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Beyond quid pro quo: Good soldiers and characteristics of their helping behaviours.

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Beyond quid pro quo: Good soldiers and characteristics of their helping behaviours.

Abstract

Purpose – Good soldiers are people who engage in citizenship behaviours "to do good" instead of "to look good". The purpose of this article is to explore the motivations behind and the specific characteristics of behaviours of the good soldiers in the context of work using social exchange theory (SET) as a theoretical framework.

Design/methodology/approach – 47 dyadic interviews with 94 individuals from three organisations where good soldiers are most likely to be observed were conducted.

Findings – Data analysis revealed that good soldiers are driven by concern for others and generalised reciprocity, but not expectations of self-benefits. Their actions were further found to be discretionary, reactive and proactive, and associated with different levels of self-sacrifice.

Practical implications – The findings of this study point human resources (HR) practitioners' attention towards qualitatively unique acts of good soldiers. An assumption is made that awareness of such behaviours can help organisations to stimulate individual self-motivation, so that the quality of helping behaviours could be improved.

Originality/value - Arguing for a fundamental rethink of the psychological foundations underpinning helpful behaviours, this paper departs from predominantly individualistic view on work motivation and reinforces the other-oriented, altruistic dimension of SET. In doing so, it addresses the lack of conceptual and theoretical clarity on differently motivated helping and extends the existing limited research evidence in this area. It further addresses a need for a comprehensive understanding of other-oriented behaviours and accounts for vital - yet neglected – features of such acts.

Keywords: organisational citizenship behaviours, citizenship motives, altruism, help, social exchange theory

Article classification: Research paper

1. Introduction

The willingness to 'walk the extra mile' is vital in the employer–employee relationship. This is linked to the interest in the scholarly community paid to Organizational Citizenship Behaviours (OCBs; e.g., Chênevert *et al*., 2015; Kao, 2017). OCBs are employees' discretionary actions that aim to promote the effective functioning of the organization (Organ *et al*., 2006) and helping is one of its mostly studied dimensions (Chou and Stauffer, 2016). Since different parties in employment relationships display variation in terms of their motivations when helping others (Kim *et al*., 2018), a distinction has been made between good soldiers and good actors (Donia *et al*., 2018; Snell and Wong, 2007). Good soldiers seek to help other people and the organisation because of their prosocial or altruistic motives (Rioux and Penner, 2001). In contrast, good actors are more likely to help "at strategic times and in strategic ways" (Grant and Mayer, 2009, p. 901) to create favourable impression (Bowler *et al*., 2019) or to gain other self-benefits (Lavelle, 2010).

Given that good soldiers are perceived as highly valuable from a HR perspective (Clarkson, 2014), surprisingly little empirical research has been conducted to understand their behaviours and motivations in depth. This may be associated with scholarly attempts to analyse most helping behaviours as part of wider reciprocal interactions (Han *et al*., 2018). Indeed, majorly investigated through the lense of SET (Cropanzano *et al*., 2017), helping is mostly based on the principle that people "reap the seeds that they sow" (Meacham *et al*., 2017, p. 1479). In this article, the notion of SET is extended to emphasise its other-oriented dimensions where any benefits in the process of help are valued as symbols of concern for others as opposed to expectations of returns (see: Colbert *et al*., 2016). This view is subsequently used as a basis to unpack the motives behind and specific characteristics of helping behaviours exerted by good soldiers in the context of work. The findings from qualitative interviews with

94 individuals from three organisations contribute to the existing limited empirical evidence in this area and offer a number of theoretical and practical implications.

First, the study contributes to answering the calls of Ocampo *et al*. (2018) to engage in an in-depth exploration of different forms of OCBs to gain more clarity on overlapping concepts. By distinguishing between differently motivated helping behaviours and pointing out to their unique characteristics, this study contributes to untangling the related inconsistent findings in the domain. In doing so, it re-emphasises the relatively unanswered call of Organ *et al.* (2006) for consistency in using specific versus broad labels (i.e. altruistic help versus help) with critical implications for theory development, research design and enhanced communication among scholars. Finally, the findings of this study reinforce the somewhat neglected other-oriented dimension to SET. By drawing attention to concern for other organisational stakeholder and imprecise multilateral exchanges between employees, insights into how the theory can provide a viable explanation of helping behaviours exerted by good soldiers are given.

