Theoretical letters

# Contrasting different philosophies of leader motivation Altruism versus egoism

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**Abstract**

In this series of letters, Avolio and Locke compare and contrast their different views on leadership motivation, considering how selfish and self-sacrificing altruistic behavior influence leaders and follower motivation and performance. Locke bases his main arguments in both letters on the premise that leaders should act and think in a rational way, with selfish interest as the basis for action. By accomplishing their selfish interests, leaders will exhibit their highest principles and performance. Avolio argues that Locke's view on selfish interest is simply too idealistic. Since leadership is seen as being in the eye of the beholder, there is a point where all of the rational decision making in the world does not change the subjective views followers have of their leaders. Moreover, there are numerous situations where everyone's self- or selfish interests cannot be satisfied and it is in those situations that the assumptions of egoistic leadership appear to breakdown. Their debate leads to some interesting suggestions for future research comparing these two divergent views of leader motivation. © 2002 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

Dear Bruce:

I would like to convey to you some of my thoughts on the issue of whether leaders should be self-sacrificial (altruistic) or egoistic (selfish). I will defend the view that leaders (and everyone else) should be selfish. However, before I can discuss this issue intelligently, I need to define my terms.

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Let me begin with self-sacrifice or altruism. [Technically, these concepts are not identical. The concept of self-sacrifice itself does not specify whom the beneficiary of the sacrifice should be (e.g., God, animals, trees.) Altruism says the beneficiary should be other people or society. This is what people typically mean when they advocate self-sacrifice.] Many people are confused about the meaning of sacrifice. Some, for example, claim that there is no such thing as self-sacrifice because all people do what they really "want" to do — that is, they choose the path with the strongest valence or expected value. Clearly, there is an equivocation here. All actions are certainly motivated by something, but the issue is: motivated by what principle? It is obvious that Mother Teresa and Thomas Edison, though both were motivated to act, were motivated by very different — and opposite — moral principles. Mother Teresa turned herself into an ascetic, selfless scarecrow whose sole function in life was to tender to the poor. Thomas Edison flamed with a burning passion to invent; his focus was not on the social good that his light bulb could achieve (though he was aware of its commercial possibilities) — ;it was on the light bulb. He was motivated by the selfish love of creation.

Another misconception is that self-sacrifice or altruism is synonymous with helping others. Helping others is not necessarily self-sacrificial. It can be done for selfish motives. For example, an individual may help his or her spouse or children out of love for them; for the same reason individuals may not help people they do not personally value. An employee may help a coworker because it is in his self-interest to see that the project gets finished and the company succeeds. A passerby may help a stranded motorist out of benevolence or good will.

What, then, does self-sacrifice actually mean? It means the sacrifice of a higher value to a lower one. "Sacrifice does not mean the rejection of the worthless but of the precious... [It is] the surrender of that which you value in favor of that which you don't" (Binswanger, 1986, p. 429, quoting Ayn Rand). Sacrifice to whom? Altruism (literally, other-ism) means the sacrifice of oneself to others. "The basic principle of altruism is that man has no right to exist for his own sake, that sacrifice to others is the only justification of his existence, and that self-sacrifice is his highest moral duty, virtue and value" (Binswanger, 1986, p. 4, quoting Ayn Rand).

So if a leader wanted to be truly altruistic, he or she should pick a role (job career) he does not want or value, make a product he or she has no personal interest in, expect no rewards for his or her achievements, and devote himself or herself to serving the wants of his or her customers and employees without any hope of pleasure or gain. Would anyone want to be a leader under such circumstances? I cannot imagine why.

Now let us consider the alternative to altruism. Obviously, it is selfishness. The concept of selfishness has been even more misunderstood than that of altruism. Consider how the so-called "selfish" leader is typically portrayed. He or she takes the job, not because he or she loves the work, but because he or she wants power. He or she is not at all adverse to lying to get his or her way, and may even enjoy it. He or she keeps promises only if it is convenient at the time. He or she may hire smart people but is sure to take credit for their accomplishments and blame them when things go wrong. He or she becomes infuriated if a subordinate disagrees with him or her. He or she likes to lead by threat and intimidation.

He or she is desperate to see his or her name in the press and boasts of his or her own greatness. He or she insists on a huge salary that is unrelated to the success of the company; if he or she has stock options, he or she makes sure (through repricing the options) that he or she makes money even if the stock goes down. He or she lets people compete for his or her favors and rewards those who bow to him or her and flatter him or her while punishing those who do not. He or she fudges the numbers, if he or she thinks he or she can get away with it, to make profits look good in the short run. He or she uses company money for personal expenses. He or she relishes the perks of the office and loves to be driven to VIP parties in his chauffeured limousine. Oh, and one more, thing: this type of leader inevitably fails, when the bottom line gets too bad to hide; typically, he or she is fired in disgrace, his or her career in tatters.

Now, let us take a closer look at selfishness. Selfishness literally means: to act in one's own interest. The concept does not specify either how to discover one's interests or how to achieve them. Many people believe that selfishness consists simply of doing whatever one *feels* like doing at the time (e.g., hedonism, pragmatism). Clearly, this is false. Just because one "wants" to do something does not mean it is in one's actual self-interest. Taking dope or driving while drunk is an obvious example. Spending money heedlessly is another. The leader in the above story is yet another example. He did what he "wanted" to do and ruined his career as a result.

To understand what self-interest actually consists of and how it is discovered, we must understand people's nature. Unlike the lower animals, people cannot survive by functioning at the sensory–perceptual level, using the pleasure–pain mechanism as their only guide. They do not possess instincts. They have to learn how to survive in the long range. Their main means of survival is reason. Through reason, they need to develop a moral code, a code of values selected by choice to guide their choices and actions. The purpose and need of a moral code is to enable one to live successfully on Earth. Life is the ultimate, and objective, standard of value in ethics. "It is only the concept of 'Life' that makes the concept of 'Value' possible" (Rand, 1964, p. 16). I must stress that only individuals exist and pursue values; society is not an entity but a collection of individuals.

The concept of egoism refers to the fact that individuals must be the beneficiary of their moral code and, therefore, of their own actions. Observe the fundamental contradiction in the doctrine of altruism: in response to the fact that one needs a moral code in order to live, it declares that one must sacrifice one's life to others. This is like advocating poison as a response to the observation that one needs food. Altruism sets one's moral code against oneself; it is the code of death. This is not an exaggeration. Who is considered the paragon of morality in the Western world? Jesus, who gave up his life for humankind, including for people who were not even born yet. What countries most consistently demanded that individual citizens sacrifice themselves for the good of the state? Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia.

