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Self-sacrifice and transformational leadership: mediating role of altruism

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Abstract

Purpose – To explore the mediating role of altruism in the relationship between self-sacrifice and transformational leadership, and to look at the effect of all three on followers' collective identity and perceptions of unit performance.

Design/methodology/approach – For Study 1, survey responses were collected from 127 managers in India. They answered questions on their leader's self-sacrifice, altruism, and transformational leadership, and on their own collective identity and perceptions of unit performance. Study 2 used a scenario experiment and 161 students to manipulate self-sacrifice and altruism and measure their effects on transformational leadership, collective identity and perceived unit performance.

Findings – It is possible to distinguish between self-sacrifice and altruism empirically. Altruism mediates the relationship between self-sacrifice and transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is positively related to followers' collective identity and perceived unit performance.

Research limitations/implications – Common source bias may have affected the findings. Use of student sample in Study 2 limits the generalizability of findings.

Practical implications – Other-orientedness (altruism) of a manager enhances transformational leadership, which in turn leads to higher collective identity and perceived unit performance. Self-sacrifice could be a good starting point in this chain of events.

Originality/value – Studies have shown that self-sacrifice enhances transformational leadership. This paper highlights the mediating process through altruism. This is the first empirical study to look at the relationship between altruism and transformational leadership. This is also the first study to look at self-sacrifice and altruism simultaneously.

Keywords Transformational leadership, Altruism, Group dynamics

Paper type Research paper

Organizations are increasingly focusing on developing transformational leadership in their managers because it leads to better organizational performance (Waldman *et al.*, 2001). One variable that enhances transformational leadership is the display of self-sacrificial behaviors by the leader (Choi and Mai-Dalton, 1999; De Cremer and van Knippenberg, 2002, 2004; Halverson *et al.*, 2004; van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg, 2005; Yorges *et al.*, 1999). Studies suggest that leaders' self-sacrificial behaviors influence followers by inciting norms of reciprocity (Choi and Mai-Dalton, 1999), by projecting leaders as role models (Shamir *et al.*, 1993) and, by demonstrating the personal importance that leaders themselves attach to the vision (Avolio and Locke, 2003).

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Altruism has also received some attention from leadership scholars as a variable that influences transformational leadership (Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996). Though many people often confuse the two constructs (altruism and self-sacrifice) with each other, they are technically not identical (Avolio and Locke, 2003). Self-sacrifice does not specify who the beneficiary of the sacrifice would be, while altruism is essentially focused on "giving up" so that the other person benefits (Choi and Mai-Dalton, 1998; O'Shea, 2004).

Though many conceptual arguments have been given by authors on how and why altruism affects transformational leadership (Aronson, 2001; Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Kanungo, 2001; Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996; Shamir *et al.*, 1993), we did not come across even one empirical study of altruism and transformational leadership. However, self-sacrifice has received much attention in the recent past. The model of self-sacrificial leadership was first empirically demonstrated by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999). They showed that leader self-sacrifice enhanced perception of transformational qualities and that such leaders were more influential than those who did not exhibit such behaviors. Subsequent studies have confirmed the above-mentioned findings, but no study has investigated the simultaneous effects of leader self-sacrifice and altruism. In this paper, we explored the mediating role of altruism in the relationship between self-sacrifice and transformational leadership.

In order to link the above-mentioned variables with organizationally relevant outcomes, we tested their effects on two dependent variables, namely collective identity and unit performance. Our paper contributes to the body of knowledge by highlighting the process by which self-sacrifice enhances transformational leadership. In addition, it helps us to understand the importance of focusing on a more enduring personality aspect like altruism as the immediate antecedent of transformational leadership, rather than focusing merely on self-sacrificing behaviors. Moreover, the paper shows how they influence collective identity and perceptions of unit performance. The paper reports two studies using two different methods. The first study used survey method to enhance the generalizability of findings. The second study used a scenario method to demonstrate causality.

Theory and hypotheses

Transformational leadership

Burns (1978) held that leadership could be broadly classified into two forms, transactional and transformational leadership. Transactional leadership occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the exchange of valued things. Transformational leaders on the other hand appeal to the higher moral values of followers.

