

Prosocial Motivation across culture: What does it imply for organizations?

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Abstract— In today's organizational context studying prosocial motivation or 'the desire to help another' is important in order to understand human motivation as well as to improve the productivity of individuals. Recent trends show increased focus on employee satisfaction, and job satisfaction leads to greater productivity and employee retention. The workplace today is grappling with complexities arising out of gender diversity and cultural diversity. As the workplace becomes increasingly global it is important for the management to understand differences in employee motivation arising out of cultural and environmental factors. Advancement in technology and communications has made the world a smaller place. Several global and multinational organizations have teams or groups consisting of individual's from different cultural backgrounds. The question that arises is do these individuals have varying external and internal motivations and are these differences culture specific?

This paper discusses one element within the larger umbrella of motivation, that is, the desire to help other individuals. Prosocial motivation operates on three levels of generality, namely global, contextual and situational. Scholars argue that self interested motivations are not opposed to prosocial motivation and can be independent depending on the level of generality.

Index Terms— Pro-social behavior, Motivation,



Individuals' motivations with regard to the self and society would likely depend on their culture. Understanding contextual prosocial motivation of individuals belonging to different cultures may be helpful to organizations. A better understanding of this concept could help one model jobs to accommodate and promote helping behaviour. Some organizations promote helping behaviour by making employees work in groups as it is proposed that it would lead to greater productivity. The conventional hierarchical structures in organizations has now given way to more complex structures in organizations which is the reason why it is even more important to understand helping behaviour and the motivation to help today.

The idea of the self and attitude towards helping others could depend on whether the culture is individualistic or collectivistic. It would also be dependent on relational job design, collectivistic rewards and leadership within an organizational context. Self protective motivations are often seen as opposite to pro social motivations. However, conceptually they need not be opposed. The literature review on self protective and pro-social motivations across cultures will help propose an argument as to how these differences can be worked on through motivational models in order to foster healthy pro-social behaviour which in turn can act as a catalyst for outcomes that are often viewed as "positive" for employees such as meaningful work and strengthened social bonds. The paper will aim to establish a positive relationship

between self protective and pro-social motivations and exploring the differences across cultures will help develop a motivational model that will benefit the employee and in turn, the organization. This will also involve exploring organizational 'cultures' themselves and their values. The components of culture that motivate an individual towards self protective or pro-social behaviour will also be explored in this paper.

'Are individuals motivated by the desire to help other individuals?' The main aim of this study is to answer this question, along with gaining more clarity into what constitutes and causes this kind of motivation. Prosocial motivation is defined as the desire to benefit other people or groups (Grant, 2007). Are people who are situated within the structure of a certain profession likely to experience this kind of motivation, in the context of their work place? For example, is a doctor motivated by his job because it allows him to help people in need, that is, is a doctor prosocially motivated? Since this study aims at understanding prosocial motivation within an organizational context, prosocial motivation is looked at as distinguished from altruism. There could be occasions where altruism and prosocial behaviour overlap, but prosocial behaviour is not the same as altruism, because prosocial behaviour is the desire to help another but not necessarily at the cost of one's self interested motives.

Since as early as the 1900s, social and organizational psychologists have shown a significant interest in studying

prosocial behaviour and the motivation behind such behaviour. The concept has evolved and been defined by different psychologists based on different parameters. Prosocial behaviour has been looked at as opposed to self interested actions. However, in so far as prosocial 'motivation' is concerned, prosocial motivation is not necessarily opposed to self interested motivations, even though in certain occasions they may cause conflict. Research has shown a causal relationship between prosocial motivation and prosocial behaviour, prosocial motivation leads to prosocial behaviour.

Prosocial behaviour has been discussed in the context of prosocial behaviour in organizations as well as prosocial behaviour focussed on certain individuals. Prosocial behaviour within organizations explore whether the structure of certain jobs allows for a larger scope of prosocial behaviour in comparison to other jobs. Psychologists have explored the motivation behind prosocial behaviour as well as the act itself. The idea of prosocial behaviour has also been studied within a cultural context, accounting for individual differences. It has also been studied within an organizational context, understanding environmental variables. Grant's prosocial handbook has defined Pro-social motivation as the desire to have a positive impact on other people or social collectives. (Adam M, 2010)

Grant has developed a model for understanding of prosocial motivation at work. This has been done by first defining the terms 'motivation' and 'pro-social action'. 'Motivation' is a desire or reason to act. 'Pro-social action' is an act for the benefit of others or with the intention of helping others. Pro-social motivation is said to be generalized at three levels namely global, contextual and situational levels. This model has been adopted to understand prosocial motivation not the act itself and this is done within the larger framework of the concept of motivation itself.