I am sure you can see another contradiction in the code of altruism. If it is good to sacrifice to others, is it not selfish (i.e., evil, immoral) of others to accept it? Should they not, in turn, sacrifice to others, thus setting up a chain of endless sacrifices with no one gaining anything in the end? Every altruist knows quite well that it is a code that cannot be practiced

consistently, else everyone would die. This means that moral perfection is impossible; the emotional consequence of this is a state of permanent guilt. That, of course, is the real purpose of the code of altruism. Those who feel guilty about value achievements such as earning wealth can readily be induced to give much of it up for the sake of those who have not earned it.

I have shown so far that one should be the beneficiary of one's own moral code. Now I will address the issue of how one actually achieves one's own survival. The answer is: through virtue. The highest virtue is rationality — ;the unconditional adherence to reason as people's only source of knowledge and only guide to action (Peikoff, 1991). To reject reason is, in the end, to reject reality, i.e., to reject facts including one's own nature. Implicit in the virtue of rationality are a number of other virtues:

- Honesty: the refusal to fake reality;
- Integrity: loyalty to one's rational judgment in action;
- Independence: acceptance of the responsibility of using one's own rational judgment to sustain one's own life;
- Productiveness: acceptance of the responsibility of producing or earning the material values that one's life requires;
- Justice: rationality with regard to other people — ;judging them in accordance with the facts by a rational standard;
- Pride: recognition of the fact that one is a being of self-made soul, a soul that seeks its own moral perfection.

Observe that these pro-life, egoistic virtues are vastly different from conventional notions of virtue which stress: faith (over reason), self-sacrifice (over egoism), conformity (over independence), compassion (over justice), and humility (over pride).

Now let us apply the above to the notion of leadership. What would truly egoistic leaders be like and how would they act?

- They would take a job (career) that they selfishly enjoy. They would discover this by trying out different types of activities, discovering what they like, and identifying the reasons for it. They would not choose this work out of duty or obligation.
- If they chose to become a leader, they would look at reality, gather facts, and try to discover how their business could succeed using their best rational judgement.
- They would hire the best people they could, including those who might argue with them, because they would know that they were not omniscient and that brainpower was essential to their own success.
- They would be consistently honest in all their dealings because they would know that when people try to fake reality, reality fakes out the faker in the end.
- They would act true to their word because they would know that subordinates and customers would not trust a leader who said one thing and did another.
- They would listen to, and even welcome, reasoned disagreement and good advice, but in the end would make the key decisions themselves.

- They would not ask the government for special favors and subsidies (as opposed to the freedom to run their business without interference) because they would want to earn the profits that they get.
- They would treat employees and clients justly because they would know that people who are treated unjustly would not want to work for or with them. They would be delighted if they made many others rich and customers happy, even though they would not be working primarily to serve them but for their own pleasure. Their focus would be on the principle of trade.
- They would take pride in the success of their business and would not feel unearned guilt for a single penny of their earned wealth even if it amounted to billions.

I think you can see that the leader described above is radically different from both the altruistic leader (if such a person could even run a profit-making firm) and the pragmatic, amoral, "big shot" who tries not to earn money but to get way with some money before he or she gets caught. The conventional belief that a leader either has to be a self-sacrificing servant of others or a conniving wheeler–dealer is a classic example of the fallacy of the false alternative. My choice is: neither of the above. A truly rational leader takes the actions that will make his or her business succeed in the long run. Virtue is not his enemy, to be escaped whenever possible, but a tool of success.

This is not to say that virtue alone is a guarantor of success. It is not. You also need business and industry knowledge, management skills, financing, a reasonably free economy, energy and ambition, intelligence, confidence, passion for work, and other characteristics (Locke, in press). Nevertheless, virtue is critical. Given the presence of these other factors, the true — ;that is, rational, egoist is the type of leader I would most like to work for.

A major source of confusion occurs for people when a leader is a mixture of virtue and vice. Some leaders are genuinely able and brilliant and have certain virtues but they are not consistent. They may love the limelight too much, be honest most but not all of the time, listen to others at times but often become overbearing and arrogant, give some credit where credit is due but often minimize the legitimate contributions of others. This is most likely to occur in leaders who have had early success and come to think of themselves as infallible. They may become "egocentric"; their own ego rather than reason and reality becomes the central focus of their lives. This happened to Henry Ford in his later years and to others and usually presages business failure or at least a downhill slide. They forget the thinking processes that made them successful and come to assume that everything they feel is automatically true. I am no fan of such people; they have abandoned reason — ;to their own detriment.

Does anyone really practice true egoism? I will mention one example. BB&T, a banking company headquartered in North Carolina, explicitly practices the virtues that I listed above (Locke, in press). The bank is very successful. If I were a new MBA with an interest in banking, would I want to work there? You bet.

Sincerely,
Edwin A. Locke

Dear Ed:

I enjoyed having the opportunity to read your thoughts on whether leaders should be more selfish. The ideas that you presented were quite intellectually stimulating for me, in the sense that we describe this construct in our work on transformational leadership. Specifically, they challenged me to rethink some of my own deeply rooted assumptions and positions about the topics that were raised in your letter. Indeed, since reading your first letter, I have found myself wondering from time to time about your definition of selfishness and how it relates to my own observations and interactions within various organizations, including my own. This was especially true during a recent week I spent lecturing at the West Point Academy, where "selfless duty" is part of the "genetic" code ingrained into future officers trained at the academy. As you know, such leaders are asked to be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country, while also being asked to be virtuous and to use their power of reasoning to lead others.

Let me address my comments to what I consider to be an important distinction regarding your main thesis about leaders needing to be more selfish. The distinction is one that was raised by Miller (1999) when he asked, "What does and what should motivate people?" Using this distinction, Miller argues that we can be prescriptive, and argue that people should be motivated by being selfish, in that they simply "ought to be" self-interested. Alternatively, we can take a normative perspective to describe such behavior, as Alex de Toqueville (1835/1969) did in his following characterization of Americans: "Americans enjoy explaining almost every act of their lives on the principle of self-interest" (p. 576).

Over the past 15 years, much of my work on leadership has been based on Jim Burns' normative theory of transforming leadership. The following quote represents an important distinction made by Burns regarding transforming versus transactional leadership: "the ultimate test of moral leadership is its capacity to transcend the claims of multiplicity of everyday wants and needs and expectations, to respond to the higher levels of moral development, and to relate leadership behavior—;its roles, choices, style, commitments—;to a set of reasoned, relatively explicit, conscious values" (Burns, 1978, p. 46). Burns implies that leaders need to transcend their immediate self-interests for the sake of achieving some higher end value. He does not say that leaders must transcend their selfish interests everyday; rather, they must have the "capacity to transcend the claims of multiplicity of everyday wants, needs, and expectations." I endorse Burns' point that leaders need a sufficient level of moral capacity to make decisions that will not only benefit themselves but also their followers. This is particularly true in situations where decisions involve significant tradeoffs and/or constitute moral dilemmas.

