Gratitude that Changes Attitude: Positive Organisational Behaviour

As Responses to Servant Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Servant leadership (SL) is an emerging model of leadership that goes beyond the popular construct of transformational leadership. Building on Fredrickson’s (2001) broaden-and-build theory of emotion, we propose a cyclical model of positive affect where followers’ gratitude in response to SL will not only result in followers’ adaptive behaviors but will perpetuate SL behaviors. Followers’ experiences and reactions will in turn mediate the relationship between SL and organizational citizenship behaviors. In addition, we argue that followers’ reactions in the context of SL will be partly dependent on followers’ self-esteem and self-concept. In this manner, followers’ self-concept will moderate their affective experiences and reactions to SL.
Observations by eminent scholars in organizational studies indicate that research in management has focused on negative behaviors in organizations in an attempt to “fix it”, and in effect to develop a more productive employee. These same scholars suggest that the field of management may be well served to re-focus on research that investigate positively oriented human behavior in relation to improvements in the workplace (Salamon & Deutsch, 2006; Wright, 2003). The recent push for research on Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) is facilitated by findings, which indicate positive-based strengths and capabilities including emotions and affect induce positive behaviors (Mc McCullough, Kimeldorf & Cohen, 2008; Wright, 2003) in organizations including reduced absenteeism, cooperative, extra-role, and helping behaviors (Brief & Weiss, 2003). For example, Erez & Isen’s (2002; p. 1065) work showed that people in a “positive mood state performed better, exhibited more persistence, tried harder, and reported higher levels of motivation than did those in a neutral mood”. Fredrickson’s work (1998; 2001) elucidated the value of positive emotions and affect in general, she also provided evidence that positive emotions can lead to individuals partaking in adaptive behaviors that broadens one’s capacity and ability to think, act, as well as safeguarding one’s health.

One category of POB that has received warranted attention is organizational citizenship behavior (Salamon & Deutsch, 2006; Thau, Bennett, Stahlberg & Werner, 2004). Many of these studies have focused on traditional research factors such as predispositions, job factors, internal and external environment, including job opportunities and organizational politics. However, few recent and published however, have looked at individual differences of positive-based variables such as discrete emotions (Fredrickson, 1998; 2001; Isen 2003) and how it influences organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). Although we acknowledge numerous studies that have investigated individual variables such as attitudes and disposition (Organ & Ryan, 1995) including general affect and moods (See Brief & Weiss, 2002) in relation to OCB; we maintain that attitudes, dispositions and moods are distinct to positive-emotions.

In short, although few published studies in the last 10 years have investigated discrete positive emotions and how it influences POB (Salomon & Deutsch, 2006). McCullough, Emmons, Kilpatrick and Larson (2001) as well as Fredrickson (1998) explained that the relative neglect of positive behavior in research could be explained by psychology’s tendency to neglect positive emotions in theory building and hypothesis testing. Wright (2003) noted that this is due to the utilitarian approach adopted in
organizational studies. In other words, scholars try to solve problems (Fredrickson, 1998); with the intention of intervening and to develop a more productive employee.

We assert that POB is a *bona fide* area of study that can be beneficial to organizations (Wright, 2003) by using a different approach than fixing problems, that is, to understand and foster factors, which allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Therefore, this paper aims to conceptually examine the relationship and impact of an antecedent variable, particularly, servant leadership (SL) on OCB as a function of self-worth and a positive discrete emotion, gratitude. The manuscript therefore will contribute towards an understanding of emotion management in the workplace to foster the pursuit of employee happiness, health, and betterment issues in organizations as viable organizational goals and ends in themselves (Wright, 2003). To our knowledge, our paper is the first to examine the link between an altruistic leadership style with individual perceptions of self, gratitude and OCB.

**POSITIVE AFFECT AND POSITIVE BEHAVIOR**

Fredrickson (2001) refers to affect as consciously accessible feelings, which are present in emotions as a component and within many affective domains such as attitudes, moods, and even affective traits. Theorists suggest that positive affect facilitates approach behavior (Cacioppo, Gardner & Berenston, 1999; Davison, 1993) and continued action (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Clore, 1994), such as prosocial behavior (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Forgas & George, 2001; Graham, 1988; Peterson & Stewart, 1996; Tsang, 2006). As a result, experiences of positive affect prompt individuals to engage with their environments and partake in their activities many of which are adaptive for the individual or both (Fredrickson, 2001).

