

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Cultivating Altruism in an Egoistic Climate Through an Islamic Model

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Keywords

Altruism
Business Education
Egoism
Islamic Management
Islam
Sufism

Received: 06 May 2022

Accepted: 14 October 2022

Abstract.

Purpose: This article presents a study on interventions by an international management consulting firm centred around an altruistic management model rooted in the Sufi tradition of Islam. The study focuses on the factors that play a role in the propagation of altruism.

Methodology: The method comprises a qualitative case study based on interviews of 55 participants from 25 organizations in Pakistan and South Africa. The altruism of participants was considered from their interviews and perceptions of consultants and coworkers.

Findings: The findings suggest that belief in a benevolent God or universe, belief in spirituality, and a quest for truth or meaning in life contribute towards an altruistic outlook. Contemporary business education and the corporate environment, on the other hand, appeared to be largely counteracting these altruistic influences through various mechanisms, and contributing towards the promotion of egoism. Childhood experiences, age, and factors relating to life situations, such as level of authority, maturity, and independence, were also found to have significant roles to play in the cultivation of altruism.

Significance: The contributions of this work to management literature include adding to the scarce work on management interventions to increase altruism in the workforce and the factors that play a role in this process.

Practical and Social Implication: The findings have implications for multiple aspects of the organization, including hiring, training, mentoring, and organizational culture. They also highlight the need for changing contemporary trends in business education for the betterment of society.

KAUJIE Classification: F22, G21, G22, H54, H55, P0, T6

JEL Classification: D64

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have criticized the increasing prevalence of egoism in society in general, and the business environment in particular, and there has been increasing realization in academic

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circles of the need for promoting ethical values in businesses (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Ul-Haq & Khan, 2018). Yet little work has been done from a social perspective on studying the process and factors that increase altruism (Dagar et al., 2022). This is especially important because the prevailing thought being globalized through business environments is seen to be leading to widespread ethical scandals and escalating global crises on multiple dimensions (Boyce, 2008). These, in turn, are generating calls for a radical rethinking of basic imaginaries (Ul-Haq & Khan, 2018). Such radical rethinking involves deconstruction of the prevalent ontological and epistemological assumptions involving atheistic, agnostic, secular, neoliberal, and capitalistic thought, and reconstruction based on alternative worldviews. Religious perspectives may be considered as an important source of radical imaginaries. Despite their crucial influence on human beliefs, values, and behavior (Habib et al., 2020; Hashmi et al., 2019; Javed, 2017), religious perspectives in general, and Islamic perspectives in particular have been inadequately represented in the management literature (Tracey, 2012; Ul-Haq & Westwood, 2012). Ul-Haq & Khan (2018) have proposed the Sufi tradition of Islam as a potent radical imaginary based on its capacity “to infuse the social world with universal meanings of love, brotherhood and divinity” (p. 1) as opposed to the moral decrepitude promulgated by prevailing capitalism and consumerism (Bauman, 2004). Islam in general, and Sufism in particular, has a strong focus on altruistic teachings (Schimmel, 1975), and thus may be particularly relevant to the study of altruism.

This article further contributes to the development of this radical imaginary of altruism. It does so through a qualitative case study focusing on an international consulting organization and their clients in Pakistan and South Africa. The case organization’s work is based on an altruistic management model rooted in Sufism. The contributions of this work to management literature include adding to the scarce work on management interventions to increase altruism in the workforce, and the factors that play a role in this process. The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The next section includes a salient discussion of prior literature on altruism, followed by a description of the case organization and its view of altruism. The methodology, based on qualitative methods, is subsequently explained in detail. The ensuing section presents the findings. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications and contributions of the research, along with suggestions for further research.

PRIOR LITERATURE

The formulation of the term altruism, in contrast with egoism, is generally attributed to Auguste Comte (Weiner & Kazdin, 2000). A person’s motivation is considered by Comte as altruistic if its end is the benefit of the other and as egoistic if the end is the benefit of the self (Comte, 1851/1973). Batson (2010) has worded this conception of altruism in modern terms as “a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare” and egoism as “a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing one’s own welfare” (p. 1).

However, it may not be accurate to view egoism and altruism as binary possibilities. As A. Grant (2013) has explicated, they are better represented as two extremes on the reciprocity spectrum. Alvin (1960) has defined reciprocity as “a mutually contingent exchange of benefits

between two or more units” (p. 164), highlighting that such exchange may not necessarily be equal but may vary quantitatively as well as qualitatively. ? has further suggested that pure egoists and altruists are rare, while most human beings fall somewhere in between these two poles. Moreover, while each person may have a dominant tendency for a particular level on the reciprocity spectrum, it can vary across situations and spheres of life. So people may be more inclined towards altruism in the family rather than at the workplace. Historically tracing the study of altruism, [Wuthnow \(1993\)](#) has expounded that it stayed a principal topic in social studies at least from the time of early Christianity, rooted in “an absolute, transcendent, or cosmic sense of moral order” (p. 347). Subsequently, since the late nineteenth century, “the philosophical crisis of faith” (p. 347) led to a more secularized view of the concept. Towards the latter half of the twentieth century, with increasing secularization, sociologists turned away from the topic; while economists and evolutionary biologists, respectively directed by worldviews based on self-interested rationality and Darwinian evolution, focused almost exclusively on proving the impossibility of altruism by proposing self-interested motives behind every altruistic phenomenon.

[Schwartz \(1993\)](#), on the other hand, has posited that egoism may not be the default state of human nature as is so generally assumed but may be developed through acculturation and socialization as well. In fact, propagating such theories through academia only serves to make them self-fulfilling prophecies. This phenomenon is growing stronger as the prevailing western market logic is spreading to other spheres of life – politics, law, education, and even family – as an “economic imperialism” (p. 334).

