

A Rational Perspective of Servant Leadership: Towards a Paradigm Shift in Servant Leader Motivation

American Business Review
May 2024, Vol.27(1) 326 - 348
© The Authors 2024, [CC BY-NC](#)
ISSN: 2689-8810 (Online)
ISSN: 0743-2348 (Print)

Kevin J. Hurt^a and Ross Nolan^b

<https://doi.org/10.37625/abr.27.1.326-348>

ABSTRACT

Advocates of servant leadership maintain that altruism is the foundational ethic fueling the success of the servant leader. Thus, the foremost requirement of a servant leader is the possession of a concern for others above and beyond his or herself. Researchers have largely neglected the possibility that servant leaders may be, at least partially, motivated by self-interest. We challenge the current foundational ethic attributed with servant leadership and put forth a new ethical perspective. Reviewing four motivational states, from purely other-centered to purely self-centered, we introduce a conceptual model and argue that the proper ethic to ascribe with servant leadership is a dual motivational perspective of rational self-interest and agapao love. A dual motivational perspective allows the servant leader to avoid the negative consequences of the self-sacrificial, altruistic motivation while maintaining the positive, pro-social behaviors that improve organizational outcomes associated with servant leadership.

KEYWORDS

Servant Leadership, Altruism, Rational Self-Interest

INTRODUCTION

Proponents of servant leadership maintain that the other-centered motivations of the servant leader are altruistic (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Sendjaya, et al., 2008; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015), contending that the servant leader is not motivated by self-interest, but rather by a heartfelt desire to serve others (Greenleaf, 1970; Keith, 2012). Although the literature on servant leadership often uses altruism to describe the servant leader's moral grounding (Barbuto, et al., 2014; Beck, 2014; Page & Wong, 2000), it rarely gives a complete definition of the term and does not address the full implications of altruism as an ethical principal. Altruism was first introduced by Auguste Comte in the 1830s to refer to the totality of other-regarding instincts in people (Dixon, 2018). As the construct has evolved, altruism has been used to refer to an actor's intentions (i.e., motivation to help others for their own sake), behaviors (i.e. any action that benefits others normally with the condition that there is some cost to the actor), and ideology (i.e., happiness of others is seen as the principal goal of the actor) (Dixon, 2018). Though they have remained unspecified, all three perspectives have been utilized in the servant leadership literature. The behavioral perspective defines altruistic acts as those that confer economic benefits to others yet are costly to self (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003). However, when servant leaders have espoused this perspective, they have largely ignored the sacrificial element. In its totality, altruism, as opposed to synonymous expressions that denote caring about others, contains the additional meaning of someone who sacrifices for another in a way that causes the self some form of

^a Columbus State University, Georgia, U.S.A

^b United States Army

Corresponding Author:

Hurt (hurt_kevin@columbusstate.edu)

personal harm or self-destructive behaviors that bestows benefits on others (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; Roth, 2005; Wilson, 1975).

Individuals who truly follow the pure altruistic ethic not only selflessly care about the well-being of others, they follow the ethic of, “love your neighbor, even at some cost to yourself” (Murphy, 2006; Ozinga, 1999). This is problematic for the field of servant leadership because an altruistic motivational requirement may limit the number of leaders who would otherwise be open to considering adopting a servant leadership style. Furthermore, it may cause negative consequences for those who fully adopt the altruistic ethic as an overemphasis on the benefits to others may shift a leader’s focus away from organizational goals, or lead to a state of mental depletion and subsequent disengagement from leadership roles (Haynes, et al., 2015; Liao, et al., 2021). Moreover, many leaders could develop poor views of servant leadership simply because the expression itself is paradoxical and the negative connotations often associated with the term servant (Heyler & Martin, 2018; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Finally, leaders may abandon servant leadership before giving it thoughtful consideration simply because “it may imply softness and weakness, more appropriate for serving staff than for leaders” (Van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1251).

Servant leadership focuses on multiple stakeholders (Lemoine, et al., 2019) and clearly emphasizes the importance and expectation placed upon servant leaders to prioritize the needs and interests of followers above their own (Ehrhart, 2004; Greenleaf, 1977; Laub, 1999). An altruistic mindset is considered “fundamental to the servant leadership construct” (Beck, 2014, p. 310). This fundamental requirement implies that servant leaders must sacrifice their own interests for the sake of others. For some servant leaders, the constant definitional demand to place subordinates interests above their own leads to exhaustion and withdrawal (Liao, et al., 2021). Servant leadership defines growth in terms of the individual followers (Beck, 2014; Giambatista, et al., 2020), but critics argue that leaders are hired to focus on the growth of the organization (Andersen, 2009). Thus, placing all other interests (i.e., organization, customers, and self) as secondary concerns may threaten a leader’s ability to get the job done (Andersen, 2009). The servant leader, like any employee in the organization, has needs and interests too and these are either ignored in the literature; or at best, relegated to a “peripheral category” along with the needs of the organization and the customers they serve (Keith, 2012; Laub, 2004; Patterson, 2003). In addition to prioritizing the growth and development of subordinates, personal growth should also be paramount as long-term leader success requires a constant development of their own knowledge, skills, and abilities (Bennis, 1989; Karp, 2014). We contend that it is essential for leaders to find a balance in their organizational and personal roles, which requires a dual focus on others (i.e., stakeholders) and self.

The servant leader is evidently motivated to a great extent by serving the best interests of their subordinates, but it is unrealistic, perhaps even immoral, to expect a leader to completely ignore the fact that they too have genuine, bona fide needs and interests that they may legitimately serve without acting in a purely selfish manner (Avolio & Locke, 2002; Price, 2008; Rand, 1964). Clearly, the leader who is centrally motivated only by selfish desires will not meet Greenleaf’s definition of a servant leader, which states that the servant leader is someone who, “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve,” and then, “conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 15). However, even scholars who consider selfishness a virtue would rebuke a leader acting on purely irrational selfish desires (Harsanyi, 1977; Rand, 1964). Greenleaf (1970) differentiates a servant leader from someone who wants to lead first, “perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions”. Yet, it is important to recognize that a servant leader may also begin with a desire to lead, and then make a conscious choice to serve the needs of their subordinates (Van Dierendonck, 2011). What is required is that servant-leaders combine leading and serving, not merely focus on serving behaviors (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

Outside of the servant leadership domain, Haynes, et al., (2015) contend that altruism in its purest sense may hurt organizational performance. Within the field of servant leadership, scholars have maintained that altruism is the proper ethical foundation of servant leadership (Beck, 2014; Patterson, 2003; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). However, researchers have not fully considered situations in which the leader acts in a purely altruistic manner to the extent that they cause harm to their own interests; nor have they considered whether leaders motivated by pure altruism positively or negatively impact organizational outcomes. Additionally, researchers have not considered whether self-interest is a potential motivating influence of servant leaders. Instead, researchers have portrayed the servant leader as an individual that is completely selfless and wholly motivated altruistically (De Clercq, et al., 2014; Keith, 2012; Patterson, 2003; Spears, 1996). Yet, this may be a precarious fallacy. To date, three studies have suggested that servant leader's may not be completely selfless (Hurt & Heath, 2017; Russell, 2016; Russell, et al., 2017). Additionally, the classic writings of Adam Smith (1776) and the modern works of some scholars suggest that there are parallels between self-interest and the end states associated with altruistic motives (Jensen, 1994; Jensen & Meckling, 1994). Finally, researchers have noted that moral leaders experience a high degree of unity between their sense of morality toward others and themselves (Frimer & Walker, 2009; Hardy & Carlo, 2011). Given the moral identity and foundation of servant leaders (Graham, 1991; Lemoine, et al., 2019; Sun, 2018), it is reasonable to expect them to be motivated to serve both communal and personal interests. Yet, little is known about servant leaders' motives as it pertains to their own interests. Russell (2016) has suggested that the practice of servant leadership has secondary benefits to the leader (e.g., affirmation of legitimate power). However, our understanding of servant leader motivation is incomplete; thus, it is important for researchers to continue assessing other factors that inspire leaders to make service a paramount component of their leadership style. Given that the full range of altruism entails elements of harmful self-sacrifice, it may be too soon to claim that altruism is the foundational motivation principle grounding servant leadership theory. Other potential motivations for the servant leader exist that do not require an altruistic ethic of self-sacrifice or self-damage (e.g., agapao love). As such, leaders might be more willing to adopt a servant leadership style if there is an acknowledgement that they may still lead as servants without actively damaging or denying their own interests.

Accordingly, the major goals of this paper are as follows. First, we analyze four motivational orientations, each with different levels of focus on the self and the other and describe how each of these is related to servant leadership. From purely other-centered to purely self-centered, these motivations are altruism, agapao love, rational self-interest, and selfishness. By examining the literature, we develop a model and theory-based propositions that depict how these motivational orientations influence the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance. Our model is illustrated in Figure 1. We acknowledge that servant leadership is positively associated with altruistic tendencies; however, we challenge both the notion that altruism is the primary motivation of the servant leader, and that pure altruism positively influences the relationship between servant leadership and organizational outcomes. We deviate from the commonly held perspective that the servant leader is completely selfless and altruistic and contend that servant leaders focus on others out of an unselfish moral love (i.e., agapao), while simultaneously focusing on rational self-interests. We further assert that the dual focus on others and self is the most ethical and ideal motivational orientation for servant leaders and should yield optimum benefits to all parties (i.e., others, self, the organization, and its customers). Finally, we elaborate on the implications of our study and provide a more targeted direction for future research in this area.

