

WHAT MATTERS MOST IN PROMOTING ETHICS: MANAGER'S ALTRUISM, ETHICAL PREFERENCES, OR TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP?

This empirical study explores the effects of supervisor's altruism, ethical preferences, and transformational leadership on subordinate's ethical preferences. Data were collected from 70 pairs of supervisors and subordinates working in several organizations in India. Preference for unethical behavior was captured from both supervisors and subordinates by asking them to respond to five scenarios -- bribery; endangering the physical environment; lying; personal gain; and favoritism. Results show that supervisor's ethical preference is the strongest predictor of subordinate's ethical preference in the case of bribery, lying, personal gain, and favoritism. Supervisor's altruism is the strongest predictor of subordinate's ethical preference in the case of endangering the physical environment. Supervisor's preference for bribery and subordinate's preference for bribery are significantly positively correlated to each other when transformational leadership is high but not when it is low. In addition, supervisor's preference for bribery fully mediates the relationship between supervisor's altruism and subordinate's preference for bribery.

Key words: Altruism, ethics, ethical preference, role modeling, transformational leadership.



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*I*ntroduction

Ethics or doing the right thing is essential for long term sustenance of a business and its dealings with the society. Every decision that an organization takes will have a bearing on the society and the people in general. Creating value for the business is as important as creating value for the people and the society at large. Ethics is embedded in the framework of doing sustainable business and hence it is pragmatic to have ethical behavior as the bedrock of any business transaction. Leadership is the currency of decision making in the business world. It has the power to transform a small start-up into an all conquering global behemoth. As Richard Nixon says "leadership isn't just knowing the right thing to do but doing the right thing".

Transformational leadership is a relationship that transforms the expectations and aspirations of followers. It also ensures that followers are elevated to a higher level. In these modern times, leadership with ethics or ethical leadership is of utmost importance. Leaders have the responsibility for ensuring standards of ethical conduct. While they transform the core values of the followers, can transformational leaders be ethical and also

ensure that their followers emulate them in ethical behavior? Can the transformational leader transform the ethical orientation of the followers?

Concern for others is the foundation of leadership. Altruism of leaders may motivate followers also to be concerned about others and the larger good of society. Altruism on the part of the leader could thus motivate followers to be ethical. This paper reports an empirical study that looked at the effects of leader's altruism, leader's ethics, and transformational leadership on follower's ethics.

Theory and Hypotheses

Ethics

In one of the first models of business ethics, Bartels (1967) focused upon marketing issues in which the ethical standards and decision-making consistent with such standards were discussed. The model was designed to guide marketing practitioners in ethical decision-making. While this model helped to an extent to understand ethical decision-making, it did not provide much assistance to understand ethical behavior in business (Fritzsche, 1991).

The study of ethics generally consists of the examination of right, wrong, good, evil, virtue, duty, obligation, rights, justice, fairness, etc. in human relationships with each other and other living things. Lewis (1985) defined business ethics as rules, standards, codes, or principles that provide guidelines for morally right behavior and truthfulness in specific situations.

The ethical characteristics of terms of (1) the moral character of the leaders' values expressed and program, and (3) the social leaders and followers engage in

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leaders can be expressed in the leader, (2) the ethical nature in their vision, articulation, ethical choice and action that (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999).

Ethical leadership can be visualized as a combination of ethical decision-making and ethical behavior that occurs in both an individual and an organizational context. It is therefore worthwhile to study the correlation between ethics of a leader and ethics of followers.

Role Modeling

Reciprocity is the starting mechanism of society. Reciprocal altruism—returning the benefit to the donor—is the fundamental mechanism through which society is formed and sustained among social animals and insects as well as humans. Supervisor's ethical practices will create emotional and cognitive pressure in subordinates to reciprocate or imitate the supervisor's behaviors. Leader ethics could be behavioral modeling for followers. Choi and Mai-Dalton (1999) found that followers' intentions of reciprocity behavior were significantly stronger when the leaders exhibited self-sacrificial behaviors than when they did not exhibit such behaviors.

Social learning theory suggests that individuals will strive to emulate the behaviors of their role models, leader, and coworkers to ensure that their behavior is in line with accepted norms. Modeling should be especially important for enhancing behaviors that are not already supported by formal systems of job description, training, or rewards. Yaffe and Kark (2011) explored "leading by example" in work organizations, focusing on the effect of leader organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) on work-group OCB. They found support for their hypothesized

moderated mediation model. Their study underscored the importance ascribed to leading by example in leadership theories by providing evidence that exemplary leader behavior may promote group-level behaviors that enhance organizational effectiveness. By setting a personal example of ethics, supervisors can promote similar behaviors from their subordinates.