”The combination of a social science that is prepared to see only egoism and social institutions that are prepared to foster only egoism virtually guarantees that egoism is all that the society will get” ([Schwartz, 1993](#)).

Also worth mentioning is the method aspect of the work done on altruism, particularly in the economic perspective. A large volume of research in this domain has employed game experiments to study altruism ([Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003](#)). While such methods allow the researchers more control over the variables, the conclusions drawn from these studies may not be simply applied outside of the controlled environment. Although some, like [Fessler \(2009\)](#), found that awareness of being in an experiment did not increase the prosocial behavior of the participants, others, like [Laury & Taylor \(2008\)](#) observed that the relationship between behavior in and outside the laboratory is not straightforward. [Fehr & Fischbacher \(2003\)](#) further noted that much work utilized students from western countries as participants and was “limited to dyadic interactions” (p. 790). Thus [Laury & Taylor \(2008\)](#) have advised caution in extrapolating the results of such experiments to the outside world. However, in recent years, a “paradigm shift” ([Piliavin & Charng, 1990](#)) fueled by postmodernism and postsecularism, is leading to a growing acceptance of the existence and even prevalence of true altruism ([Piliavin & Charng, 1990](#); [Schwartz, 1993](#)). So long as people think they are acting altruistically, and so long as the culture presupposes the possibility of selfless behavior, that possibility itself is an empirical reality to be taken into account in sociological theories of human behavior ([Wuthnow, 1993](#)).

In the business context, recent studies have found altruism to be contributing towards

positive outcomes in organizations and ultimately in society. [Brown & Treviño \(2006\)](#) observed altruism to be a common factor among authentic, spiritual, transformational, and ethical styles of leadership. [Sosik et al. \(2009\)](#) found that superiors' assessment of managers' performance was predicted by subordinates' perception of managers' altruism. [Bekkers & Wiepking \(2011\)](#) identified altruism as one of the most influential drivers of charitable giving. [Romani et al. \(2013\)](#) established consumer altruistic values as a significant moderator for positive consumer reactions and advocacy of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). [Wainwright & Russell \(2010\)](#) concluded that altruism enhances organizational trust and decreases relationship conflict, thereby increasing Organizational Learning Capability (OLC). [Salas-Vallina & Alegre \(2018\)](#) discovered altruism as having a significant positive impact on employees' Happiness At Work (HAW).

However, despite its positive impacts, not much work has been done to study how altruism may be promoted or the factors that may induce people to move further towards altruism on the spectrum. One study by [Valentine et al. \(2011\)](#) found perceptions of corporate ethical values to be positively related to self-reported altruism, mediated by individual career satisfaction. An article by [Furnham et al. \(2016\)](#) discovered relationships between certain personality traits and altruism. Based on two studies, they concluded that altruism was negatively related to neuroticism and positively related to agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness. A study by [Dagar et al. \(2022\)](#) expounded on how certain yoga practices may help build altruism. According to their study, yoga-based practices enhance subjective vitality and self-transcendence, which, in turn, lead to increased psychological capital and altruism. Yet, the arena of altruistic interventions needs more studies. [Wuthnow \(1993\)](#) has advocated the use of qualitative methods for the study of altruism as they may help in uncovering social realities beyond the preconceptions of the researchers; however, these remain underemployed in this arena to date.

Research Context: Schuitema's Model of Altruism

This study endeavors to address the gap in the literature related to the factors contributing to altruism, discussed in the preceding sections, by focusing on a model of altruism based on Sufism. It is pertinent to note that Sufism (*tasawwuf*) is an integral part of Islam [Dehlawi \(2004\)](#), and its foundation is in altruism, sincerity and purification of intention and will ([A. Y. Khan, 1996](#)). The ultimate objective of this purification is to attain God's pleasure, nearness and love by following the footsteps of Muhammad (PBUH) ([Rumi, 1926](#)). In Islam, there are two parallel aspects of the way of the Prophet (PBUH), each of crucial significance, as stated in the Quran:

Truly Allah has shown grace to the believers by sending to them a messenger of their own, who recites to them His revelations and causes them to grow in purification and teaches them the scripture and wisdom. (3: 164)

As the above Ayah shows, the outward aspect pertains to the teaching and exposition of the Quran, and the inward aspect pertains to the purification of the inner character. Thus, the perfect following of Muhammad (PBUH) is essential for the attainment of divine love, as stated in this *āyah*:

Say: If you love Allah, follow me, Allah will love you . . . (3: 31)

As poetically described by [Rumi \(1926\)](#),

Love makes the sea boil like a kettle; Love crumbles the mountain like sand;

Love cleaves the sky with a hundred clefts; Love unconscionably makes the earth to tremble.

The pure Love was united with Muhammad; For Love's sake God said to him, "But for thee."

Since he alone was the ultimate goal in Love; Therefore God singled him out from the (other) prophets,

(Saying), "Had it not been for pure Love's sake; How should I have bestowed an existence on the heavens?"

I have raised up the lofty celestial sphere; That thou mayst apprehend the sublimity of Love (([Rumi, 1926](#)), verses 2735-2740).

One aspect of this divine love is to love God's creation regardless of race, color, or creed. The one who has learned the secrets of this love can cultivate positive relationships based on brotherhood, harmony, and a selfless desire to help those in need. Hence, Sufism has the potential to offer radical insights on ethical topics ([Ul-Haq & Khan, 2018](#)), particularly altruism ([Schimmel, 1975](#)). This study investigates the topic by adding empirical content to the concepts of altruism presented by Schuitema ([Schuitema, 2011a,b](#)) through a qualitative case study. Researching the concepts as they are put in practice by the case organization creates an opportunity of further development and refinement of the conceptual work.