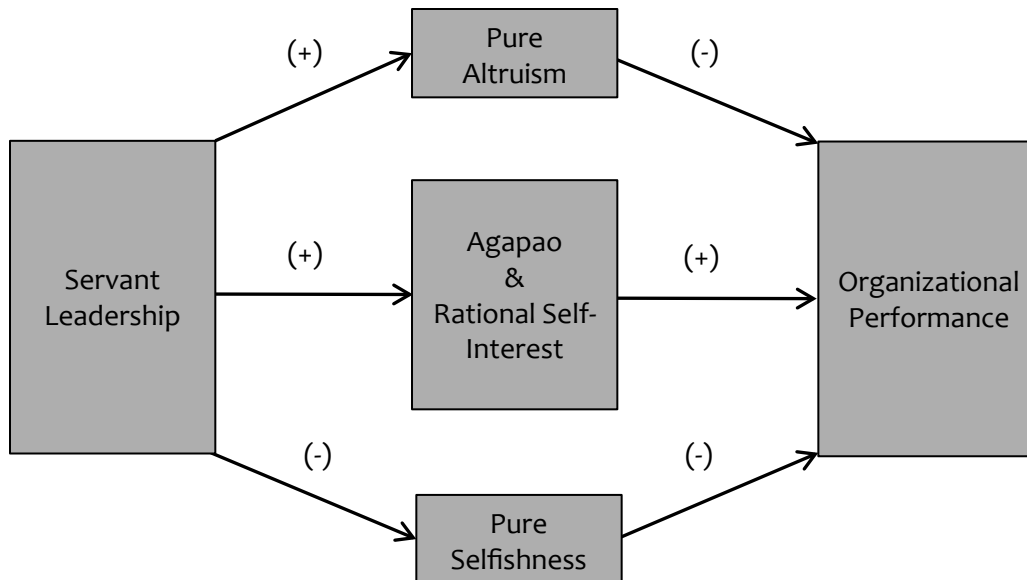


Figure 1. Mediating Model of Motivations on the Relationship Between Servant Leadership and Organizational Performance

THEORY AND PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

Servant leadership theory is credited to the writings of Robert Greenleaf (Greenleaf, 1970, 1972, 1974), who believed that a great leader was seen as a servant first. From Greenleaf's perspective, proper leadership materializes from one whose most important motivation is a profound and sincere desire to serve or help others (Spears, 2004). Advocates of servant leadership depict the servant leader as one whose mission in life is not achievement for his or her own self, but rather whose mission is to meet the needs of others, suggesting that it is in this latter mission that the servant leader finds meaning in life (Keith, 2012). This motivational orientation, regarded as a moral or ethical component of servant leadership, is considered the most influential distinguishing factor separating servant leadership from other similar leadership theories (Graham, 1991; Stone, et al., 2004; Ukeni, 2021).

SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND ALTRUISM

When Greenleaf initially coined the term servant leadership, he emphasized that the servant leader is motivated first by service and then is called to lead (Greenleaf, 1970). As a result, subsequent conceptualizations of servant leadership theory have attributed an altruistic motivational requirement to the servant leader (Beck, 2014; Patterson, 2003; Reed, et al., 2011). Scholars have drawn parallels between the origins of servant leadership and numerous religious doctrines because both are rooted in acts of servitude and service is considered a fundamental universal value (Keith, 2012; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Sendjaya, et al. (2008) assert that servant leadership is an altruistic leadership style and that leaders are driven to serve by spiritual insights and humility. They support that assertion by referencing the life of Jesus Christ as the highest form of servant leadership since Christ was called to make the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of others (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Sendjaya, et al., 2008). In general, servant leadership scholars appear to have reached an accord that altruism is foundational to servant leadership, commonly defining altruism as behavior that is aimed at benefiting another person (Beck, 2014; Patterson, 2003; Van Dierendonck, 2011; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). Since the servant leader's primary purpose is to promote the best interests of others, their actions are considered altruistic (Northouse, 1997). Others have linked altruism with servant leadership without

providing a definition for altruism (Liden, et al., 2008). Finally, as scholars have moved to develop measurement instruments of servant leadership, they have all included some aspect of altruism as a tenet of the construct (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Dennis & Bocarnea, 2005; Liden, et al., 2008; Reed, et al., 2011; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). A few servant leadership scholars have noted that an altruistic condition of servant leadership may require sacrifice on behalf of the leader (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Patterson, 2003; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015) but with one exception (see Reed, et al., 2011) sacrifice by the servant leader has been omitted from the definition of altruism in servant leadership.

As noted, a comprehensive definition of altruism is seldom, if ever, provided in the servant leadership literature. A *simple* dictionary definition of altruism is, “devotion to the welfare of others, regard for others, as a principle of action; opposed to ego or selfishness” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). This definition of altruism is similar to the definition used by Laub (2004) to describe an altruistic calling, which he defined as “the motivation of leaders to put others’ needs and interests ahead of their own” (p. 119), and to the definition used by Beck (2014), which defines altruism as “behavior that is aimed at benefitting another person” (p. 301). These commonly used definitions of altruism do not consider the full range of altruism but have several close synonyms such as generosity, caring, or kindness.

A more complete definition of the pure nature of what is meant by altruism contains an additional element, which is that the motivation to help others causes some sort of action that causes harm on the individual (i.e., self) (Monroe, 1994). Roth (2005) defines the *ethical* principle of altruism (rather than a *simple* definition of the word) as, “behavior meant to benefit others rather than, or at the expense of, oneself” (p. 46). Locke and Woiceshyn’s (1995) definition of the ethic of what they call “secular altruism” is very similar. They define secular altruism as a philosophy that “required the sacrifice of one’s desires in the name of duty, not duty to anyone or for anything but as an end in itself” (p. 407). They provide historical examples of this phenomenon, from Plato’s calling on the sacrifice of one’s self to the city state, to Communism’s calling on individuals to sacrifice themselves in the name of the proletariat, and the Nazi’s requirement to sacrifice the self to the fatherland. Whatever the moral end of the individual’s self-sacrifice was, secular altruism denied the idea that the individual had a right to have his or her own self-interest. Instead, the individual was morally required to sacrifice his or her own interests to some other person or other entity.

Using the above definitions there are two similar, but distinct aspects of the motivations and actions associated with altruism. The first is the truly heartfelt, unselfish desire to care for the needs of others. Arguably, this is the most common colloquial understanding of the term, and is what researchers of servant leadership generally mean when they are defining altruism as a central motivation of the servant leader (Keith, 2012; Patterson, 2003). Using this understanding of altruism, however, fails to consider the full implications of what altruism means and how its motivations determine actions. The other nature of altruism relates to that aspect which requires, as an ethical principle, self-sacrifice on the part of an individual to serve some other interest in a way that disregards his or her own (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996; Packard, 2012; Roth, 2005). It requires the individual to not just sacrifice their interests, but denies that they have legitimate interests at all (Locke & Woiceshyn, 1995). A person fully following the altruist ethic must deny that their personal interests are legitimate (Ayn Rand Institute, 2018). Any definition of altruism that fails to consider its self-sacrificial nature is missing a key element of the ethical component of the word. Therefore, we differentiate colloquial definitions of altruism (meaning caring for others) from pure altruism, which considers the self-sacrificial nature of the construct. Individuals acting with the pure altruistic motivation operate for the benefit of others in ways that can be reasonably expected to cause harm to his or her self (Dill, et al., 2014; Oakley, et al., 2011). Asking leaders to behave altruistically in its purest sense, i.e., to be perfect

agents who make decisions without regard for their own concern, is unethical; and, doing so does not guarantee that a leader's actions will be moral (Ciulla, 2004; Jensen, 1994).

There is an auxiliary possibility that altruistic motivation may be separated from altruistic action. An individual may possibly be motivated by purely selfish desires to act in ways perceived by others to be altruistic. For example, a child who assumes greater than her share of familial responsibilities may be unconsciously attempting to control his or her siblings through the creation of guilt feelings in them (Berofsky, 2011). Here, the action is altruistic (the child sacrifices her time for the benefit of her siblings), but the motivation for doing so may be, even subconsciously, completely self-serving (receiving something in return from her siblings.) Generally, altruism is a motivation, and not necessarily action (Berofsky, 2011). We should be especially careful to consider the motivations since understanding motives allows one to predict how another person is likely to behave in the future (Wilson, 1992). However, those motivations, although defined by "intent, not outcome" (Berofsky, 2011, p. 264), may have detrimental effects on both the altruist and the person who they are attempting to benefit, since, "the actions of an altruistic agent may backfire" (Berofsky, 2011, p. 264).