Hypothesis 1. Supervisor's ethics are positively related to subordinate's ethics

Transformational Leadership

According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership "occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (page 20), and results in a transforming effect on both leaders and followers. Bass (1985) built on Burns (1978) work and described transformational leadership in terms of the impact that it has on followers; followers feel trust, admiration, and loyalty towards the leader. Transformational leaders motivate followers to do more than the latter originally expected to do. Transformational leadership consists of five factors—idealized influence attributed, idealized influence behavior, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

According to Burns (1978: 4), "the result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents." The issue of moral leadership concerned Burns the most. He considered moral leadership returning to, the fundamental values of the followers. Burns held that transformational leadership "ultimately becomes of human conduct and ethical and thus it has a transforming effect on both" (page 20). According to Bass (1999), transformational leadership refers to the leader moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests.

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Transformational leadership is an engaging relationship. The personality of the leader is of vital importance as the behavior of the leader can make the follower want to emulate the leader in areas of motivation and ethical behavior. Only those leaders are considered to be truly transformational who convert followers into leaders and increase awareness of what is right, good and important.

Transformational leaders make their followers more aware and increase acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group and more importantly they influence their followers to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group. Transformational leadership is unequivocally intertwined with virtue and moral character. However, whether the followers embrace or reject the morality depends on the strength of the transformational dyadic relationship. The strength and quality of relationship will result in social ethical choices and action that leaders and followers collectively pursue (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999).

Authentic transformational leaders are concerned about developing their followers into leaders. A study by Toor and Ofori (2009) found that ethical leadership was positively and significantly associated with transformational leadership but bore no correlations with transactional leadership. Previous research has also suggested that transformational leaders tend to exhibit ethical behaviors (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). A study by Banerji and Krishnan (2000) on the ethical preferences of transformational leaders showed that the relationship between

a leader's ethical preference and the characteristics of transformational leadership depends on the nature of the organization.

Leader-Follower Relation and Ethics

Transformational leadership seems conceptually similar to the process of developing a unique exchange relationship that is central to leader-member exchange (LMX). Past empirical studies indicate that LMX is positively related to transformational leadership, which in turn is positively related to terminal value system congruence between leader and follower (Krishnan, 2005). Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) claimed that congruence in values between leader and follower is the moral foundation of authentic transformational leadership.

The relationship between and followers' dependence identification with the leader. feelings and behavior according identification gives rise to values and beliefs in line with

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transformational leadership is mediated by personal Followers mould their beliefs, to those of the leader. Personal followers' desire to align their those of the leader (Shamir et al.,

1993). The main motivation for followers could be to obtain recognition and approval from their leaders. Such an approval may be obtained by emulating the ethical behaviors of leaders.

Groves and LaRocca (2012) found that follower beliefs in corporate social responsibility partially mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and follower extra effort, which was strongly associated with leadership effectiveness. Mulla and Krishnan (2012) studied whether transformational leaders raise followers to higher levels of morality and found that transformational leadership was positively related to followers' duty-orientation and indifference to rewards. Zhu (2006) found that transformational leadership had a positive effect on follower moral identity and follower moral decision intention.

Hypothesis 2. Transformational leadership enhances the strength of the relationship between leader ethics and follower ethics

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, van Lange, Ahmed and Lishner, 2003; Singh and Krishnan, 2008). Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) defined altruism as any behavior that benefits others regardless of the advantages such behavior could have for the benefactor. It could include helping others 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, Brown, Lewis, Luce, and Neuberg (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 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).

Altruism is focused on helping others, is full of moral intentions and is devoid of self-interest. 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).

Essentially, the authors argue that positive outputs could be achieved by a consistent concern for the other individual. Less preference for unethical behaviors would be an immediate outcome of such a consistent concern for the other individual. Therefore, it was hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3. Supervisor's preference for unethical behaviors mediates the relationship between supervisor's altruism and subordinate's preference for unethical behaviors.

Method

Data for the study were collected from managers across organizations operating in India. The companies were spread across domains such as education, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), information technology (IT), construction, telecom, financial logic behind studying ethical was to understand the various (Fritzsche, 1991).