The influence process of transformational leadership is through internalization; followers tend to accept (internalize) the appealing vision provided by the leader. The vision becomes appealing to the follower when it is in alignment with the values and ideals of the follower (Dvir and Shamir, 2003). Leaders can enhance the perception of their commitment to the vision by self-sacrificing. Self-sacrificial behaviors by leaders contribute to many important outcomes such as:

- perceptions of charisma;
- norms of reciprocity;

- leader effectiveness;
- contributions to the public good;
- cooperation for the group;
- willingness to exert extra effort;
- group belongingness; and
- attributions made about the leader behavior (Choi and Mai-Dalton, 1999; De Cremer and van Knippenberg, 2002, 2004; Halverson et al, 2004; Yorges *et al.*, 1999).

Self-sacrifice

Self-sacrifice has been defined by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998, p. 399) as the "the total/partial abandonment, and/or permanent postponement of personal interests, privileges, or welfare in the division of labor, distribution of rewards, and exercise of power." Similarly, Yorges *et al.* (1999, p. 428) defined self-sacrifice as "giving up or loss of something important to an individual." A point to be noted here is that both these definitions have focused on the "giving up personal benefits" aspect of self-sacrifice. On the other hand, De Cremer and van Knippenberg (2004, p. 141) viewed this construct 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 the 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 indicates the person "for whom" the leader has sacrificed. By definition, self-sacrifice narrowly focuses on "giving up" by the person, and has nothing to do with the beneficiary of such an act (Avolio and Locke, 2003; Choi and Mai-Dalton, 1999; O'Shea, 2004). Both, Locke (Avolio and Locke, 2003), and Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998) have clarified that when the beneficiary appears in the picture, the behavior should be construed as altruistic and not self-sacrificial.

Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) said that authentic transformational leaders were those who sacrificed for the common good. Self-sacrifice builds trust, earns followers' acceptance as a role model, and helps in making a leader transformational (Bass, 1985; Yukl, 2002, pp. 265-66). Conger *et al.* (2000) found that display of exemplary acts (such as self-sacrifice) was positively related to followers' sense of reverence for the leader. Self-sacrifice by the leader leads to the development of a culture of giving and selfless service in the organization (Choi and Mai-Dalton, 1999). Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999) showed that followers shared a strong implicit leadership theory about self-sacrifice being a part of transformational leadership. Van Knippenberg and Hogg (2003) have used the social identity perspective to explain how and why self-sacrifice works in the context of transformational leadership. Therefore, we hypothesized:

H1. Self-sacrifice is positively related to transformational leadership.

Altruism

Altruism, which essentially means "putting others" objectives before one's own, has been discussed extensively in disciplines as diverse as psychology, sociobiology, political science, economics, and management (Batson *et al.*, 2003). Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) defined altruism as any behavior that benefits others regardless of

the advantages such behavior could have for the benefactor. According to Smith *et al.* (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.

There is broad agreement that altruism focuses on the benefit to another person, and that it is an end in itself and not a means to an end (O'Shea, 2004). Cialdini *et al.* (1997) proposed that blurring of distinction between self and other is a characteristic of altruism. They introduced the concept of "oneness" wherein altruism occurs because the "other" gets integrated into the helper's sense of self. This concept is very relevant for leadership because leadership is about influencing "others" (followers) and altruism brings in the dimension of "others" into leader's definition of self.

According to Aronson (2001), altruism is an antecedent variable for transformational leadership and charismatic/transformational leaders operate out of high concern for others. Kanungo (2001) also mentioned altruism as the tool that such leaders use for influencing followers towards the collective goal. He posited that altruism is a philosophical orientation of transformational leaders. Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) reasoned that altruism drives leaders' capacity to grow, be sensitive to needs of followers, to lead by being led. Such leaders have a consistent value system that is socialized rather than personalized (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). Considering that several authors have made strong conceptual arguments relating altruism and transformational leadership, we found it surprising that this relationship has not been studied empirically.

