Selflessness and management
– an antagonism?

Ursula Kapfenberger-Poindl

ABSTRACT: Management literature emphasize mainly efficiency and profit maximization. Selflessness seems not to be a necessarily usual trait for managers and is not educated in management schools. However, managers are also human beings with a personal history and have developed personal values. Therefore, these values may be also influence factors for management decisions. The question of this paper is, if managers are only rational driven on basis of their business targets or do they act on basis of their personal value scheme. For this paper three categories and some of the included values of the Schwartz’s value scheme are considered. The three categories tradition, benevolence, and the category universalism are analyzed in a survey with 118 managers of different branches. The hypothesis is, that managers do rate those values low which are connected with selflessness. However, the study could show, that management reality is not that easy. There is evidence that management is connected with high personal and business values, although the small sample provides the basis for further research.

KEYWORDS: Leadership styles, Business Values, Management, Organization, Selflessness

JEL Code: J17, J50, O10, Z13, M14

1 Ursula Kapfenberger-Poindl PhD Student, University of West Hungary, Alexandre Lamfalussy Faculty of Economics, and University of Applied Sciences Burgenland, u.poindl@gmx.at
Introduction

Management and selflessness seems to be a contradiction itself. In common sense, companies are used to make profit and not to have altruistic targets. Therefore, managers were considered as business and goal oriented people, who act strict profit oriented. But on the one hand, managers are human beings, who have personal values, which cannot always be separated from their business behavior and on the other hand, altruism can make sense also for companies and improve their performance. In this paper three categories and some of the included values of the Schwartz’s value scheme are considered. The three categories tradition (values: devoutness, humbleness and modesty) benevolence (values: helpfulness, forgivingness, love, friendship, meaning in life and a spiritual life) and the category universalism (values: wisdom, broad mindedness, a world at peace, inner harmony) are analyzed in a survey with 118 managers of different branches. The hypothesis (H1) is, that managers do rate those values low, which are connected with selflessness.

Theoretical background

Selflessness is connected in literature with self-transcendence, mediation and serenity (Levenson et. al, 2005.), altruism (Gates & Steane, 2009), spirituality (Delbecq, 1999) and virtue (Grant, 2011). Similar personal values can be found in the universal value scheme of Schwartz (Schwartz, 1992a). Czinkota (2017) claimed that corporations are expected not only to make profit, but also take responsibility for society and governmental problems to find possible answers of future problems and that it is expected that companies see their responsibility for instance for marketing caused problems and find future solutions. Unethical behavior lead to a loss of consumer’s trust and afterwards also profit. People feel a growing desire of business based on responsibility, wisdom and humanistic and holistic philosophy. To hear of the voice of soul and match it up with business intentions should guide managers and influence both, customers and team members. Four new areas are defined for a responsible business: truthfulness, simplicity, expanded participation and personal responsibility. Companies should practice mindful leadership instead of profit maximization. Ethic and honesty should be basis of business and should be teaching in management education. Steven Brookes (Brookes, 2014) worked on principal oriented leadership in public interest, which he defined as “a benefit or advantage of the whole community”. In
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public leadership values of the society receive an exceptional meaning, apart from profit gaining. Many authors work on the influence and impact of spirituality in business. They complain, that business produces “large scale ecological, social and ethical ills” (Zsolnai & Illes, 2017) and claim that spiritual business models would lead to enhanced motivation of employees and employers and therefore business performance should not only be measured in business factors but in a broad “wisdom-based” management scheme (Bouckaert & Zsolnai, 2011). Some leadership style theories focus on value orientation and emphasis the meaning of responsibility and altruism in management.

