Toward a Better Understanding of Transformational Leadership: Differentiating between Altruism and Self-Sacrifice

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Abstract. This paper distinguishes between self-sacrifice and altruism, and reports a cross-sectional survey of working managers (n = 127). The study tested how the two variables differentially affect transformational leadership. Results yielded evidence that altruism is a better predictor of transformational leadership than self-sacrifice is. The hypothesis that self-sacrifice would enhance the effect of altruism on transformational leadership did not obtain support. Findings also showed that transformational leadership in turn leads to followers' enhanced perception of collective identity and performance. Implications of the results are discussed and future directions for research are proposed.

Key Words: Transformational Leadership, Altruism, Self-Sacrifice, Collective Identity, Performance.

The seminal book by Burns (1978) brought about paradigm shift in the area of leadership (Conger, 1999). In this book, Burns had introduced the term 'transformational leadership', and said that such leaders took their followers to higher levels of motivation and morality. Literature has suggested that transformational leaders are altruistic by nature (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Kanungo & Mendonca; 1996; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). However, as discussed later, leader altruism has not been subjected to empirical investigations. A related concept that has received a lot of attention in the recent past is self-sacrifice. The first empirical work on self-sacrificial leadership was done by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999). Other studies that followed found empirical evidence that self-sacrifice did indeed seem to work and since then, it has become an accepted aspect of leadership. Nonetheless, we felt that self-sacrifice, which has been defined as mere 'giving up' by the leader (without getting into the motive behind such acts), would not be judged as positively by followers as altruism would be. Essentially, this study sought to show that altruism influences transformational leadership more than self-sacrifice per se.

This paper helps in seeing the underlying process of transformational leadership more clearly, by bringing out the subtle difference between two often-confused constructs. In addition, it helps us understand the importance of focusing on a more enduring personality picture of transformational leaders, rather than focusing on mere behaviors. Transformational leaders have high goals and lofty visions (Bass, 1985) and enhance feelings of collective identity with the unit to which both leader and followers belong (Shamir et al., 1993). They expect and get their followers to perform beyond set standards. Therefore, we tested the

impact of self-sacrificial behaviors and altruism of transformational leaders on two organizationally important outcomes (collective identity and performance)with a cross-sectional survey of working executives from India.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Transformational Leadership

According to Burns (1978), *transformational leader*s "engage with others in a way such that, both leaders as well as followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p. 20). Transformational leaders are those who appeal to the higher moral values of followers. In transformational leadership, it is important that the leader should address the true needs of the followers, and lead followers towards satiation of those needs. Pillai, Williams, Lowe and Jung (2003) have shown that personality characteristics such as proactivity, need for achievement, and emotional empathy of the leader are important determinants of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders also display many compassionate behaviors and are helpful by nature (Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000). Transformational leaders deal with issues from a higher moral plane (Banerjee & Krishnan, 2000). Conger, Kanungo and Menon (2000) found that transformational leadership led to a sense of collective identity, resulted in enhanced sense of reverence, developed trust in the leader, and enhanced satisfaction with the leader.

The process by which followers are influenced by transformational leaders has been the focus of many studies. Literature suggests that one of the ways of influencing used by such leaders involves the display of self-sacrificial behaviors (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2004; Halverson, Holladay; Kazama & Quinones, 2004; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005; Yorges, Weiss & Strickland, 1999). It has been shown to contribute to many important outcomes such as (a) perceptions of charisma, (b) norms of reciprocity, (c) leader effectiveness, (d) contributions to the public good, (e) cooperation for the group, (f) willingness to exert extra effort, (e) group belongingness, and (f) attributions made about the leader behavior.

Self-Sacrificing Behavior

Self-sacrifice has been defined by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998: 399) as the "the total/partial abandonment, and/or permanent postponement of personal interests, privileges, or welfare in the (1) division of labor, (2) distribution of rewards, and (3) exercise of power." Similarly, Yorges et al. (1999: 428) defined sacrifice as "giving up or loss of something important to an individual." A point to be noted here is that both the articles have focused on the 'giving up personal benefits' aspect of self-sacrifice. De Cremer and van Knippenberg (2004: 141) on the other hand took this definition in a broader perspective to include the benefit that the other party would gain if the leader self-sacrificed. More precisely, they defined self-sacrifice as willingness on part of the leader "to incur personal costs (or run the risk of such costs) to serve the goals and mission of the group or organization." This distinction is crucial to the definition of self-sacrifice because it brings in 'the other person for whom' the leader has sacrificed. By definition, self-sacrifice narrowly focuses on 'giving up' by the leader, and has nothing to do with the beneficiary of such an act (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998; Avolio & Locke, 2002; O'Shea, 2004). As pointed out by both Locke (Avolio & Locke, 2002) and Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998), when the beneficiary comes into the picture, the behavior should be construed as altruistic and not self-sacrificial.