Practically, the findings of this study point HR attention towards the unique nature of helping behaviours exerted by good soldiers. If practitioners are not aware that some people are primarily concerned with others as opposed to self, they will likely fail to understand how such actions could play an important role in organisations. This has further implications for recruitment, rewards and promotion decisions – critical aspects of HR practice with implications for the organisational ability to meet business needs through managing its human capital. The reported research is an initial step in the direction of aiding HR practitioners in playing a role in recognising and maximising the value of good soldiers in their organisations.

In the sections to follow, theoretical rationale and empirical basis for the current study are outlined. The research design and method are presented and justified. The interview data is

analysed and the main findings are discussed in light of their theoretical and practical contributions. The discussion is concluded with directions for future research.

2. Social exchange theory and the principles of workplace help

SET is based on the assumption that human behaviour is the result of an exchange where the ultimate aim is to maximize benefits and minimize costs. Since workplace helping behaviours are predominantly investigated from a perspective of SET, they are often portrayed as a process of negotiated exchanges between the parties (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017) based around the assumptions *I do it for you = you do it for me* (Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2015). This, however, appears somewhat paradoxical in the context of good soldiers who are concerned with the welfare of others rather than self-benefits (Donia *et al*., 2015).

Importantly, while the norm of reciprocity lies at the heart of SET (e.g., Ahmad *et al*., 2019, p. 100), what seems to be somewhat discarded as important is the fact that it does not necessarily provide the only universal principle of exchange (see: Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). The seminal work of Meeker (1971) implies that other exchange principles may include rationality (maximising own gains), equity (receiving what one deserves on the basis of input), competition and rivalry (maximising own gains at an absolute cost), and altruism (helping another person). The principle of reciprocity can be further divided into generalised and balanced types (Willer *et al*., 2012). Whereas balanced reciprocity is characterised by a *quid pro quo* approach to the exchange, generalised reciprocity has more altruistic orientation which is not concerned over the timing and the content of the exchange, potential returns are not stipulated in advance, and the acts of support are mainly ingrained in trust in the exchange partner (Baker and Bulkley, 2014). It is demonstrated in Table 1 below how the same behaviour at visual level (A helps B) can vary significantly when the underlying principles of help (i.e., motives) are examined.

---------Insert Table 1 about here ----------

Although helping behaviours guided by the balanced reciprocity principle of SET are undoubtedly important in employment relationships (Koster and Sanders, 2006; Sanders and Schyns, 2006), the approach adopted in this study is based on the premise that other rules are viable as well and they will uniquely contribute towards specific characteristics of resultant helping behaviours. Consistently, an alternative view on SET that recognises other rules should not be neglected if fertile ground for theory development is to be provided. This is particularly vital given that in situations when people expect reciprocation, potential breach of a 'deal' can subsequently sully the effectiveness of such arrangements (Conway and Briner, 2005). Moreover, the changing and often indeterminate needs of the contemporary organisation (Grant *et al*., 2009) mean that the conditions are often unfavourable to building a stable pattern of cooperation based on explicit reciprocal deals. Consistently, there exists a strong rationale to consider complementary principles of SET and the characteristics of differently motivated behaviours. Given the focus of this paper is placed on helping behaviours exerted by good soldiers, this study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

What motivates helping behaviours exerted by good soldiers in the context of work?

What are the specific characteristics of helping behaviours exerted by good soldiers in the context of work?

3. Methodology

A qualitative research strategy was adopted. Since the logic of theoretical sampling lie in the selection of information-rich cases which can be studied in depth (Morse and Clark, 2019), the choice of data samples was hoped to enable the researcher to impute the theoretical aspects of the research. To inductively explore the research questions guiding this study, a focus was therefore placed on organisational contexts in which good soldiers are most likely to be

observed. The choice of organisations from public and non-profit sectors in England was based on the principle that organisations coming from such environments are likely to render what was being studied is "transparently observable" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 537). This is because the value of such organisations lies in achievement of social purposes for which no revenue stream is readily apparent (Word and Sung, 2015) whereas their organisational members perceive careers as vehicles for social change (Drucker, 2006). Such organisations are also characterised by collectivistic culture based on the tenets of altruism as opposed to individualistic cultures emphasising individual gains (Lemmon and Wayne, 2015). While at face value the explored organisations came from similar backgrounds, actually each of these cases was placed in unique contexts which revealed in-depth contextual information regarding the researched phenomenon.