It seems to me that we need both normative and prescriptive models to explain the full range of leader and follower behavior. Moreover, we need to consider that leadership constitutes more than just the actions of an individual. It also includes the interactions of leaders with followers and the context in which those interactions are taking place or are embedded over time.

Complicating matters, I believe your definition of selfishness is perhaps too idealistic, leading to two important questions in my mind. First, can self-interest or selfishness be

defined without considering the context in which leadership is observed? When I refer to context here, I include group, organization, national, and/or global context. I also include in my definition of the context elements of danger, risk, turbulence, and so forth.

My second question relates to the maturity of both the leader and follower. How does the maturity of each party impact his or her perceptions of what constitutes self-sacrifice versus selfishness? Can those who are morally immature view self-sacrifice as selfishness? I believe they can, and that is why Burns referred to the "capacity" of leaders to transcend immediate interests. Let me tackle the contextual issue first, building on some recent observations from my own experiences.

Again going back to the West Point Academy context, there is a great deal of energy placed on establishing norms of leadership that develop leaders of character or those who are virtuous. Cadets are trained to adopt the value of being willing to "sacrifice" for the good of their fellow soldiers, platoon, company, and nation.

Over the last several years, there have been concerns raised at the academy about the number of junior officers being lured away with big "signing bonuses" to work for corporate America. The luring occurs immediately after the officers have met their minimal obligations to serve in the military. We need to consider that the military and both you and I as taxpayers have invested nearly US$250,000 in each cadet's 4-year education. The selfish interest of our military leaders is to retain the cadets to lead our nation's armed forces.

Perhaps, we are all being a bit selfish. Using our powers of reasoning, we could certainly argue that it is good for our nation if a greater percentage of these future leaders remain in the military, than is presently the case. However, the young officer might argue that it is in his or her selfish interest to leave the military to pursue lucrative job offerings, which can provide a higher quality of life for his or her family? It appears that our nation and these young officers may have competing "selfish interests." This is the reality of the current dilemma, and I am not necessarily suggesting that either side act altruistically nor feel guilty. Rather, we have a dilemma, which is like many other choice dilemmas, where one group's selfish interest conflicts with another.

Let me expand the context in which we have examined the dilemma presented above. I worked very closely with a Wall Street firm over a period of 5 years, and through my work there came into contact with many other firms on the street. Their industry had a singular focus on hiring usually the youngest, brightest, and most capable employees, and a West Point graduate is certainly a prime target. However, fulfilling their selfish interests comes at the expense or the needs of our military. Here is where we must confront the idealism characterizing your definition. In a world of finite resources, including time and people, at some point the selfish interests of one party will conflict with another. And it is here where some sacrifice or altruism oftentimes needs to be considered for the good of both groups. Otherwise, how do we resolve this dilemma?

The situation that I have presented above raises an important issue for us to consider in our dialogue. Is it possible for everyone's selfish interests to be satisfied? I believe in many situations the answer is no. Thus, a rational choice made by some virtuous leader could be to endure a short-term sacrifice for the good of the larger group.

Even where it may be possible to satisfy each party's selfish interests, oftentimes one group may perceive that its selfish interests were not as fully met as compared to another group's interests. We know this is oftentimes the case as people are not purely rational beings in terms of how they gather information and make decisions. Unfortunately, leaders must work in the world of socially constructed realities that require such "messy" decisions.

The same person, a group, an organization, or even a nation may have at any one point in time equally competing selfish interests, which cannot be resolved by satisfying everyone's individual interest. This is not a case of simply saying that life is always a zero sum game. To the contrary, it is fundamentally how people define their selfish interest, which typically is more dynamic, as you correctly point out in your initial arguments concerning the importance of what actually constitutes self-sacrifice and selfishness.

The definition becomes more complicated when we consider that self-sacrifice may contribute to satisfying a leader's long-term selfish interest. Taking a utilitarian viewpoint, by giving up something in the short term, a leader may be given more respect and trust from followers for their self-sacrifices. Self-sacrifice is a way of showing others the importance of what you are working towards, or your commitment to "the cause." A platoon leader, who waits until all of his or her soldiers are fed, may be sacrificing his or her selfish interests, or he or she may be promoting his or her dedication to the soldiers. Such dedication may be translated later on in terms of a willingness to follow the leader, even when it is clearly not in the soldier's selfish interests, e.g., when it is life-threatening.

In the US culture, it seems fair to say that we consider satisfying one's self-interest as an appropriate way to legitimate the behavior of individuals, making that behavior generally more socially acceptable. Indeed, this seems to be a premise that you have embraced in your work. However, in other eastern cultures, similar instances of satisfying one's selfish interest would be viewed as being at the expense of others, and not socially acceptable. Here, context or culture matters in terms of how the behavior is interpreted.

My personal belief is that there is a common good in many instances that is not the simple summation of selfish interests. And the common good oftentimes can only be achieved by having some people sacrifice or tradeoff their selfish interests for the benefit of others. Perhaps, over time, outcomes may balance out, and we can then say that by sacrificing up front, everyone can ultimately achieve his or her selfish interests, but in specific moments it would still look and feel like self-sacrifice to me.

I have several other concerns regarding the advocacy of selfishness and self-interest as a basis for interpreting ideal leadership. First, it is an ideology that can be easily justified in the minds of less morally developed or virtuous leaders, as you correctly pointed out in your reference to the Nazis. They built a reasoned argument that it was okay for the German people to satisfy their selfish interests, even if it was at the expense of others.

In contrast, leaders of higher moral character who espouse and live towards universal end values will see that satisfying their selfish interests neither benefits the groups they lead in the short term nor even themselves over longer periods of time. Indeed, their definition of selfish interest is likely to be very different than leaders of lower moral perspective and character.

Morally developed leaders may have a selfish interest in seeing their country come together in peace, and this may be in alignment with their people's selfish needs or interests. Yet, a less morally developed leader in the same position may see that the accumulation of power and wealth is in his or her self-interest, even when it is at the expense of others in the leader's country. The moral capacity to define selfish interest for each leader can easily result in outcomes that differ for both leaders and followers.

So whose definition of selfishness or self-interest do we accept? Is there a normative definition that we should use, or is selfishness or self-interest in the eye of the beholder? If it is in the eye of the beholder, then it seems unlikely to me that we can all satisfy our selfish interests without an expense to some, at least in the short term.