Global prosocial motivation is defined as the tendency to care about benefiting another and placing importance on promoting the well being of another, in general. Contextual Prosocial is the desire to help another by virtue of one's job, occupation or role, for example, a teacher's passion for educating students. Research suggests that relational job design in terms of higher task significance and higher contact with beneficiaries leads to higher pro-social motivation. (Adam M, 2010) This idea has been further explored to understand whether individuals within a certain job are more likely to be prosocially motivated. Grant (2007) 'Relational Job Design and the motivation to make a positive difference', particularly explores how the specific structure of jobs allow for individual's to be motivated to make a positive difference in another's life.

This concept can be further understood by identifying key antecedents, out of which relational job design forms one of them. Collectivistic norms and rewards, individual differ-

ences in other-oriented values, agreeableness, and conscientiousness along with relational job design form the key antecedents that were identified within an organizational context.

Prosocial motivation can also be intrinsic and extrinsic. Research shows that intrinsic prosocial motivation predicts persistence, performance and productivity to a larger extent than extrinsic motivation. Impression management motivation along with citizenship behaviours and trustworthiness of managers is discussed in the context of extrinsic prosocial motivation. Studies found that prosocial motivation strengthens the relationships between core self-evaluations and performance as well as the relationship between intrinsic motivation and creativity. The perception of impact also plays a large role in understanding of prosocial motivation. The paper 'Relational Job Design and the Motivation to make a Prosocial Difference' puts forth six propositions in relation to these two Ideas. (Grant, 2007) 'The greater the magnitude, scope, and frequency of job impact on beneficiaries, the stronger the employee's perception of impact on beneficiaries. The greater the prevention 'focus' of job impact on beneficiaries, the stronger the employee's perception of impact on employees. The greater the frequency, duration, physical proximity, depth, and breadth of contact with beneficiaries provided by the job, the stronger the employee's perception of impact. The greater the frequency, duration, physical proximity, depth, and breadth of contact with beneficiaries provided by the job, the stronger the employee's affective commitment to beneficiaries. Social information about beneficiaries moderates the effect of contact with beneficiaries on affective commitment to them such that the more favourable (unfavourable) the information, the stronger the positive (negative) effect of contact with beneficiaries on affective commitment to them. The stronger the employee's perception of impact on beneficiaries, the stronger will be the employee's motivation to make a prosocial difference. Affective commitment to beneficiaries increases the positive effect of perceived impact on the motivation to make a prosocial difference. (Adam M, 2010; Grant, 2007)

Research has been done on pro-social behaviour among students in schools and how teacher's beliefs and behaviours affect them. (Clea Mcneely, 2004) However, how teachers perceive their jobs itself has not been looked into especially in an Indian context. Teachers can actually perceive the positive impact they cause due to the structure of the job. Following the model suggested by Grant, this can be determined by 'Job Impact on Beneficiaries' and 'Contact with beneficiaries' which in turn could cause 'Perception of Impact' and 'Affective Commitment to Beneficiaries'. (Adam M, 2010)

A study done on employees' prosocial values and the impact that it has on the firm proposed that within or-

ganization transformational leadership and professional altruism are key elements of a national business ideology's stimulation of employees' prosocial values, while corporate corruption is considered to be an impediment.

This paper focuses on why individuals focus on prosocial behaviour as this approach assumes that most human behavior is motivated by individuals' goals and needs, so that individuals proactively and consciously choose to engage in prosocial behaviors. (Miriam Muethel M. H., 2011) A study done on prosocial behaviour and job performance, focuses on employees' need for control, need for achievement, and the more commonly studied variable of organizational commitment as direct predictors of prosocial behaviour and ultimately as indirect antecedents of job performance. Therefore studying the motivation behind this behaviour becomes important. (Yehuda Baruch, 2004)

Prosocial behaviours of employees may be functional or dysfunctional for the organization. Prosocial acts may be directed towards the organization in general or towards a particular individual depending on individual values. Studies discuss prosocial behaviours that are present in the job design and extra prosocial behaviours exhibited by an employee. Prosocial behaviours are distinguished based on the beneficiary or target that is whether they are targeted towards a particular individual or towards the organization. This is important to understand especially in cases where individual or client benefit is opposed to organizational benefit.