A major Community Services Provider and a well-established Academic Institution were directly approached by the researcher. A Public School was accessed after a referral made by one of the Community Services Provider's employees. All organisations agreed to take part in the study. The location of organisations in the North of England geographically presented practical access to a representative sample of interviewees across a region which, it can be argued, reflects the rich diversity of England as a whole.

3.1. Respondents

Participants within cases were selected using purposeful convenience sampling with different levels of management engagement in recruiting participants between the organisations. The HR director of Community Services Provider sent a generic email to all staff explaining the research and asking to consider taking part in the study. The researcher subsequently followed up with an email and contacted interested participants to arrange interviews. In the Public School, having discussed requirements for a varied sample with the researcher, the Head Principle approached staff personally to introduce the researcher. In the Academic Institution,

the researcher was given permission to contact staff with no further engagement from the Director of Research. The decision of each individual whether to participate in the research project remained voluntary.

94 participants (Community Services, n= 32; Public School, n=32; Academic Institution, n=30) agreed to participate in this study, a total of 94 participants. Of the respondents, 59 were females and 35 were males. The average age was 42, the average time spent in current position was 4 years, and the average organisational tenure was 9 years. Participants occupied various roles representing different levels of organisational hierarchies. Such a purposefully selected sample reflects a more general composition of the explored organisations. Ethical approval was obtained prior to the commencement of fieldwork and informed consent was received from all participants.

3.2. Dyadic interviews

Dyadic interviews are a specific type of an interview where two participants are interviewed together (Morgan *et al*., 2013). The author conducted a total of 47 dyadic interviews with 94 individuals at the three research sites. At that point theoretical saturation was reached and no new data emerged. Each interview was conducted face-to-face in meeting rooms at the premises of the companies and lasted approximately an hour. The process of data collection was carried over a 6 months period in 2016.

Interview questions were broadly structured around the perceptions and experiences of helping behaviours deemed to be exerted by an employee to benefit a colleague as an end in itself (thus reflecting the existing conceptualisations of good soldiers). Participants were asked about their experiences as observers, recipients, and actors, respectively. Although an interview agenda was used to maintain consistency (Appendix 1), respondents were encouraged to

engage in more complex discussions relating to the themes that they perceived to be most important which was in line with the inductive nature of the study.

The dyadic format of an interview facilitated interactions among participants that generated particularly rich data – often probed by research participants in addition to the interviewer. To reduce the risk of socially desirable responses (especially in the presence of an interview partner), most questions were asked in an indirect way. Additionally, careful selection of dyads based on the level of acquaintance (Morgan *et al*., 2016) appears to have provided participants with a sufficient level of comfort of discussions where they felt secure enough to disagree on some issues.

3.3. Data analysis

Template Analysis was used to analyse interview transcripts (King and Brooks, 2017). A coding template was developed on the basis of a subset of data, and was subsequently applied to further data, revised in the light of each transcript to form a final version of the template which served as the basis for interpretation of the data set and for the writing up of findings. The codes were defined in light of the research questions and were organised hierarchically into meaningful clusters and diagrammatical representations. The combination of these two strategies allowed for the examination of the data without losing sight of the big picture as well as each individual voice.

4. Findings

Careful examination of participants' perceptions of the acts of help exerted by good soldiers shed more light on the motivations guiding such behaviours as well as their more specific characteristics. This is summarized in a graphic model below (see Figure 1).