PURE ALTRUISM AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: SELF-DESTRUCTIVE SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Pure altruism can have potentially negative consequences for individuals and for organizations (Kaufman & Jauk, 2020). In his book, *Give and Take*, Adam Grant (2013) identifies three types of people, i.e., givers, takers, and reciprocators. Takers generally try to take more value than they give, givers tend to give more value than they take, and reciprocators try to keep the value tradeoff balanced. Through extensive research, Grant (2013) concludes that givers are both the most successful and least successful people. What differentiates the two outcomes among givers is whether they give intelligently. According to Grant (2013), "since givers tend to put other's interests ahead of their own, they often help others at the expense of their own well-being" (p. 161). The selfless giver acts with disregard for their own interests, acting in ways that are injurious to the self, making it very similar to Locke and Woiceshyn's (1995) secular altruism.

This nature of pure altruism, where one seeks the best interests of the other in a way that damages their own best interest is different from a simple dictionary definition or colloquial understanding of altruism as normally used in servant leadership literature, and is much closer to what Oakley, et al. (2011) called pathological altruism. They define the pathological altruist as, "a person who sincerely engages in what he or she intends to be altruistic acts, but who harms the very person or group he or she is trying to help, often in unanticipated fashion; or harms others; to irrationally become a victim of his or her own altruistic actions" (Oakley, et al., 2011, p. 4). The latter portion of that definition is synonymous with our definition of pure altruism: that it makes the individual the victim of his or her own altruistic motivations. The negative consequences suffered by the recipient of the altruistic action are generally unintended. The pathological altruist genuinely wants to help people, but, as Burtoon (2011) points out, believing that you are acting in the best interests' of another is not synonymous with acting in another's best interests. No matter how much the pathological altruist feels that they are helping others, in all likelihood they may be doing harm to themselves, their organizations, and even their subordinates who they are altruistically attempting to help.

Generally, researchers have stayed away from studying the potentially negative impacts of this definition of altruism, partly because of, "fear that such knowledge might be used to discount the importance of altruism," which is also partly due to the fact that, "there has been a long history in science of avoiding paradigm-shifting approaches" (Oakley, et al., 2011, p. 10409). Studying only the simple, narrow definition of altruism has shown that it leads to increased pro-social behaviors and organizational citizenship behaviors that are linked to improved organizational outcomes (Emmerik et al., 2005). However, a growing body of evidence has shown that when altruism is exercised to

extremes, it can lead to very negative outcomes. Examples in the social science research include inefficient government regulations that, although well meaning, end up hurting the same people they are trying to help (Rubin, 2014). Distinguished American economist, Walter Williams, contends that numerous government anti-poverty programs (e.g., public education, minimum wage, government licensing, the Davis-Bacon Act) that were intended to reduce poverty, in fact, had the opposite effect with disastrous results, particularly for minority groups (Free-to-Choose-Network, 2013). Likewise, pathological altruism was one of the public policy motivators that led to the disastrous subprime mortgage crisis in the United States (Oakley, 2013). This definition of altruism, which is very similar to our definition of pure altruism, can also lead to disastrous impacts on leaders, their subordinates, and their organizations despite the other-centered motivation of the action.

One of the primary reasons that this type of altruism can lead to negative organizational outcomes is that it often leads to burnout (Grant, 2013; Kartman, 1983). Burnout is defined as, “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, [and] reduced personal accomplishment” (Schepman & Zarate, 2008, p. 216). Altruism can lead to burnout in people who give too much because, selfless giving, in the absence of self-preservation instincts, can easily become overwhelming (Grant, 2013). People who are overwhelmed in their work have shown signs of burnout and have exhibited withdrawal behaviors and negative employee outcomes such as, absenteeism, turnover, and serious health complaints (Emmerik et al., 2005). A review of the literature in the field of counseling reveals several negative consequences of ignoring one’s self interest (i.e., acts of pure altruism) which include, among other things, frustration, job dissatisfaction, stress-related health problems, lowered work productivity, job withdrawal, inability to cope with occupational stress, interpersonal conflict, apathy, burnout, and role ambiguity (Flynn & Black, 2011; Liao, et al., 2021). This phenomenon has been especially apparent among people in the caregiving profession. Klimecki and Singer (2011) identified compassion fatigue among people in the care giving profession as a form of pathological altruism. “Compassion fatigue is altruistic: caregivers with compassion fatigue were initially motivated by the pro-social aim of alleviating the suffering of others by means of their empathetic care” (Klimecki & Singer, 2011, p. 369). They cite evidence from multiple sources that compassion fatigue is associated with everything from feelings of callousness, emotional exhaustion, and feelings of depression, which in turn leads them to exhibit less pro-social behavior.

This lack of concern for the self also has been associated with detrimental effects on mental health (Emmerik et al., 2005; Helgeson & Fritz, 1999; Klimecki & Singer, 2011). Helgeson and Fritz (1999) distinguished unmitigated communion, defined as those who, subjugate their own needs to the needs of others, and who, help others even at their own expense, from communion and empathy (which does not exclude a concern for the self). They found that unmitigated communion was associated with decreased self-esteem and depression. We can therefore expect that leaders who give at the expense of and with complete disregard to their own interests will be less able to effectively help their employees, less able to achieve organizational goals, and less able to perform their jobs effectively. Thus, the following proposition is put forth:

Proposition 1: Pure altruism as a leader motivation negatively mediates the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance.

PURE SELFISHNESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: PSEUDO-SERVANT LEADERSHIP

On the opposite end of the motivation spectrum from pure altruism is pure selfishness, which is rarely considered a beneficial strategy, particularly in group settings (Eldakar & Wilson, 2008; Stebbins, 1981). A common definition of selfishness is, “caring chiefly for oneself or one’s own interests, regardless of others... characterized by concern only for oneself” (Braham, 1996, p. 652). The key point in this

definition is that the individual does not take any consideration into account other than himself or herself. The purely selfish individual has no concern for any interest other than his or her own narrow, usually short-term interests. Such leaders are guided by one's emotional whims or pleasure at the moment (Rand, 1964). This definition describes selfishness that is devoid of rational calculation or concern for second and third order effects of their actions. Under this definition, the selfish leader acts in a way that is actively injurious to other interests, just as long as the leader can foresee some benefit for his or herself, regardless of the damage it causes to others (Locke & Woiceshyn, 1995). This is similar to the ethic of cynical egoism, which states that, "one should do whatever one feels like, thus rejecting any objective standard for the good" (Locke & Woiceshyn, 1995, p. 405-406). A leader with this moral will work only towards what they believe to be their own interests, which is, gratifying one's desires, maximizing one's personal utilities, indulging one's emotions, or satisfying one's wishes (Locke & Woiceshyn, 1995). Purely selfish leaders are those who are narcissistic, toxic, destructive, egocentric, and unethical (Doty & Fenlason, 2013; Padilla, et al., 2007; Southard, et al., 2015). Under any definition of servant leadership, the purely self-centered leader is the antithesis of what Greenleaf described.

The personality and leadership style of a leader in an organization affects organizational outcomes in part by influencing the attitudes of employees (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Peterson, et al. (2012) specifically found that the personality trait of narcissism (which is associated with pure selfishness) in CEOs was negatively associated with firm performance. These leaders alienate their followers since their excessive motivation for power will cause them to use that power in an impulsively aggressive manner for self-aggrandizing purpose, to the detriment of their subordinates and organizations (House & Aditya, 1997). These toxic behavioral traits are also associated with higher rates of theft, sabotage, psychological distress, and organizational failure (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). While such leaders do sometimes create positive organizational outcomes in the short-term, the long-term effects on the organization and on the individuals within it are generally negative (Doty & Fenlason, 2013). Thus, we put forth the following proposition.

Proposition 2: Pure selfishness as a leader motivation negatively mediates the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance.

AGAPAO LOVE, RATIONAL SELF-INTEREST, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: RATIONAL SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Purely altruistic and purely selfish leaders are polar extremes of the motivational spectrum. If a purely selfish or purely altruistic leader can be expected to cause negative organizational outcomes, a theoretical ideal for servant leaders must exist somewhere between those two motivational extremes. In fact, Haynes, et al., (2015) suggest that a balance between self-interest and concern for others may be the best approach. In this theoretical ideal, the leader should realize the best organizational outcomes associated with servant leadership without suffering the negative effects from excessive or pathologically altruistic behaviors. We contend that this ideal motivational state occurs as an interaction between *agapao* love and rational self-interest.

AGAPAO LOVE

There are many similar and closely-related forms of other-directed behaviors that are often confused with altruism (e.g. kindness, generosity, caring, cooperating, sharing, loving, benevolence) that capture what is meant when a servant leader chooses to serve the best interests of the led over their own self-interest (Laub, 2004; Monroe, 1994). Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015) used the

expression “compassionate love” to describe this nature of the servant leader. They defined compassionate love as “doing good with a clear motivation of concern for the followers, acts of kindness that are intended for the follower’s benefit not for the leader’s benefit (such as looking good)” (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015, p. 121). Furthermore, they likened this to the Greek word *agapao*, which is considered a moral, unselfish love centered on the welfare of others (Seipp, 2021; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015; Winston, 2002). A person who leads with *agapao* love focuses first on the individual employee, then on the employee’s talents, and lastly on how this may benefit the organization (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). This definition provides a greater understanding of the motives and behaviors of other people, allowing for more constructive behavior and a stronger focus on the needs of others, which can be connected with servant leadership (Russell & Stone, 2002; Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). This motivation to genuinely care about the best interests of others does not necessarily require that the leader give in a self-sacrificial manner. Rather, the leader who is inspired by *agapao* love authentically cares deeply for the well-being and professional advancement of their employees, places a high personal value on their interests, provides for their legitimate needs, and creates a culture where employees feel psychologically empowered so that they can accomplish their tasks (Stone, et al., 2004; Winston, 2002; Zorlu, et al., 2021).