The sample that was studied and subordinates. There were education sector companies, 8 pairs from IT sector, and 5 from advertising, construction, FMCG and the telecom sector. Of the 70 supervisors who responded, 43 were male and 27 were females. The survey was sent to 130 people, 83 of whom responded. Some of the responses were not complete (either the supervisor or the subordinate had not completed the survey) and hence had to be removed.

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services, and advertising. The decision making of managers ethical issues arising in business

consisted of 70 pairs of supervisors 31 pairs of respondents from the pairs from the Finance sector, 26

Krishnan's Transformational Leadership Questionnaire (Loganathan and Krishnan, 2010) developed for the Indian context (Singh and Krishnan, 2007) was used to measure transformational leadership. The subordinates of the supervisors were asked to answer the leadership questionnaire items regarding their supervisors. The questionnaire had six items to measure each of the five factors of transformational leadership (total of 30 items): idealized influence attributed, idealized influence behavior, inspiration, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Subordinates filled in the leadership questionnaire by indicating how frequently their supervisors had displayed the behavior described, using a five-point scale (1 = not at all; 2 = once in a while; 3 = sometimes; 4 = fairly often; 5 = frequently if not always).

Ethics was measured using the five scenarios used by Banerji and Krishnan (2000). The vignette approach was used because it replicates a real life problem that involves decision making and judgment on part of the individual or organization as a whole. Questionnaire-based surveys bring along their share of ambiguity. Vignettes provide the detail lacking in simple questions and thus tend to standardize the stimuli across respondents, with a resulting

improvement in the quality of the data collected.

The survey was administered to supervisor-subordinate dyads. The supervisor was provided with a questionnaire based on the vignettes pertaining to his or her ethics. The supervisors were requested to indicate their intended decision in a given scenario of the vignettes. Each vignette raised an ethical question and the supervisors were asked what action they would take in that scenario. The supervisors had to assess the scenarios and give likelihood of their displaying any were recorded using a three-would not; 2 = sometimes. The scenarios used were: physical environment; lying; According to Fritzche (1983), activities which marketers are same set of vignettes which were also administered to the subordinates to measure their ethical behavior.

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their responses based on the given behavior. The responses point scale (1 = definitely would; 3 = definitely would). bribery; endangering the personal gain; and favoritism. these scenarios are related to likely to be involved in. The were provided to the manager

In addition, the supervisors were given four more questions to measure their altruism: (1) I put others' best interests ahead of my own; (2) I do everything I can to serve others; (3) I sacrifice my own interests to meet others' needs; (4) I go above and beyond the call of duty to meet others' needs. The supervisors answered the four altruism items by indicating how frequently they had displayed the behavior described, using a five-point scale (1 = not at all; 2 = once in a while; 3 = sometimes; 4 = fairly often; 5 = frequently if not always).

Results

The descriptive statistics and correlations between all the variables are included in Table-I. The standardized Cronbach coefficient alpha for the four altruism items was 0.83. The standardized Cronbach coefficient alphas of

Table - I
Descriptive Statistics

N=70	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Altruism	3.19	.64												
2. Transformational Leadership	3.20	.63	†.20											
3. M-Bribery	2.07	.79	*-.28	.02										
4. M-Environment	2.50	.78	**-.36	.03	**-.32									
5. M-Lying	2.07	.89	***-.50	-.13	-.01	.05								
6. M-Gain	2.39	.73	-.05	.19	*.28	.09	*.25							
7. M-Favoritism	2.49	.70	-.08	.05	**-.39	***.46	-.08	.11						
8. E-Bribery	2.19	.77	*-.28	.03	***.41	.13	.15	***.39	*.24					
9. E-Environment	2.04	.91	***-.45	-.19	***.56	†.22	*.25	**-.33	***.33	***.47				
10. E-Lying	1.97	.92	*-.26	†-.22	.16	.14	*.29	-.01	**-.32	*.30	**-.38			
11. E-Gain	1.99	.83	*-.27	-.08	***.52	.17	.14	**-.32	*.29	***.42	***.48	.15		
12. E-Favoritism	2.19	.84	*-.26	-.15	***.42	*.26	.14	.14	**-.31	*.24	**-.37	†.23	***.42	

M-prefix = Supervisor. E-prefix = Subordinate. † = $p < .10$. * = $p < .05$. ** = $p < .01$. *** = $p < .001$.

the five transformational leadership factors were all above 0.8. The mean of the items comprising each factor was taken as the score for that factor of transformational leadership. The five transformational leadership factors were strongly and positively correlated to each other, the bivariate correlation between any two factors being not less than 0.79 ($p < 0.001$). The mean of the five factors was taken as the composite score for transformational leadership, and only this composite transformational leadership score was used in all analyses.

