of human flourishing – or the value attributed to it – that determines whether a company actually makes an agapeic turn. It is the company's sustained commitment to well-being and human flourishing by allowing employees to influence organisational decision-making in ways that they see fit for their personal flourishing and that of the team of which they are part. Employees are not just a resource to create economic value, even though the individual's contribution to a collective end-result adds to Levinas' description of the quality of life. As mentioned previously, this quality of life is determined by the balance between jouissance and responsibility.

The paper presents two currents in organising agape. The first takes a structured approach. Both holacracy and sociocracy create an environment in which employees have a direct influence on their work and the work of their team irrespective of the ideas, behaviour and activities of the firm's owners or senior organisational members in super circles – and an indirect influence on the organisation. This personal freedom and influence can be restricted only through reasoned and paramount objections of others, when they can demonstrate that the proposal harms the interests of others in the organisation or the business. Moreover, both methodologies require that when an individual makes a proposal or files an objection the other members of the circle have to listen. At first, they can only ask clarifying questions. It is only after all the clarifying questions have been sufficiently addressed and answered that members of the circle can respond to the idea, challenge it, and make suggestions for improvement. And it is only when reasoned objectives are brought to bear that the member submitting the proposal or idea has to provide a sufficient rebuttal. Following a substantial counterargument, the circle usually searches the middle ground to seek a solution that does justice to idea of the initiator and the concern of the objector. If there are no objections, the proposal is adopted and can be executed.

The second current is based on leadership and culture in line with the requirement of a rapidly changing environment. Employees are working in a decentralised, team-based organisation, based on shared values, individual responsibility, and opportunities for personal growth. As Getz (2009: 49) writes, "the F-form is based on the clear acknowledgement of every employee's personal needs". Listening to employees and creating an environment for their personal growth is an important condition for liberating and teal companies

– following insights of psychologists like Argyris (1957), Likert (1967), McGregor (1960), Deci and Ryan (2000). Unlike approaches like sociocracy and holacracy, however, there is no coherent set of plans, programs, processes, or rules, that allows employees to voice their ideas, needs, interests and concerns in a structured and determined way – and are listened to. As a result, it remains unclear whether and how these companies truly "concern with the Other for the Other's benefit'' (Bauman 1993: 12, 13). Employees are dependent on the good will and the humanitarian spirit of the leaders of an, based on their willingness to respect and trust the other.

We now must ask to what extent both currents address the needs, concerns, and interests of others and act upon those – in a way that they acknowledge and respect individuals working for the organisation as humans in a de-totalising way. At the end of "Levinas, an Ethics of Human Encounter" section we asked whether the design of organisations, their processes and decision-making:

– approach the other from the perspective from that of the other,
– allow, enable, and encourage the other to express her or his uniqueness,
– open up to and care about the needs, concerns and interests of others as perceived by the latter,
– promote co-creation of collective results to which the individual can meaningfully contribute,
– is aware of potential negative externalities on third parties.

Regarding the needs of third persons who do not belong to the organisation we believe that both currents are equivalent. All approaches are attuned to rapid changes in their environments, but that is merely for self-preservation. Likewise, when it comes to acknowledging the unique face of the other, the four approaches allow individuals to express themselves. Even though both liberating leadership and teal organising allow employees to express themselves, this self-expression relies on benevolence and is not the result of structures and processes that in themselves promote respect, trust, and the ability to flourish. A case in point is Favi, that fell both from the 'Freedom Inc.' and 'Reinventing Organisations' heaven (Laloux 2016)[13]. The procedures that are at the core of the sociocratic and holacratic methodologies explicitly invite the other to address her or his needs, ideas, interests, vision, and values that allow no member of the organisation to intervene, object or oppose the message the individual wants to convey. Only after a circle member finishes her or his contribution, others can start asking questions. From the viewpoint of the employees, the explicit communication, and decision-making structures of sociocracy and holacracy, therefore, seem to provide more guarantees for "recognition of the infinity of the Other". An important precondition for both currents is the ability to control the organisation. In a historic study, O'Toole (2019) demonstrates that only privately controlled firms remained "enlightened capitalists". Within this self-controlled space, a Levinasian agapeic turn appears to be best assured in sociocracy or holacracy. Both these methodologies allow employees freedom to determine their own future and grow within the organisation – irrespective of the totalising interventions and controlling behaviour of their leaders. By becoming responsive to the needs of employees and creating an environment in which the latter can contribute to the fulfilment of societal needs, organisations make an agapeic turn which allows others – and most particularly their employees – to flourish.

In this paper we focused on the meaning of agape in the context of a business organisation. It raises the question to what extent the definition of agape as provided in this contribution can be applied in other social domains or cultures. This calls for further research.

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[13] https://corporate-rebels.com/when-pioneering-companies-fail/.

Also, we call for more empirical research into the practice of agape in businesses. What do organisations do in allowing employees to voice their ideas, interests, needs, and wisdom? We hope this paper contributes to a wider range of publications on promoting humanity in the workplace using a Levinasian perspective.

Declarations

None of the authors of this paper has a financial or personal relationship with other people or organizations that could inappropriately influence or bias the content of the paper.

Conflicts of Interest/Competing Interests No Competing interests are at stake and there is No Conflict of Interest with other people or organisations that inappropriately influenced or biased the paper or could do so in the future.

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