Agapao, therefore, is a potentially better word to use to describe a primary motivator of servant leaders. It lacks the self-sacrificing connotation of altruism while still capturing the all-encompassing, deeply felt compassion that one person can feel for another. In the Greek language, there are five distinct words for love: *storge*, or familial love; *epithymia*, or desire (meaning sexual desire); *philia*, or close friendship or family relations; *eros*, or erotic love; and finally, *agape*, or the biblical meaning of love (Lindberg, 2008). *Agape* and *agapao* love are the words most associated with the complete love for people found in the Holy Bible. Although the two words are conjugations of the same root word, the distinction between the two in terms of how they are used in the Bible shows significant differences in connotative meaning. *Agape* is only used to describe the love of God which is, “self-sacrificing love that references total commitment even unto death” (Thomas, 2014, p. 30). On the other hand, *agapao* love is a “moral love that does the right thing at the right time for the right reason; it is the foundation of relationships between people and produces motivation at the heart level, even inspiration” (Thomas, 2014, p. 30). Christians are called to have *agapao* love for each other, which is a human love that mirrors God’s love, but differs from God’s love (Thomas, 2014). Specifically, *agapao* is distinctly different from altruism in the degree of sacrifice it expects of people.

Again, we see a difference between a level of caring for others that is pathological (that causes harm to one or both parties) and a love that, although it does not start with a desire for benefit to the self, allows for gain (Ayers, 2008), creating a situation in which both the leader and their subordinates have the ability to advance their best interests. The leader inspired and motivated by *agapao* love will lead in a way that creates “optimal human functioning, sense of community and meaningfulness” (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015, p. 127). It is important, then, to understand where the motivation for the individual’s self-interest comes from, how it can be compatible with servant leadership, and what distinguishes it from pure selfishness.

RATIONAL SELF-INTEREST

Rational self-interest is defined as “thinking and acting in a manner that is expected to lead to an optimal or maximum result for a person on the basis of a consideration of the person’s values and risk preferences” (Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004, p. 946). Many behavioral and economic theories have been developed around the belief that individuals are rational decision-makers acting in such a way that maximizes their self-interests (Miller, 1999; Miyamura, 2020; Sears & Funk, 1991; Staw, 1984); while simultaneously promoting the welfare of others in society (Friedman & Friedman, 1990; Smith, 1776).

The most comprehensive description of the principle of rational self-interest comes from the philosophical writings of Ayn Rand. In her book *The Virtue of Selfishness*, Rand (1964) articulates her moral philosophy, which is based on the idea that individuals have an ethical right to work towards their own best interests, which means that every individual has a right to exist for his or her own sake. Furthermore, man's highest moral purpose is to achieve his own rational happiness without sacrificing himself for others or asking others to sacrifice themselves for him. Accordingly, "man's life is the standard of value- and his own life is the ethical purpose of every individual man" (Rand, 1964, p. 27).

Rational thought allows a person to decide what is in their own best interest and what will achieve for them their own survival and happiness. Subsequent descriptions of rationality have largely agreed with Rand's perspective that a person is largely entitled to his or her own interests adding that these should be guided by rules of logic (Shafir & LeBoeuf, 2002). Since a person has the capacity to reason, "that which is proper to the life of the rational being is the good; that which negates, opposes or destroys it is the evil" (Rand, 1964, p. 25). A person must first objectively understand what is in their best long-term interests. Rand believed that when an individual only works to serve their short-term, hedonistic desires they are working counter to their actual rational interests. People who only work to serve their own short-term, selfish interests, "live life with impunity on the range of the moment, like an animal, a playboy, or a thug" (Rand, 1964, p. 26) which Rand believes is hedonistic. In this manner, rational self-interest is different from pure selfishness as described above. A purely selfish individual is one who tries to take all they can from others to satisfy what they feel to be their own short-term interests, but these acts are immoral in Rand's system of ethics. They are serving immediate self-indulgent wants, but in doing so damage their long-term interests as well as the interests of others.

Individuals should be entitled to pursue interests according to their values (Friedman & Friedman, 1990; Rand, 1963). The person who relies on rational principles places things they value, or want to maintain for their own best interest, onto a hierarchy. Thereafter, they make rational decisions based on the extent to which those things are valued. If a person gives up something they value to gain something they value more, this is not a sacrifice; rather, it is a completely rational tradeoff that works within a person's own best interest (Rand, 1964). For example, if an individual were to turn down a promotion that required an overseas assignment because they hold time with their family as a higher value, this is not a sacrifice. This person made a rationally self-interested choice based on his or her own personal values. They traded something they value (professional advancement) for something they value more (time spent with their family). A sacrifice is "the surrender of a greater value for the sake of a lesser value or a non-value" (Rand, 1964, p. 50). To highlight the difference, Rand uses the example of a husband who sells everything he owns to save his wife from an illness. This is not an altruistic sacrifice because the husband values his wife above the material possessions he could get for that money. A sacrifice, according to Rand, would be if the husband traded his wife's life to save ten other people. Since he values his wife above those ten other people, trading his wife (his highest value) for other people (a lower value) would be an altruistic sacrifice. For this reason, the ethic of altruism may be problematic because it attempts to morally require an individual to sacrifice their interests for someone else's (Rand, 1964; Schwartz, 1993). In its purest sense, altruism denies that the individual may legitimately pursue his or her own interests. Yet, ironically, for an altruistic act to occur, there must be something in it for the altruist (Schwartz, 1993).

Rand does not simply allow that a person can legitimately define anything as the highest value, and then define any efforts to preserve or serve that value as legitimate rational self-interest. Rand also expects that values must be evaluated on this hierarchy in a way that meets the rational standard of what she calls the objectivist ethics, which means placing the highest value on life and happiness (Rand, 1964). The pure altruist, therefore, may define helping others as their highest value, even above their own self-preservation, but this would not be rational by Rand's definition since it ignores the

individuals legitimate personal interests. A purely selfish individual, on the other hand, seeks to better themselves at the expense of others. This too violates Rand's conception of rationality because she does not believe that any legitimate concern can be served by trying to force another person to sacrifice their interests on behalf of someone else. This ethic is best summarized by the oath of John Galt, the hero of Rand's book entitled *Atlas Shrugged*: "I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine" (Rand, 1963, p. 159). Both purely altruistic sacrifice and purely selfish actions, as we have defined them, violate this oath. In this sense, there is nothing in this ethical system that prohibits an individual from making a rational decision to engage in acts that serve others such as philanthropy (Green & Fox, 2007). De Dreu (2006) similarly contends that individuals can have a simultaneous concern for self and others. The standard is to determine whether serving others is part of a rational calculation that does not cause damage to either actor.

A rational hierarchy of values will place an individual's self-preservation and the concerns of their family as their highest values. A leader following this ethic will be one who does not seek to aggrandize his or her self by selfishly attempting to get other people to sacrifice their own highest values for them. Neither will they altruistically nor needlessly sacrifice their legitimate, personal interests for others. Since individuals differ in the degree to which they focus on self-interest (Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004), this allows for a middle ground in business where a leader is free to consider a wide range of values, from personal advancement and organizational goals, to service, leader development, and the growth of their employees.

An individual who meets the definition of a servant leader, one who seeks to serve the best interests of those they lead, can be expected to place their followers' interests near the top of their values hierarchy, while still acting rationally under Rand's definition. A servant leader will, of course, have other concerns; however, they do not serve with the sole primary focus on results, but also on service itself (Stone, et al., 2004). If a servant leader, for example, makes a choice to spend time professionally developing his or her junior managers rather than take time for themselves, this is not a sacrifice, but a rationally self-interested choice motivated by *agapao* love that benefits both parties. We can anticipate that the leader who rationally considers their interests and their values, and who is inspired by *agapao* love, will be the one expected to realize the best outcomes that are associated with servant leadership. A leader who is inspired by *agapao* love will choose to place a relatively higher value on their subordinates. By rationally placing the needs of subordinates towards the top of the values hierarchy, servant leaders are likely to see increased organizational performance since leaders who make a deliberate choice to focus on others demonstrate humility, and their humility stimulates strong relationships with followers, encouraging them to become fully engaged in their work (Liden, et al., 2014). Therefore, the interaction of *agapao* love and rational self-interest may be the ideal leader motivation to optimize the positive organizational outcomes associated with servant leadership. Figure 2 shows a graphical depiction of this ideal motivational state. This theory rejects the idea that the pro-social behaviors that contribute to increased organizational outcomes must be caused by leader behavior that is self-injurious, which is consistent with research on self-interest and other orientation (De Dreu, 2006; Goeree, et al., 2002). Rather than being polar opposites, self-interest and other-orientation can coexist and lead to positive organizational outcomes such as increased organizational citizenship behavior and pro-social behavior (De Dreu, 2006; Van Lange, 2008). Thus, both self-concern and other-orientation can have positive effects on work motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, and ultimately organizational performance (De Dreu, 2006).