Value oriented Leadership styles
In literature different leadership styles have been defined and every style seems to have its focus on different priorities. Autocratic style is known for straight decision-making of the leader, in democratic style team members have an active part in decision making while in laissez faire leadership team members have to decide alone because of the lack of leading of the team leader (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939. On basis of these three basic leadership styles there have been defined further leadership styles with different emphases. In the context of selflessness especially value oriented leadership styles should be mentioned. Those leadership styles not only focus on business targets alone but include also factors like personal and ethical values, work climate, traditions and social and religious conventions into their business decision making concepts (Frederick, 1995). In value based leadership the four principles self-reflection, balance, genuine humility and true self confidence are in the center of the leading person (Kraemer, 2011). In servant leadership style the decision making process is even stronger carried out from team members but not from the leader(Frick, 2004) while decisions in transformational leadership both variants are possible but always with the focus on the whole vison of the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The focus of servant leaders is more in trust and relationship oriented and has the emphasis more on people than processes and figures (Dutta & Khatri, 2017). They are altruistic, wise, supportive, persuasive and emotional healing (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006). Covey’s (Covey, 1992) model of principal centered leadership is based on four levels – personal, interpersonal, managerial and organizational – and has defined the characteristics life-long-learning, service orientation, optimism, believing in people, a balanced social, spiritual, hardworking, adventurous and creative life. All decisions are made with emphasis on long-time goals, personal values and ethical principles. All value oriented
leadership styles have an emphasis on ethical and moral aspects and personal values in common which is often connected with spiritual convictions.

**Methodology**

A quantitative survey in March and April 2017 in Austria and neighbouring countries was carried out. An online questionnaire was sent directly to selected companies and to different disseminators like the Danube University Krems, the University of Applied Sciences Burgenland, the chamber of commerce Austria and their nine branches in the federal states, to regional organisations, like the Wirtschaftsforum Waldviertel and the Danube-Moldau region. The survey was also published on online platforms like XING, LinkedIn and SurveyCircle. The survey target group were managers of different management levels. 189 persons took part, 118 participants completed the survey fully. 71 male and 43 female people participated, four people did not specify their sex. 25,4% of the attending managers were between 18 and 35 years old, 43,2% were between 36 and 50 years, 28% were between 51 and 65 years and three were over 65 years old. One person did not specify his/her age. 88 (74,6%) came from Austria, 26 (22%) from Germany, 2 (1,7%) from Hungary, 1 (0,8%) from Italy and 1 person (0,8%) from Switzerland. Participant’s education level from compulsory school to postgraduates. About two thirds have graduated from University. Almost 17% of participants are owner of a company, to more than 20% CEOs, 24,5% are division Managers and nearly 29% are heads of a department. 3,4% are team managers, the remaining people have other duties. Nearly 63% work in small and medium companies with less than 250 employees. The group of respondents covers a wide range of industries. These are banking, media, food and agriculture, electronics, sports and entertainment, trade, production and craft, logistics and transport, engineering, medicine and pharmaceutics, consulting, services, construction and architecture, education, energy, tourism, facility management and real estate, IT, arts and culture and others.

Investigated value categories and the included values were, based on the value scheme of Schwartz (1992b) and the advanced version for business values of Koiranen (2002):
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- **Self-direction:**
  - Personal: freedom, creativity, independence, choosing own goals, curiosity, self-respect
  - Business: visionary top management, innovativeness, resourcefulness, autonomy/independence, target mindedness

- **Stimulation:**
  - Personal: an exiting life, a varied life, daring
  - Business: flexibility, risk taking

- **Hedonism:**
  - Personal: pleasure, enjoying life
  - Business: sense of humor

- **Achievement:**
  - Personal: ambition, influence, capacity, success, intelligence
  - Business: Industriousness and hard working, respectability, stress tolerance, economic return, persistence, quality (products and activity)

- **Power:**
  - Personal: social power, wealth, authority, preserving the public image, social recognition
  - Business: social citizenship, strive for growth, good public image, social status with recognition, nonhesitancy to seize opportunity

- **Security:**
  - Personal: family security, national security, reciprocation of favors, sense of belonging, health, social order, cleanliness
  - Business: wellbeing of personnel, cautiousness, credibility, behaving and acting systematically