And once you enter into this dialogue, I believe you inevitably have to factor in the idea of self-sacrifice. At the most transactional level, I might choose to self-sacrifice now, for future gains later on. At a more transformational level, I may decide that by self-sacrificing now, the greater good of my group of followers and myself would be best served.

I believe there are very few leaders who do not question the utility of their sacrifices, even when it is for all the right reasons. There are some, however, who probably do not even consider it a sacrifice, but rather what they are able to contribute to the common good of their group, community, and society. The lens through which they view their actions does not label them self-sacrifices or losses at all, but rather as contributions, which they feel they are supposed to make to their followers.

Let us take Connie Lightner as one potentially complex example, who said, "I'd rather have ten people working with passion than a thousand people working with interest." Connie Lightner's life was fundamentally changed when her teenage daughter was killed in a motor vehicle accident involving a drunk driver. Was it in her selfish interest to start Mothers Against Drug Driving? Or, was it a life sacrifice that she was now enduring to make a difference for other parents? As a parent, it is difficult for me to see her actions just being motivated by selfish interest. Whether it is selfish or self-sacrifice or both, the net result is still over a 60% reduction in teen-aged drunk-driving fatalities over the last decade. As this example shows, human behavior typically is more complex than a rational model of decision making can always account for or fully explain.

I believe the actions of this mother can be seen as selfish, self-interested, and self-sacrificing, depending on your perspective and maybe depending on where she was in her own healing process. Perhaps, what best distinguishes her actions is the intent that underlies them. At one extreme, a mother losing a child may want "revenge" against all drunk drivers and could energize a national movement to place all offenders in jail for life. Her motives are driven by hatred and revenge, and we could say that they are selfish, in the more traditional sense. In the middle range, we have someone who is going through the healing process and is turning her grief into passion to make a difference for the good of the community. Still selfish perhaps, but at a much higher moral level. Finally, we have someone who is so purely altruistic in the traditional sense, he or she can only think of the good of the community. Any amount of time he or she puts into a movement is seen as contributing to the good of the community. A level of selfishness that is so highly moral, it is hard not to define it as altruism.

Perhaps there is a point where common ground can be achieved in our discussion of self-sacrifice, selfishness, and self-interest. One way to create common ground is to consider "banding" around self-interest. What I mean by banding is that at one extreme, people pursue their selfish interest very narrowly defined. Characterizing this tendency, Drucker (1999) remarked that we tend to suffer from single cause interest groups, who subordinate the common good for their own aggrandizement. The banding idea can be simply stated: Does the leader really care about anyone else but himself or herself? If not, it does not necessarily mean that achieving his or her self-interests is necessarily bad for others; it can actually be good. However, I suspect that the probability of such selfishness resulting in solutions that are good for all is likely to be lower.

Well, should leaders be selfish, and if so, under what conditions? In the US culture, there is more of an orientation towards self-interest being "okay." Yet, as Johns (1999) pointed out, if an individual or group comes to believe that their approach, goal, or mission is superior, then they risk developing a self-serving bias. Failure is not our fault, but rather the fault of all those who keep us from achieving our superior objectives. Salancik and Meindl (1984) used this form of self-serving bias to explain why companies frequently attribute success to themselves and failure to external events in their annual report.

Another potential risk in advocating selfishness is how it will play on the development of interdependence. The need for interdependence and the means by which it is achieved in organizations are, in part, dependent on how they are perceived (Weick & Roberts, 1993). Can we develop interdependence through the exact alignment of selfish interests? Or, should we now explore the collective selfish interests of groups as a basis for motivating interdependence? This to me seems like a very delicate balance to achieve and depends, in large part, on how each party's selfish interests are perceived to coincide with another party's selfish interests.

Where we seem to have total agreement is around the issue of honesty and virtue. I believe that leaders must create high levels of transparency in their organization for their followers to fully understand the intent underlying their actions. If transparent, then the leader must also be willing to be vulnerable and challenged by others. You must be able to defend your "selfish interests" as the best alternative for the group. If you are both transparent and vulnerable, then you better be honest or virtuous. Obviously, people know what is going on, they can question the leader, and therefore the leader better be doing the "right thing." If the first three conditions are met, then the goal of the leader is to get followers to identify with what he or she most wants to achieve. One way to get them to identify with what is most important is to show what the leader is willing to sacrifice or give up to achieve the mission or vision. It is only one way, but one oftentimes chosen by many leaders nonetheless.

I will close my letter now as I end a 2-week stay in Singapore. Each morning when I went down for coffee, I saw on the counter a box. The box had a sign asking for a donation to Mother Theresa's charity. I personally reflected on Mother Theresa's sacrifices as being a demonstration of the importance she associated with her vision. I have passed many similar donation boxes on counters around the world, but today I was motivated to show my support for her vision, in "exchange" for what she was willing to sacrifice. Maybe our selfish interests were aligned for a moment, and then again maybe not.

Dear Bruce:

Thank your for your reply to my letter. You brought up many issues. The main theme of your letter seemed to be the issue of conflicts of interest in society, business, and the military, so these are the issues I will focus on in my reply. Before I address these issues, let me correct one important error in your reply. I did not say the Nazis were selfish; I said just the opposite — ;that Nazism (and all forms of statism) is based on the principle of self-sacrifice, the sacrifice of the individual to the state. (Hitler himself, of course, was just a criminal.)

## 1. Conflicts of interest

Much of your reply involved the issue of alleged conflicts of interest among people in society and between leaders and followers. You also implied that selfishness is a subjective concept so that when conflicts occur, there is no way we can resolve them ("Whose definition of selfishness do we accept?"). You concluded from all this that sometimes some people need to sacrifice for some greater good or "higher" value. Of course, if everything is subjective, then there are as many "higher values" as there are pressure groups, and society reduces to Hobbes war of all against all, with the biggest gang or pressure group winning out in the end. (Our country is not too far from this state right now.) My view is very different.

Rand (1962) once made the startling claim that there can be no conflicts of interest among rational men. What is the basis for this assertion? She identified four considerations.

### 1.1. Reality

A wish or desire or emotion is not primary but is caused by one's (subconscious) ideas, including values. For a rational person, desires are not the starting point in deciding how to act or what is good. One first has to identify and validate a proper code of morality. I addressed this issue in my first letter. It is not rational to hold a wish based on an invalid premise, e.g., one that is wrong because it contradicts reality, such as wanting something you have no right to.

### 1.2. Context

A rational person thinks long range, not just for the range of the moment. It may be tempting to steal your neighbor's new car, but such an act leads not to happiness but to jail. Similarly, a rational person does not desire ends divorced from means. In a free society, the proper means of getting what you want is voluntary trade.

