

**CSC “Managing in Complexity Series” Lecture on
"Addressing Complex Social Challenges"
by Mr Adam Kahane, Partner in Reos Partners;
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Mr Adam Kahane has spent the past 20 years addressing complex social changes over the world ranging from climate change in Copenhagen to peace negotiations in Columbia. Through trial, failures and learning, he has sought to get to the answers to how we get stuck and subsequently get unstuck of complex social challenges. Mr Kahane concludes that, for most of the time, it is through *Power and Love*.

Why do we get stuck?

Mr Kahane started off the lecture by asking: “why do we get stuck as we address social challenges?” Mr Kahane shared his experience in Copenhagen and how the whole city, from shops to churches and civil societies, was involved in the climate change issues. Throughout the negotiations and numerous meetings, attended by more than 20,000 government and non-governmental negotiators, he observed a polarisation into two camps. On one side was the *Power* camp, comprising the United States and other industrialised countries, bent on maintaining their positions. This group also included industrialising and developing countries concerned about their growth momentum. The main issues for this group were development, growth and self-determination. The other side was the *Love* camp. Members of this camp included the Danish Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who emphasised the cooperation of ecological sustenance, as well as non-governmental organisations that stressed Love and consideration for future generations. Inter-connectedness and the planet’s health were the central themes in this faction.

Mr Kahane cited his experiences in dealing with civil conflict in South Africa as another example of conflict between Power and Love. According to him, there were both a strong Power drive and a Love drive in South Africa. The Power camp comprised guerillas seeking to establish their positions, while some South African politicians and peace activists made up the Love camp. These two camps created a huge conflict. The Power camp criticised the Love camp as unrealistic, while the Love camp criticised the Power camp as irresponsible. Mr Kahane believes such criticism did not resolve the issues, and they remained stuck. This collision between Power and Love often led to immovable social situations. Mr Kahane then asked the audience: “What would it take to address such complex social challenges?”

What does it take to move?

Mr Kahane saw the same problem faced worldwide. Within organizations, there would always be a Power drive to achieve aims, and a Love drive that sought teamwork and employee wellness. Even within a person, there were often such conflict and collision.

Mr Kahane believes that two basic human dynamics caused this to happen. Theologian Paul Tillich was quoted by Mr Kahane as defining Power as the drive of every living being to realise itself, while Love was defined as the drive that sought to unify the separated. These definitions implied an

underlying unity, a oneness that had been fractured and Love was the drive to bring together what had actually been one.

Mr Kahane suggested that Power has two sides – generative and degenerative. He also proposes that Love has both a generative and a degenerative side. Mr Kahane cited his experience in Israel to demonstrate the polar forces of both drives. The two sides of Power were quite obvious: the determination of Jews who rebuilt Israel, and the flip side of that determination aimed towards the Palestinians. It, however, required time to explore the two sides of Love.

What determines Power to be generative or degenerative? According to Mr Kahane, it is Love. Power without Love, according to him, is chaotic tyranny. Similarly, he believes that Love without Power was anemic. Both require each to be generative and constructive. Mr Kahane quoted Martin Luther King Jr.:

“Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change....And one of the great problems of history is that concepts of Love and Power have usually been contrasted as opposites – polar opposites – so that Love is identified with the resignation of Power, and Power with the denial of Love....What [we need to realize is] that Power without Love is reckless and abusive, and Love without Power is sentimental and anemic.”

Mr Kahane also observed a collision in Copenhagen. He further cited a tale in the Greek myth Odyssey, where a ship had to be steered in a narrow lane between a pile of rocks and a whirlpool – steering too much to either side resulted in tragedy.

Mr Kahane believes that most problems come when parties are stuck either on Power or on Love. He stated that when we choose *either* Power or Love, we get stuck. To get unstuck, Mr Kahane proposed that we have to find the way to choose both. Mr Kahane then starts off the next section of his lecture by asking: “How can we get unstuck from this Power and Love conflict?”

How to get unstuck?

Mr Kahane’s work involves getting different stakeholders of the society together to reconcile objectives, creating safe situations for stakeholders to provide opinions and feedback. The Sustainable Food Lab conference was one of his many projects and an example he used to show how to get unstuck from the Power and Love conflict.

Mr Kahane stated that over the past decades, food production has kept up with population growth. It was cheap for the rich but expensive for the poor. Food production takes up huge resources from the earth. In the food production system, Mr Kahane observed, through his work, that there are many actors who wanted to improve the system but are often Powerless on their own. He thought that there was a dominance of Power over Love. Results were overemphasized over ecological responsibility and consideration. Mr Kahane believed that this required counter-reactions known as *Love Moves*.