- **Conformity:**
  - Personal: obedience, self-discipline, politeness, honoring of parents and elders
  - Business: obeying the law, productivity, politeness

- **Tradition:**
  - Personal: respect for tradition. Devoutness, accepting the portion in life, humbleness, modesty, detachment
  - Business: respect for traditions, thriftiness, service mindedness

- **Benevolence:**
  - Personal: helpfulness, responsibility, forgivingness, honesty, loyalty, mature love, true friendship, a spiritual life, meaning in life
  - Business: helpfulness, responsibility, honesty, loyalty, cohesiveness
• **Universalism:**
  - Personal: equality, unity with nature, wisdom, a world of beauty, social justice, broad-minded, protecting the environment, a world at peace, inner harmony
  - Business: continuous learning, ethics, openness, ecological consciousness, harmony

Personal values which are connected with selflessness are devoutness, humbleness and modesty (tradition), helpfulness, forgivingness, love, friendship, meaning in life and a spiritual life (benevolence) and wisdom, broad mindedness, a world at peace, inner harmony (universalism).

Koiranen (2002) defined on the Schwartz’ model special business values, which are: visionary top management, innovativeness, resourcefulness, autonomy / independence, target mindedness, Flexibility, risk taking, sense of humour, Industriousness and hard working, respectability, stress tolerance, economic return, persistence, Quality (products and activity), social citizenship, strive for growth, good public image, social status with recognition, non-hesitancy to seize opportunity, wellbeing of personnel, cautiousness, credibility, behaving and acting systematically, obeying the law, productivity, politeness, respect for traditions, thriftiness, service mindedness, helpfulness, responsibility, honesty, loyalty, cohesiveness, continuous learning, ethics, openness, ecological consciousness, harmony. In business service mindedness (tradition), helpfulness, loyalty, cohesiveness (benevolence) and ethics, openness, harmony (universalism) are the “selfless values”.

**Description and Findings**

In the survey, people were asked about their personal and business values and additionally about the most adored traits and values of their role models in childhood. Answers were summed up within the ten value categories. Those values, which are connected in literature with selflessness and should be investigated in this paper, can be found in the value categories: tradition (values: devoutness, humbleness and modesty) benevolence (values: helpfulness, forgivingness, love, friendship, meaning in life and a spiritual life) and universalism (values: wisdom, broad mindedness, a world at peace, inner harmony).
Comparison of the value schemes show, that there are similarities of personal, business and role model values in self-direction, benevolence and tradition, whereby the latter is on a low level. Differences consists in achievement, power, security and conformity. A possible explanation could be that achievement is distinctive at a role model and also in business categories but not in personal life. Security is important for personal life as already been stated by Maslow (Maslow & Frager, 1987) and, with some limitations also in business life. On the other hand, it seems not to be an important value for a role model. Conformity and tradition work the same way. Both have generally minor importance but especially with the role model, because humans would usually not adore those traits on an idol. Stimulation and Hedonism play a role especially with the role model but on a low level and it seem not to be important values in personal and business life. High rated single values in business were credibility, honesty, responsibility and target mindedness. High ranked after these typical business values were the “selfless business values” loyalty, openness, helpfulness and service orientation. In the middle field were cohesiveness and ethics and only harmony has been rated low.

**Differentiation between Leadership Styles**
In the survey people were asked twenty questions about their leadership styles. Answer possibilities were “I fully apply” (4 points), “I largely apply” (3 points),

![Comparison of Personal, Business and Role Model Values](image-url)
“I do rather not apply” (2 points) and “I do not apply” (1 point). Those questions were assigned to one of the five different leadership styles as can be seen in the table below. Answer points were subsumed under the respective LS Style and the average of each Leadership style was calculated.