----------Insert Figure 1 about here----------

4.1. Motivations of good soldiers

Research interviews revealed that the acts of help exerted by good soldiers are "genuinely for the good of other people" (Imogen) and such people help out because they "care for them and worry about how they must feel (…)" (Kate). The recalled representative responses suggest that good soldiers' goals stem from concern for others as opposed to other aspects of the situation. Compared to an "altruistic motivation" (Tamara) or "altruistic spirit" (Laura), concern for other organisational recipient emphasises the other-oriented nature of such behaviours. This finding is in line with the existing literature where concern for others is the key characteristic distinguishing good soldiers from good actors (Grant and Mayer, 2009; Snell and Wong, 2007). While most commonly reported was concern felt for one's colleagues, concern for organisational customers was also found to characterise the acts of good soldiers. This was particularly evident in the Community Services Provider and the Public School. Respondents commonly suggested that even if an individual helps a colleague, what often motivates them to act is "genuinely being nice to the client so they have got better lives" (Harriet). The motivating power of concern for customers is also well illustrated in the following representative extract from a conversation between the Public School employees:

> *Kate: To me it's all about the end result. The end result is getting a good deal for children.*
> *Dan: The reason why we are all working in school, whether it's on the reception, the dining room, or you do the admin job like I do - it is because you want the children to do well, and you are all working towards the same aim.*
> *Kate: We will never let the kids down.*

Concern for others was also found to be embroiled in more complex considerations. For instance, some participants found it problematic to decide when a given act is performed with the welfare of another in mind and when it is concern with self-interests – especially in the context of in-role behaviors. The following extract from a conversation between the two managers is an interesting example of such a confusion. Here, Noah disregards any behaviour that helps him do his job as a manager as associated with being a good soldier because it directly

relates to his professional goals. In contrast, Kristina holds a broader view and argues that even though it may help her complete the requirements of her role, she genuinely wants to help the other person:

> *Noah: I don't think as managers you can work in an area where you are completely altruistic. Everything has an end gain in a way. As managers we know the people that will be causing trouble, we head off and ask before they get there. And I think it's to make my life easier. (…) I don't always do it just to help them, there's always an end gain because this is work. So if I help people, I help them because I don't want them to go off sick or be stressed, I want them to have their job done quicker. So at work there's always another behaviour. I don't think I am helpful just for helpful sake, I think it's just part of my make up as a manager (…)*
> *Kristina: But if someone was in that position where they say 'I am really struggling with this', would you see that you are doing this to help yourself rather than genuinely wanting to help them because you are caring? The people that I manage, I think that I help because I genuinely care. I don't want to see them struggling.*

Participants' responses suggest that perceptions of the nature of the actions exerted by good soldiers differ and depend on individuals' own interpretations. However, as long as an individual feels that a given act is performed to genuinely benefit the other (i.e., is guided by concern for other organisational recipient), the potential impact it may have on his/her professional career may not necessarily mean that the agent cannot be identified as a good soldier. Rather, it is the intention to benefit the other (for whom concern is felt) that constitutes the core element of the definition of a good soldier – and not the automatic or inevitable consequences.

Beyond concern for others, the acts of good soldiers were described to be motivated by generalised reciprocity, i.e. an investment in the collective welfare but without expectation of an instrumental direct benefit (see: Willer *et al*., 2012). Participants' answers clearly emphasised that such behaviours are not based on direct reciprocal agreements and the assumption *I do it for you = You do it for me* but are guided with more general settlements that may come with benefits which are imprecise, generic, and do not stem from any particular person:

> *Brad: There's an element of 'If I'm doing this, hopefully in the future, people will come and help me'. And it's that sort of thing of someone saying – 'I'm going to give more to help us overall and hopefully it will come back'.*

Similar views are reflected in the work of Hsiung *et al*. (2012, p. 260) who suggested that generalised reciprocity "helps people transcend self-serving motivations" and Clarkson (2014, p. 265) who added that it "seems more altruistic in its nature, insofar as there is no real tracking of the exact value of the exchange (…) [and it] does not preclude the situation where reciprocation does not occur". This is in opposition to direct reciprocal transactions which, concomitantly with the interview progress, led participants to question the other-oriented nature of apparently altruistic behaviours:

> *Kath: The way you've helped him... I think it's altruistic.*
> *Mark: If the situation was reversed, he would do the same thing for me. That is why I would question how you would call it because there is a lot of mutual support in there.*

Direct reciprocity was therefore perceived as disregarding behaviours as altruistic in contrast to more indirect and multilateral exchanges where "you're not giving it back to the recipient, you're giving it out to somebody else" (Ivy). Additionally, while the acts of good soldiers were found to be ingrained in wider exchanges, the importance of not being motivated by expectations of returns was emphasised. It was succinctly explained by Luke who suggested that good soldiers "would give out help selflessly without expecting anything in return" or Louise who concluded, "You would want to help somebody through without really much thought of what you can get out of it. You would just want to help them".

