

*“The lower the emotional attachment,
the more the love principle mutates
towards a credit principle.”*

The love principle

He used to study the credit, equity and egoism principles, but **Erich Kirchler** has discovered a different and powerful principle in harmonious relationships: the love principle.

It is essential that partners who seek harmonious relationships realize goals through collaboration, which is based on mutual trust. Partners in such balanced relationships not only express themselves, but have an intuitive understanding of each other, resulting in both sides' expectations and needs being met. The dynamics of successful and mutually beneficial decision-making processes rely on relationship harmony and on balanced power relations between the partners. In harmonious relationships, imbalance of power only exists to a small degree in favour of one or other partner, or else an uneven power distribution between the partners is not used by either of them to obtain egoistic advantages in decision-making.

Partners in unhappy relationships, on the other hand, are inclined to view themselves as economic partners and to calculate what return they can get from the other partner and what they have to contribute to the other partner. Depending on the harmony and power of the partners, their behaviour can range along a continuum reaching from altruistic behaviour to market-like exchange transactions.

Six pack

Partners in harmonious relationships act in accordance with the 'love principle'. This principle – rather than the credit, equity or egoism principle – exhibits six particular characteristics.

1. Happy partners do not seek to keep a (mental) account of demands and obligations. They act spontaneously in a manner which is partner-orientated. While partners in disharmonious relationships keep account of their demands and obligations and immediately seek to achieve a balance between the two, partners in happy relationships orientate themselves above all by the needs of the other person and show consideration.
2. Partners in harmonious relationships are dependent upon one another in their feelings, thoughts and actions. They are affected by the behaviour of the other and are, at the same time, aware that their own actions can affect the other person. The more harmonious the relationship, the greater the mutual concern and consideration.
3. In economic relationships, give and take are directly linked. If people hand over a part of their resources, then they expect a corresponding share in rewards from the other person in return, and the other person feels obligated under the principle of reciprocity. If a relationship is harmonious, then there is no requirement for an immediate return for a pleasure which has been given.
4. The more harmonious the relationship, the less interest the partner has in concluding a trade with the partner. The relationship in itself acquires a value. Unhappy partners seek to exploit their opportunities for profit.
5. According to the equity rule of distributive justice, partners are compensated in proportion to their contributions. In close relationships, however, such rules do not necessarily hold in the same way. Happy partners offer one another pleasures as spontaneous acts.
6. In economic relationships, only selected types of resources are traded, which are mainly universalistic. In harmonious relationships, the main resources traded are particularistic. They are not restricted to only a few resources that partners share, but instead a wide variety of rewarding resources are given and received by the partners.

Egoistic desires

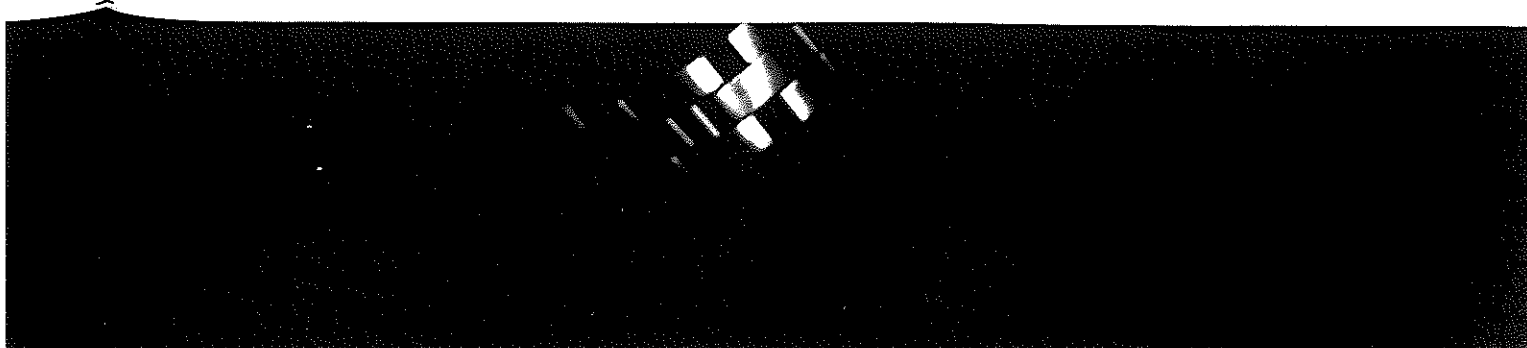
The lower the level of emotional attachment to each other, the more the love principle mutates towards a 'credit principle'. The partners still seek to offer pleasures to each other and look after one another, but they are waiting for a similar effort to be made in return. If the relationship quality diminishes further, then the pattern of interactions mirrors the 'equity principle' in social exchange theory. The partners act increasingly like two business partners. The lower the quality of the relationship, the more important the power differences between the partners. Whereas the power relations in harmonious relationships are unimportant, in 'cooled-off' relationships, the partner who possesses more power will also use the opportunity to control exchange transactions with the other and act according to the 'egoism principle'.

By contrast, relationships between happy partners and between good friends resemble each other in their positivity and altruism. Partners in love and good friends have unconditional positive regard for each other and spontaneously act to please each other; they are less likely to subject their joint actions to the principles of doing business and to consider the costs of their actions. Egoistic desires diminish and are superseded by shared desires. Egoistic maximization of individual benefits, which is generally taken to be the 'dominant strategy' of 'homo oeconomicus', is the rare exception rather than the rule and proves that love really is a many-splendoured thing.

The keys

- **The dynamics of successful and mutually beneficial decision-making processes rely on relationship harmony and on balanced power relations between the partners.**
- **Partners in harmonious relationships act in accordance with the 'love principle'. This principle exhibits six particular characteristics.**
- **The lower the level of emotional attachment to each other, the more the 'love principle' mutates towards a 'credit principle'.**

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edited by
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