Supervisors' preference for each of the five unethical behaviors was positively correlated to subordinates' preference for the same unethical behavior ($p < .10$ for endangering the environment, $p < .05$ for others). This provided support for Hypothesis 1. Supervisors' altruism was positively correlated to transformational leadership ($p < .10$). Supervisors' altruism was significantly negatively correlated to their preference for three of the five unethical behaviors – bribery, endangering the physical environment, and lying. Supervisors' altruism was significantly negatively correlated to subordinates' preference for each of the five unethical behaviors.

To test for the moderating effect of transformational leadership on the relationship between supervisor ethics and subordinate transformational leadership variable was calculated. Each regressed on transformational supervisor ethics variable, and term was significant only in preference for bribery and bribery were significantly other when transformational when it was low. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported in the case of only bribery.

Transformational leaders make their followers more aware and increase acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group and more importantly they influence their followers to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group.

ethics, the simple product of and each supervisor ethics subordinate ethics variable was leadership, the corresponding the product term. The product the case of bribery. Supervisor's subordinate's preference for positively correlated to each leadership was high but not

Baron and Kenny (1986) was followed to test for the mediating effect of supervisor ethics in the relationship between supervisor altruism and subordinate ethics. To test for mediation, one should estimate the three following regression equations: first, regressing the mediator on the independent variable; second, regressing the dependent variable on the independent variable; and third, regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator. To establish mediation, the following conditions must hold: First, the independent variable must affect the mediator in the first equation; second, the independent variable must be shown to affect the dependent variable in the second equation; and third, the mediator must affect the dependent variable in the third equation. If these conditions all hold in the predicted direction, then the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable must be less in the third equation than in the second. Perfect mediation holds if the independent variable has no effect when the mediator is controlled.

Supervisor's preference for bribery fully mediated the relationship between supervisor's altruism and subordinate's preference for bribery. Supervisor's preference for endangering the environment or lying did not significantly affect subordinate's preference for the same unethical behavior in the third equation. Thus, third condition of mediation was not satisfied. Therefore, supervisor's preference for endangering the environment and lying did not mediate the relationship between supervisor's altruism and subordinate's preference for the same unethical behavior. Supervisor's altruism did not significantly affect supervisor's preference for personal gain or favoritism in the first equation. Thus, first condition of mediation was not satisfied. Therefore, supervisor's preference for personal gain and favoritism did not mediate the relationship between supervisor's altruism and subordinate's preference for the same unethical behavior. Thus, supervisor

ethics was a mediator in the case of bribery only. Thus, similar to Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 3 was also supported in the case of only bribery.

Regression analysis with the forward-selection technique (Judge, Griffiths, Hill, Lutkepohl, and Lee, 1985) was used to find out the best predictor of subordinates' preference for each unethical behavior. The forward-selection technique begins with no variables in the model. For each independent variable, it calculates F statistics that reflect the variable's contribution to the model if it is included. The variable that would produce the largest F statistic is added to the model. The evaluation process is repeated with the variables remaining outside the model. Once a variable stays. Thus, variables are added until no remaining variable Subordinate's preference for behaviors (bribery; endangering personal gain; and favoritism) against supervisor's altruism, and supervisor's preference for the forward option.

If the leader is altruistic, he or she will tend to display behaviors that arise out of concern for the recipient.

is entered into the model, it one by one to the model produces a significant F statistic. each of the five unethical the physical environment; lying; was separately modeled transformational leadership, that unethical behavior using

Supervisor's preference for bribery was the strongest predictor of subordinate's preference for bribery. Supervisor's altruism and transformational leadership did not explain significant additional variance than what was already explained by supervisor's preference for bribing.

Supervisor's altruism was the strongest predictor of subordinate's preference for endangering the environment. Transformational leadership and supervisor's preference for endangering the environment did not explain significant additional variance than what was already explained by supervisor's altruism.

Supervisor's preference for lying was the strongest predictor of subordinate's preference for lying. Supervisor's altruism and transformational leadership did not explain significant additional variance than what was already explained by supervisor's preference for lying.

Supervisor's preference for personal gain was the strongest predictor of subordinate's preference for personal gain. Supervisor's altruism explained significant additional variance, but transformational leadership did not explain significant additional variance than what was already explained by supervisor's preference for personal gain and supervisor's altruism.