In her broaden and build theory of emotions, Fredrickson (1998) proposed that certain discrete positive emotions (joy, interest, contentment, pride, including gratitude) all share the ability to broaden people’s thought–action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources that are fundamental for survival (See also Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Furthermore, Fredrickson (2001) argued that personal resources that are accrued to people while they experience positive emotions are durable and outlast the transient emotional states that prompted the acquisition of such emotions. This, in turn, is expected to increase
individual’s personal resources that can be called upon in future circumstances and in different emotional states (Fredrickson, 2001).

We believe that apart from building behavioral repertoires for survival, expressions of positive emotions also serve a fundamental function of creating and sustaining social relationships (Algoe, Haidt & Gable, 2008; Fredrickson, 1998; 2004; Shiota et al., 2004). Fredrickson (1998, p. 311) argued that, “these social relationships become enduring resources that individuals can draw on later in times of need”. Although she did not go as far as explicating this implication for organizations, we believe that the type of alliances, friendships and bonds that are created through expressions of positive emotions are also fundamental survival resources in the workplace. In fact, Algoe et al. (2008) viewed gratitude as detection-and-response system to help find, remind and bind ourselves to attentive others.

**Positive Affect and Subsequent Positive Organizational Behaviors**

There is evidence to suggest that positive emotions and affect may be accompanied by positive behavior and attitudes (Baron, 1996; Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Brief & Weiss, 2002; DeSteno, Petty, Wegener, & Rucker, 2000; Forgas & George, 2001; McCullough, et al., 2008; Petty, DeSteno & Rucker, 2001; Tsang 2006). Baron (1996) argued that individuals that experience positive emotions and mood tend to see his/her self as pleasurably engaged in terms of both interpersonal relations and achievements. This proposition has been confirmed by empirical studies. For example, Watson, Clark & Tellegen (1988) found that people with high positive affect (PA) possess a level of interpersonal insight that makes their interpersonal communication style more satisfactory. In contrast, people with low PA given their penchant for lethargy and a general lack of interpersonal enthusiasm are not likely to possess the communication style needed to be successful in interpersonal relationships. Similarly, individuals with high PA describe themselves as interested, enthusiastic, confident, gregarious and excited (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik & Welbourne, 1999), then tend to receive higher evaluations and liked more by interviewers (Fox & Spector, 2000).

Recent studies corroborate the idea that positive affect is related to positive behavior. Erez and Isen (2002) found that PA was positively related to expectancy of success in a cognitive-ability test and increased effort level when the task was expected to require moderately high level of effort as opposed to low level of effort. McCullough et al.’s (2008) recent review highlighted a number of studies which
found that participants who felt gratitude - a positive emotion, behaved more generously and more willing to help others (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002; Tsang 2006). In this paper, we extrapolate the implication of findings concerning positive affect to gratitude and OCB.

**GRATITUDE AS A LINK BETWEEN SL AND OCB**

**Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership (SL) is an emerging model of leadership (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002) which goes beyond the popular construct of Transformational Leadership (TL) by including moral/ethical, spiritual, altruistic, and follower-centric dimensions (Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004; Stone, Russel, & Patterson, 2004). The crux of servant leadership is its focus on the internal orientation rather than external compliance (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Servant leaders portray a conviction and strong character by taking on not only the role of a servant, but also the nature of a servant (Jaworski, 1997), which is demonstrated by their total commitment to serve other people. Thus, unlike transformational leadership whose primary concern is ‘performance beyond expectations,’ the *sine qua non* of servant leadership is followers’ holistic spiritual and moral/ethical development, both of which are not well articulated in the TL construct. As such, we maintain that SL and TL are distinct.

Bass (1985) highlighted the positive aspects of TL, namely, that transformational leaders seek to empower and elevate followers rather than keep followers weak and dependent. We argue that the increased motivation and commitment derived from TL will not necessarily benefit followers, as “there is nothing in the transformational leadership model that says leaders should serve followers for the good of followers” (Graham, 1995, p. 110). Furthermore, the effects that SL instill in their followers emerge in different forms than those propagated by transformational leader, namely, servant leaders empower followers to “grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants” (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 13-14). In many ways, servant leaders function as stewards who, consistent with Block’s (1993) notion of stewardship, regard their followers as people who have been entrusted to them to be elevated to their better selves and to be what they are capable of becoming.