In evaluation two datasets were excluded, because all questions were answered either with “I fully apply” or “I do not apply”, which would be contradictory. So 116 datasets remained for analysis. Analysis of the question showed, that most participants had a participative leadership style (68), 23 people had a servant leadership style, 16 had a laissez-faire style and five in each case had either an autocratic or a transformational leadership style. On contrary, autocratic (LS1) and laissez-faire (LS5) were those styles with the least points (LS1- 56 person, LS2 – 2 people, LS3 – 1 person, LS4 – 0 people, LS5 – 57 people), so that it can be assumed that LS1 and LS5 are extremes in leadership.

![Figure 2: Distribution of Leadership styles of survey](image)

Three 3% of men and 7% of women, are autocratic leaders in this survey group. Participative leadership style is the most common and the allocation between men and women is nearly the same. The second most common leadership style is servant leadership and the allocation between the genders is also nearly equal. Transformational leadership style is, together with autocratic leadership style the least common. Laissez-faire leadership style has a predominant male share. It is difficult to make a final conclusion about male and female preferences in leadership.
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style because of the small sample. It may be a certain tendency that women tend more to the autocratic leadership style than men and on the other hand, men may be use more often laissez-faire style. On the basis datasets, different leadership styles were compared analyzed with regard of value categories in personal and in business areas and compared to each other.

![Comparison of Personal Values and Leadership Style](image)

**Figure 3: Comparison of Personal Values and Leadership Style**

*Source: Own calculation*

Although the small sample does not allow final statements, a certain pattern can be seen. The figure above shows different value pattern of each leadership style in the field of personal values. LS1 has low results in stimulation, hedonism and power and peaks in self-direction, achievement, security, conformity, benevolence and universalism. LS2 has its lowest points in power and tradition, but is generally quite consistent. LS3 is high in self-direction, achievement, security, benevolence and universalism. LS4 is quite high in all categories but lowest in power and tradition. LS5 has its peaks in self-direction, hedonism, benevolence and universalism, is very low in power and the other value categories are also generally low. The range between lowest value and highest are from about 55% up to 88%. Considering business value categories and leadership style it shows a different picture.
Considering the different leadership styles and their value category schemes, the first thing to notice is that lines are approaching each other, more than in the comparison of personal values. The range of value importance also increased to a range between 70% up to 94%. Autocratic leadership style again has its lowest point on hedonism, but now stimulation, achievement, power, security, and benevolence are high. Universalism has decreased. Which could mean, that business needs are steering these values. Laissez-faire style again is the bottom line except in hedonism. Participative and servant leadership style now have quite similar value schemes whereby servant leadership style in every category is slightly higher than participative style. Transformational leadership style has a unique peak in stimulation, apart from that, it follows more or less the value schemes of participative style. In an earlier paper, publications about leadership styles were analysed and scanned for mentioning specific values. The result of the analysis of the frequency of mention in percent is shown in the table below.
Table 1: Values in leadership literature

| Source: Own calculation |

Results were now ranked between 1 to 10, whereat 10 is the most frequently mentioned value and 1 is the least mentioned value. In a second step the results of the business values of the different leadership styles were also ranked in this way and on this basis business values in leadership theory and leadership practice were compared. As can be seen, literature mentions and practical results differ in many points. These discrepancies may come from concentrating on typical and prominent characteristic of this leadership style in literature whereas in reality a leader mostly cannot be attributed into a single leadership style. Because of being too focused on leading, some value categories were not yet regarded in some leadership literature at least for certain leadership styles, like laissez-faire style. What can be seen in the autocratic style is, that stimulation, security and benevolence plays a much bigger role in reality, whereas conformity, tradition and power do not. In participative leadership, tradition and security seem to have not the importance in reality as literature may suggest, on the other hand hedonism and achievement have a significant higher importance. Servant leadership style would imply that tradition and universalism are most important and stimulation and achievement are not, but
as the chart shows is there no correspondence in these four value categories. More correspondence can be found in transformational leadership in theory and reality. This may be the case, because this leadership theory works with the whole value range. And nearly no correspondence can be found in laissez-faire leadership style, because literature again do not yet focus on values of the leading person, but this does not mean in reality, that laissez-faire leaders do lack of values. A methodical problem in this analysis and in the graphical representation is, that many value categories have reached a high percentage, and because of the ranking method, a distortion of results may occur. So it is possible that a value, which has reached a high level can have a low ranking only because there are some other values only a slightly higher in the percentage result. It is important to keep this fact in mind when considering these results.