As mentioned earlier, while altruism is focused on helping others, is full of moral intentions and is devoid of self-interest (Smith *et al.*, 1983), self-sacrificial behaviors focus on "just the loss to the benefactor." Following the suggestions made by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998), we have operationalized and defined self-sacrifice as an act of abandoning or postponing personal interests, privileges, and welfare. The effect of self-sacrifice on the follower was left out from the definition. Although, Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998) gave such a clear demarcation between self-sacrifice and altruism in their conceptual paper, subsequent operationalization of self-sacrifice did not really keep "benefit to other" out of the behavioral manifestations described as part of self-sacrifice. We tried in this paper to distinguish between the two constructs and to demonstrate that self-sacrifice would lead to altruism, which in turn would affect transformational leadership.

An explanation as to why self-sacrificing behaviors do not directly affect transformational leadership, but do so only by first enhancing altruism, has been provided in studies that investigated the motives behind "helping behaviors." As pointed out by Ames *et al.* (2004, p. 461), "it's the thought that counts" in establishing future relationships between the benefactor and 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". When the recipient perceived that the decision was based on affect (i.e. positive feelings about him or her), he or she would become more inclined toward future interaction and reciprocation than if he or she perceived that the decision was based on role or cost-benefit calculation. They proposed that the cause behind why the act is being done informed the recipient about underlying attitudes of

the helper, which in turn clarified their relationship. In light of this psychological process, we can perhaps explain why altruism, rather than self-sacrifice, is the immediate antecedent 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 followers perceive the underlying concern and thus become more inclined toward improving future interaction and reciprocation towards the helper (leader). On the other hand, mere self-sacrificing does not bring the motive or affect aspect into the picture.

Essentially, we argue that greater group orientation (Van Knippenberg and Hogg, 2003) and therefore positive outputs could be achieved by a consistent concern for the other individual. Self-sacrifice would bring about such a consistent concern for the other individual. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H2. Self-sacrifice is positively related to altruism.

H3. Altruism mediates the relationship between self-sacrifice and transformational leadership.

Collective identity

An organizationally important outcome of transformational leadership is that it gives rise to feelings of collective identity among the unit members. Kidwell and Bennett (2001) showed that altruism of employee's enhanced feelings of group cohesiveness and collective identity among unit members. Altruism is highly related to pro-social behavior and performance (Friedman and Lobel, 2003). Schnake (1991) suggested that on-the-job altruism might result in reciprocal relations at workplace. Similarly, Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999) showed that display of self-sacrificial behavior brought about feelings of reciprocity among followers. This establishes a chain of norms about putting group goals above personal benefits. De Cremer and van Knippenberg (2004) showed that self-sacrifice enhanced perception of collective identity among followers.

Conger *et al.* (2000) showed the role modeling effect of transformational leaders on followers, leading towards identification with and among the unit members. Transformational leaders have the ability to transform self-interests of followers into collective interests. They do so by enhancing salience of collective identity in the self-concept of followers (Shamir *et al.*, 1993). Followers of transformational leaders work towards advancing overall mission of the group rather than their own personal interests (Conger *et al.*, 2000). Members of such groups are prepared to stand up for these leaders and do the work necessary for their vision to be realized (De Cremer and van Knippenberg, 2004). Brown and Treviño (2006) showed that socialized charismatic leadership style was associated with reduced interpersonal and organizational dimensions of deviance in the leader's work group. In this paper, we argue that altruism would enhance transformational leadership, which in turn would lead to higher levels of collective identity. Hence, we hypothesized:

H4. Transformational leadership is positively related to collective identity.

Group performance

Studies have empirically demonstrated that transformational leadership leads to higher levels of performance (Conger *et al.*, 2000; Judge and Bono, 2000; Lowe *et al.*, 1996). Leaders' expectations of successful unit performance play a crucial role in

ensuring successful implementation of unit goals (Yukl, 2002). Such feelings have a transformational influence and empower subordinates to participate in vision implementation. It also helps subordinates persist in efforts despite organizational obstacles (Conger *et al.*, 2000). The goals and visions set by transformational leaders are often lofty and challenging and encourage followers to perform beyond the expected boundaries (Kanungo and Mendonca, 1996). Transformational leaders also repose trust and express high confidence in the ability of followers. Similarly, followers also repose high trust in leaders, and have faith in achievement of the vision set by these leaders (Bass and Avolio, 1993). This would lead to a collective belief in the achievement potential of the group as a whole. They express belief in the group's ability to achieve the target (Shamir *et al.*, 1993). From this, we can conclude that perceptions of group performance would be high under transformational leaders. We therefore hypothesized:

H5. Transformational leadership is positively related to perceptions of group performance.