Overall, SL as a leadership style tends to perpetuate altruistic behaviors where the beneficiary of SL then becomes a benefactor of SL. Although situational constraints is a factor (Wood, Stewart, Maltby,
Linley & Joseph, 2008), research where cyclical beneficiary-benefactor behaviors have been documented (both in interpersonal and individual-organizational relationship) suggests that positive emotions such as gratitude are involved, including trust (Appadurai, 1985; Bachrach & Jex, 2000; Cohen, 2006; Komter, 2004; McCullough et al., 2001; McCullough et al., 2008; Wat & Shaffer, 2005).

In short, we argue that the link between SL and OCB is facilitated by positive affect (at least not negative affect) either through a sense of gratitude as a beneficiary of a leader’s altruism (Cohen, 2006; Komter, 2004; McCullough et al., 2001), or through perceptions of being treated fairly by a leader and/or organization (Bachrach & Jex, 2000; Isen, Shalker, Clark & Karp, 1978; Messer & White, 2006). It is also possible that OCB is facilitated by less positive processes such as a social norm of reciprocation (Gouldner, 1960; Levinson, 1965; Salamon & Deutsch, 2006; Shiota, Campos, Keltner & Hertenstein, 2004) or even a darker element, such as Compulsory Citizenship Behavior (Vigoda-Zagot, 2006; 2007). However, inclusion of these less positive processes into our model are beyond the scope of this current paper, since our focus is to extrapolate Fredrickson’s (2001) hypothesis that positive emotion builds and broadens individual’s thought-action repertoires. Therefore, we assert that followers who experience positive emotion(s) and affect as a function of SL will partake in adaptive behaviors that complements and perpetuate SL behaviors, such as OCB.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

While many definitions of OCB abound in the literature, it is typically understood as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, 1988, p. 4). Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine and Bachrach’s (2000) work identified almost thirty potentially different forms of citizenship behaviors and organized them into seven dimensions: Helping behavior, sportsmanship, organizational loyalty, organizational compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue, and self-development. The significant contribution of OCB to individual and organizational effectiveness has been well documented in the literature. For example, Borman, White, and Dorsey (1995) as well as Motowidlo and Van Scotter’s (1994) studies suggested that supervisors consider both in-role and extra-role behaviors when appraising performance of individual employees. Consequently, when employees
engage in OCB over and above their call of duty, they help weave the fabric of social capital into the organizations (Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002).

More recent work on OCB suggests that it is a type of extra-role altruistic behavior that is motivated by a need to signal an individual’s otherwise unobservable capabilities to the organization (Salamon & Deutsch, 2006), and/or to improve their status internally and external to the organization (Hui, Law & Chen, 1999; Thau et al., 2004). This ability signaling perspective was coined the *handicap principle* (Grafen, 1990; Zahavi, 1995) to suggest that extra-role altruistic behaviors are sacrificial since individuals who exhibit them incurs significant costs, therefore, *handicapping* the individual (Salamon & Deutsch, 2006). In short, the individual to performs OCB at the expense of something else, however, it conveys to others that he or she is capable to the extent that that lesser individuals are not able to perform or fake the extra-role behaviors. Again, Salamon and Deutsch’s (2006) work confirms previous works that argue OCB may not be as positive and less altruistic as many scholars suggests (Bolino, 1999; Vigoda-Zagot, 2006; 2007). Regardless of the signaling effect and/or possible self-interest motives associated with OCB, we maintain that OCB still involve good-will whether or not it is an in- and/or extra-role behavior that still benefit the organization (Hui et al., 1999; Salamon & Deutsch, 2006; Thau et al., 2004).

**Gratitude as Positive Emotion**

Research on gratitude is still in its developmental early stages with the concept gaining acceptance as a positive emotion (Emmons & McCullough, 2004; McCullough et al., 2002). Emmons and McCullough (2003) saw gratitude as number of things including an emotion, an attitude, a moral virtue, a habit, a personality trait and a response. Early on, Emmons and Crumpler (2000) suggested that gratitude is an interpersonal emotion felt towards a person or an entity and not towards oneself. In other words, gratitude is different to other general positive emotions and affect, because it is an other-oriented emotion whereas other positive emotions tend to be self-focused (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Jackson, Lewandowski, Fleury, & Chin, 2001; Tsang 2006; Weiner, Russel & Lerman, 1978; 1979). Stated in another way, gratitude is an attribution-dependent positive emotion that involves an appraisal process (Cohen, 2006; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Jackson et al. 2001; McCullough et al., 2001; 2008; Smith, Haynes, Lazarus, & Pope, 1993; Van Kleef, 2009; Wood et al.,
“Prototypically gratitude stems from the perception of a positive personal outcome (or beneficiaries of a gift), not necessarily deserved or earned, that is due to the actions of another person” (Emmons & McCullough, 2003, p. 377, italics added; also see Wood et al., 2008). This appraisal process distinguishes it from other general positive emotions such as happiness and contentment (e.g., Weiner et al., 1979) that are self-focused.