Supervisor's preference for favoritism was the strongest predictor of subordinate's preference for favoritism. Supervisor's altruism explained significant additional variance, but transformational leadership did not explain significant additional variance than what was already explained by supervisor's preference for favoritism and supervisor's altruism. Thus, supervisor ethics were the strongest predictors of subordinate ethics, except in the case of endangering the environment.

Discussion

Results of this study show that supervisor's ethical preference and subordinate's ethical preference are positively correlated, thereby providing evidence for the role modeling effect. Among supervisor's ethical preference, supervisor's altruism, and transformational leadership, supervisor's ethical preference is the

strongest predictor of subordinate's ethical preference in the case of bribery, lying, personal gain, and favoritism. Supervisor's altruism is the strongest predictor of subordinate's ethical preference in the case of endangering the physical environment. Transformational leadership moderates the relationship between supervisor's ethical preference and subordinate's ethical preference in the case of bribery. Supervisor's preference for bribery and subordinate's preference for bribery are significantly positively correlated to each other when transformational leadership is high but not when it is low. In addition, supervisor's preference for bribery fully mediates the relationship between supervisor's altruism and subordinate's preference for bribery.

Managerial Implications

This study clearly demonstrates the importance of role modeling in encouraging ethical behavior in organizations. People will learn to be more ethical when they see their supervisors exhibiting ethical behaviors. Organization could start their ethical focus from the top and cascade it down the organizational hierarchy. Just as organizations try to develop cascading leadership and create a leadership pipeline, similarly, they could try to develop cascading ethics starting with the top management. When it comes to ethics, people will look at what others, particularly supervisors, do.

Much of the focus on ethics exhortations only. Preaching Our study shows that walking comes to ethics. What matters behaviors in organizations is role and not supervisor's altruism or Making the work place more set examples personally.

Just as organizations try to develop cascading leadership and create a leadership pipeline, similarly, they could try to develop cascading ethics starting with the top management.

has been at the level of oral ethics may not be very useful. the talk is important when it most to encouraging ethical modeling of ethical behaviors, transformational leadership. ethical requires supervisors to

Altruism of the supervisor does not seem to have much role in encouraging ethical behavior in organizations. Only in one of the five unethical behaviors studied, supervisor ethical preference mediates the relationship between supervisor altruism and follower ethical preference. It is possible that the relationship between supervisor ethical preference and follower ethical preference is so strong that the role of supervisor altruism becomes negligible.

Like supervisor altruism, transformational leadership also does not seem to have much role in encouraging ethical behavior in organizations. Only in one of the five unethical behaviors studied, transformational leadership moderates the effect of supervisor ethical preference on follower ethical preference. A moderating effect of transformational leadership was expected in the case of all five ethical behaviors, since the effect of supervisor ethical preference on subordinate ethical preference will be stronger if the supervisor is inspiring, intellectually stimulating, individually considerate, and is seen as charismatic. The lack of support for four of the five unethical behaviors could be because ethics and transformational leadership were unrelated in the sample studied.

The findings do not seem to support the popular notion that transformational leadership is related to ethics. It is possible that there is no simple linear relationship between transformational leadership and ethics. There is some evidence from this study in favor of a non-linear relationship, with the relationship with ethics existing only at extremely high and low transformational leadership values. Banerji and Krishnan (2000) found that the

relationships between ethics and transformational leadership varied by the organizations studied. The sample size in this study was not sufficient for doing organization-wise analysis.

Limitations

A clear limitation of the study is the sample size of 70 supervisor-subordinate dyads. The study needs to be replicated with larger samples. In addition, the measurement of ethical preference through the scenario based questionnaire was done on a three-point scale; future researchers could use a five-point scale and check if they get a more accurate measure of ethics.

Another limitation of the study could be the fact that this study captured preference for unethical behavior and not actual unethical behaviors. Measuring actual unethical behaviors should throw better light on the relationship between ethics and other variables.

Conclusion

This study was started with the question as to what matters most in promoting ethics among employees in organizations. The role of ethical preferences, and was analyzed. This study preference is the strongest preference in the case of favoritism. The importance by example is crucial in organizations. As more studies modeling for ethics, there will be greater success in making organizations more ethical in future.

The importance of role modeling and leading by example is crucial in encouraging ethical behaviors in organizations.

manager's altruism, manager's transformational leadership showed that supervisor's ethical predictor of subordinate's ethical bribery, lying, personal gain, and of role modeling and leading encouraging ethical behaviors in establish the importance of role

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