### 1.3. Responsibility

A rational person takes responsibility for knowing the conditions required to achieve his goals. For example, an employee knows that to be employable, she needs to acquire relevant

skills. A manager knows that to make the business succeed, he must make the organization an enjoyable place for the employees to work.

## 1.4. Effort

A rational individual knows that all values must be produced by human effort and that one person's efforts to achieve values are not made at the expense of those who do not exert effort.

Now consider her application of these principles to a classic case of alleged conflict, the case of two men who apply for the same job (Rand, 1962, p. 35):

(a) "Reality." The mere fact that two men desire the same job does not constitute proof that either of them is entitled to it or deserves it.
(b) "Context." Both men should know that if they desire a job, their goal is made possible only by the existence of a business concern able to provide employment — ;that that business concern requires the availability of more than one applicant for any job. . . and that competition for the job *is* to their interest, even though one of them will lose in that particular encounter.
(c) "Responsibility." Neither man has the moral right to declare that he does not want to consider all those things, he just wants the job.
(d) "Effort." Whoever gets the job has earned it (assuming that the employer's choice is rational). This benefit is due to his own merit — ;not to the "sacrifice" of the other man who never had any vested right to that job.

Now consider the wider, political context. Ayn Rand's (and my own) view of the proper rules for a free society is that people should be (politically) free to do whatever they want so long as they do not physically harm others. Thus, criminal behavior — ;which means the initiation of force (including fraud) — ;is ruled out. This means a society governed politically by the principle of individual rights. In this context, if a given individual who is not a criminal chooses to be irrational, one does not have to deal with him. Rights include the right to use one's own property as one sees fit. Thus, if a property owner wanted to build a house that blocked your view, that would be permitted. A property owner would also have the right to destroy the habitat of the 12-toed salamander on his property, even if it were the last one on Earth. An owner would not have the right, however, to spew poisonous gases or dump dangerous chemicals onto his neighbor's land or into his or her water supply. Having a proper, objective view of the concept of rights would eliminate millions of so-called conflicts that exist today as a result of the total perversion of the concepts of rights — ;which today means, anything any powerful influence group "wants" at the expense of some other group. (The "mixed" economy is one aspect of this perversion.)

If people are rational, think in principles, and do not violate the rights of others, then there are no fundamental conflicts of interests between people. And no one needs to be sacrificed to anyone. Rational people, of course, may disagree, e.g., over the terms of a contract, but then it is the interest of both parties to adjudicate the disagreement objectively, in the courts.

## 2. Business leadership

Now let us apply the above principles to the issue of business leadership. If both leader and follower respect each other's legitimate rights to trade freely with others, then there are no criminal issues to cause conflict. If one party is irrational, the other party is free not to deal with him or her.

The rational leader will neither want to sacrifice his or her legitimate interests to the employees nor to sacrifice the employee's interests to his or her own. The rational leader will not take the job unless it is personally important to him or her. To get and keep good employees, the leader will want to appeal to the employees' self-interest, viz. if you come to work here, I will give you mentally challenging work and chance to grow, fair rewards, and competitive benefits, etc. He or she will not think just of the range of the moment (viz., I will work them to the bone and make my results look good to my boss this quarter), but also of the long-range consequences of his or her actions (e.g., what will happen if the best people all quit). His or her goal will be to merge to interests of all parties so that everyone gets something out of it and the organization prospers. The ideal relationship is mutual trade to mutual benefit.

You argue that self-sacrifice is a way that leaders can show that they are committed to their values. This is the direct opposite of the truth; showing your commitment to your values by self-sacrifice is a contradiction. To show your commitment to a value or goal, you go after it with all the reason and passion at your disposal. Yes, you give up lesser values, but this is not a sacrifice if they are, in fact, less important. As I noted in my first letter, all actions involve choice. Action is only self-sacrificial if you give up a greater value for a lesser one. The ultimate proof of commitment is not what you give up but what actions you take to achieve the value in reality.

You seem to assume that it is a sacrifice if a leader gives up something in the short term for the sake of the long term. Not necessarily. Let us say a founding CEO agrees to take no salary for 2 years until his company gets off the ground. This a not a sacrifice if: (a) the leader loves his job and the company; (b) sees this step as necessary to make the business viable at the start-up stage; and (c) expects to make up the lost salary later in stock options and the like. It is a sacrifice if he has no personal interest in the company or its products and works short and long term only to selflessly serve society—;like Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa, who was truly selfless, may be an ideal role model to you—;but not to me. She worshipped poverty; I admire those who worship production, like Bill Gates.

You mention the issue of leader and follower maturity. Maturity is important—;to me it means the ability to hold a rational, long-range context in the face of the emotions of the moment—;but it is only helpful if the people involved hold rational, pro-life values.

I believe that a bigger problem today than immaturity is amorality. No one segment of society has any monopoly on this trait. Many people just seem to have no moral principles at all; they are "pragmatists." One example: I asked the members in my UG OB class this spring to raise their hands if they knew anyone who had cheated in college. (To prevent self-incrimination, I did not ask them about themselves.) One hundred percent raised their hands. I asked them if they realized that this meant those people were getting their degrees by fraud.

They looked at me like I was from another planet. By comparison, I did not know anyone who cheated when I went to college (which is not to say there were no such people). Pragmatists do whatever ''works'' for the range of the moment; this is not rational or selfish because pragmatism is not, in fact, practical. Living short range works for the lower animals but not for man. For a detailed discussion of this issue in relation to the virtue of honesty, see Locke and Woiceshyn (1995).

You say that my concept of rational self-interest (from Ayn Rand) is too idealistic. I certainly agree that it is idealistic. I believe in moral ideals, but not the ones that are conventionally taught (see Locke, 2000), especially not self-sacrifice. The ideal of self-sacrifice is antilife and antihappiness (Rand, 1957). I believe that a person's highest moral purpose is the achievements of his or her own happiness on this Earth and that if people are rational and respect individual rights, they can live together in society and in organizations happily, harmoniously — ;and nonsacrificially.

## 3. The military

I am glad you brought up this topic. It is one dear to my heart, and one that I have published an op ed on (see AynRand.org). Yes, soldiers, by the nature of their profession, have to be willing to die for their country, but it does not follow that this is a sacrifice. It depends on what they die for. It was disgraceful to send our brave soldiers to die in Vietnam; that was a pointless, self-sacrificial war if there ever was one. But is it not a sacrifice if the soldiers are fighting for the protection of our country against an aggressor. The New Hampshire motto, ''Live free or die,'' names the essence of the proper view; it is better to die fighting for your freedom than to live as a slave. This puts a solemn responsibility on our politicians: they should never send our soldiers to risk their lives unless our national interest is clearly at stake. I am assuming here an all-volunteer Army in which the people who join are those who love their country and want to be soldiers. (Am I in favor of using American soldiers to police the world? Definitely not!)