4.2. Characteristics of good soldiers' helping behaviours

Helping behaviours exerted by good soldiers were further reported to vary on several dimensions. First, respondents considered the acts of good soldiers only as those which are discretionary. In other words, individuals need to exercise their own judgement and choice to be seen as good soldiers, as opposed to being coerced to do something by others:

> *Gail: One of our colleagues didn't feel well and everyone was really worried about her. And the other colleague was sweet, he drove her to the hospital where he waited with her till her husband got there. And that's quite an example [of a good soldier] as he didn't have to... he had his own work to be fair. So people just go out of their way because they want to.*

It was suggested that if individuals are told what to do they only appear to be good soldiers but, in reality, they are "more reluctant" (Henry) and "have less enthusiasm" (Fiona) to help. Such examples reflect the basic assumptions behind Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) which posits that felt autonomy results in higher internalised motivation to perform a given task (Grant and Berg, 2012). Interestingly, it should be noted that many helping behaviours under the label of OCBs migrated "from discretionary to required" (Turnipseed and Wilson, 2009, p.201) and can stem either from personal values and initiatives or from external pressures or rewards. In fact, a growing body of research suggests that compulsory citizenship is prevalent in organisations (e.g., Liu *et al*., 2019) and has negative impact on employees' wellbeing (Bolino *et al*., 2013). In contrast, the findings of the current study clearly suggest that the acts of good soldiers do not fall down under this category and they need to originate from own will.

The degree of self-sacrifice that characterises the behaviours of good soldiers is another theme that emerged during the interview process. The examples of helping provided by respondents started with simple acts of kindness that do not bring significant costs to the actor (such as making someone a cup of tea). Further examples included bigger projects that involved "putting themselves [the actors] on the line of fire to benefit others" (Kevin) and were often associated with "a massive pain" (Beth). It therefore sounds as if good soldiers engage in behaviours that lie on a continuum from acts that involve hardly any sacrifice to behaviours that require significant costs to the actor. The results of the current study therefore chime with the existing tendency in the literature to accept that those who altruistically support others are prepared to sacrifice their own energy and time perhaps more than others (Bergeron *et al*.,

2013; Moon *et al*., 2008). However, self-sacrifice was not found to be a necessary component of behaviours exerted by good soldiers. This is in opposition to the commonly held view in the management literature where altruistic help is evaluated based on the extent to which it decreases the actor's immediate benefits (Li *et al*., 2014).

While most examples of behaviours exerted by good soldiers involved an individual taking his/ her initiative and actively seeking to benefit another person ("Some people actually offer to do something for you before you even know you've needed it!", Donna*)*, participants' responses suggest that, in some instances, such acts may be reactive in nature. When asked if good soldiers are common in his workplace, Simon confidently said that "if you ask people, they do support you" whereas Theresa concluded that "it is just the sort of [her] initial reaction if they ask for help". Therefore, in contrast to the existing assumptions that only reactive behaviours could be altruistic (Spitzmuller and Van Dyne, 2013), it is concluded that behaviour of good soldiers stems both from own initiative and from being asked for support. This finding further directs our attention to scholars who emphasise the importance of proactive behaviours as critical determinants of organisational success (e.g., Bergeron *et al*., 2014). The results from this study demonstrated that reactive behaviours are as important and their potential impact on organisations should not be underestimated (see also: Lee *et al*., 2019).

The characteristics of the reported altruistic behaviours were common across the explored organizations. It was emphasised that the nature of altruistic behaviours exerted by employees was influenced by "the kind of company we are" (Gail), "organizational philosophy" (Susan) and "ethos of an organization" (Daniel) in all three research sites. This is further aligned with the underlying assumptions behind the sampling strategy for this study, i.e. seeking organisations predominantly characterised by collectivistic culture based on the tenets of altruism as opposed to individualistic cultures emphasising individual gains (see also: De Clercq *et al*., 2019).