Servant leaders realize they are part of a larger network of interconnected people, each with their own valid needs; thus, by first meeting the legitimate needs of others in a collaborative effort (e.g., *agapao*), servant leaders are also able to meet their own needs (e.g. *rational self-interest*) (Crocker, et al., 2009; Hurt & Heath, 2017). Figure 2 visually depicts that the best effects of servant leadership occur

when rational choice brings individuals to lead by compassionately serving the legitimate interests of their employees. Leading in this way has been associated with increased follower loyalty (Savage-Austin & Honeycutt, 2011), improved employee perceptions of organizational support (Huning, et al., 2020), creating a climate of knowledge sharing within an organization (Song, et al., 2015), increased organizational commitment and reduced intentions for turnover (Huning, et al., 2020; Jaramillo, et al., 2009), and overall, multilevel, simultaneous positive behavior from individuals, team/groups, and organizations (Searle & Barbuto, 2010). It is no surprise, then, that servant led organizations are well represented in the list of Fortune magazine's top 100 companies to work for (Lichtenwalner, 2011; Wong, et al., 2007). None of the above requires an altruistically motivated self-sacrifice to realize the improved organizational outcomes, but all require a genuine caring for the people in the organization, which is consistent with Greenleaf's (1970) writings on servant leadership. For the morally compassionate leader who rationally places the best interests of their employees relatively higher on their values hierarchy, serving the best interest of their employees is not a sacrifice. Rather, it is a completely self-interested, yet rational tradeoff. Hence, we put forth the following proposition.

Proposition 3: The interaction between agapao love and rational self-interest is the ideal positive mediator on the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance.

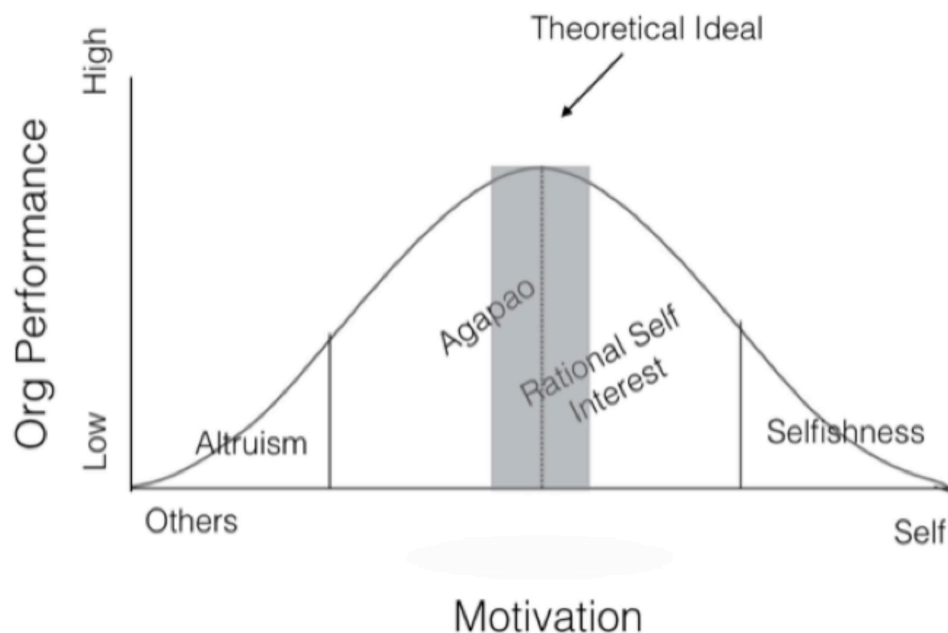


Figure 2. Ideal Theoretical Leadership Motivation

DISCUSSION

In this paper, we recommend a different basis for understanding the motivations of the servant leader. While we are not the first to question the purely altruistic nature of the servant leader, we are the first to put forth a comprehensive model of the continuum of motivations behind servant leadership and its proposed outcomes. To maximize the benefits of servant leadership, we assert that the proper motivational ethic of servant leaders is one with a dual focus on self and subordinates, i.e., rational self-interest and *agapao* love. This perspective may appear to be in contradiction with Greenleaf's (1970) depiction of service; however, we contend that this dual motivational ethic reinforces it. Adam

Smith (1776) promoted the idea that individuals should simultaneously pursue interests of both self and society and indeed, the benefits to others (e.g. job creation, wealth, opportunity) derived from individuals following their self-interests have been well documented (Friedman & Friedman, 1990; Newbert, 2003; Perloff, 1987). Furthermore, the benefits associated with self-interest and agapao love are consistent with other-directed motives (e.g. caring, helping, giving, cooperating, sharing) (Jensen, 1994; Monroe, 1994). People seem to prefer activities that represent a convergence of self- and other-oriented interests rather than activities in which they are in direct competition with one other (Kaplan, 2000). For example, De Young's (2000) work on volunteerism revealed that a person with more self-oriented motives (e.g. esteem enhancement, personal development) remained a volunteer longer than one who had a community-oriented motive. The opportunity to have a self-oriented motive is what kept the volunteer actively involved.

Proponents of servant leadership maintain that the altruistic motivation is paramount to the theory (Bavik, 2020; Keith, 2012; Patterson, 2003; Spears, 1996). However, there are a number of concerns that lead us to concur with the alternative perspective that altruism in its purest sense is not the best concept for characterizing the ethics of leadership (Ciulla, 2004; Rand, 1964). Advocates of altruism have succeeded in getting man to accept two primary beliefs: a) that any concern with one's own interests is evil, and b) the altruists' activities are in fact to one's own interest (Rand, 1964). Altruism refers to a leader's intentions, actions, and ideologies (Dixon, 2018). Actions are considered moral if their primary purpose is to promote the best interest of others (Northouse, 1997). Since the full range of altruism requires sacrifice, there cannot be a benefit to the self (Kaplan, 2000; Monroe, 1994). Altruism demands that a leader regard everyone as a value except his or her self (Ayn Rand Institute, 2018). Hence, any action taken by a leader resulting in self-benefit would be deemed immoral. This is a principal failing of the altruistic position since it endeavors to put aside the issue of self-interest in human behavior (Kaplan, 2000). Servant leadership suffers from this same shortcoming as researchers have largely ignored, if not implicitly denied, the role of self-interest among servant leaders. Additionally, some altruistic perspectives suggest that intentions matter more than consequences; hence, as long as an actor intended for his or her actions to be of benefit, it does not matter if the actual consequences hurt another...they would still be considered altruistic (Monroe, 1994). Yet, examples abound where good intentions have led to dire consequences (see Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022; Eberlin & Tatum, 2005; Rummans, et al., 2018).

Servant leadership researchers use the term altruism to describe the servant leader's motivational ethic of caring for the needs of their subordinates (Keith, 2012; Patterson, 2003; Spears, 2004). Most have narrowly viewed altruism as behavior intended to benefit another, but we suggest that they have confused its meaning with similar and closely related forms of other-directed behaviors (e.g., sharing, caring, giving, loving). The problem with the current altruistic viewpoint in servant leadership is that it relies on a colloquial understanding of the construct. Helpful inclinations to care for the wellbeing of others should not be mistaken for altruism (De Young, 2000). A definition that considers the full range of the ethical principle of altruism requires the individual to not only care for and serve the legitimate needs of the other; it requires them to do so even if it causes the altruist to ignore his or her own legitimate needs (Emmerik et al., 2005; Murphy, 2006). Any identification of legitimate interests for the leader is viewed as selfish (i.e. pure selfishness), and requires the subordination of those interests to others (Laub, 1999; Oakley, et al., 2011). Current definitions and depictions of the characteristics of servant leadership fail to acknowledge that altruism can go too far, and that the ethic of altruism can have these types of negative effects (Kaufman & Jauk, 2020).

We maintain that it is unreasonable, and unethical, to expect someone to deny their own interests and still function well as a leader. Since an incessant focus on others increases the tendency to experience negative psychological and physical states, this makes the pure altruist who takes this principal to a pathological extreme less useful to those they are attempting to serve (Dill, et al., 2014;

Kartman, 1983). A noteworthy problem with using the altruist ethic as a motivation for a theory of servant leadership is that few people will be likely to adopt this leadership style if they believe that doing so will have unintended negative consequences for themselves and the people they are trying to serve. As Frimer and Walker (2009, p. 1669) assert, “if one’s moral concerns inherently conflict with the self’s interest... why would anyone bother with morality?” Such an ethic is potentially harmful to a servant leader’s families, their professional lives, and their mental well-being (Dill, et al., 2014; Grant, 2013). Yet, servant leadership has been shown to create positive outcomes for both organizations and individual employees (Liden, et al., 2014; Peterson, et al., 2012), so it would be unfortunate to have leaders dismiss the theory out of a rejection of the altruistic ethic when such an ethic is not required. There should be room under the servant leader paradigm for leaders to understand that taking time for self-care to prevent themselves from experiencing physical or psychological harm can make them much more able to lead as a servant.