As to military pay, if the pay is so low that soldiers cannot make a decent living — ;which is certainly true today — ;then the solution is simple: raise their wages! I suspect that the reason their pay has been held at such disgracefully low levels is that the politicians *expect* them to sacrifice not only their lives but their standard of living as well. You call the problem of military pay a ''dilemma'' because ''society'' wants soldiers to work for peanuts and the soldiers want to selfishly live a decent life. You ask, ''How to we resolve this dilemma?'' But the dilemma disappears if society does not ask for a sacrifice it has no right to demand or expect. Pay the soldiers what they are worth and there will be no shortage of fighting men and women.

## 4. Conclusion

Let me end with some comments on two other issues you brought up. First, the Connie Lightner (who founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving) story, which you seem to use in a

way that obfuscates the issues. The main problem with this example is that we do not know this woman's psychology or moral philosophy so there is no way of knowing whether she was acting in her self-interest or not. There can be many motives for such an endeavor, but it seems quite clear that self-interest was involved in the sense that this issue had great personal meaning to her.

My favorite example of "giving" is Michael Milken, the great financier, who contracted prostate cancer after the government sent him to jail on trumped up charges for the sin of making too much money. He has donated many millions to prostate cancer research, and he has a very selfish reason for it — ;he wants to live!

Second, what of the issue of "banding" — ;which you define as "Does the leader care about anyone else but himself or herself?" Making yourself your highest value does not preclude you liking and loving other people — ;in fact, a firm sense of pride and identity are a prerequisite to loving another. To quote Howard Roark from *The Fountainhead*, "To say 'I love you' one must know first how to say the 'I'" (Rand, 1952, p. 376). Love, in fact, is the most selfish of all emotions; it means that you consider another person to be an important value to you, that the other person's happiness and welfare are critically important to your life and happiness. To be unable to love another person is to be unable to value. Narcissism is not egoism but a psychological abnormality.

Dear Ed:

In the last three letters, we have fleshed out differences in our philosophies concerning leadership, definitional issues regarding concepts such as selfishness and self-sacrifice, and the importance of examining the context in which leadership is embedded. As I indicated in my first response, your arguments have caused me to stop and reconsider how we might view leadership using an egoistic philosophical framework. By stopping to consider your views, they have certainly broadened my thinking about how our models, constructs, and methods of measurement may need to be reexamined to test the positions you have raised in your discussion. In this last letter, I would like to revisit some of your concerns, as well as my own, to suggest how they might form the basis for future research projects. I am taking this direction to address one of the major goals of the *Leadership Quarterly*, which is to advance the science of leadership. Consequently, even though our philosophical debate has been very interesting for me, it is perhaps time to get some "product out the door."

## 5. Looking back at definitions and philosophy

When I read your first letter, I came to the conclusion that we not only differed on certain aspects of our philosophy, but also on our interpretation of constructs such as self-sacrifice. Rather than debate our choice of definitions, I felt it was more productive to take your arguments and apply them across a variety of contexts to help expand our conceptualization of leadership.

Let me start my discussion with a broad definition of leadership provided by Hogan, Curphy, and Hogan (1994), which was stated as follows: "leadership involves persuading

other people to set aside for a period of time their individual concerns and to pursue a common goal that is important for the responsibilities and welfare of a group. This definition is morally neutral.'' Putting aside applies to both leaders and followers, and in the extreme I interpret ''putting aside'' as self-sacrifice. Perhaps we can also apply the same definition to our discussion and set aside our respective differences to achieve a common goal of advancing the science and practice of leadership.

Nothing has been said in our exchange thus far, which has fundamentally changed my views about altruism, self-sacrifice, and selfishness. They are each fundamental parts of what constitutes human nature in general, and in the particular case of human nature we refer to as leadership. Yet, I have wondered whether our different views could be integrated into something more interesting than a simple checklist of differences. For example, Seyle (1974) suggested combining altruism and egoism, labeling it ''altruistic egoism.'' It is certainly possible for a vision to be articulated in such a way that it represents what is good for all people, and yet still serve the selfish interests of the leader, as you suggest in your first letter: *to act in one's own interest*. Perhaps, we can agree that when a leader's own interests are in line with the collective interests of his or her organization, that any further discussion of our differences becomes moot. Where these interests are incompatible, or one interest comes before the other, is where our arguments and I would add that the study of leadership gets quite interesting.

So how do we take our positions and turn them into research ideas. One area of research to explore could involve how certain leaders are able to inspire followers to extraordinary efforts, even when it is apparent that the leader's self-interest has nothing to do with his or her followers' needs or interests. How do such leaders motivate followers to substitute their own interests for the sake of the leader's interests, especially when the substitution takes them down-versus-up Maslow's need hierarchy? Under what extreme conditions is such behavior more or less likely to occur? What type of impression management techniques do such leaders use to motivate followers to support the leader's self-interest? Some leaders fake sacrifice and it seems to motivate others to believe in their message. If they can fake it to gain such effects, how does real sacrifice affect different followers' motivation to perform beyond expectations? Are some more or less prone to the allure of self-sacrifice?

My experience in working with organizations around the world suggests to me that the case of complete alignment across all individual interests is less common than the clash of individual interests. This condition was the basis for my earlier comment about your arguments for egoistic leadership being too idealistic. Alignment is the less typical case, as evidenced by the rising need for negotiators, conflict management consultants, and compensation analysts. Moreover, even in the situation where there is some basis to argue that each party's self-interests can be ''objectively'' satisfied, the reality is that some people will still not see their situation as being equitable. Although my self-interests may be absolutely and objectively the same as yours, I may not view them as being equivalent. Research on equity theory and sensitivity to equity differences inform us that these differences in perception are quite common.

Clearly, ''self interests,'' ''selfishness,'' and ''altruism'' are in the eye of the beholder, which makes our task of explaining the motivational impact of leaders on followers much more complex than simply saying that leaders need to be more selfish. Even if we accept that

argument, the degree of selfishness that will motivate different followers will be affected by differences in their respective motivational states. Indeed, my reference to Nazi Germany was meant to suggest that many people in Germany took Hitler's message and translated it into satisfying their selfish interests in many ways, including stealing from others. I do not believe this behavior represented self-sacrifice for the German nation.