'The Role of Dispositional and Situational Antecedents in Prosocial Organizational Behavior: An Examination of the Intended Beneficiaries of Prosocial Behaviour' (Meglino, 1994) discusses prosocial motivation that is aimed at benefiting another individual and prosocial motivation that is aimed at benefiting the organization. The factors are distinct due to the difference in intended beneficiaries. The study showed that the relationship between job satisfaction and prosocial behaviour directed at individuals remained significant and the relationship between job satisfaction and prosocial organizational behaviour was not significant when effects such as perception of reward, equity and recognition and value of concern for others was removed. The psychological processes and motivation behind prosocial behaviour is different and dependent on the beneficiary. The paper proposes the following hypothesis, 'Job satisfaction will be positively related to both prosocial behaviour directed only at the organization and prosocial behaviour directed only at specific individuals. The value of concern for others and empathy will be positively related to prosocial behaviour directed only at specific individuals. The effect of the value of concern for others and empathy will account for a substantial amount of variance in the relationship between job satisfaction and prosocial behavior directed only at specific indi-

viduals. Reward equity and recognition for desirable behaviour will be positively related to prosocial behaviour directed only at the organization. The effect of reward equity and recognition for desirable behaviour will account for a substantial amount of variance in the relationship between job satisfaction and prosocial behaviour directed only at the organization.' The results showed that the processes behind prosocial behaviour are different when the beneficiary is an individual versus an organization. This correlates with previously done research. Research done prior to this study does not distinguish between the beneficiaries towards whom the behaviour is intended. (Meglino, 1994). Whichever context prosocial motivation is studied within, the 'motivation' would be dependent on employees perception of impact. There could be certain organizational environments in which benefiting an individual beneficiary would indirectly involve benefiting the organization as a whole. However, the motivation behind benefiting an individual and an organization would be different. For example, a teacher by helping her student could indirectly be helping the organization, that is, the school because if the students fair well, the school would benefit. However, the intention behind helping a particular student may not be the same as a teacher helping a class because she or he wishes to benefit the organization. She would probably intend to benefit the organization by virtue of his or her job and the processes underlying it would be reward equity and recognition. The study conclusively found that behaviour intended to benefit another individual was not determined by reward equity and recognition, instead it was determined by dispositional factors, whereas organizational prosocial motivation may be determined by reward, equity and recognition. (Meglino, 1994)

Prosocial behaviour has also been studied in a specific organizational perspective. The construct of prosocial organizational behavior is defined and 13 specific forms are described. They vary according to whether they are functional or dysfunctional for organizational effectiveness, prescribed or not prescribed as part of one's organizational role, and directed toward an individual or organizational target. (Miriam Muethel, 2011)

The authors, Arthur P. Brief and Stephan J. Motowidlo define 'Prosocial organizational behavior' is behavior which is (a) performed by a member of an organization, (b) directed toward an individual, group, or organization with whom he or she interacts while carrying out his or her organizational role, and (c) performed with the intention of promoting the welfare of the individual, group, or organization toward which it is directed.' (Motowidlo, 1986) (Grant, 2007) (Miriam Muethel, 2011)

Employees often care about making a positive difference in other people's lives. It is ideally assumed that employees want to make a difference (Bornstein, 2004; Everett,

1995; May, 2003; Quinn, 2000). In order to motivate employees, many organizations define their missions in terms of making a difference (Collins & Porras, 1996; Margolis & Walsh, 2001, 2003; Thompson & Bunderson, 2003). Qualitative research and quantitative research reveal that many employees describe the purpose of their work in terms of making a positive difference in others' lives (Colby, Sippola, & Phelps, 2001; Ruiz-Quintanilla & England, 1996), and research in diverse bodies of literature suggests that this motivation to make a prosocial difference is prevalent in a variety of work contexts. (Motowidlo, 1986)

Secondary reading on the relation between gender and prosocial behaviour, a study of two mixed sex groups of adolescents at a four day camp showed that even though the amount of prosocial behaviour exhibited by both genders did not exhibit a large difference in the prosocial behaviour that was displayed but there were differences in the kind of prosocial behaviour that was displayed. Males displayed more physical assistance behaviors, while females performed more verbal support behaviors. No relationships were found between the sex of helper and the sex of the beneficiary. This helps understand gender roles and the kind of prosocial behaviour that is displayed by different genders. (R. Shepherd Zeldin, 1982) (Nancy Eisenberg, 1996)

In a study conducted to understand whether the relationships between teachers and students relations in early education can help determine prosocial behavior among students. The parameters for understanding this relationship were social and relational factors such as closeness between teacher and student, emotional relationship. This was studied across different ethnographic backgrounds. (Asha L. Spivak, 2011)

Cultural context plays an important role in understanding prosocial behaviour as well. A study conducted on preschool children, in four different cultures, explored emotional responses specifically sympathy and distress and prosocial behaviour. The response of distress was seen to be related to less prosocial behaviour in comparison to sympathy which predicted higher prosocial behaviour. The study showed that the children from the two individualistic western cultures displayed more sympathy focussed prosocial behaviour as compared to collectivistic cultures in which children displayed more self distress focussed behaviour. The important aspect that this study showed was the positive relationship between the emotional response of sympathy and prosocial behaviour and a negative relationship between distress and prosocial behaviour. This study was understood within a cultural context, on a population of preschool children but highlights important aspects of emotional responses related to prosocial behaviour. (Gisela Trommsdorff, 2007)