Study 1

Method

Survey responses were collected from 127 managers in India. The respondents belonged to different industries; 26 percent belonged to information technology and information technology enabled services; 28 percent belonged to manufacturing industry including automotive and textiles; 22 percent belonged to service industry including consulting and banking; and the remaining belonged to business process sector and core industry like steel. The sampling was not purposive; there was no particular reason why participants came from these industry sectors. The sample was drawn from different organizational levels, with 13 percent from higher level, 42 percent from middle level, and the remaining from lower level in the organizational hierarchy. Of the managers who responded, 59 percent were males, and the age ranged from 22 to 55 years with the median being 29 years.

Data was collected through two sources. The questionnaire was hosted on a website and managers were asked to fill in their responses directly on the website. Forty percent of the responses were through this medium. The remaining 60 percent of the responses were taken from fulltime managers who were enrolled in a distance learning management program. Care was taken to ensure that no two managers responded for the same supervisor. No significant difference was found in the *t*-test that was done to see if any difference existed between the two modes of data collection. All the items had a five-point rating scale. To evaluate the effect of common method variance, we performed Harmon's one-factor test, following Podsakoff and Organ (1986), and the results suggested that the constructs in our model were not related solely due to common-method variance.

Measures

Transformational leadership. Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 5 × of Bass and Avolio (1995) was used for measuring transformational leadership. Respondents were asked to rate their immediate supervisor. The questionnaire has 20 items to measure five factors of transformational leadership.

Self-sacrifice. A new scale was developed to measure self-sacrifice. A total of 13 items were developed based on Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998; 1999) and an exploratory factor analysis was done. Based on a screen test, we extracted two factors, and did an orthogonal rotation. The second factor consisted of items with low reliability and it was dropped. Therefore, only one dimension consisting of six items was used in the study. Sample items are: "Voluntarily gives up or refrains from exercising or using his/her authority, position power or privileges for own benefit"; "Abstains from using privileges that other business leaders take for granted"; "Assumes the blame and/or responsibility for failure, misfortunes, accidents, mistakes, etc., for which he/she is not solely responsible."

Altruism. Altruism was measured using the five-item scale developed by Podsakoff *et al.* (1990). Three more items were added to the scale based on the conceptual definition given by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998). Using the differentiation made by them between self-sacrifice and altruism, we defined altruism as "leader behaving out of concern for the other." Since we had added items to an earlier scale, we did an exploratory factor analysis with orthogonal rotation on all the eight items. One clear factor emerged. Sample items are: "Uses his/her personal resources such as time, money and knowledge for the benefit of others in the community"; "Voluntarily waives, limits, or delays taking his/her fair share, when he/she feels that the organization or other members in the organization need it more."

Collective identity. Collective identity was measured using the five-item scale of Conger *et al.* (2000). One item that was bringing down the reliability was subsequently deleted from the scale.

Performance. Performance was measured using the four-item scale of Bass (1985) to measure unit effectiveness. Five items from the scale of Conger *et al.* (2000) were also used. The 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. We did an exploratory factor analysis with all the nine items of performance, from which a single factor emerged.

Results

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

We followed the procedure suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) to test *H3* that altruism would mediate the relationship between self-sacrifice and transformational leadership. Altruism was first regressed on self-sacrifice; the model was significant.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Altruism	2.79	0.73	(0.84)				
2. Self-sacrifice	2.82	0.82	0.73	(0.76)			
3. Transformational leadership	3.41	0.82	0.79	0.63	(0.93)		
4. Collective identity	3.58	0.70	0.49	0.37	0.53	(0.73)	
5. Performance	3.73	0.62	0.46	0.41	0.58	0.67	(0.89)

Notes: $N = 127$; Cronbach Alpha is in parentheses along diagonal; $p < 0.01$ for all correlations

Table I. Means, standard deviations, cronbach alphas, and correlations (study 1)

Transformational leadership was then regressed on self-sacrifice; the model was significant. Finally, transformational leadership was regressed on both altruism and self-sacrifice and this model was significant too. Thus, all the three conditions of mediation were satisfied. The parameter estimate of self-sacrifice in the third regression equation was non-significant. Therefore, altruism fully mediated the effect of self-sacrifice on transformational leadership, thus supporting *H3*. The results are shown in Table II.