Finally, no matter what the characteristics of the reported behaviours, respondents in all three organizations jointly agreed that these are "very important" (Derek) or "a major reason" (Anna) for staying with the company. Indeed, altruistic help was compared to an essential part of organizational life that is necessary for its survival:

> *Jane: We are like a ship and by doing it [helping] you keep the ship floating. If you were not doing it, it would not float, it would just go under.*

The above statements reflect a wider trend in the existing literature where the importance of altruistic helping behaviours in the workplace context is acknowledged (e.g., Clarkson, 2014) and a need for the businesses to move from working for economic gains to a more holistic approach encompassing altruistic values is emphasised (Bhaskar and Mishra, 2019). However, more research is needed to understand the detailed implications of altruistic help exerted by good soldiers.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical implications

Interest in helping behaviours at work has grown significantly in the past years (e.g., Podsakoff *et al*., 2014). While some scholars called for further research investigating a range of such behaviours as one general phenomenon (Bolino and Grant, 2016) rather than dichotomising self-interested and other-oriented behaviours (De Dreu, 2006), others (Homberg and Costello, 2019; Schott *et al*., 2019; Szulc, 2019) started to recognise that there are benefits of adding an extra level of specificity. The findings of this research further emphasise the latter calls and demonstrate that other-oriented behaviours are unique in motives and characteristics. By seeking to provide greater clarity to other-oriented help, this article contributes to advancing our knowledge about good soldiers and their behaviours.

This study is considered as an initial attempt to empirically distinguish which principles of exchange characterise helping behaviours exerted by good soldiers. More specifically, altruistic and generalised reciprocity dimensions of SET were supported and reinforced as a viable explanation of such acts. Whereas a conventional view on SET heavily relies on addressing the relationships among employees in terms of outcomes for the self (e.g., "Will exchanges with others result in favourable outcomes for me?"), the findings of this study demonstrate that the relationships among employees could be addressed in terms of outcomes for others (e.g., "Are those I am in relationship with receiving favourable outcomes?"; also see Kamdar *et al*., 2006, p. 850) and therefore call for future research to pay more attention to the principles of SET that go beyond simply reciprocity.

Focusing on other-oriented motivations appears particularly important given that a number of prominent scholars argue that it is the behaviour that matters and not intentions or motives (e.g., Grant, 2013; Li *et al*., 2014). Indeed, whether helping behaviour is driven by altruistic or egoistic motives seems to be often disregarded even if labels of altruism or altruistic help are used to describe them (e.g., Carmeli *et al*., 2005; Chuang *et al*., 2019; Koster and Sanders, 2006). Such trends may potentially stem from suggestions that research should focus on the dynamics that may be common across multiple behaviours (Crant, 2000; Parker, 2000). However, the position taken in this study is based on the argument that if underlying motivations behind the acts of help are disregarded, what may appear as a gain in extensional coverage (i.e., breadth) may lead to being surpassed by losses in precision (i.e., depth). This, in turn, has implications for future research design in a way that it warns against the danger of mistaking opportunistic behaviours exerted by good actors with the acts of good soldiers. Without an appropriate level of specification we would not be able to fully understand the nature of help governed by concern for others and the associated long-lasting benefits they may bring (Bergeron *et al*., 2013).

5.2. Practical implications

Practically, increased managerial awareness of people who act as good soldiers should facilitate capitalising on the power and advantages of such behaviours. By recognising that employees might use helping behaviours to benefit others or as a strategic tool to obtain self-benefits, HR can work to ensure that the acts of help are exerted with good overall intentions and not "merely as a means to look good" (Long *et al*., 2015, p. 492). Training supervisors to pay attention to employees who help out of dubious intentions may be a fruitful strategy (Halbesleben *et al*., 2010).