The theory behind how and why self-sacrificial behavior works in the context of transformational leadership has been discussed by van Knippenberg and Hogg (2003). They explained the influence from a social identity perspective. Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999) showed that followers shared a strong implicit leadership theory about self-sacrifice being a part of transformational leadership. Conger et al. (2000) found that display of exemplary acts such as self-sacrificial behaviors were positively related to the follower sense of reverence for the leader. This in turn led to the leader being perceived as transformational.

Various studies done on effects of self-sacrifice in the context of transformational leadership have shown that it enhances perceptions of charisma (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999; De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2004; Halverson, et al. 2004; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005; Yorges et al., 1999). Based on all the findings mentioned above, we conclude that leaders would be perceived to be transformational if they displayed self-sacrificial behavior.

Hypothesis 1. Self-sacrifice would be positively related to transformational leadership.

Altruism

Altruism, which essentially means, "putting others' objectives before personal ones," has been discussed quite extensively in disciplines as diverse as psychology, sociobiology, political science, economics, and management (Batson, van Lange, Ahmed & Lishner, 2003). Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) defined altruistic behaviors as any work-relevant behavior that benefits others regardless of the advantages such behavior could have for the benefactor. According to Smith, Organ and Near (1983), altruism is defined as a pro-social act towards other organizational members, such as helping with heavy workloads, orienting new people, and helping those who have been absent. Almost all definitions of altruism stress upon the effect the benefactor wishes to have, i.e., some kind of benefit for the beneficiary.

Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998) said that while altruism focuses on behaviors that have the motive of helping others, are full of moral intentions and are devoid of self-interest (Smith et al., 1983), self-sacrificial behaviors focus on "just the loss to the benefactor." Although, Choi and Mai-Dalton gave such a clear demarcation between self-sacrifice and altruism in their conceptual paper, the subsequent operationalization of self-sacrifice did not really keep the "benefit to the other" out of the behavioral manifestations described as part of self-sacrifice. For instance, Halverson et al. (2004: 275) inserted a line in the vignette they used for the experiment to study self-sacrifice, "Due to this crisis, Bill, the president, initiated the following actions." We feel that this would have brought the "other-orientedness" aspect of altruism into the picture, and the respondents subsequently felt that the president was "giving up" because he had concern for them. While introducing the concept of self-sacrifice, Yorges et al. (1999: 431) had defined it as mere giving up. Nevertheless, when they operationalized self-sacrifice in the vignette used in their study, they defined self-sacrifice as "enduring hardship and personal loss *while pursuing the vision*." The examples quoted above shows that self-sacrifice was not manipulated in its pure form in many of the studies.

An explanation as to why these two types of behaviors would have differential effects on followers has been provided in studies that investigated the motives behind "helping behaviors." As pointed out by Ames, Flynn and Weber (2004), "it's the thought that counts" in establishing future relationships between the benefactor and the recipient. Through a series of experiments, the authors showed that "a recipient's evaluation of a helper's intentions and the recipient's own attitudes about future interactions with the helper depend on the recipient's perceptions of how the helper decided to assist: based on affect, on role, or on cost-benefit calculation" (p. 461). They proposed that the cause behind why the act is being

done, informed the recipient about the underlying attitudes of the recipient, which in turn clarified their relationship. Other studies showed that followers' actively engaged in psychological processes to investigate the 'intention' behind leader behavior (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Dasborough & Ashkanasy 2005)

In light of this psychological process, we can perhaps derive reasons as to why altruism is a better predictor of transformational leadership. If the leader is altruistic, he or she will tend to display behaviors that arise out of concern for the recipient. It can be expected that the followers perceive the underlying attitude and thus they become more inclined toward improving the future interaction and reciprocate towards the helper (leader). On the other hand, self-sacrificing does not bring the motive or affect aspect into the picture, which might appear as mere symbolic actions. Without the moral intention of 'concern for the other', merely giving up of self-benefits will not make the person transformational.

Nevertheless, it is possible that an individual who has altruistic intentions will tend to display behaviors that might be self-sacrificial. van Knippenberg and Hogg (2003) argued that when relationships are characterized by concern for the other individual and this is exhibited overtly (self-sacrifice), greater group orientation and therefore positive outputs are achieved. In other words, it is likely that when the leader is altruistic and expresses his altruistic intentions through self-sacrificial behaviors, the impact on transformational leadership would be higher. Essentially, we argue that the effect of self-sacrifice on transformational leadership would disappear the moment we control for altruism, but when both are present in the same person, it would have a complimentary effect. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2. Altruism would be positively related to transformational leadership.