The hypothesized model was put to test using LISREL software and structural equation modeling (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993). The model was examined by using correlation matrices and LISREL's maximum likelihood procedure. Three criteria (i.e. absolute, incremental and parsimonious fit measures) were used to assess the acceptability of the hypothesized model yielding the following results: χ^2 (df = 6, $n = 127$) = 39.13, $p = 0.00$, GFI = 0.89, AGFI = 0.72, χ^2/df = 6.52, indicating acceptable fit to the observed data. Figure 1 presents the model. All the hypothesized relationships were supported.

We used an experimental design in our Study 2 to distinguish between the constructs of self-sacrifice and altruism empirically. Experimental manipulation of altruism and self-sacrifice would also help analyze their differential and unique effects on transformational leadership. We therefore designed a scenario experiment for clarifying the distinction between self-sacrifice and altruism and for confirming the findings obtained from the first study.

Table II. Regression analyses for mediating effects of altruism (study 1)

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Parameter estimate	t	Model R^2	Model F
Altruism	Self-sacrifice	0.68	11.93*	0.53	142.33
Transformational	Self-sacrifice	0.63	9.02*	0.39	81.38
Transformational	Altruism	0.77	8.89*		
	Self-sacrifice	0.11	1.31	0.63	104.99

Notes: All the models are significant at 0.05 level; *= $p < 0.001$

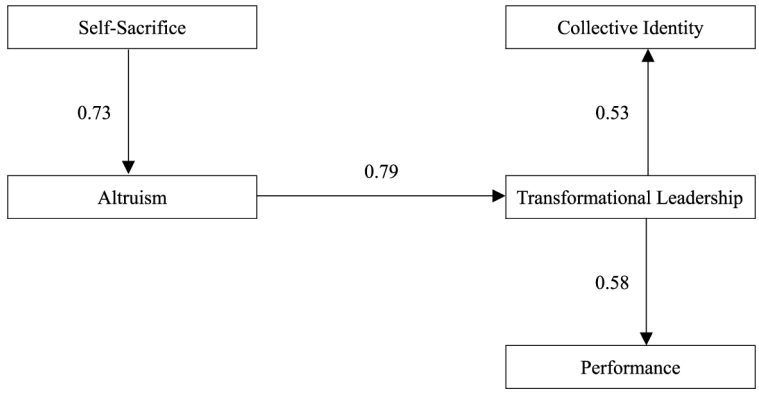

Figure 1. LISREL analysis of the entire model (study 1)

Study 2

The first study used survey method and measured all the variables at the same time. Hence, it could not establish causality, though the generalizability of findings is strength of the study. The second study aimed at demonstrating causality and used a scenario method. Since generalizability of findings was not a concern, a sample of students was used for Study 2.

Method

Sample consisted of 161 undergraduate students (37 women and 124 men) belonging to engineering and management disciplines. Their age ranged from 20 to 26 years. Participation was voluntary. The participants were randomly assigned to a 2×2 (self-sacrifice vs no self-sacrifice and altruism vs no altruism) between-subjects factorial design. Besides transformational leadership, the two dependent variables (collective identity and perceived unit performance) that were tested in Study 1 were also included as part of this study.

Procedure

Students were provided with vignettes that described an academic institution (this setting was chosen so that they could relate better) and were asked to respond to a questionnaire after reading the vignette. They were told to base their responses on how they would have reacted had they been a part of this institution. The scenario was drawn by using examples from Choi and Ma-Dalton (1999) and Yorges *et al.* (1999).