To recognise good soldiers, management could further pay attention to the characteristics of helping behaviours exerted by their employees. Although judging behaviours as other-oriented is a subjective process (Kim *et al*., 2018), it may be useful to look at the nature of situations in which helping behaviours are observed. The findings of this research suggest that good soldiers are likely to help others when they feel concern for their wellbeing or if they view it as part of wider multilateral exchanges where they can contribute to the greater good. Management could therefore question seemingly altruistic nature of help exerted by individuals if they do so predominantly in the presence of more influential colleagues or superiors (Bowler and Brass, 2006) or when other self-benefits, such as promotion, can be gained in the process (Hui *et al*., 2000). To inform employees' motives, practitioners can observe a change in the pattern of potential good soldiers in the presence of egoistic motives. For instance, it would be interesting to see how employees' helping behaviours change (e.g., in frequency or span) once performance appraisals approach to indicate the underlying nature of these.

While it might be tempting from a HR perspective to directly encourage employees to behave as good soldiers, the findings of this study emphasise the discretionary nature of such behaviours. This implies that if members view such acts as coercion, then their voluntary component will be violated. Consistently, HR may look for indirect ways through which

altruistic help can be encouraged. For instance, they may consider specific job redesign interventions that aim to foster interactions among employees with more opportunities for day-to-day acts of help. They can further signal that such behaviours are valued, for instance, by using symbolic rewards such as plaques or certificates. Such indirect ways to encourage altruistic help appear particularly relevant in the context of existing HR practices that seem to predominantly foster individualism narrowly defined in terms of self-interest (Bal and Dóci, 2018).

Indeed, the findings of the reported research provide some initial support suggesting that it is the collectivistic values that make us more concerned about the well-being of others (see also: Grant and Berg, 2012). In this case, it would appear natural to suggest that HR may consider introducing subtle and/or more significant changes in their environments to actively influence whether their employees tend to act more as good soldiers or as good actors. However, our knowledge about the factors which will either facilitate or inhibit employees' engagement in altruistic helping is still scant (see: Szulc, 2019). More research in this area would provide HR professionals with comprehensive information about how altruistic help unfolds in organizational contexts so that it could be used to the advantage of organizations and their members.

5.3. Limitations and future research

As with all empirical research, the reported study is not without limitations. First, although it was not the intention of this research, questions about the scientific generalisation of the findings to other organisations, industries, or geographical regions may be raised. Since differences exist in how people perceive helpful behaviours across international boundaries and cultural viewpoints (Farh *et al*., 2004), more research testing the findings from the current study in other cultures would be beneficial. Similarly, one may argue that the specific nature of the explored organisations may bias the sample in relation to helpful behaviours.

Nevertheless, such a selection allowed for developing particularly rich accounts of good soldiers and their behaviours. This practice revealed additional depth of information about the researched phenomenon which can be now applied to a wider range of contexts by what is known as theoretical generalisation. In the same time, it would be interesting for future research to test the proposed findings in larger scale samples and across sectors and industries.

In addition, it is acknowledged that it is not always possible to accurately assess motivations using qualitative inquiry or self-reported data. This is because individuals may simply not know what their ultimate motivation is, those who help out of egoistic concerns may attempt to hide their real motives, or individuals may over-report the extent to which they engage in desired behaviours – especially in the presence of an interview partner. While it is important to be aware of problems of this nature when interpreting the data gathered in this research, the aim of this study was not to measure the quantity of behaviours exerted by good soldiers nor how pure motivations behind such acts were. Rather, the goal was to provide an in-depth exploration of individuals' perceptions of the characteristics and motivations of the actions of good soldiers. The methods used in this research enabled insights into these interpretations to be achieved whereas the choice of dyadic interviews was particularly helpful in generating rich data. This is something that previous research on good soldiers has significantly underexplored and therefore an important contribution to the current literature. Management research would now benefit from further developing new ways of investigating good soldiers and their behaviours. This appears particularly relevant given that existing measures of altruistic help have been argued to represent somewhat limited content and only a minimalist assessment of underlying motivations (Sosik *et al*., 2009). One way to overcome such problems may be to infer specific motivation from an individual's behaviour by observing it in systematically varied situations that isolate the potentials goals of the individual. Such an approach could be implemented in laboratory or longitudinal field-based settings.

Finally, this study considered the acts of good soldiers aimed only at specific individuals. However, existing literature differentiates between citizenship behaviours targeted at individuals and the organization (Spitzmuller *et al*., 2008; Williams and Anderson, 1991). Indeed, the latter may be characterized by unique features and driven by specific mechanisms (see: Marinova *et al*., 2010) that were not captured in the reported study. Consistently, to get a more comprehensive picture of good soldiers and their behaviours, future research should go beyond interpersonal help and explore the characteristics of behaviours aimed at benefiting the organization.