Frimer and Walker (2009) have shown that the relationship between self- and other-interests can be transformed from one of mutual competition to one of synergy. When self- and other-interests are integrated, self-concerns become motivated by communal values, yielding exceptionally moral behavior (Frimer & Walker, 2009). Thus, we suggest that a dual motivational ethic (i.e., rational self-interest and *agapao* love) is more ideal in servant leadership than altruism because it tempers a leader from harming others by preventing purely self-interested behaviors; and it mitigates the need for a leader to be a sacrificial animal by removing the requirement of altruism in its purest sense. It is not a contradiction to suggest that a leader can be rationally self-interested while still genuinely and deeply caring for the best interests of those they lead. The interaction between rational self-interest and *agapao* love preserves an others orientation while maintaining a consideration of personal interests as an ethical part of the leader’s motivation. Using Rand’s model of a hierarchy of values is useful in understanding how this interaction can take place. Ultimately, it is entirely consistent for a servant leader to pursue their best interests, which for the others-oriented servant leader, will place a heavy focus on the interests of those they lead while still maintaining the legitimacy of their own self-care as a part of their leadership ethic. This would position servant leaders in such a way as to allow optimal creation of value by making rational choices that satisfy the needs of self, subordinates, and society.

IMPLICATIONS

Our greatest contributions in this manuscript are theoretical. We identified the motivations of pure altruism and pure selfishness as win-lose ethics, which is consistent with the concept of selfishness but contradictory to those who are proponents of altruism. We acknowledge that in a situation of purely altruistic leadership, it is possible for the leader to achieve some of his or her personal goals. Likewise, in a situation of pure selfishness, there is the potential for the organization and the employee to achieve their goals. However, we reason that those potential outcomes are unintended positive consequences of each leadership motivation, and not the reasonable result of action working within the limits of each motivational ethic. The purely altruistic leader can be expected to realize negative outcomes for themselves, their subordinates, and their organization due to increased psychological and physical stressors associated with constantly serving others without regard for their own self-preservation (Dill, et al., 2014; Kartman, 1983; Schepman & Zarate, 2008). On the other hand, the purely selfish leader, which is not a servant leader under any definition, is likely to realize negative organizational outcomes due to employee alienation and decreased organizational citizenship behaviors (Graham, 1995; House & Aditya, 1997; Padilla, et al., 2007). Under both leader motivations, one interest wins and the other loses. In both, the organization stands to lose.

Altruism offers the dichotomy of selfishness or selflessness (Monroe, 1994). This dichotomy suggests that man’s interests clash such that the good of one man must be achieved at the expense

of another (Ayn Rand Institute, 2018). There is no reason that concern for others and self-interest must be mutually exclusive. Although researchers have refrained from associating servant leadership with self-interest, there is nothing in the servant leadership literature that discounts the possibility of the servant leader acting in a self-interested way. The person motivated by *agapao* love and rational self-interest genuinely and critically considers other people's and society's interests with the understanding that no person has a moral right to expect another person to sacrifice their own best interest (Rand, 1964). In a good relationship, there should be no victims, i.e., neither side should be forced or expected to sacrifice for the other (Packard, 2012). According to former Delta Force Commander Pete Blaber, leaders must simultaneously care for, "the mission, the men, and me," and he emphasized that, "if you neglect one, you'll screw up the others" (Blaber, 2010, p. 10-11). He understood that, although the leader must be centrally concerned with the organization's mission and the concerns of the people, if the leader ignores their own interests too long, they will be much less capable of effectively caring for either.

In this paper, we have provided a lucid conceptualization advancing the middle ground of our model, i.e., where the leader is inspired by a dual focus of *agapao* love and rational self-interest, as the ideal motivational ethic of the servant leader. This middle ground exemplifies areas for win-win leadership. A dual motivational ethic of *agapao* love and rational self-interest minimizes the possibility of experiencing negative physical and psychological stressors (e.g. burnout, withdrawal) due to neglect of the self, while enabling the leader to lead in a way that takes the best interests of those led into consideration (Goeree, et al., 2002). Thus, the servant leader advancing their own rational best interest, interacting with a genuine, heartfelt, and deep feeling of *agapao* love toward their employees will be expected to fully realize the best positive organizational outcomes associated with servant leadership. Future research should test the validity of the propositions put forth in this study. Additionally, researchers should attempt to understand: how the dimensions of other- and self-interest coexist, how servant leaders balance these dimensions to best serve the organization, their subordinates, and themselves, and identify whether a dual focus is equal among seemingly competing but distinct dimensions (i.e. others and self) (De Dreu, 2006), or whether the focus on a particular dimension becomes prevalent according to individual leader characteristics and environmental factors (e.g. industry characteristics).

Future research should thoughtfully consider the extent to which leaders who embrace a servant leadership style truly adopt an altruistic ethic as defined in this paper. There are several instruments that can be used to measure servant leadership in organizations such as the Servant Leadership Survey (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) and the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) (Laub, 1999). However, these measurement instruments do not capture aspects of pure or pathological altruism as defined by Oakley, et al. (2011) and therefore do not identify its prevalence in servant led organizations. The OLA, for example, asks people taking the survey to rate the extent to which top leaders in the organization, "Use their power and authority to benefit the workers," and, "Put the needs of the workers ahead of their own" (Laub, 1999, p. 30). Neither of these meets the self-sacrificial definition of the altruistic ethic or of pathological altruism. Leaders who are willing to act in that manner in no way violate the requirements of rational self-interest. Leaders who put others' needs first may potentially be making completely rational judgments. Their actions to benefit their employees may not be sacrificial since they are trading a value for something they value more: in this example, the best interests of their employees. Nevertheless, researchers may want to consider modifying existing measurement instruments such that they can capture the extent to which the servant leader's altruistic tendencies may, in fact, be pathological and detrimental to those they are attempting to serve. Additionally, researchers should consider modifying their measurement instruments to capture a leader's rational self-interest as this is currently not reflected in any measurement instrument presently being used.

Finally, future research should also attempt to identify those behaviors in organizations that have measurable servant leadership characteristics and identify whether there is a correlation between physical and psychological stressors (e.g., burnout) and pathological altruism in those organizations. It would be expected that high functioning, servant led organizations in fact have very little prevalence of pathological altruism in their leaders, and in those that do, the efforts of those well-meaning leaders would be expected to be counterproductive. Such research could identify best practices that servant leaders can use to avoid having their kindness being taken advantage of by their employees in a way that damages their own interests.

LIMITATIONS

The most obvious limitation of these propositions is that most people generally believe that altruism is a good thing. Associating the altruistic ethic with negative organizational outcomes by connecting it with pathological altruism sounds like a contradiction. However, as stated above, there are two primary understandings of altruism: one that narrows the range of altruism to simply mean genuinely caring for others, and the other that considers the full range of altruism that means serving others at the expense of one's self. Since there are supplementary other-centered ethics that do not contain this additional self-sacrificial connotative meaning, it is important to critically analyze whether altruism is the correct ethic to associate with servant leadership theory. There is no reason that a leader who has a deep, genuine caring or *agapao* love for his or her employees cannot also make rational decisions based on their own legitimate needs. As Rand puts it, "Concern for the welfare of those one loves is a rational part of one's selfish interests" (Rand, 1964, p. 51). Notably, Rand does not support the idea of loving everyone indiscriminately. Rather, she states that only those with virtue are worthy of being loved; hence, one serves their own interests best by associating with, and caring for, those who share similar values (Rand, 1967). No one, neither the leader nor those they lead, can genuinely benefit from expecting another party to sacrifice interests on their behalf.

Another possible criticism is that this is simply an issue of semantics. Defining a leader's value judgments as putting their employees' best interests above their own, and then defining this as self-interested, may be legitimately criticized as simply a word game. A similar critique would say that altruism as defined here is not what researchers of servant leadership mean when describing the motivations of servant leaders. This is a worthwhile criticism, but words have meaning, and it is important to understand the full meanings of words when attempting to describe a phenomenon such as a leader's motivations. Greenleaf (1970) clearly intended the servant leader to be motivated by a genuine caring for their employees' best interests above and beyond the leader's narrow interests. However, Rand's (1964) discussion of rationality clearly shows how this can be a completely rational tradeoff rather than a self-sacrifice. It will be much easier to convince a person of the positive effects of servant leadership if they believe that they do not have to sacrifice their own interests to adopt that leadership style.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we sought to identify the motivational requirements of a servant leader in the context of an in-depth definition of altruism, *agapao* love, and Ayn Rand's philosophy about rational self-interest. Using Rand's depiction of rationality, we show how purely altruistic and purely selfish motivations can be irrational and create lose-lose situations for all parties involved. It is not controversial to say that selfish motivations create lose-lose outcomes, but it is controversial to say the same for altruistic motivations because those are commonly considered to be morally good (Avolio & Locke, 2002). However, Rand's (1964) philosophy shows how it can never be morally good to require one person to

expect another to sacrifice a value on their behalf, and no person is likely to truly benefit from such an act. Rather, there is a middle ground motivation for the servant leader that includes an acknowledgement of the truly heartfelt and deeply genuine *agapao* love that a servant leader feels for their subordinates. *Agapao* love is a virtuous means to value people morally and if leaders possess the disposition to love, then many of the behaviors needed for effective servant leadership will follow (Ayers, 2008). The interaction of *agapao* love with a person's rational self-interest allows a leader to acknowledge that they do have legitimate interests, but also motivates them to serve the legitimate needs of their employees, even above and beyond what is required for them to achieve organizational objectives. This meets any definition of servant leadership but adds the potential for an ethic of including a leader's rational self-interest, which potentially increases the attractiveness of adopting a servant leadership style.