Another study done on Social and Relational Fac-

tors in Early Education and Prosocial Actions of Children of Diverse Ethnocultural Communities understands the relation between prosocial behaviour expressed by children and early education. Teachers assume an important role in this study, because this study examined interactions between teachers and children from different ethnocultural backgrounds. In this study five factors were examined, these five factors were chosen based on previously done research. These five factors were, closeness Social and relational factors including closeness of the teacher-child relationship, emotional tone of teacher-child interaction, engagement in social pretend play, competency in pretend play with peers, and positive social interaction among peers were explored in relation to children's prosocial behavior. (Asha L. Spivak, 2011) (Lorena Polazzi, 1996). Of these five factors closeness of the teacher-child relationship, emotional tone of teacher-child interaction, observed social pretend play, competency in pretend play with peers, and positive social interaction among peers—social pretend play engagement and competency positively related to children's prosocial behavior. These relations were significant across the different ethno cultural groups. Children have been examined specifically because research indicates that children who engage in prosocial acts in earlier developmental stages are likely to engage in prosocial behaviour at later stages of their development. (Asha L. Spivak, 2011) (Nancy Eisenberg, 1996) (Tina Malti, 2009)

Psychologists have long assumed that the motivation for all intentional action, including all action intended to benefit others, is egoistic. People benefit others because, ultimately, to do so benefits themselves. Distinctions between egoism and altruism emerge through research, discussing prosocial behaviour in contrast with self interested motives and whether prosocial motivations should be looked at from a different lens. It argues that each of these ideas are unique in so far as motivation is concerned because the processes is different. (Francis, 1991) As mentioned earlier, one of the antecedents that determine prosocial behaviour is Relational Job Design. It is necessary to define and explore each of these concepts as they will be used in the later sections of this paper. 'Individuals have different dispositions in terms of work orientation and individual values. Individuals may have egoistic or altruistic dispositions. For some individuals their job may be their calling, for others they may be a part of a particular profession due to other factors. (Grant, 2007)

'Relational Job design involves task significance, job impact on beneficiaries, contact with beneficiaries and perceived impact on beneficiaries. Task Significance is defined as the degree to which an employee's work affects the health and well being of other people. A job is defined as a collection of tasks designed to be performed by one or more employees. The components of Relational Architecture of a job are job impact on beneficiaries and contact with beneficia-

ries. Job impact on beneficiaries is the 'degree' to which a job provides opportunities for employees to affect the lives of beneficiaries. It includes the magnitude, scope, frequency and focus of the impact. (Grant, 2007)

The first aspect is the magnitude of impact, that is, the degree and duration of the potential effects of the job on beneficiaries. The second aspect is the scope of impact the number or breadth of people potentially affected by the job. The third dimension is the frequency of impact, how often the job provides opportunities for affecting others. The magnitude, scope, and frequency dimensions of job impact can each be characterized in terms of a fourth dimension of job impact, the focus of the impact, whether the job primarily provides opportunities to prevent harm or promote gains to other people. It is human tendency to value preventing of harm as higher than promoting gains' (Grant, 2007)

'Contact with Beneficiaries is the degree to which a job is relatively structured to provide opportunities for employees to interact and communicate with people affected by their work. It includes physical proximity, depth and breadth of impact.' (Grant, 2007). 'The first aspect of contact with beneficiaries is the physical proximity of contact, does the job allow for physical contact between the beneficiary and the beneficent. The second dimension is the duration of contact, the length of time for interactions with beneficiaries that the job provides. The third dimension is the physical proximity of contact, the degree of geographic and interpersonal space in the interaction that the job provides. The fourth dimension is the depth of contact, the degree to which the job enables the mutual expression of cognitions, emotions, and identities. The fifth dimension is the breadth of contact, the range of different groups of beneficiaries, the job places in communication with the employee.' (Grant, 2007)

Thus, Prosocial behaviour varies culturally but not necessarily among different genders. Jobs can promote prosocial motivation by creation of job structures that include a larger scope of perception of impact. If employees are made aware of the impact and benefit that they could cause, physical proximity and by increasing the frequency of contact individuals would be prosocially motivated. Another aspect that should be considered is whether the cultural upbringing of the employee is collectivistic or individualistic. Even though theoretically individuals from collectivistic cultures should exhibit helping behaviour this may not always be the case as collectivistic cultures involve norms. Prosocial motivation is positively related to job satisfaction and therefore organizations must promote this by creating relational job designs that foster prosocial behaviour, increase the breadth, scope and magnitude of impact with an effort to increase the perception of positive impact by the employee.

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