The Schuitema Human Excellence Group was founded in South Africa in 1989 by Etsko Schuitema with a vision "to enable people to triumph as human beings" ([Schuitema, 2021](#)). The organization strives to achieve this vision through the Care and Growth model of leadership ([Schuitema, 2011b](#)). This model was developed by Etsko based on his background in the Shadhili-Darqawi order of Sufism ([F. R. Khan & Naguib, 2019](#)) and his research at the Human Resources Laboratory of the South African Chamber of Mines ([Schuitema, 2011b](#)). It was further refined through his training, consulting, and implementation experiences at over 200 client organizations in 27 countries [Schuitema \(2011a\)](#). [Schuitema \(2011b\)](#) has posited that care and growth are the two elements which form the core of a positive leader-follower relationship. Care is characterized by a sincere and unconditional interest in the welfare of the other. Growth is manifested through providing honest feedback, learning situations and improvement opportunities. It is not the behavior, but the intent of a person that differentiates a willing followership from a forced one. Benevolent intent is defined by unconditional giving for the betterment of others, while viewing people as "resources" to achieve personal betterment constitutes malevolent intent. Unintentional receiving may nevertheless coexist alongside unconditional giving without marring benevolence. So if one helps a poor person in need, and that person ends up saving one's life on a later occasion, it would not negate the benevolence of the initial help as the later benefit was not part of the expectations from it. Intent, however, is not a binary, and a maturation process moves an individual along the spectrum from egoistic to altruistic intent. According to Schuitema, adverse events in life provide the thrust for a person to move towards intent maturation, and it is the altruistic state

which is the ultimate ideal status for a human to achieve in this life (Schuitema, 2011a).

Drawing on Sufi teachings, Schuitema (2011a) illustrates the evolution of intent through the life of a human, where at birth, an infant is totally focused on getting. All the infant cares about is getting food and sleep, and getting cleaned. As the infant matures to a child, the intent of the human progresses to conditional giving. The child gives affection so as to get toys, be taken out, etc. As the child advances to adulthood, the conditional giving progresses further where the conditionality is not for the benefit of the self but for others. The parent, for example, works so as to get food for the family. And at death, the final stage of this life, a human is faced with complete and unconditional giving. This evolution is depicted in Figure 1.

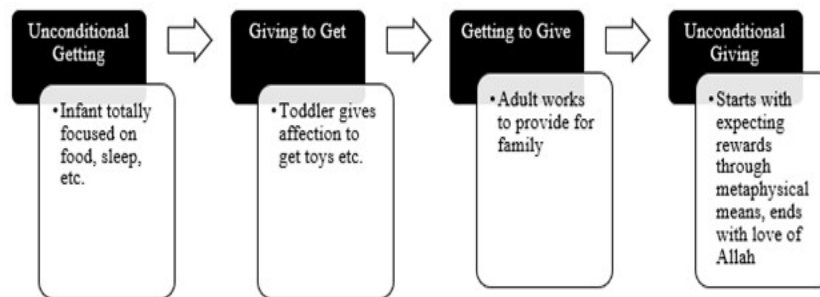


FIGURE 1. Egoism to Altruism Progression

The maturity of a human is reflected in one's capacity to face this scenario, which depends on the ability to give unconditionally. Thus a mature human, who has learnt to give unconditionally in life, experiences death with absolute serenity as an utter experience in giving, whereas for the immature one, engrossed in getting, it is the ultimate horror as an extreme experience in being forcibly taken from. Schuitema puts this in the following words:

When all is said and done, this issue of intent is the single criterion that accounts for the success or failure of a life. At the end of this process of growth, we face an examination. This examination is called the grave. It asks the one question only: are you able to put down, give away or lose everything right now, unconditionally. . . . If you have not used your life to study this matter you will fail. You will give nothing, everything will be taken away (Schuitema, 2011a).

Maturity is reflected in responsibility, being value-driven, self-awareness, patience, and respectfulness – all of which require and facilitate giving (Schuitema, 2011a). On the contrary, manipulation, competition and control are focused on getting, and thus are all manifestations of malevolent intent and reflections of immaturity (F. R. Khan & Naguib, 2019).

Schuitema (2011b) maintains that the practical incarnation of the benevolent intent of a leader is through the care and growth of others. This care and growth is manifested, not always in niceness, but in acting appropriately to the situation at hand. This can require generosity or courage. The leader may need to demonstrate lenience in some situations, yet strictness in others. Doing the opposite of what benevolent intent demands in a situation

implies selfish behaviour, and thus taking. For example, not taking a subordinate to task for negligence or deliberate malevolence reflects selfishness, as the manager is putting the subordinate's good opinion of the manager ahead of the subordinate's progress towards a higher potential. The key to benevolence is that the ends of the action are the benefit of the other, and in case of the leader, involves guiding the followers towards the maturation of their intent, rather than the conventional target of achieving outcomes through the followers (F. R. Khan & Naguib, 2019). The outcomes, in this case, become the means towards the ends (Schuitema, 2011b).