REFERENCES

- Andersen, J. A. (2009). When a Servant-Leader Comes Knocking. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 30(1), 4-15.
- Avolio, B. J., & Locke, E. E. (2002). Contrasting different philosophies of leader motivation: Altruism versus egoism. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 13, 169-191.
- Ayers, M. R. (2008). Agapao in servant leadership. Servant Leadership Research Roundtable, Ayn Rand Institute. (2018, October 9). *The psychology of altruism by Ayn Rand* [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJIEY9RYh-M>
- Barbuto, J. E., Gottfredson, R. K., & Searle, T. P. (2014). An examination of emotional intelligence as an antecedent of servant leadership. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 21(3), 315-323.
- Barbuto, J. E., & Wheeler, D. W. (2006). Scale development and construct clarification of servant leadership. *Group & Organization Management*, 31(3), 300-326.
- Bavik, A. (2020). A systematic review of the servant leadership literature in management and hospitality. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(1), 347-382.
- Beck, C. D. (2014). Antecedents of servant leadership: A mixed methods study. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 21(3), 299-314.
- Bennis, W. (1989). *Why Leaders Can't Lead*. Jossey-Bass.
- Berofsky, B. (2011). Is pathological altruism altruism? In B. Oakley, A. Knafo, G. Madhavan, & D. S. Wilson (Eds.), *Pathological altruism* (pp. 368-384). Oxford University Press.
- Blaber, P. (2010). *The Mission, the men, and me: Lessons from a former delta force commander*. Penguin.
- Braham, C. G. (1996). *Random house Webster's dictionary*. Ballantine Books.
- Burtoon, R. A. (2011). Pathological Certitude. In B. Oakley, A. Knafo, G. Madhavan, & D. S. Wilson (Eds.), *Pathological altruism* (pp. 131-138).
- Cheeseman, N., & Peiffer, C. (2022). The curse of good intentions: Why anticorruption messaging can encourage bribery. *American Political Science Review*, 116(3), 1081-1095.
- Ciulla, J. B. (2004). Ethics and leadership effectiveness. In J. Antonakis, A. T. Cianciolo, & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *The nature of leadership* (pp. 302-327). Sage Publications.
- Crocker, J., Olivier, M. A., & Nuer, N. (2009). Self-image goals and compassionate goals: Costs and benefits. *Self and Identity*, 8(2-3), 251-269.
- De Clercq, D., Bouckenoghe, D., Raja, U., & Matsyborska, G. (2014). Servant Leadership and Work Engagement: The Contingency Effects of Leader-Follower Social Capital. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 25(2), 183-212. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21185>
- De Dreu, C. K. W. (2006). Rational self-interest and other orientation in organizational behavior: A critical appraisal and extension of Meglino and Korsgaard (2004). *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(6), 1245-1252.
- De Young, R. (2000). Expanding and evaluating motives for environmentally responsible behavior. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 509-526.
- Dennis, R. S., & Bocarnea, M. (2005). Development of the servant leadership assessment instrument. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 26(8), 600-615. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730510633692>
- Dill, J., Erickson, R., & Difendorff, J. (2014). *Motivaiton and care dimensions in caring labor: Implications for nurses' well-being and employment outcomes*. American Sociological Association, San Francisco.
- Dixon, T. (2018). Altruism. In *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. Retrieved, September 26, 2022 from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-andreligion/philosophy/philosophy-terms-and-concepts/altruism>
- Doty, J., & Fenlason, M. S. J. (2013). Narcissism and toxic leaders. *Military Review*, 55-60.

- Eberlin, R., & Tatum, B. C. (2005). Organizational justice and decision making: When good intentions are not enough. *Management Decision*, 43(7/8), 1040-1048.
- Ehrhart, M. G. (2004). Leadership and procedural justice climate as antecedents of unit-level organizational citizenship behavior. *Personnel Psychology*, 57, 61-94.
- Eldakar, O. T., & Wilson, D. S. (2008). Selfishness as second-order altruism. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 105(19), 6982-6986.
- Emmerik, I. H. V., Jawahar, I., & Stone, T. H. (2005). Associations among altruism, burnout dimensions, and organizational citizenship behaviour. *Work & Stress*, 19(1), 93-100.
- Fehr, E., & Fischbacher, U. (2003). The Nature of Human Altruism. *Nature*, 425(6960), 785-791. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature02043>
- Flynn, S. V., & Black, L. L. (2011). An emergent theory of altruism and self-interest. *Journal of Counseling and Development: JCD*, 89(4), 459-469.
- Free-to-Choose-Network. (2013, April 16). "Good Intentions" with Walter E. Williams. [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5TS8QUJWXo>
- Friedman, M., & Friedman, R. (1990). *Free to choose: A personal statement*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Frimer, J. A., & Walker, L. J. (2009). Reconciling the self and morality: an empirical model of moral centrality development. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(6), 1669-1681. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017418>
- Giambatista, R., McKeage, R., & Brees, J. (2020). Cultures of servant leadership and their impact. *Journal of Values-Based Leadership*, 13(1), 1-16.
- Goeree, J. K., Holt, C. A., & Laury, S. K. (2002). Private costs and public benefits: Unraveling the effects of altruism and noisy behavior. *Journal of Public Economics*, 83(2), 255-276.
- Graham, J. W. (1991). Servant leadership in organizations: Inspirational and moral. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 2(2), 105-119.
- Graham, J. W. (1995). Leadership, moral development, and citizenship behavior. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 5(01), 43-54.
- Grant, A. (2013). *Give and take: A revolutionary approach to success*. Hachette UK.
- Green, D. P., & Fox, J. (2007). Rational choice theory. In W. Outhwaite & S. P. Turner (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Social Science Methodology* (pp. 269-281). Sage Publications.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1970). *The servant as leader*. The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1972). *The institution as servant*. The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1974). *Trustees as servants*. The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Paulist Press.
- Hardy, S. A., & Carlo, G. (2011). Moral Identity: What Is It, How Does It Develop, and Is It Linked to Moral Action? *Child Development Perspectives*, 5(3), 212-218. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2011.00189.x>
- Harsanyi, J. C. (1977). Morality and the Theory of Rational Behavior. *Social Research*, 44(4), 623-656.
- Haynes, K. T., Josefy, M., & Hitt, M. A. (2015). Tipping Point. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 22(3), 265-279.
- Helgeson, V. S., & Fritz, H. L. (1999). Unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion: Distinctions from agency and communion. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 33(2), 131-158.
- Heyler, S. G., & Martin, J. A. (2018). Servant leadership theory: Opportunities for additional theoretical integration. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 30(2), 230-243.
- Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. (2005). What we know about leadership. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 169-180.
- House, R. J., & Aditya, R. N. (1997). The social scientific study of leadership: Quo vadis? *Journal of Management*, 23(3), 409-473.

- Huning, T. M., Hurt, K. J., & Frieder, R. E. (2020). The effect of servant leadership, perceived organizational support, job satisfaction and job embeddedness on turnover intentions. *Evidence-based HRM: A Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship*, 8(2), 177-194.
- Hurt, K. J., & Heath, M. (2017). Antecedents and outcomes of servant leadership: Understanding the effects of leader motivation, character, and perceived organizational support. *International Journal of Servant Leadership*, 11(1), 101-137.
- Jaramillo, F., Grisaffe, D. B., Chonko, L. B., & Roberts, J. A. (2009). Examining the impact of servant leadership on salesperson's turnover intention. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 29(4), 351-365.
- Jensen, M. C. (1994). Self-interest, altruism, incentives, and agency theory. *Journal of Applied Corporate Finance*, 7(2), 40-45.
- Jensen, M. C., & Meckling, W. H. (1994). The nature of man. *Journal of Applied Corporate Finance*, 7(2), 4-19.
- Kanungo, R. N., & Mendonca, M. (1996). *Ethical dimensions of leadership*. Sage Publications.
- Kaplan, S. (2000). Human nature and environmentally responsible behavior. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(491-508).
- Karp, T. (2014). Leaders need to develop their willpower. *Journal of Management Development*, 33(3), 150-163. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jmd-04-2012-0051>
- Kartman, L. L. (1983). People helping people: Burnout. *Activities, Adaptation & Aging*, 3(4), 49-57.
- Kaufman, S. B., & Jauk, E. (2020). Healthy selfishness and pathological altruism: Measuring two paradoxical forms of selfishness. *Frontiers in psychology*, 11, Article 1006. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01006>
- Keith, K. M. (2012). *The case for servant leadership*. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.
- Klimecki, O., & Singer, T. (2011). Empathic distress fatigue rather than compassion fatigue? Integrating findings from empathy research in psychology and social neuroscience. In B. Oakley, A. Knafo, G. Madhavan, & D. S. Wilson (Eds.), *Pathological altruism* (pp. 368-384). Oxford University Press.
- Laub, J. (2004). Defining servant leadership: A recommended typology for servant leadership studies. Servant Leadership Roundtable,
- Laub, J. A. (1999). *Assessing the servant organization: Development of the organizational leadership assessment (OLA) instrument* [Florida Atlantic University]. Boca Raton, Florida.
- Lemoine, G. J., Hartnell, C. A., & Leroy, H. (2019). Taking stock of moral approaches to leadership: An integrative review of ethical, authentic, and servant leadership. *Academy of Management Annals*, 13(1), 148-187. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2016.0121>
- Liao, C., Lee, H. W., Johnson, R. E., & Lin, S.-H. (2021). Serving you depletes me? A leader-centric examination of servant leadership behaviors. *Journal of Management*, 47(5), 1185-1218.
- Lichtenwalner, B. (2011, March 1). Fortune's best companies to work for with servant leadership. *Modern Servant Leader*. <http://modernservantleader.com/featured/servant-leadership-companies-list/>
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Liao, C., & Meuser, J. D. (2014). Servant leadership and serving culture: Influence on individual and unit performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(5), 1434-1452.
- Liden, R. C., Wayne, S. J., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008). Servant leadership: Development of a multidimensional measure and multi-level assessment. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19(2), 161-177.
- Lindberg, C. (2008). *Love: A brief history through western Christianity*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Locke, E. A., & Woiceshyn, J. (1995). Why businessmen should be honest: The argument from rational egoism. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 16(5), 405-414.