Notwithstanding the questions that surround the concept, particularly, the many ways in which gratitude can be conceptualized; there is a consensus among researchers that gratitude typically has a positive emotional valence (Baron, 1984; Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994; Ortony, Clore & Collins, 1987). Others suggest that gratitude contributes to positive social atmosphere (Ellsworth & Smith, 1998) since it tends to inhibit destructive interpersonal behavior (Baron, 1984; McCullough et al., 2001). Recent research has also answered a long-lived question on whether gratitude motivates prosocial behavior in a reciprocal cycle context over and above the effects of positive emotions in general (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Tsang 2006). Bartlett and DeSteno (2006) found that people who were grateful were more helpful than those who were amused (i.e., a positive emotion). Likewise, Tsang (2006) found that people who were grateful exhibited prosocial behavior towards his/her benefactor by giving more resources to the original benefactor compared to people who had a positive mood.

We acknowledge evidence that suggest people who are beneficiaries of positive personal outcome experience an unpleasant emotion such as indebtedness including guilt, for example when one feels that one do not deserve it (Cohen, 2006; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough et al., 2001; Solomon, 2004; Tsang, 2006). However, we maintain, that the positive emotion associated with being a beneficiary of something positive is gratitude.

Taken together, the above reviews suggests that emotions and positive affect can influence subsequent judgments and actions towards other people ensuing interactions (Graham, 1988; Peterson & Stewart, 1996; Tsang, 2006), even if the judgments were unrelated to the original source of the emotions (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; DeSteno et al., 2000; Petty et al., 2001). Therefore, these empirical studies provide some support to Fredrickson’s (2001; 2004) view that positive emotion such as gratitude broadens and builds behavior, as well as social resources as a function of reciprocal altruism (Also see
Shiota et al., 2004). Therefore, we expand this to propose that gratitude is a mediating factor that leads to OCB, namely that followers’ positive affect and expression of gratitude as a result of SL perpetuates the leaders’ SL behaviors, please refer to Figure 1.

In summary, we propose that followers in servant leadership context (FSL) who recognize that they are beneficiaries of a positive personal outcome, appraise the gift, and attribute its cause to the servant leader or organization. In turn the followers experience gratitude and express their gratitude by responding in creative ways such as, emulating the servant leader’s behavior to other employees or group members (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Tsang 2006; Van Kleef, 2009). For example, if the servant leader behavior resembled OCB then the followers may embrace it and emulate it. Therefore, the expression of gratitude is a direct function of the behaviors modeled by the servant leader. This view corroborates the general notion that leader behavior are antecedents of follower behaviors (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer & Hogg, 2004) and in particular Podsakoff et al.’s (2000) conclusion that leader behaviors are generally antecedents to OCB.

**Proposition 1:** Followers in a servant leadership context (FSL) who recognize that they are beneficiaries a positive personal outcome will attribute the source to their servant leaders and/or their organization.

**Proposition 2:** FSL who recognize that they have received a positive outcome are more likely to experience a positive emotion (i.e., gratitude) and emulate SL behaviors including OCB; compared to FSL who do not experience a positive emotion (e.g., indebtedness or guilt).

**Gratitude as a Reinforcing Mechanism.** We now extend Fredrickson’s (2001) broaden and build hypothesis of positive emotion as a reinforcing mechanism. Recent work has pointed to the notion that positive emotion can also provide an incentive for others to respond in kind. Shiota et al. (2004) discussed that one of the functions of positive emotions in interpersonal relationships is to provide an incentive for others’ behavior; the other two functions described were providing information and evoking emotional responses in others. Accordingly, it is possible that the characteristics of a servant leader maybe strengthened and built further, such that when gratitude is shown by followers the servant leaders’ characteristics are reinforced. Early research on gratitude (Clark, 1975; Goldman, Seever & Seever, 1982;
Moss & Page, 1972) indicates that when gratitude is expressed to a benefactor that he/she is likely to produce similar behaviors in the future (also see McCullough et al. 2001, and Van Kleef, 2009). In addition, prior research indicates that a mild level of positive mood has been shown to increase the likelihood that recipients will embrace the attitudes of the benefactor as their own (Isen, 1984). Based on this argument we propose the following.