A long line of research on transformational leadership has shown that it can *augment* transactional leadership in predicting performance (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1998). We draw from this work the conclusion that transformational leadership activates the higher-order needs of followers, which then induces them to transcend their self-interests for the sake of the overall organization's needs, interests, and goals. By transcending self-interests, we meant "to rise above," as self-interests are frequently by definition, not necessarily the best alternative for everyone in the group either "objectively" or "subjectively."

Let me share a recent example that highlights my concerns regarding how we judge "self-interested" versus "altruistic" leadership. At the end of the third presidential debate between Vice President Gore and Governor Bush, one of the commentators, who is an historian named Doris Kearns Goodwin, remarked that each candidate kept saying what he did, and what he would provide for each of us. But neither candidate asked what we should all be willing to sacrifice to achieve our collective goals as a nation. She compared these two candidates to several great presidents of the past, and conveyed her disappointment of how they each paled in comparison to those earlier presidents. She was disappointed in their selfishness, traditionally defined.

Maybe self-sacrifice is on the wane, or at the very least it is something our political leaders should not ask of us, out of fear of losing popular support. Nevertheless, her comments were framed in terms of disappointment about the stature of these two candidates. Asking us to be willing to delay our self-interests, or to even sacrifice for the good of our own children, was in her opinion a normative expectation for presidential aspirants. It is a frame set and way of thinking that shapes how people interpret the actions of leaders. This presidential historian is not unique in invoking this frame set to judge the leadership of each candidate. And this has been one of my central arguments throughout our discussion. Selfish or altruistic leadership is not only in the eye of the beholder, it is also determined in part by organizational and cultural norms. Smirich and Morgan (1982) made this point by describing leadership as follows: "leadership as a phenomenon is identifiable within its wider context as a form of action that seeks to shape its context." Weick (1979) referred to this as the "punctuation of contexts," where a leader frames the context in such a way that followers are able to use that framing as a point of reference for interpreting their own actions (Smirich & Morgan, 1982). Your inability to interpret Connie Lightner's behavior as being selfish or self-sacrificing supports the position that we cannot always judge leaders on a purely rational basis.

Leadership not only shapes the context in terms of how it is interpreted, it also is shaped by the context in terms of how it is perceived. For example, in African humanistic philosophy, a person is not considered a person unless discussed in relationship to some other person. They refer to this core linkage as the basis of an individual's **vital force**. How might this cultural lens and context affect how we operationally define and measure "selfishness," "self-serving," and/or "altruistic" behavior, as compared to the normative lens in our culture?

Exploring what constitutes selfish or altruistic behavior in Muslim, African, and Asian cultures, as opposed to our western culture, might shed some further light on the importance of the context to how followers interpret exemplary (or abysmal) leadership.

House and Aditya (1997) indicated that nearly 98% of leadership research has been done in western contexts, so neither you nor I know how culture will affect perceptions of selfishness. This remains an important area for experimental and field research to explore, especially in light of the globalization of economies and organizations.

I recently re-read Hollander's (1958) early work on leadership for a review article that I am currently completing. As you know, Hollander argued that leaders build up idiosyncratic credits with followers based on the competence and "signs" of the leader's loyalty to their followers. Over three decades later, Hollander and Offermann (1990) described "self-serving" behavior as one form of leadership action that can "drain idiosyncratic credits" from the leader's bank of loyalty or trust. Again, I do not believe that our differences are as much about definition, as they are about perception. If I agree with your definition of selfishness, it still does not change Hollander and Offermann's conclusion. Leaders *perceived* as being more "self-interested" in an egoistic sense may suffer the loss of loyalty and trust that Hollander and Offermann have referred to in their paper. I would also argue that the variance in loss is going to be greater or less, depending on the cultural context in which the leader and his or her followers interact and are embedded in over time.

Let me offer some other evidence to support the concerns I have regarding how leadership is enacted and perceived versus what the actual intentions may be on the part of the leader.

- Kellerman (1984), who has also written on presidential leadership, expresses views similar to the ones of the presidential historian that I referred to earlier. Paraphrasing Kellerman's comments, presidential leadership is accomplished by working in the world of other people's needs and aspirations. If we expect presidents to forgo their own needs for the larger group, then how does that impact on our evaluations of their exercising his or her own selfish interests?
- Jacobs (1970) discussed the concept of "fair exchange" with respect to leadership. "The leader who holds a position of 'high place' should be the one in the group who can function best for the common good." (p. 80). Fairness is an indispensable quality of leadership.
- Schelling (1971) provides a number of examples where individuals acted rationally to increase their own outcomes, which unfortunately resulted in a loss for the entire group of which they were members. We know that only a portion of human behavior can be interpreted through a rational lens, and even when there is no loss, some will perceive it as such.
- One could argue that visionaries like Bill Gates of Microsoft, through his own egoistic behavior, have demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that such behavior can significantly increase the quality of life of people on this planet. Those who believe this position would not see his success and domination of the software market as a loss to humankind. Alternatively, one could also argue that his selfish interests have actually retarded the development of products and services, which could have been avoided if he

had taken actions early on for the "good of the group." He has held firm to the idea that opening the "source code" for Microsoft products was not in his or Microsoft's self-interest. Gates felt that taking this approach would be a sacrifice that would put his company at a significant disadvantage in the market. Now, let us contrast his view of software development with a growing competitor of Microsoft, which may represent a case of "altruistic egoism." Linux is a software system that follows an open source code format. Its founder believed that opening the source code to all software programmers would benefit not only the creative development of his software, but himself as well. On the surface, his actions could be easily construed as sacrificing his own self-interests for the good of the larger community in that everyone knows the code. Going back to my point about perception, it is interesting that Bill Gates is seen as being on the side of the "dark forces," while Linux is viewed as the "white knight" in the software field, ready to slay the Microsoft dragon. One leader "appears" to place his interests first, while another leader "appears" to place the interests of the community first. Yet, no one really knows either person's intent in terms of the actual strategy that was chosen, but that does not prevent us from making judgments about their intent. My position has been as follows: Where leaders demonstrate self-sacrifice, or clearly delay self-interests to accommodate the group's interest, the signal sent to their follower's is generally a more positive one. These behaviors are significant signals of a leader's intent, just as keeping the "source code" secret is one bit of data concerning a leader's selfish intent. How leaders manage these signals and the impact it has on group efficacy, commitment, cohesion, trust, and loyalty is an interesting avenue for future research to explore.

- Besides cultural differences, there are also gender differences, which have not been factored into our discussion. For example, Berdahl (1996) demonstrated that all-male groups showed more "self-oriented" behavior as compared to all-female groups, which exhibited more "communal" behavior. This leads me to question how women will perceive our arguments concerning the importance of self-sacrifice, selfishness, and altruism.