Hypothesis 3. Self-sacrifice would enhance the effect of altruism on transformational leadership.

Collective Identity

One of the most organizationally important outcomes of transformational leadership is that it gives rise to feelings of collective identity among the unit members. Kidwell and Bennett (2001) showed that altruistic behaviors by employees enhance feelings of group cohesiveness and collective identity among the unit members. Schnake (1999) suggested that on-the-job altruism might result in reciprocal relations at the workplace. Conger et al. (2000) showed the role modeling effect of transformational leaders on followers. A recent article by De Cremer and van Knippenberg (2004) showed that self-sacrifice led to enhanced perception of collective identity among the followers. In the next section, we discuss how transformational leadership affects the collective identity of followers.

Transformational leaders have been shown to have the ability to transform the self-interests of the followers into collective interests. They do so by enhancing the salience of collective identity in the self-concept of followers (Shamir et al., 1993). Followers of transformational leaders work towards advancing the overall mission of the group rather than their own personal interests (Conger et al., 2000). Display of self-sacrificial behaviors and altruism by transformational leaders raises feeling of reciprocity among the followers (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999). This creates a chain wherein a norm of putting group goals above personal benefits is established. Studies have shown that followers favor those leaders who show the ability to promote collective interests associated with a shared group identity (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Members of such groups are prepared to stand up for these leaders and do the work necessary for their vision to be realized. In this study, we argue that display of self-sacrifice as well as altruism would enhance feeling of belongingness among

the followers with the organizational unit. However, this relationship would be transmitted through the transformational abilities of the leaders. In light of the above arguments, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 4: Transformational leadership would mediate the relationship between leader altruism and collective identity.

Hypothesis 5: Transformational leadership would mediate the relationship between leader self-sacrifice and collective identity.

Performance

It has been hypothesized that transformational leadership brings about higher levels of performance by the followers (Bass, 1985; Conger et al., 2000). The followers' expectations of successful unit performance play a crucial role in ensuring successful implementation of unit goals (Yukl, 2001). The goals and visions set by transformational leaders are often lofty and challenging and encourage followers to perform beyond the expected boundaries (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). This leads to a collective belief in the achievement potential of the group as a whole. From this, we can conclude that feelings of group performance would be high under transformational leaders. In addition, since leaders emphasize the whole group's contribution in achieving the goal, it results in enhancing the collective identification. These leaders show their group-mindedness by making more references to the collective history, the collective interest, and the group's mission, and by expressing belief in the group's ability to achieve the target (Shamir et al., 1993; Shamir et al., 1998). Thus, we believe that collective identification would mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and group performance. Similar findings were reported by De Cremer and van Knippenberg (2004).

In addition, we felt that the display of self-sacrificial behaviors and altruism by the leader would also affect the performance of the followers. However, these two variables would influence group performance only through the transformational qualities of the leader. Leadership happens when any person is influenced by another to work in the direction of the group's vision. Thus, though the display of self-sacrificial behaviors and altruism might influence followers' perceptions of group's performance, such beliefs would be transmitted only through the transformational qualities of the leader. We therefore hypothesized:

Hypothesis 6. Collective identity would mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and followers' perception of group performance.

Hypothesis 7. Transformational leadership would mediate the relationship between altruism and followers' perception of group performance.

Hypothesis 8. Transformational leadership would mediate the relationship between self-sacrifice and followers' perception of group performance.

METHOD

This study used cross-sectional survey methodology and responses were collected from 127 working managers from all over India. From a cultural perspective, India is a country with a diverse cultural profile, and falls in the mid-range with respect to individualism vs. collectivism (Hofstede, 2003). Thus, a sample taken from this pool would be more representative for making the theoretical distinction between the two variables.

The sample was drawn from different organizational levels, with 13% from higher level, 42% from middle level, and the remaining from lower level in the organizational hierarchy. Of the managers who responded, 59% were males, and the sample age ranged from 22 to 55 years with the median being 29 years. The respondents were equally represented from all sections of industry, with 26% belonging to IT industry, 28% belonging to manufacturing industry, 22% belonging to service industry and remaining belonging to process and core industries. All the items had a five-point rating scale.