What Schuitema has termed benevolent intent is closer to the vernacular meanings of altruism than some of the other definitions in academic literature. His definition views altruism as determined by intent, not behaviour. It is similar to Comte's conception discussed previously in that it considers altruism as a motive rather than as a behaviour. A person may behave generously, yet it would not constitute giving if the intent is to get something out of the other, or a person may behave harshly, but it would be benevolence if the intent is the benefit of the other. Moreover, the intent maturation process illustrated by Schuitema may be viewed as a further elaboration of the reciprocity spectrum discussed by ?. According to Schuitema, altruism starts on the spectrum when one's expectations of reciprocity move from the physical dimension to a spiritual or metaphysical dimension. Thus, while benefitting someone for attaining the "good opinion of others" would be considered egoistic, intrinsic gratification generated from benefitting others or expecting a reward "the other side of the grave" would cross the line into altruism. However, ultimate altruism would require no other motive but the love of Allah (personal communication, January 23, 2019).

Research Question

Schuitema has developed his altruistic model based on Sufism and in light of his life experiences (Schuitema, 2011a,b). Moreover, he has promoted and implemented this model through the client interventions of the Schuitema Human Excellence Group. To contribute to improving our understanding of altruism and its antecedents in Schuitema's Sufism-inspired model, this research project investigated the following research question: *What are the factors that influence the progress on the path to altruism?* The experiences of Schuitema's organization and their clients with the praxis of this model based on altruism offer a potentially rich source of data for investigating this research question. The scope of this study comprises the consulting and client organizations in South Africa and Pakistan. More detail regarding the research methodology is discussed in the subsequent section.

METHODOLOGY

Given the exploratory nature of this study, qualitative research methods were chosen to answer the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Within the qualitative paradigm, the case study approach was suitable for this research, as the experiences of the case organization, Schuitema, and its clients, afford the empirical data to study the phenomena of interest. For this purpose, the experiences of the consultants, trainers, and other employees of Schuitema, as well as the people who have received training, undergone mentoring, and undertake the

implementation of the Care and Growth model, were the main focus of the case.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through interviews. Initially, in-depth open-ended interviews were conducted, which were followed up by semi-structured interviews. In total, 55 interviews were conducted, including members of 25 organizations. The duration of the interviews ranged from approximately 12 to 104 minutes, with an average of approximately 37 minutes. The process was initiated by four open interviews of two Schuitema consultants and two managers from client organizations. This was followed by 51 semi-structured interviews of 11 Schuitema consultants and personnel, 35 managers from client organizations, two freelancers, and two subordinates of managers from client organizations. Thirty-five of the participants were in Pakistan, with 15 in South Africa. All except three interviews were conducted face to face, the exceptions were audio meetings over Skype and Zoom. Forty-five of the participants were males, and five were females, which is reflective of gender ratios in the corporate environment of these countries. Age of the participants ranged from 25 to 72 years, with a median age of 46 years. Highest levels of education attained were mostly bachelor's and master's degrees. Most of the client organizations were in the manufacturing, mining, and telecommunications sectors.

Alongside the qualitative data, the demographic data of participants were collected to enable the contextualization of the interview data. This is essential for drawing conclusions from qualitative data (Blaikie, 2000; Mead, 1953). Individual demographic data included age, gender, designation, education, years of work experience, number of organizations worked for, and duration with the organization. The demographic data of participants are included in Table 1.

Interviewees were initially selected through purposive sampling in order to “maximize the possibilities of obtaining data” by “talking to the most knowledgeable people” (Glaser, 1978). Open-ended, in-depth interviews were conducted with the initial sample, on the basis of which, a protocol for semi-structured interviews was developed for subsequent interviews. Subsequent interviewee selection was performed through a combination of snowball and theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Oppong, 2013). Primary data collection was conducted in Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi, Pakistan, and Johannesburg, South Africa. The Pakistani cities were selected due to the presence of a significant number of clients there which would enable sufficient data collection. Johannesburg was selected, as it housed the head office of the South African organization, and also provided access to a significant number of key consultants and clients.

Most of the interviews were conducted at the premises of the participants' current organizations. In some cases, interviews were conducted at residences. A few interviews of managers from client organizations were conducted at the Schuitema office near Johannesburg. Semi-structured interviews continued until data saturation was achieved (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Schensul et al., 2012). In addition to primary data, secondary data from books by Schuitema (2011a,b, 2012, 2015) on the Care and Growth model were also used to enrich the findings.

TABLE 1
Demographic Details of Participants

Participant Number	Age (Years)	Education (Years)	Work Experience	Organizations Worked For	Gender
1	64	Bachelor's	39	5	M
2	33.5	Master's	14	3	M
3	62	Bachelor's	41	5	M
4	57	Master's	30	8	M
5	29	Master's	5	3	M
6	42	Master's	20	3	M
7	31	Bachelor's	12	3	M
8	27	Bachelor's	6.5	3	F
9	26	Bachelor's	3	2	M
10	29	Bachelor's	8	3	M
11	50	Master's	27	4	M
12	35	Master's	9	3	M
13	57	Matriculation	20	2	F
14	27	Bachelor's	4	2	M
15	45	Intermediate	15	5	M
16	48	Master's	22	4	M
17	32	Master's	8	4	M
18	47	Master's	24	6	M
19	36	Master's	12	4	M
20	38	Master's	11	6	F
21	32	Master's	10	2	M
22	29	Master's	5	1	M
23	26	Bachelor's	5	5	M
24	56	Master's	32	15	M
25	41	Bachelor's	18	14	M
26	54	Master's	30	7	M
27	43	Master's	20	5	M
28	45	Master's	20	7	M
29	50	Master's	30	8	M
30	50	Master's	25	3	M
31	46	Master's	20	3	F
32	61	Master's	30	5	M
33	39	Master's	19	4	M
34	45	Master's	19	5	M
35	46	Master's	17	6	M
36	60	Master's	34	1	M
37	50	Bachelor's	29	4	M
38	62	Bachelor's	37	1	M
39	64	Doctorate	35	2	M
40	29	Master's	6	2	M
41	38	Bachelor's	14	4	M
42	56	Bachelor's	35	6	M
43	72	Doctorate	45	5	M
44	46	Bachelor's	26	2	M
45	46	Master's	18	6	F
46	25	Bachelor's	4	6	M
47	44	Bachelor's (3 yrs)	20	2	M
48	48	Master's	24	3	M
49	48	Bachelor's	31	3	M
50	51	Bachelor's	35	7	M