- O'Connor, Mumford, Clifton, Gessner, and Connelly (1995) conducted a series of psycho-historical analyses of "world-class" leaders, concluding that a lack of social commitment to others in life themes was associated with leaders who had disastrous consequences in terms of their society's long-term interests. I need to add here that many of the leaders included in their analysis were also unethical and morally corrupt. Nevertheless, how we judge leaders, their fairness, and even their historical greatness is based, in part, on their willingness to look at the group's needs first.

- Looking to the "Big 5" personality factors, agreeable individuals are described as being individuals who are more altruistic and concerned with the interests of others, while also showing empathy towards others (Digman, 1989). The archetype of leadership, which will likely vary somewhat across cultures, places tremendous value on altruistic behavior, and at the extreme self-sacrificing behavior.

- Shamir (1991) hits the point I have been arguing right on the head in defining charismatic leadership. "Charismatic leaders take on high personal risks (likely against their self-interests), and engage in self-sacrificing activities to achieve their vision"

(p. 90). At least one way a charismatic leader gets others to link their self-concept to the collective concept of the group is by demonstrating the importance of the cause by what he or she is willing to sacrifice. This high-level exchange distinguishes the transformational from the transactional in leader–follower relationships. It is an exchange that other authors have referred to as well in their writings. Sashkin (1988) indicated that by engaging in risk-taking and personal sacrifices, charismatic leaders demonstrate their conviction to the mission (also see Conger & Kanungo, 1987).

- Building on Shamir's earlier work, House and Shamir (1993) have the following to say about leadership and human perception: They describe the transformational effects of charismatic leaders as creating a "willingness on the part of followers to transcend their own self-interests for the sake of the collective (team or organization)" (p. 86). In their self-concept theory of leadership, they also offer some assumptions relevant to our discussion. Assumption 1: "*Human beings are not only pragmatic and goal-oriented—;they are also self-expressive of feelings, aesthetic values, and self-perceptions.* This expressiveness accounts for self-sacrificial behavior that cannot be accounted for by instrumental, rational, hedonic, purposive theories that assume that individuals are always motivated by self-interest" (p. 89). House and Shamir also argue, "since values and identities are socially based, their control of behavior is likely to represent a shift from the instrumental to the moral and from concern with individual gains to concern with contributions to a collective" (p. 90).

Leadership and how it is perceived is all the more difficult to explain as a consequence of the human conditions that were summarized above. Unfortunately, when we explore leadership in different "real worlds," it is difficult, if not impossible, to explain intent and its consequences by neatly packaging it into an egoistic framework. We could spend time arguing over how we should define truth, or what is good, or what is moral or immoral. However, I think there is little room to argue that leadership is in the "eye of the beholder," and that this beholder oftentimes views self-interested leaders as not being the ideal leader.

In sum, demonstrating self-sacrifice is a way of demonstrating the merit of one's position and investment in what you believe. You said, "to show your commitment to a value or a goal, you go after it with all the reason and passion at your disposal. Yes you give up lesser values, but this is not a sacrifice if they are, in fact, less important." Of course, I understand the logic of your argument, but invariably one gets to a point where you have to address whose values are more or less important in a world where resources, including rain forests, are not infinite. Again, what is a sacrifice for some is considered a contribution for others, making what constitutes selfish or self-interested behavior much more complex to define, measure, and understand.

## 6. Ownership and rights

I also found your concept of ownership to be too idealistic. Why? Many aspects of the physical and psychological world tend to be more highly interconnected than we all previously

realized. Although in theory it may sound good to say, "rights includes the right to use one's own property as one sees fit," the reality is quite different and again varies dramatically across cultures. Our Native Americans had a very different conception of property ownership than those who "settled" the land, and their definition was obviously ignored.

Your definition of ownership is clearly based on a set of values that is tied to one cultural view. The *Leadership Quarterly* was founded on the idea that we should examine leadership in all cultures and therefore we must take into consideration different value systems. Consequently, even if I agreed with your philosophical value set, we would both be agreeing on how leadership should be viewed based on a value set that applies largely to our own culture. There are some obvious problems with that approach in terms of furthering our understanding of leadership theory and practice within a global context.

## 7. Ideals and idolization

Somehow you came away from my first letter with the idea that I viewed Mother Theresa as my ideal role model. I certainly used her as an example of how one can translate self-sacrifice into loyalty and commitment. She did express ideals that I respect, and I am keenly interested in understanding how they affected her followers in life, and subsequently after her death. However, you make an attribution about me idolizing her, which was incorrect, and appears to be based more on your philosophy than my own. Again, leadership and its interpretation should be examined from the "eye of the beholder."

Let me add to the mix that I, too, admire people who are focused on production, and yet, I am intrigued by those leaders who are willing to delay or give up wealth for some cause they believe in, sacrificing short-term interests for a higher value. However, I do not idolize Mother Theresa. I am firmly against the idolization of leaders, and indeed chose the term "idealized" in our model of leadership to distinguish idealized versus idolized leaders. The former are those who build people up to be leaders; the latter are those who expect unquestioning followers. I think Mother Theresa is more idealized versus idolized, at least by me.

Turning to your last points about the military. Private industry is paying more than our government to lure people out of the military, and this is apparently attracting people to leave military careers. If we paid soldiers exactly what they could be paid in private industry, that still might not address the problems we are confronting today with retention. A recent study on the culture of the US military showed that retention rates were related to the culture of a soldier's unit and indirectly to the leadership of that unit.

Soldiers stay in the military because of an emotional attachment, as well as for rational reasons. Their willingness to sacrifice their lives for our country also depends on their emotional attachment to their fellow soldiers. And perhaps they are willing to give up their lives for a higher value that is associated with being loyal to their fellow soldiers, thus substituting a lower value for a higher value. However, you have yet to convince me that giving up one's life "rationally" is not a sacrifice. Yet, this area is worth exploring in terms of pursuing a systematic line of study that examines why people are willing to sacrifice for the good of any group, and what types of changes they will accept, if not embrace, to do so.

*B.J. Avolio, E.E. Locke / The Leadership Quarterly 13 (2002) 169–191*

In closing, what else can I agree with you on? We cannot simply judge a leader's intent by the actions that have been taken. Perhaps in the leader's mindset she created a movement out of self-interest, but from the followers' perspective it looked like and felt like altruism. Again, from both the leader's and follower's side, it is how their behaviors are perceived and interpreted at the end of the day that seems to really matter in terms of judging leadership. If we can agree on that, then we have a starting point for a very useful line of research inquiry.

Regards,
Bruce

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