Self-sacrifice manipulation. Self-sacrifice was manipulated based on the definition given by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998; 1999). We extrapolated the behavioral descriptions given by Choi and Mai-Dalton and quoted them in the vignettes as if the director of the institution was displaying (or not displaying) them. Behavioral indicators of self-sacrifice include: not taking special privileges such as special parking space, eating in common canteen, leading a humble life, spending time in helping the poor and sick, taking personal risk, etc. In each of these behavioral indicators, we were careful to remove the "other-orientedness" from the scenario. The reason was that we wanted to maintain as much purity of the cell manipulation as possible.

Altruism manipulation. In the cell in altruism, we incorporated the description of altruism given by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998). Behavioral indicators include: doing things that would benefit the institution, being concerned about cost-saving and minimizing expenses. In this cell, we took care to show that whatever the director did, he was primarily concerned whether it would benefit the other person and/or the institution.

Each scenario consisted of one paragraph that described the background of the institution. This paragraph was common in all the scenarios. Additional paragraphs contained the self-sacrificial behavior manipulation (included only in the cells in which self-sacrifice was present) and the altruism manipulation (included only in the cells in which altruism was present). Immediately after reading the scenario, the participants were asked to respond to the attached survey instrument.

Presented in this way, the variable manipulation provided several advantages. First, the students felt like they were facing a live business problem, and that they had to respond keeping in mind how they would have reacted, had they been a part of the institution. Since the institution was similar to the one that they had closely seen, the

responses were more likely to be realistic. Though we acknowledge the limitation of a scenario experiment, the conceptual relatedness of the two independent constructs (self-sacrifice and altruism) required that this type of compartmentalized manipulation be maintained. Controlling for one of these independent variables in the real world would have been difficult to capture. Thus, in the absence of a better research design, we decided to follow the footsteps of earlier studies in this area (Choi and Mai-Dalton, 1999; De Cremer and van Knippenberg, 2002, 2004; Halverson *et al.*, 2004; van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg, 2005; Yorges *et al.*, 1999). The generalizability of scenario experiment can be questioned, but we used this study to confirm the findings obtained from Study 1 and for checking empirically whether self-sacrifice and altruism can exist independent of each other.

Measures

Four items each from the scales used in Study 1 for measuring altruism and self-sacrifice were used for doing manipulation checks. The three dependent measures in this study were the same as the previous study – transformational leadership, collective identity, and perceived unit performance – and the items used to measure the variables were also the same.

Results

Manipulation checks. A 2 (self-sacrifice, no self-sacrifice) $\times$ 2 (altruism, no altruism) ANOVA of the sacrificing question yielded a significant main effect for self-sacrifice, $F(1, 161) = 16.6, p < 0.001$ indicating that the self-sacrificing leader was evaluated as more sacrificing than the less self-sacrificing leader (M[SD] = 3.57[0.75] vs M[sd] = 3.05[0.82]). The main effect of altruism was not significant. However the interaction, $F(1, 161) = 4.86, p < 0.05$ was significant. A 2 $\times$ 2 ANOVA of the check on altruism manipulation question yielded a significant main effect for altruism, $F(1, 161) = 9.30, p < 0.001$ indicating that the altruistic leader was evaluated as more altruistic than the less altruistic leader (M[sd] = 4.14. [0.74] vs M[SD] = 3.65[0.73]). Neither the main effect of self-sacrifice nor the interaction was significant.

Transformational leadership. We conducted a two-way ANOVA, which yielded a significant main effect of altruism, $F(3, 161) = 3.10$, $p < 0.01$, showing that transformational leadership was higher when altruism was present as compared to the no altruism cell. Neither the main effect of self-sacrifice nor the interaction was significant. Results showed that presence of only self-sacrifice (altruism being absent) did not bring a significant difference in ratings of transformational leadership. The results of the ANOVA across the four cells are given in Table III.

Dependent variables. The means, standard deviations, Cronbach alphas, and correlations between all the dependent variables in the second study are given in Table IV.