Measures

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 5x of Bass and Avolio (1995) was used to measure *transformational leadership*. Respondents were asked to rate their immediate supervisor on the MLQ. The questionnaire has 20 items to measure the five factors of transformational leadership. A new scale was developed to measure *self-sacrifice*. The items were composed on the basis of the conceptualization by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998; 1999), and a total of ten items were written with the help of behavioral descriptions given by them. Self-sacrifice was calculated by taking a mean of all the ten items. *Altruism* was measured using the five-item scale developed by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman and Fetter (1990). Three more items were added to the scale based on the conceptual definition given by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998). The new items that were added increased the Cronbach Alpha of the scale from 0.77 to 0.85. Since we had added new items to an earlier scale, we did an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation with all eight items. One clear factor emerged, showing that the new items that were added captured the same construct. Altruism was calculated by taking a mean of all the eight items. *Collective identity* was measured using the five-item scale developed by Conger et al. (2000). One item that was bringing down the reliability was deleted from the scale. Mean of the four items was included in the calculation. *Performance* was measured using the four-item scale developed by Bass (1985) to measure unit effectiveness. Five items from the scale developed by Conger et al. (2000) was also used. A second scale was included as it had dimensions that spoke about the perception of higher levels of collective performance, which was over and above meeting the day-to-day task effectiveness. Since we had added items to an existing scale, we did an exploratory factor analysis with all the 9 items of performance, from which a single factor emerged. The Cronbach's alpha obtained for the scale was 0.89, which was higher than that obtained individually for the two scales. All the nine items were included for calculating performance.

RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, Cronbach alphas, and correlations between all variables in the study are presented in Table 1. All the variables had significant correlations with each other.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach Alphas and Correlations.

(N=127)	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Altruism	3.14	0.78	(.84)				
Self-Sacrifice	3.02	0.72	.74***	(.77)			
Transformational Leadership	3.41	0.82	.83***	.68***	(.95)		
Collective Identity	3.56	0.71	.51***	.40***	.55***	(.73)	
Performance	3.73	0.62	.48***	.46***	.68***	.68***	(.89)

Cronbach Alpha is in parentheses along diagonal. ***=p<0.001.

The correlation table provides support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. We followed the procedure suggested by Aiken and West (1991) to test for Hypothesis 3 that self-sacrifice would moderate the relationship between altruism and transformational leadership. The independent variable and the moderator were "centered" before testing for the significance of the interaction term. When the two independent variables were entered along with the product term, the main effect of altruism was significant, partial moderation was obtained for the main effect of self-sacrifice, while the product term was not significant, and the overall model attained significance. Therefore, we can conclude that self-sacrifice did not moderate the relationship between altruism and transformational leadership. Our Hypothesis 3 did not obtain support. However, the effect of self-sacrifice on transformational leadership was reduced to partially significant levels when altruism was entered in the model.

Table 2. Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Self-Sacrifice on Altruism and Transformational Leadership, Study 1 (Hypothesis 3).

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B	t	R^2	F
Transformational Leadership	Altruism	0.87	16.43***	0.69	269.79***
Transformational Leadership	Self-Sacrifice	0.79	10.38***	0.47	107.81***
Transformational Leadership	Altruism	0.76	9.48***	0.70	92.74***
	Self-Sacrifice	0.17	2.00*		
	Altruism * Self-Sacrifice	0.01	0.13		

We used the procedure suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) for testing Hypotheses 4 to 8. Transformational leadership fully mediated the relationship between altruism and collective identity and between altruism and performance, thus supporting Hypotheses 4 and 7. The results are shown in Table 3. Transformational leadership fully mediated the relationship between self-sacrifice and collective identity and between self-sacrifice and performance, thus supporting Hypotheses 5 and 8 as displayed in Table 4. Collective identity partially mediated the effect of transformational leadership on perceived unit effectiveness. We did Sobel's test that showed that the reduction in the parameter estimate was significant. Thus, Hypothesis 6 was supported. This has been shown in Table 5.

Table 3. Regression Analysis for Mediating Effect of Transformational Leadership, Study 1 (Hypotheses 4 & 7).

	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	B	t	R^2	F
Model with Collective Identity						
Step 1	Transformational Leadership	Altruism	0.87	16.42***	0.69	269.79***
Step 2	Collective Identity	Altruism	0.49	6.20***	0.26	38.94***
Step 3	Collective Identity	Transformational Leadership	0.34	2.91***	0.31	25.07***
		Altruism	0.18	1.44		
Model with Performance						
Step 2	Performance	Altruism	0.40	5.73***	0.23	32.94***
Step 3	Performance	Transformational Leadership	0.45	4.35***	0.34	28.60***
		Altruism	0.01	0.12		

Table 4. Regression Analysis for Mediating Effect of Transformational Leadership, Study 1 (Hypotheses 5 & 8).