Summary

The survey showed that value categories, which are connected with selflessness are mainly ranked high. Benevolence and universalism were quite high ranked, in both, personal and in business life, something which has not been expected to this extent. Values were generally high ranked in this study group, although there were differences between personal and business values. In business live the selfless values “loyalty”, “openness”, “helpfulness” and “service mindedness” are ranked high, whereby “ethics” and “cohesiveness” can be found only in the middle field and “harmony” ranks on the lower end. Different leadership styles did show different value schemes; though different leadership styles were getting closer in business matter. Self-direction, benevolence and universalism were those value categories, which were highest ranked whereas tradition were low ranked in every leadership style. Hedonism seemed to be an important value category for all except for autocratic leaders. Laissez-faire style had the lowest level of value schemes, except in hedonism. Gender allocation of participants was about one third women and two third men. Female leaders seemed to tend more to an autocratic style than men and men tended more to a laissez-faire style in this study. Although because of the small sample no general statement can be given at this time. Proportional distribution between male and female in participative, servant and transformational style is fairly even without significant deviation. The hypothesis, that different leadership styles would develop different value schemes could be proven only to a certain extent, because value schemes actually do differ, but show similar pattern. A survey with a bigger sample could lead to more accurate results. Reality check
of the text analysis of values of leadership style descriptions in literature and the survey came to the result that there are some differences. These deviations probably result, among others, from the concentration on main points in leadership literature to make clear, where the focus of the leadership style is, but this does not mean by implication that a leader do not have certain other values as well, what could be shown in this survey. What became visible is, that transformational leadership style work has the most overlaps between theory and reality and laissez-faire style obviously is rarely described by values. Limitation of this study can be socially desirable answers and an exaggerated opinion of participants as well as different possible perspectives, like the perspective of the leader for himself or for his employees. In comparison of theory and reality the ranking method stresses the importance of single value schemes, so that only little differences in percentage of importance lead to high or low results. Another survey with a larger sample may lead to more clarification.

**References**


Appendix

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<th>Sex</th>
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<td>Count</td>
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### Age and Sex

*Source: Own calculation*

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<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship or vocational training School</td>
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<td>10.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary School or higher</td>
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<td>15.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical or vocational school</td>
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### Educational Level

*Source: Own calculation*
Gender allocation of Leadership styles

Source: Own calculation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Leadership style</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I do the decisions without consulting my staff members</td>
<td>1:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I consult my staff members, afterwards I take my decision</td>
<td>2:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My staff members decide autonomous, I am only advising them.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My staff members have complete freedom in their decisions.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I make plans, lists and job descriptions, which everyone must comply.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My staff members develop processes and working documents completely independently</td>
<td>5:3:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I check each instruction on compliance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I set up specific goals and check them regularly</td>
<td>1:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am part of the team</td>
<td>2:3:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I listen well and I am open for any suggestions of my staff members</td>
<td>2:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I acknowledge my staff members with praise</td>
<td>1:2:3:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. If it is necessary, I also provide critique</td>
<td>1:2:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I do communicate my goals openly and regularly to my staff members</td>
<td>2:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I keep in contact with my staff members and know their problems and needs</td>
<td>2:3:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I challenge and encourage my staff members to reach extraordinary goals</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. It is important for me, to support my employees in their professional development</td>
<td>2:3:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. We have established a friendly cooperative atmosphere</td>
<td>2:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Competition between team members promotes the capability of the organisation</td>
<td>1:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The wellbeing of our employees is more important for me than target achievement</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. My main priority is target achievement, no matter how.</td>
<td>1</td>
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Question of Leadership style and assignment

Source: Own calculation