**Proposition 3**: FSL who emulates SL and/or perform OCB will perpetuate their servant leaders’ behaviors (Voluntary Subordination, Authentic Self, Covenantal Relationship, Responsible Morality, Transcendental Spirituality, Transforming Influence; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2006) and/or OCB.

**SELF-ESTEEM AS A MODERATOR BETWEEN SL, GRATITUDE AND OCB**

It is our view that the link between SL, gratitude and OCB may be more complex than just experiencing gratitude and emulating SL and/or performing OCB. In short, we believe that the link between SL, gratitude and OCB will be moderated by people’s self-esteem and self-concept. Recent works on self-esteem suggests that people’s affective reactions to events will be stronger in relation to areas of their lives that are attached to their self-esteem (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Wolfe & Crocker, 2003). In other words, affect is strongly correlated to success or failures in areas of life that are attached to one’s self-esteem. Therefore, we believe that people who prioritize work higher relatively to other things in their lives are more likely to react more strongly to SL in general.

Crocker and Wolfe (2001) argued that people’s self-esteem is dependent on domain (self-worth) areas of their lives considered important to the extent that performances in these areas add up to define people’s self-esteem. These domain areas are called contingencies of self-worth, which is, “a domain or category of outcomes on which a person has staked his/her self-esteem, so that person’s view of his/her value or worth depends on perceived successes or failures or adherence to self-standards in that domain” (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; p. 594). Crocker and Wolfe (2001) argued that people’s self-esteem is dependent on satisfying or not satisfying those contingencies. The upshot of attaching one’s self-worth to a particular domain area is that people will be more sensitive to events that are linked to those domain areas (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Wolfe & Crocker, 2003). This implies that any threats or opportunities related to the domain area will lead to stronger affective reactions compared to other domain areas in which a person has not staked his/her self-esteem.
For example, if a person’s self-worth is attached to a domain such as *relational competence*, defined by *popularity at work*; then the person’s self-esteem will increase if he/she is *popular at work*. In addition, the person’s affective reactions will be more intense in relation to events that facilitate or hinder his/her *popularity at work* (Wolfe & Crocker, 2003). Therefore, according to contingencies of self-worth theory a person’s self-esteem is effectively determined by the domain area in which the person has invested or not invested his/her self-worth (either consciously or unconsciously).

Applying Crocker and Wolfe’s (2001) contingencies of self-worth theory to SL and OCB, we argue FSL experience positive affect (gratitude) when followers’ gains from SL are consistent with facilitating performance at work. In short, if SL facilitates work performance a person will have higher PA, however, if SL hinders work performance a person will have lower PA. At the same time, a person’s goals may also be defined by work activities that facilitate perceptions of competence, such as, OCB. The crucial point is that domain areas that are attached to a person’s self-worth can be a strong source of motivation for people to the extent that a specific contingency of self-worth can define a person’s goal. Therefore, a person who prioritize work higher relatively to other things in their life and strongly bases his/her self-esteem on work might be more motivated to engage in OCB, compared to those whose self-esteem is not as strongly attached to work performance.

This application of contingencies of self-worth to SL corroborates the *handicapping* view of OCB; that is, in some cases OCB is motivated by a need to signal an individual’s otherwise unobservable capabilities to the organization and/or to improve their status to organizations internally and externally (Hui, et al., 1999; Salomon & Deutsch, 2006; Thau et al., 2004). Hui et al. (1999, p. 16) did argue that in some contexts, “performing OCB may have instrumental values. Even though OCB is discretionary, employees typically do exhibit some of this type of behavior and they may exhibit OCB as a means to obtain some ends”. In some cases, employees may perform OCB to impress their supervisors, since extra-role performance may influence employees’ overall performance evaluations (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Hui, 1993). Based on the above argument we propose the following.