	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	B	t	R^2	F
Model with Collective Identity						
Step 1	Transformational Leadership	Self-sacrifice	0.78	10.41***	0.47	108.405***
Step 2	Collective Identity	Self-sacrifice	0.42	4.59***	0.16	21.08***
Step 3	Collective Identity	Transformational Leadership	0.43	4.55***	0.31	24.10***
		Self-Sacrifice	0.09	0.86		
Model with Performance						
Step 2	Performance	Self-sacrifice	0.43	5.49***	0.21	30.09***
Step 3	Performance	Transformational Leadership	0.39	4.83***	0.35	29.75***
		Self-sacrifice	0.12	1.23		

Table 5. Regression Analysis for Mediating Effect of Collective Identity, Study 1 (Hypothesis 6).

	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	B	t	R^2	F
Step 1	Collective Identity	Transformational Leadership	0.48***	6.90	0.30	47.58***
Step 2	Performance	Transformational Leadership	0.46***	7.60	0.34	57.70***
Step 3	Performance	Transformational Leadership	0.24***	3.80	0.53	61.98***
		Collective Identity	0.46***	6.62		

DISCUSSION

The results of the study provide evidence regarding the influence of altruism on transformational leadership. This finding comes out more starkly when compared with the influence of self-sacrifice. Earlier studies generated evidence of the effectiveness of leader self-sacrifice in comparison with the leader self-benefiting behavior (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002; Yorgess et al., 1999). As pointed out by van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg (2005), these findings do not provide much ground for concluding that self-sacrifice per se impacts transformational leadership. The present study has contrasted self-sacrifice with altruism to show that indeed, the effects of 'merely giving up' per se does not lead to enhanced perception of transformational leadership, but does so only when the 'concern for others' is present. As pointed out earlier, perhaps, the 'motive' behind the action taken by the leader is the decision node that followers use for deciding their future interactions with the leader (Ames et al., 2004). While self-sacrifice focuses on mere symbolism, altruism is more genuine as it takes into consideration the concerns for the followers. This tells us that selection of managers who are high on altruism would help organizations develop their managers into transformational leaders. If managers have altruistic personality, their chance of being seen as transformational leaders is enhanced.

This study also provides support for the claim by Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) that a transformational leader is essentially a person with moral convictions and values. Mere giving-up of personal benefits, without the moral intention behind doing such acts might make managers appear transformational, but this influence will be less than that of an altruistic manager. If organizations wish to see their managers become transformational, they would be better off by addressing the whole personality of the manager.

When leaders are modeling the importance of cooperative behaviors over personal interests, through altruistic behaviors and personal sacrifices, they are likely to be seen as more transformational, thereby promoting similar behaviors among followers and bringing about a change in the salience of collective self-concept. Perhaps, the biggest learning for practitioners from this study is that managers should have high concern for people working under them, and that acts of self-sacrifice (such as giving up parking space) may not by themselves enhance transformational leadership.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research.

Ratings of transformational behavior, input variables and outcome variables were taken through the same source. This could result in same source bias accounting for the association between variables. Future research might also benefit from extending this study to include measures of actual performance outcomes, rather than perceptions of expected outcomes. An interesting question that arises is how self-sacrificial behavior affects the perceptions of followers after a certain amount of time has elapsed. If leaders consistently display self-sacrificial behaviors, will they be construed as altruistic? In other words, do the two constructs have a reciprocal relationship? This important question can be answered by future researchers. As this study was done using field survey methodology, which tends to suffer from some statistical issues (McClelland & Judd, 1993), designing an experimental study that tests for the difference in impact between altruism and self-sacrifice would yield meaningful results.

Conclusion

Organizations are continuously looking for newer ways to develop their managers into transformational leaders and to help employees feel that they belong to the organization. This paper provides one model of how this can be achieved through interventions initiated from the leader angle. The study addresses the relationship between leader motives, behaviors, transformational leadership, and unit-level outcomes. Specifically, it shows that it is likely that followers will attribute high transformational qualities to those supervisors who have high moral convictions. By offering support and guidance to subordinates, altruistic leaders could elicit similar behaviors from the subordinates, thus creating a culture that promotes caring and helping behavior. Organizations should give training to their managers on transformational leadership as it leads to organizationally relevant outcomes, such as collective identity and unit performance. The results of the study make it possible to conclude that other-orientedness of a manager enhances transformational leadership, which in turn leads to higher collective identity and unit performance.

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