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded and audio-coded using MAXQDA software. Audio coding helps to reduce the time and cost of analysis (Wainwright & Russell, 2010). This method also makes for more authentic interpretation of data, thus leading to a better quality of analysis. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a widely used technique for developing themes from qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In thematic analysis, themes are identified from the qualitative data in its various forms, such as voice, text, and graphics, and encoded (Boyatzis, 1998). The codes are analyzed to generate broader themes, which are refined, related, and organized. Themes are not always determinable based on quantitative measures but on their relevance to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Particularly in relation to non-mainstream perspectives and such topics as marginalization, taboos, etc., proportionately smaller segments of the data may be significant for the subject under discussion. Furthermore, in qualitative data, while multiple sources may generally address a theme and its subtopics, each piece of data is largely unique. Thus, rather than a common denominator approach, the analysis is more analogous to making a jigsaw puzzle, whereby different items are pieced together into an overall picture. The resulting picture as well as its relation with existing literature, is woven into an “analytic narrative” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The main themes generated from data analysis were used to organize the discussion section. To support the results, applicable audio excerpts were transcribed verbatim and used to enrich the discussion. Where necessary, Urdu quotes were translated into English.

Respondent Validation

Respondent validation (Bloor, 1978) or member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2016) comprises involving participants and getting their feedback during the analysis process. This was incorporated in this study through reviews of the analysis results by a stratified sample of key participants, as suggested by (Creswell & Poth, 2016), including two consultants and two managers from different client organizations, and the respondents agreed with the major themes emerging from the data.

Reflexivity

It is acknowledged that the background and experiences of the researcher as a Pakistani Muslim may have influenced the selection of the case organization, the devising of the research questions, and the analysis of the findings. However, as propounded by standpoint theory (Harding, 1991), this situatedness may have enabled the researcher to pick up on issues and phenomena, such as colonial and secular biases, that may have gone unnoticed by researchers belonging to more privileged social backgrounds in the global hierarchy. To circumvent the influence of the researcher’s views on the participants, as part of the interview protocol, leading questions were avoided, and themes were allowed to emerge from the voluntary responses of the participants. Additionally, the respondent validation process was undertaken to ensure the authenticity of the representation of the findings. Further confidence in this respect was attained through the fact that the key topics and themes of analysis continued to

change and evolve throughout the research process.

Another aspect regarding reflexivity was that the commonality of culture, religion, and language between the researcher and the Pakistani participants facilitated the relationship-building necessary for qualitative research. Some of the participants may have felt more comfortable talking about religious perspectives, even in a secular environment, because of the religious appearance of the researcher.

Crystallization

The term crystallization has gained preference over triangulation in qualitative methods involving the use of multiple sources, methods, and viewpoints. Triangulation, associated with positivistic worldviews, involves the use of multiple sources to verify the same conclusion. Crystallization, allowing for interpretive and postmodern worldviews, uses similar approaches as triangulation but for developing a more multidimensional view and deeper understanding (Tracy, 2010). Crystallization was achieved through multiple aspects in this study as suggested by Denzin & Lincoln (2011). One aspect is the collection of data through multiple data sources – multiple organizations and stratified participants. Another aspect is use of multiple data collection methods including interviews and textual readings. And a third aspect is the review of the analysis process by other academicians. The findings for this study are detailed next.

FINDINGS

Belief in a Benevolent Universe

It is worth mentioning that although the Care and Growth model is rooted in Sufism, the proponents of the model include adherents of many different religions. Although the participants of the current study were mostly Muslims and Christians, the consultants also mentioned people of other religions who had subscribed to this altruistic model. A primary common factor that was found in all proponents of the Care and Growth model among participants was a strong belief in a benevolent universe. This belief took multiple forms – the Muslims referred explicitly or implicitly to the benevolence and justice of Allah, while others referred to God, fate, karma, or the universe. One South African manager explained his experiences and belief in the following manner:

... the more you give, the more you receive; and you give what you can and you receive what you need, and they may be completely different things. If you give away everything, it will all just come back to you ... in some way ... and in the most helpful way ... that's the belief or the experience of a benevolent universe. (Male South African manager)

A business owner went further along the spectrum towards altruism, viewing his giving as his duty towards Allah:

I don't work for bread. Allah gives me bread so I may contribute. (Male South African client)

However, the predominating climate in these corporate environments was found to be that of a hostile environment and personal survival, promoting malevolence rather than benevolence. One Pakistani manager described the prevailing corporate mindset and its tension with the Care and Growth model:

... normally in corporate every person comes with the design that I do my job, save my job, and go home ... in this (Care and Growth) model sometimes you have to look bad in front of management (for the sake of your people) ... and you have to trust the design of everything, right. It requires a leap of faith ... (Male Pakistani manager)

And yet, people experienced a transition in their beliefs and mindset. The transition may not be a sudden, absolute switchover but more of an, incremental process. A South African manager recounted how, in very difficult financial circumstances, he gave his lunch money to a beggar. Through this event, he realized that he was blessed rather than deficient by the fact that he could survive while giving. When he repeated this practice, the realization grew stronger.