- Meglino, B. M., & Korsgaard, M. A. (2004). Considering rational self-interest as a disposition: Organizational implications of other orientation. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 89*(6), 946-959.
- Miller, D. T. (1999). The norm of self-interest. *American Psychologist, 54*(12), 1053-1060.
- Miyamura, S. (2020). Are we all rational, optimising agents? In K. Deane & E. Van Waeyenberge (Eds.), *Recharting the History of Economic Thought* (pp. 13-30). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Monroe, K. R. (1994). A fat lady in a Corset: Altruism and social theory. *American Journal of Political Science, 38*(4), 861-893.
- Murphy, N. (2006). Is altruism good? Evolution, ethics, and the hunger for theology. *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science, 41*(4), 985-994.
- Newbert, S. L. (2003). Realizing the spirit and impact of Adam Smith's capitalism through entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Ethics, 46*(3), 251-258.
- Northouse, P. G. (1997). *Leadership: Theory, and Practice*. Sage.
- Oakley, B. A. (2013). Concepts and implications of altruism bias and pathological altruism. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 110*(Supplement 2), 10408-10415.
- Oakley, B., Knafo, A., Madhavan, G., & Wilson, D. S. (2011). *Pathological altruism*. Oxford University Press.
- Ozinga, J. (1999). *Altruism*. Praeger Publishers.
- Packard, S. (2012, May 5). *Ayn Rand interviewed by Phil Donahue* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZqKpfVWoio&t=538s>
- Padilla, A., Hogan, R., & Kaiser, R. B. (2007). The toxic triangle: Destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments. *The Leadership Quarterly, 18*(3), 176-194.
- Page, D., & Wong, T. P. (2000). A conceptual framework for measuring servant-leadership. In S. Adjibolooso (Ed.), *The human factor in shaping the course of history and development* (pp. 69-110). University Press of America.
- Patterson, K. (2003). Servant leadership: A theoretical model. Servant Leadership Research Roundtable,
- Perloff, R. (1987). Self-interest and personal responsibility redux. *American Psychologist, 42*(1), 3-11.
- Peterson, S. J., Galvin, B. M., & Lange, D. (2012). CEO servant leadership: Exploring executive characteristics and firm performance. *Personnel Psychology, 65*, 565-596.
- Price, T. L. (2008). *Leadership ethics: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rand, A. (1963). *For the new intellectual: The philosophy of Ayn Rand*. Penguin.
- Rand, A. (1964). *The virtue of selfishness*. Penguin.
- Rand, A. (1967). Ayn Rand's first appearance on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBmViYDlrjU>
- Reed, L. L., Vidaver-Cohen, D., & Colwell, S. R. (2011). A new scale to measure executive servant leadership: Development, analysis, and implications for research. *Journal of Business Ethics, 101*(3), 415-508.
- Roth, J. K. (2005). *Ethics. Revised Edition*. Salem Press.
- Rubin, P. H. (2014). Pathological altruism and pathological regulation. *Cato Journal, 34*, 171.
- Rummans, T. A., Burton, M. C., & Dawson, N. L. (2018). How good intentions contributed to bad outcomes: The opioid crisis. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*,
- Russell, E. J. (2016). Servant leadership's cycle of benefit. *Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice, 3*(1), 52-68.
- Russell, E. J., Maxfield, R. J., & Russell, J. (2017). Discovering the self-interest of servant leadership: A grounded theory. *Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice, 4*(1), 75-97.
- Russell, R. F., & Stone, A. G. (2002). A review of servant leadership attributes: developing a practical model. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 23*(3), 145-157.

- Savage-Austin, A. R., & Honeycutt, A. (2011). Servant leadership: A phenomenological study of practices, experiences, organizational effectiveness, and barriers. *Journal of Business & Economics Research*, 9(1), 49-54.
- Schepman, S. B., & Zarate, M. A. (2008). The relationship between burnout negative affectivity and organizational citizenship behavior for human services employees. *International Journal of Social, Behavioral, Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering*, 2(4), 242-247.
- Schwartz, B. (1993). Why altruism is impossible...and ubiquitous. *Social Service Review*, 67(3), 314-343.
- Searle, T. P., & Barbuto, J. E. (2010). Servant leadership, hope, and organizational virtuousness: A framework exploring positive micro and macro behaviors and performance impact. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 18(1), 107-117.
- Sears, D. O., & Funk, C. L. (1991). The role of self-interest in social and political attitudes. *Advances in Experimental and Social Psychology*, 24, 1-91.
- Seipp, D. T. (2021). Institutionalizing a culture of innovation. *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 38(1), 53-59.
- Sendjaya, S., & Sarros, J. C. (2002). Servant leadership: its origin, development, and application in organizations. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 9(2), 57-64.
- Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C. (2008). Defining and measuring servant leadership behavior in organizations. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(2), 402-424.
- Shafir, E., & LeBoeuf, R., A. (2002). Rationality. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53(1), 491-517.
- Simpson, J. & Weiner, E. (1989). Altruism. In *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed.). Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Smith, A. (1776). *The wealth of nations*. W. Strahan and T. Cadell, London.
- Song, C., Park, K. R., & Kang, S.-W. (2015). Servant leadership and team performance: The mediating role of knowledge-sharing climate. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal*, 43(10), 1749-1760.
- Southard, A. C., Noser, A. E., Pollock, N. C., Mercer, S. H., & Zeigler-Hill, V. (2015). The interpersonal nature of dark personality features. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 34(7), 555-586.
- Spears, L. C. (1996). Reflections on Robert K. Greenleaf and servant-leadership. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 17(7), 33-35.
- Spears, L. C. (2004). Practicing servant leadership. *Leader to Leader*, 34(7), 7-11.
- Staw, B. M. (1984). Organizational behavior: A review and reformulation of the field's outcome variables. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 35, 627-666.
- Stebbins, R. A. (1981). The social psychology of selfishness. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 18(1), 82-92.
- Stone, A. G., Russell, R. F., & Patterson, K. (2004). Transformational versus servant leadership: a difference in leader focus. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 25(4), 349-361.
- Sun, P. (2018). The motivation to serve as a corner stone of servant leadership. In D. van Dierendonck & K. Patterson (Eds.), *Practicing servant leadership: Developments in implementation* (pp. 63-80). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Thomas, D. (2014). Love as a Replacement for Fear in the Workplace. *Emerging Leadership Journeys*, 7(1), 27-33.
- Ukeni, I. G. (2021). *Servant leadership and moral reasoning orientation: A quantitative examination of the antecedent and dimensions of servant leadership in contemporary organisations*. [Doctoral Thesis, University of Huddersfield]. <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/35658/>
- Van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant leadership: A review and synthesis. *Journal of Management*, 37(4), 1228-1261.

- Van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011). The servant leadership survey: Development and validation of a multidimensional measure. *Journal of Business Psychology*, 26(3), 249-267. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9194-1>
- Van Dierendonck, D., & Patterson, K. (2015). Compassionate love as a cornerstone of servant leadership: An integration of previous theorizing and research. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 128(1), 119-131. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2085-z>
- Van Lange, P. A. (2008). Does empathy trigger only altruistic motivation? How about selflessness or justice? *Emotion*, 8(6), 766.
- Wilson, D. S. (1992). On the relationship between evolutionary and psychological definitions of altruism and selfishness. *Biology and Philosophy*, 7(1), 61-68.
- Wilson, E. O. (1975). *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. Harvard University Press.
- Winston, B. E. (2002). *Be a leader for God's sake*. Regent University.
- Wong, P. T., Davey, D., & Church, F. B. (2007). Best practices in servant leadership. Servant Leadership Roundtable, School of Global Leadership and Entrepreneurship, Regent University.
- Zorlu, Ö., Baytok, A., Avan, A., & İnci, E. (2021). How servant leaders psychologically empower their followers. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 69(4), 505-526. <https://doi.org/10.37741/t.69.4.3>