*Proposition 4:* FSL who attaches their self-worth to competence in work activities will have a stronger affective (positive or negative) reaction to SL.
**Proposition 5:** FSL who attaches their self-worth to competence in work activities are more likely to exhibit OCB compared to FSL who do not attach their self-worth in work activities.

Finally, based on the literature reviewed we assert as a consequence of followers engaging in OCB, they are likely to develop a more positive self-concept. Closely linked to Proposition 3, we further believe that engaging in OCB serves a dual reinforcing function such that a positive effect in followers will also have a positive impact on the leader’s self-concept, not unlike a contagion effect (Van Kleef, 2009). Research on attribution theory suggests that leaders have the tendency to attribute to themselves followers’ positive behaviors, thereby enhancing the leader’s self-concept, especially when the followers are part of the in-group members (Campbell & Swift, 2006). This leads to our final proposition.

**Proposition 6:** SL and/or OCB performed by FSL will enhance both the leaders and followers positive self-concept and self-esteem.

**SUMMARY AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

To summarize, we would like to discuss and elucidate that Fredrickson’s broaden and build theory of positive emotions (1998; 2001) and Crocker and Wolfe’s (2001) contingencies of self-worth theory are both complementary with our view that gratitude and self-esteem is a mediating and moderating variable, respectively, in the SL reciprocal cycle.

Plutchik (1980) argued from a psychoevolutionary theory perspective that emotions are survival mechanism based on evolutionary adaptations. In other words, emotions function to prepare the mind and body to act in specific ways in reaction to (recurring) events, or serve as information for social interactions (Van Kleef, 2009). If we extrapolate Plutchik’s (1980) argument to a work setting, a person may avoid or stop certain behaviors after being reprimanded by a supervisor. Thus, the reprimand may have stimulated a negative emotion such as guilt or shame, which caused the individual to change his/her behavior in the future. It could be argued that by stopping the behavior, the person is in effect attempting to avoid experiencing negative emotion(s) again in similar situations. In short, stopping the behavior was adaptive, since it was an attempt to avoid negative emotions. In contrast, positive emotions signal a person to approach or continue with particular behaviors (Fredrickson, 1998; 2001). For example, if a supervisor thanked a person after a particular behavior, he/she is likely to continue the behavior again in the future since the supervisor just signaled that the behavior is acceptable and evoked gratitude. We
argue that these two situations fall within the scope of Fredrickson’s (1998; 2001; 2004) built and broaden theory of emotion (Also see Van Kleef, 2009).

In this paper, we argued and presented gratitude as a positive emotion that mediates behavior of workers in a SL context. In particular, the processes that leads an individual to recognize that they have received a positive outcome to experience gratitude or other emotions is facilitated by the leader’s behaviors, organizational social norm and moderated by how the person views him/herself. Consequently, testing whether gratitude is experienced in response to an altruistic leadership style carries the promise of understanding the mechanism that leads to positive emotions in the workplace.

If gratitude is experienced by followers in a SL context, then we proposed a number of subsequent actions that the followers may take. One possibility is for the follower to reciprocate the positive outcome through POB directly to the leader or to the organization, or by simply thanking the leader or organization. In any case, both behaviors have the potential to reinforce SL behaviors in the leader (i.e., reciprocal altruism: Fredrickson, 2004; Salamon & Deutsch, 2006). At the same time, receiving an undeserved positive outcome may bring about a less positive emotion, such as indebtedness or guilt. In this case, it is possible that the follower will still respond with organizational behavior directly to the leader or to the organization, however, via a transaction mode rather than genuine gratitude.

Finally, we also proposed that POB could be moderated by how a person views him/herself. The main argument being that if a person views work as being central to his/her self-worth, then he/she is more likely to exhibit POB in general, especially as an expression of gratitude towards the leader and/or organization within an SL context. We believe that social norms are the main drivers of such reciprocal POB. This view accounts for the fact that social norms can be driven by genuine motives or need to conform (Appadurai, 1985; Gouldner, 1960; Komter, 2004). Furthermore, regardless of the motives that drive followers to exhibit POB, the outcomes are likely to enhance the leader’s and followers’ self-concept. Future research can also test whether a beneficiary of a positive outcome can experience a negative emotion rather than a positive one, and if so under what circumstances. Therefore, future research is needed to fully appreciate the interaction effects of a person’s capabilities and self-esteem on extra-role positive organizational behavior.
REFERENCES


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Figure 1. Gratitude as a mediator and self-concept as moderator between servant leadership and OCB.