That's a massive internal change that happens at that point; because suddenly from being in a universe of scarcity I'm now involved in a universe that has actually given me more than I really need to survive - that's a change in attitude which far exceeds the little bit of money, you know, that I gave. (Male South African manager)

People related such a belief in a benevolent universe to generation of gratitude and trust, which, in turn, motivate altruistic feelings. Gratitude can find different forms of expression, one of which is to benefit others. Trust can help in overcoming insecurities which are a general hindrance to giving. Etsko Schuitema described this thought in the following words: "Life works by an ingenuity which is bigger than yours; you can afford to unconditionally forgo outcomes and you will be looked after."

Belief in Spirituality

One of the roots from which the Care and Growth model grew was spirituality. Etsko Schuitema's worldview, grounded in Sufism (of which spirituality is an essential aspect), and his progress on the spiritual path played a formative role in the conception and refinement of his model of altruism.

This belief in spirituality, albeit in differing forms, was a common factor that was found in the participants subscribing to this altruistic model. Again, Muslims and Christians drew on their religions for concepts of spirituality. A Muslim consultant, who was also a Sufi disciple of Schuitema, explained her understanding of spirituality and its relation to religion as religion guiding the practice of spirituality:

I don't see any chasm in it, ... that religion is something else and spirituality is something else. (Female Pakistani consultant).

She also learnt from her experience with Schuitema's teachings that intent and practice have a bidirectional relationship. While intent affects one's practice, practice also helps in

further refinement of intent. Another manager elucidated a similar bidirectional relationship between giving and receiving when viewed from a spiritual dimension. He described how forgiving someone results in an immediate spiritual gain, as it increases the sense of spiritual connectedness with the other.

Let's say you've insulted me ... I've got this mind concept ... I'm putting you in a cage for being a very bad-mannered person, but for me I've now got this cage where I've got this moral superiority over you. When I forgive you; it forgives me that moral superiority, which is, in fact, just a veil in front of what really is connecting us, which is the deep inner connection that we are talking about. ... So any of those sort of things, the giving and receiving are always simultaneous. (Male South African manager)

This belief in spirituality was not just of an individual, independent spirit, but also included a spiritual connection with others, extending, ultimately, to the whole universe. This connection forms an important basis for the motivation to benefit others, as one views others as connected, not disjoint, from oneself. Another role spirituality played in influencing altruism was a dynamic view of spirituality rather than a static one. Participants viewed growth in altruism as a form of spiritual growth which proceeds through time and experience and requires overcoming internal as well as external challenges.

... it was a spiritual growth for me to be moving down the track of being able to say "I am not in this (job) just for my family and myself, I am actually in this to give these people that I ... have the privilege of working with, to be part of the environment which enables them to grow" (Male South African manager).

Quest for Truth and Meaning

Yet another element related by people that led to their subscription to an altruistic philosophy was a quest for truth and meaning in life. This quest drove people to move beyond egoism, and develop intentions to contribute to nobler, altruistic causes. A Pakistani manager described his experience relating to his struggle towards fulfillment of his quest like this.

I have always had this quest - I knew clearly the management style we are following ... there is some problem (with that) ... I felt the problem was that mostly these (management techniques) are based on manipulation ... because one person wants to get something or the other out of another. ... Anyhow I kept struggling (in the quest for truth) ... so when the training was being conducted and it was like Schuitema Sahib talked about ... all these concepts, I said oh man! ... then there was some click ... I felt like this is just the thing I was searching for, because it was pure. (Male Pakistani manager).

Such a quest, if directed towards finding meaning and a higher purpose in life rather than being tilted towards meaningless pursuits, can lead a person towards altruism.

Question everything but with the right intent ... questioning just for the heck of questioning ... for no reason, to annoy ... that questioning has no value ...

questioning in the quest of fulfillment, the real fulfillment - that matters. (Male Pakistani manager).

Childhood Teachings and Experiences

Childhood teachings were also found to have a major role in people's inclination towards altruism. Many participants who expressed acceptance of altruistic concepts referred to the congruence of these concepts to what they were taught as children. These childhood values resurfaced when they were exposed to the altruistic management model as adults, acted as a force towards acceptance of the model, and helped them to overcome the internal and external resistance created by the egoistic atmosphere around them.

Look one thing was there since the beginning, that was that there was good training at home, nature was good, was never rude to anyone, used to deal respectfully, the caring part was always there. Yes sometimes, just to look nice, we don't take appropriate action. ... Giving is not always about being generous ... When parents beat you in childhood ... that growth part was not there (in my dealings with my subordinates). There wasn't that clarity in my mind (Male Pakistani manager).

The trainings and mentoring helped to further develop and refine the childhood concepts and their application in personal and social as well as professional spheres of life.

Age

Age appears to play a role, albeit a complex one, in the altruistic progression of people. A Pakistani female, who was working as an independent trainer and consultant more particularly with women and children, found that children were quicker in acceptance and practice of altruistic concepts as compared to adults. Some of the younger managers felt the model was more relevant to senior managers as they felt the existing organizational policies and culture were not in line with altruistic values, and senior managers have more authority to bring about the relevant changes. On the other hand, some of the senior managers felt the model was more relevant to the younger managers, as they themselves had become too "set in their ways". And yet, some of the younger clients had proceeded quite successfully with implementing the model in their own jurisdiction, possibly because they had a certain level of authority as department heads or business owners. Another senior consultant, who had taken up consulting after retirement from full-time employment, commented that he found it easier to progress with the model because, at his stage of life, he "had nothing to lose". A South African manager provided another example of this phenomenon where age had a role to play in altruistic progression.