6. Conclusions

This study has contributed to the theoretical and empirical knowledge about good soldiers, their motivations and the characteristics of their helping behaviours. It is hoped that a number of findings that emerged in this study will inspire practitioners and academics to take a fresh, beyond *quid pro quo* look at the nature of employee relations with further implications for the dominant HR practices.

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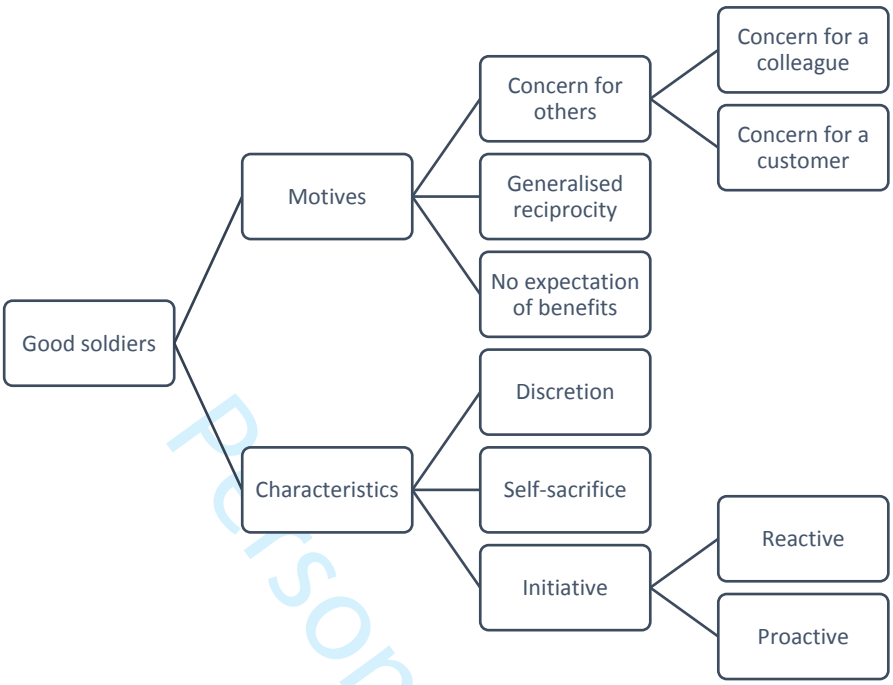
Table 1: Principles of help

Underlying principle	Rationality	Equity	Competition and rivalry	Balanced reciprocity	Generalised reciprocity	Altruism
What we see	A helps B	A helps B	A helps B	A helps B	A helps B	A helps B
What really happens	A helps B because it will help A with A's personal interests	A helps B because A thinks B deserves help	A helps B because A believes it will enable A to win over C	A helps B because A needs B's help with something else	A helps B because C may (or may not) help A or B in the future	A helps B because A is concerned for B

Figure 1: Good soldiers: Motives and characteristics



Appendix 1: Interview questions

Introduction
We will talk about behaviours performed to benefit a colleague as an end in itself.
Experiences as observers
Do you see people in your company engaging in such behaviours?
If yes: What does it involve, can you give me some examples? Why do you think they do it? What might influence their decision? If no: What do you think might have affected this?
Can you think of any experiences when your colleagues helped others just for the sake of helping? Whom where they helping? What were they helping them with? What do you think affected their willingness to help? Why is this important? How do you think they felt about it?
If you think about your colleagues, are there any people that are more likely than others to engage in such behaviours? Why do you think it is so? How would you describe these people (that person)?
What do you think makes it easier for some and more difficult or challenging for others to engage in such behaviours?
Experience as recipients
What is your experience of receiving help from others?
Can you distinguish when someone is helping you out of genuine motives or when they do it for some other purposes?
Experience as actors
Do you have a chance to engage in such help-giving behaviours? Can you give me an example? Who are you helping and what are you helping with?
What makes you help? What stops you from helping? How do you feel about it?
Concluding questions
Is there anything else you would like to add?
Is there anything you would like to ask me?