Discussion

The results provide evidence regarding the mediating role of altruism in the relationship between self-sacrifice and transformational leadership. The scenario experiment made an important contribution by showing that self-sacrifice and altruism can be operationalized as two independent constructs as argued by Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998; 1999). Earlier studies generated evidence of the effectiveness of leader self-sacrifice in

comparison with the leader self-benefiting behavior (De Cremer and van Knippenberg, 2002; Yorges *et al.*, 1999). As pointed out by van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg (2005), these findings do not provide ground for concluding that self-sacrifice per se impacts transformational leadership. The present study has shown that self-sacrifice ("merely giving up") fulfils itself through altruism ("concern for others"), which leads to enhanced perception of transformational leadership. Perhaps, the motives behind self-sacrifice of the leader raise attributions of charisma among followers.

The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge by showing that though self-sacrifice has a relationship with transformational leadership, the relationship is mediated by altruism. This study indicates that followers consider their supervisors as transformational because of "the motive" (as measured through altruism). The reason for this could be that altruism is about the whole personality of the leader, as opposed to self-sacrifice, which focuses on just "personal giving-up" of the leader. "Motives" behind action taken by leaders are perceived as important by followers (Ames *et al.*, 2004). If followers perceive that the leader's action was because of role obligation or some cost-benefit analysis – and not motivated out of concern for them – their intention of continuing the interaction as well as reciprocity would be less than what it would have been had the action arisen out of affect (concern for the followers).

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. If organizations wish to see their managers become transformational, they would be better off by addressing the whole personality of the manager. If managers have altruistic personality, their chances of being seen as transformational are enhanced.

With respect to collective identity, this study provides support to the earlier theories (Shamir *et al.*, 1993), which claim that transformational leadership enhances collective identity among followers. When leaders are modeling the importance of cooperative behaviors over personal interests, through helping behaviors and personal sacrifices, they are likely to be seen as more transformational, thereby promoting similar

	Self-sacrifice	Altruism	M	SD	F (all cells)
Cell 1 ($n = 41$)	No	No	$3.11^{a,b}$	0.73	
Cell 2 ($n = 36$)	Yes	No	3.17^{c}	0.53	
Cell 3 ($n = 43$)	No	Yes	3.34^{b}	0.68	
Cell 4 ($n = 41$)	Yes	Yes	$3.51^{a,c}$	0.60	3.103^{*} (3, 161)

Notes: Means with the same superscript differ significantly at $p < 0.05$; $^{*}=p < 0.01$

Table III. ANOVA of transformational leadership across the four cells (study 2)

	M	SD	1	2	3
Transformational leadership	3.29	0.65	(0.84)		
Collective identity	3.61	0.64	0.29^{*}	(0.64)	
Performance	3.58	0.58	0.27^{*}	0.68^{*}	(0.79)

Notes: $N = 161$; Cronbach Alpha is in parentheses along diagonal; $^{*}=p < 0.01$

Table IV. Means, standard deviations, cronbach alphas and correlations among dependent variables, study 2

behaviors among the followers and enhancing the salience of collective self-concept. Under transformational leadership, followers' perception of successful unit performance is also demonstrated.

Limitations

A significant limitation of Study 1 could be same-source bias. Ratings of transformational leadership, input variables, and outcome variables were taken through the same source. This could result in same source bias accounting for the association between variables. However, the scenario experiment addresses this issue to some extent. With respect to Study 2, external validity is a questionable aspect. Future research might also benefit from extending this study to include measures of actual performance, rather than perceptions of performance. More in-depth analysis of the various dimensions of transformational leadership could be done and their relationships with the outcome variables could be studied. An interesting question that arises is how self-sacrificial behavior affects perceptions of followers after a certain amount of time has elapsed. Do leaders need to display self-sacrificial behaviors consistently over a period before they will be seen as altruistic? In addition, do the two constructs have a reciprocal relationship? We urge future researchers to investigate these aspects. Longitudinal research would also be required to assess the extent to which transformational leaders themselves are actually transformed because of the altruism and self-sacrificial behaviors displayed by them.

Conclusion

Organizations are continuously looking for newer ways to develop their managers' transformational leadership abilities 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 altruistic supervisors. 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. The results of the study make it possible to conclude that other-orientedness (altruism) of a manager enhances transformational leadership, which in turn leads to higher collective identity and unit performance. Self-sacrifice could be a good starting point in this chain of events.

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Further reading

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