... I was 39, 40 when I started this (working with the Care and Growth model), and that is probably a key age, 'cause up 'til then, I mean, I hadn't really thought about giving or leaving anything or being a part of anything bigger than myself. It was just making a living for myself and my family, that was what I was thinking about up 'til then ... (Male South African manager).

Thus the level of authority, other life experiences, and the situation in life may create differences in the effect of age on altruism. Generally, it may be easier for younger people to

accept altruistic ideals; however, they may be limited in practice by their level of authority, particularly in an environment that promotes egoism. On the other hand, maturity and independence may facilitate altruism in older age. This altruistic progression may take time. Some people initially rejected such concepts, but ended up accepting them later, sometimes much later, in life. A South African manager described how some people were initially reluctant to adopt an altruistic outlook and had to leave the company but came to accept the ideas later in their lives.

... some people didn't get it and they were fired, ... it sounds, you know, a harsh process but it wasn't harsh, but it was firm, ... and a lot of those people came back years later and are still my friends, ... and some of them, five years later or ten years later, got Etsko back into their new organizations (laughing). So some people just weren't ready for it ... (Male South African manager).

Environmental Influences and Role of the Education System

The prevailing corporate environment and education system appear to have been more instrumental in developing an egoistic, rather than altruistic mindset in people. Several participants, both consultants and clients, implicated the education system, particularly MBA programs in this regard. Some of these participants were MBA degree holders themselves. They felt from their experience that students are typically trained in these programs to develop an exploitative mindset towards people rather than a caring one. The focus is typically the benefit of the organization, which acts as a glorified façade for the benefit of organizational shareholders rather than the benefit of the people who constitute the organization. Personal incentives towards this end further strengthen the egoistic tendencies in the students. A manager gave an example of the way egoism is inculcated through business education:

The term "human resource" also is a bit of a misconception ... resources are meant to be consumed - you are consuming humans. So care for them, ... you take the labour, the skillset of a person ... but a human ... alive, awake, who has emotions, who has feelings, who thinks, who would have a belief set, who would belong to some certain creed, who has a certain upbringing, will also come along ... we are not taking care of that. (Male Pakistani manager).

One consultant with experience in both Pakistan and South Africa observed that there was a significantly greater proportion of managers with foreign (typically western MBA) education, as well as a more selfish mindset in the Pakistani corporate environment, as compared to the South African one. Overcoming the egoistic mindset created by such "education" was a greater challenge in Pakistan, which made the model a harder sell in concept as well as moving beyond the concept to practice. Even with the model being rooted in Sufism, it appeared alien to many Pakistani Muslims because of their indoctrination in western thought.

On the other hand, a more altruistic work environment can have the reverse effects as well. People coming from the egoistic atmosphere of typical business education and corporate environments to organizations implementing altruistic management experienced a shift in their worldviews. One employee, who had been working with an altruistic manager for one and a half year, describes her progression in words below.

Working with this team ... one of the aspects it's changed about me personally is that it's made me think about other people in the team as well. Meaning, if I compare myself to what I was a year and a half (ago), I would say I was a very selfish person, I would just think about myself, I mean, "I have to do this ... My goal is this ... I don't care about anything else". But ... working with the people over here; that has molded that into that I wanna help the others achieve their goals as well. It's just not me, me, me, me, me ... (Female Pakistani client employee).

This shift in worldviews was not limited to the participants' outlook in the work environment, but expanded to permeate their personal life spheres and their family and social relationships as well.

Continued Reinforcement

Both consultants and client personnel alike stated that the "conversion" to an altruistic worldview was permanent for individuals, though transitory for organizations. In multiple client organizations who had successfully brought about an altruistic cultural change, a change in people, particularly top management, brought about a reversion to an egoistic culture. Such reversion is understandable, as that was the prevailing culture in most business education and corporate environments from where the new people came. However, altruism stayed with the individuals in whom it had become established.

... so it's actually the wrong variable to have as the ... marker as to ask "Do organizations change?" Well they do and they don't, and they can change back very easily. But the individuals that are affected, they'll stay ... they'll never go back, I mean they've got a different way of looking at things, like a penny drops ... you look in the guy's eyes you can see (snap of fingers) something's happened there. He's never going to be the same after that, he can never go back to his old way of looking at things. (Male South African consultant).

However, initial acceptance of the model is followed by further internal and external challenges that people need to overcome, and they mostly require some level of moral support through this process. Typically, under the influence of the environmental factors discussed previously, egoism has become so entrenched that the transition to altruism is generally an incremental, time-taking process that requires ongoing intellectual and moral support.

But then as people start working with the stuff they get increasingly challenged by this idea that I have to forgo my good fortune ... and then it becomes a tighter and tighter challenge, ... and people find, when they are on that journey they find it very useful to have someone to talk to because most other people are gonna think that they are nuts. I mean this world doesn't think that it's sane to stop controlling, to forgo outcomes. (Male South African consultant).

The participants who stayed the course appeared to have engaged in some form of continued reinforcement over the years. This reinforcement took varied forms. Some of the participants, both male and female, had become Etsko Schuitema's disciples in Sufism. Some had moved

on from their jobs to become consultants and trainers based on Care and Growth, either as part of Schuitema Human Excellence Group, or as independent consultants. Others had developed social networks around these concepts among coworkers, or made the concepts a regular topic of discussion among family and friends. Most stayed in touch with Schuitema one way or another.

What I have experienced is these people, they inevitably become my friends. It's no longer just a consulting relationship . . . (Male South African consultant).