The first Love Move, according to Mr Kahane, is to create a forum to bring different stakeholders together. This is a required, necessary move – a basic condition that everyone needs to see each other. The second Love Move is through dialogue. Mr Kahane suggested that this not only allows stakeholders to speak but also state reasons for their opinions and gives listeners a chance to understand. The third Love Move comprises of learning journeys – travelling together to different parts of the food systems. This, according to Mr Kahane, gives participants first-hand experience, not just second-hand narratives. Mr Kahane believes that these Love Moves are crucial to balancing the system but the danger, however, is falling into the other side of the conflict: into Love. To counter that is to design and facilitate *Power Moves*.

Mr Kahane proposes three Power Moves. The first Power Move is to allow ambition, motives and interests to be visible, discussable and legitimate. Denying these wants, according to him, are unhelpful. The second Power Move requires stakeholders to form alliances and interest groups calling for collective cooperation. Social alliances often results in the best forms of innovation. The third Power Move necessitates empowerment – work that goes toward self-realization and actualization.

What does it take in practice to reconcile the conflict between Power and Love collectively?

Under stress, according to Mr Kahane, one goes back to his original position in the Power or Love camp. To Mr Kahane, Power and Love are not choices but dilemma. He believes that in practice, however, it might be more efficient to do both alternately rather than simultaneously. Mr Kahane cited the analogy of a walking person. His legs are not in static balance but there is always one foot forward and the other back. Fluid alternation of Power and Love can move forward social improvements. Mr Kahane suggested three “recipes” to reconcile the conflict between Power and Love.

1st recipe: Be aware of the capacity of Power and Love. Power people think Love is useless while Love people perceives Power people as dirty.

2nd recipe: Strengthen our weaker drives. Exercise your weaker drives periodically and regularly.

3rd recipe: Exercise alternating Power and Love. The best way to learn is to learn separately and clearly.

Mr Kahane ends his presentation by asking: “Why is it difficult to reconcile the conflict between Power and Love?” He thinks it is because we are afraid. According to Mr Kahane, we fear exercising Power in which we might hurt others, or exercising Love in which we might hurt ourselves. He believes that we need to step forward even if we are afraid. Mr Kahane uses an alternative story of Moses splitting the Red Sea, which he heard during his stay in Israel, as an example to step forward despite fear.

Questions and Answers

How do you apply the ideas of Power and Love when one party is highly dominant in Power?

Mr Kahane: Being aware that one party is highly dominant in power is the important first step. Do not deny the fact of the imbalance. There are two parts to the answer: A Power person without Power often meet with barriers, and hit walls. Even with differing levels of Powers, people often need each other to move forward. It is wise to be coy about the Power but not act like it is not there. People who are disempowered often come together to form groups for more Power. There is more flexibility than one expects.

How do you bring about people who are indifferent rather than like-minded together?

Mr Kahane: I did not define people who come together as indifferent but as concerned groups or individuals. Problems are never defined clearly. It is not necessary to define the problem before coming together. People come together for different reasons. There is no simple answer except to explore ways in which they view as situations as unsatisfactory or worthwhile mobilizing without the big players. Participants often go away from meetings accomplishing things to do together even though problems weren't defined clearly.

Build trust as a result of getting going.

What happens when both parties undermines the other side?

Mr Kahane: This actually happens universally. Awareness and understanding polarization is imperative.

What are the limitations of this theory if any?

Mr Kahane: This is a general theory. This interaction between Power and Love is important in all social levels. This is not a complete theory but the drives are universal. If we want to work through complex social challenges other than through force, this is fundamental.

What would happen if the dominant group is the Love camp? Would it change the dynamics?

Mr Kahane: Power dominating Love is the easiest and most common to solve. Love dominating Power is more complicated as it is very hard to see and work with. This phenomenon happens more often in the health professions. As James Hillman said, "In politics, Power is more visible and cleaner". This situation can result in an anemic or worse, an unchangeable situation.

How to get people with differing interests to open up?

Mr Kahane: Start off the gathering by interviewing each other at length. The act of interviewing and attempting to understand is fundamental to getting others to open up. It, however, does not mean agreement, but more of seeing the other as a fellow human being. Learning journeys also open people up. They are powerful because the journeying itself is important. Also, for the first time, both parties have *shared data*. This aids in breaking down polarization and barriers towards seeing each other as humans.

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