Discussion

Most of the literature on altruism over the past century has viewed it through lenses of self-interested rationality and Darwinian evolution, assuming its impossibility and tying phenomena of apparent altruism to self-interest and survival (C. Grant, 1997; Wuthnow, 1993). Majority of such work has employed controlled experiments and mathematical models, which serve to limit the results because of the underlying assumptions of researchers (Wuthnow, 1993). This study adds to the scant qualitative work from on altruism from a sociological perspective, seeking to expand the view of its social realities.

The findings of this study corroborate such literature that suggests that not only is altruism possible, but also highly desirable (C. Grant, 1997; Piliavin & Charng, 1990; Wuthnow, 1993), and that the prevailing global climate in contemporary educational institutions, as well as corporate organizations seems to be promoting egoism rather than altruism (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Dagar et al., 2022; Schwartz, 1993). Yet significant clarifications and additions to the extant literature may be made based on the findings.

Although management literature has found positive outcomes of altruism in organizations and society (C. Grant, 1997; Romani et al., 2013; Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2018), studies on antecedents of altruism are rare. A few exceptions include Valentine et al. (2011), who found that perceptions of corporate ethical values contributed to altruism in employees. Furnham et al. (2016) discovered a positive relationship between altruism and certain personality traits. Dagar et al. (2022) explicated how certain yoga practices may help build altruism through enhancing subjective vitality, self-transcendence and psychological capital.

The findings of the current study indicate factors different from those identified by previous studies. Belief in a Benevolent God or universe generates gratitude and trust that are possibly essential foundations of altruism. Spiritual beliefs can create a feeling of unification with the universe, thus developing a conception of the self that is not atomic and independent, but closely interconnected with others. This may intensify empathy, which has been acknowledged as a contributor to altruism (De Waal, 2008) and even the distinction between doing something for the self or for the other may blur (Schwartz, 1993). A quest for truth and meaning in life, in the works of Victor Frankl (1985), has been identified as crucial for human survival, especially in the most adverse circumstances. Such a quest may lead human beings beyond egoism and self-interest to contribute towards the welfare of others and betterment of the society as a collective whole (Vollhardt, 2009). Dagar et al. (2022) have identified self-transcendence as one of the factors leading to altruism and elucidated how yoga practices may be a way to self-transcendence. The findings of the current study suggest alternative beliefs that can also lead to self-transcendence and altruism.

The remaining factors influencing altruism shed additional light on the nature vs. nurture debate. The findings do not negate the possibility of altruism being intrinsic to human nature. In fact, it appeared as a reality for many of the participants, who were motivated by such a view, based on their beliefs, in cultivating altruism within their selves and in others. At the same time, multiple aspects of nurturing were also found to have crucial impacts on intrinsic altruism. Childhood reinforcement of such values keeps reappearing throughout one's lifetime, and as one navigates through different ages and stages of life, the combinations of external influences and experiences in these stages may serve to revive or suppress these values. The influence of the prevailing education system in general, and MBA programs in particular, added to that of the contemporary corporate environment may suppress altruistic values while cultivating egoism and promoting it as the default state of human nature, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Dagar, Pandey, & Navare, 2022; Miller, 1999; Schwartz, 1993). And yet the findings demonstrate the reverse may be as adequately achieved through a different worldview, corroborating the conclusions by Valentine et al. (2011) that an ethical corporate environment can promote altruism in its members. The extent to which altruistic values are strengthened may affect their persistence through an opposing climate. Thus, though it may vary in form, the need for reinforcement of altruistic values stays lifelong.

Implications for Practice

The above findings have important implications for management and business ethics. These findings signify the need for multidimensional approaches for the transformation of the prevailing egoistic corporate climate to an altruistic one. The findings from multiple cultural contexts suggest that people may be growing up with beliefs and values that promote altruism. However, the contemporary business education and corporate climate is counteracting this process, even though it may be detrimental to businesses themselves, as well as to society in general. The economic view based on "limited resources and unlimited wants" prevails with little critique in the business environment (Shabbir & Ahmed, 2020) and has a tendency to counteract the effects of belief in a benevolent universe, by fostering feelings of insecurity and competition. The business education environments are generally high in materialistic values (Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006), which may undermine belief in spirituality. Business and economic theories tend to not just legitimize, but actually valorize greed (Hayat et al., 2021), which obstructs altruism rather than promoting it. Quest for truth and meaning may be counteracted by secularism and pluralism, which on the one hand may make more room for some forms of alternative and marginalized thought, but on the other hand weaken all forms of conviction (Berger, 1983). Businesses also need to be aware of "economic imperialism"; or the growing invasion of market logic to all spheres of life like family, social, etc. (Schwartz, 1993); and actively work towards counteracting this phenomenon, possibly as part of corporate social responsibility initiatives. Focus on humanistic values, including those introduced in early life, may be indicated in the hiring process. Additionally, effective training, mentoring, and other strategies for cultural change, including ongoing reinforcement, designed around these values, can help in further cultivation and growth of altruism. People may need different forms of assistance at different stages of life – young employees may find

it easier to adapt but require more support from senior managers, while senior managers may find it more difficult to change their ways and require more mentoring. A revamping of the education system, particularly business education programs, also appears to be in order to this end.

Conclusion

This article makes multiple contributions to management literature. It adds to the scant literature on altruism, focuses on altruistic interventions, and based on qualitative evidence, highlights some of the factors that play a role in the cultivation of altruism. Further work is needed to explore additional factors that may influence altruism. A dire need also exists to deeply explore the role of the education system in general, and business education in particular in this process. Consequently, one can focus on turning these systems around so they bring out the best in humankind.

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