

Chapter 6 Charisma as Trait and as Theatre

Trait Approach - Charisma has been studied as a trait (Weber, 1947) and as a set of behaviors (House, 1977; House & Baetz, 1979; House & Howell, 1992). The trait approach to charisma looks at qualities such as being visionary, energetic, unconventional, and exemplary (Bass, 1985; Conger, 1989; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Harvey, 2001; House, 1977). Charismatic leaders are also thought to possess outstanding rhetorical ability (Harvey 2001: 253).

Theatrical Approach - Most recently charisma is being rethorized as theatrical. What are the behaviors that leaders and followers do to enact attributions of charisma for various audiences (internal and external to the firm)? For example, Howell and Frost (1989) began to study the ways verbal and non-verbal behaviors can be acted out to lead follows to attribute more or less charisma to leaders. They trained actors in a lab experiment to verbally and nonverbally exhibit behaviors identified as charismatic versus structuring and considerate (See [Behavioral Leadership Study Guide](#)). Charismatic leaders voiced overarching goals, communicated high performance expectations to followers, and exhibited confidences in follower ability to meet those high expectations (Howell & Frost, 1989: 251). In their charismatic character roles, actors were coached to use nonverbal cues such as extended eye contact, using vocal variety, speaking in a relaxed posture, and using animated facial expression. The more structuring and considerate leaderly-characters said the same lines buy with less dynamic non0verbal cues.

Impression Management - Charisma was revisited to look at its impression management behaviors or what House (1977) had called "image building." Studies by Bass (1985, 1988, 1990) suggest that charismatic leaders engage in impression management to construct an image of competence, increased subordinate competence and subordinate-faith in them as leaders. Bass argues that charismatic leadership is less likely to emerge or flourish in a transactional (bureaucratic) culture, and is more likely within a transformational culture (See X dimension of [XYZ In the Box Leadership Model](#)). Here, we want to explore ways in which leaders act charismatic, and co-create organizational scripts in which promote such attributions by a variety of audiences (inside and outside the firm).

A Theatrical Perspective on Charismatic Leadership - Charisma is dramaturgical, a theatrical role played by a leader that is jointly constructed with followers, as well as by suppliers, competitors, and customers (Gardner & Alvolio, 1998). Gardner and Alvolio's (1998) dramaturgical perspective is that charismatic leadership is an impression management process enacted theatrically in acts of *framing*, *scripting*, *staging*, and *performing*.

Harvey's (2001) study of Steve Job's charisma at Apple Corporation raises several important points. Jobs uses exemplification (embodying the ideal of being morally

responsible, committed to the cause, and taking risks) and self-promotion (and less often organization-promotion) to enact his characterization of charismatic leadership (Harvey, 2001: 257). When leaders cast themselves in the charismatic roles and their followers are cast as allies in pursuit of the charismatic leaders vision (Gardner & Alvolio, 1998: 42; Harvey, 2001: 254), there are three contradictions.

- First, the charismatic leader balances self-consistency over the longer term with the desire for shorter-term social goals. In the In-The-Box model of leadership this is X, how transactional (short term) and how transformational (long-term) to be.
- Second is the "exemplifier's paradox," and the "self-promoter's paradox." The exemplifier paradox is being "one of us, but not one of us (Harvey, 2001: 258). Self-promoter's paradox, is to be charismatic you must promote the glory of your leadership skill and ability; but to do it too much and people find it more pompous than charismatic. It is an apparent conflict in the charismatic leaders' tendency to construct personalized versus collective accounts of aspirations, accomplishments, and histories; leaders attribute extraordinary personal power to themselves or to the accomplishment of followers. In the In-The-Box model of leadership this is the Y dimension, how to manage the contradictory desires of "will to serve" and "will to power."
- Third, there is the issue of voice. In the In-The-Box model of leadership this is the Z-dimension. Does the charismatic leader become the sole voice of the enterprise (taking credit for everything accomplished), or do they give voice to the efforts of others' work.
- Fourth, there is the dark side. Goffman (1967) proposes the idea of "facework," how the leader justifies actions that could be (or are) negatively evaluated by others. There is face work the protects the self-image of the leader, and other facework that guards the self-image of the organization. There is the opposing forces of the positive and the negative sides of charisma. Yukl (1999) argues that charismatic leadership research has dismissed the dark side, lead by Burns' (1978) interpretations of charisma as a heroic form of leadership that is absent of conflict. Yukl points out that charismatic leaders also use manipulative behaviors, such as "exaggerating positive achievements and taking unwarranted credit for achievements," "covering up mistakes and failures," "blaming others for mistakes," and "limiting communication of criticism and dissent" (1999: 296).

A min point is that charisma is a co-constructed theatrical event. It takes casting of both leaders and follower roles, antagonists and protagonists (e.g. competitors who are enemies) to bring off the charismatic drama.

- [Weber 1947 Charisma](#) Max Weber 1864-1920
 - Weber had a more trait approach to leadership. According to Weber: charisma is 'a certain quality of an individual personality,

by virtue of which s/he is set apart from ordinary people and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader'.

- Charisma is one of several ideal types of authority. The others are bureaucratic and feudal. Weber observed that the capitalist entrepreneur has three choices: be charismatic, feudal, or bureaucratic. For most leaders, the bureaucratic choice has been made.
- An extension to Weber would be to look at how charismatic, bureaucratic, and feudal are differently acted by leaders.

DARK SIDE OF CHARISMA

Charismatic Leadership: Claiming special knowledge and demanding unquestioning obedience with power and privilege. Leadership may consist of one individual or a small group of core leaders. Charismatic leadership has its dark side.

1. Problems
 - [Hitler and Charisma](#) by Lindholm
2. Charisma and Cults
 - [Heaven's Gate](#)
 - [Is Amway a Cult?](#)
 - [Short Introduction to Lysenkoism](#) (Lysenkoism as a cult) by Nikolai Bezroukov
 - [Cult Mind Control](#)

Scripting - the development of a set of directions that define the scene, specifies the actors to be cast, outlines expected behavior, and cues when events occur and actors enter and exit (Benford & Hung, 1992; Gardner & Alvolio, 1998). Scripts supply the collective

definition of the situation (plot and the dialog in Aristotle's terms). Scripting is what leaders do to direct and setup the scene before a performance. In McDonaldization, scripts are written to integrate activities in a very repetitive and integrated way, with few spaces for improv (See [Image Theatre study guide](#); [McDonaldization Study Guide](#)). The point is leaders can exercise control through theatrics not only by performance, but by the scripting and rescripting of cast member dialog and by changing the plot of the situation. The pre-performance and off-stage aspects of leadership is casting roles, scripting dialog, rehearsing, and direction the action. The charismatic leader cast themselves in the role of the visionary leading the assembled characters in pursuit of their vision, while not falling victim to the trickery and schemes of their antagonists. The charismatic leader's scripted plot is to save the day, to rescue people from antagonists. Gardner and Alvolio (1998) include dialog and directing as aspects of scripting:

Directing - Leaders are directors for performances. This can include rehearsals by leader and staff to give desired impressions. After September 11th, President George Bush, rehearsed with speech writers and coaches to give a more heroic leaderly image to his public. Karen Hughes, his Director of Communication was able to work with Bush to rescript his role as leader to deal with the changed expectations of followers, who wanted a confident and dynamic, yet stern and forceful leader. Changes in direction included using props in speeches (President George W. Bush grabbed a bullhorn to give support to search and rescue workers who were looking for survivors at the World Trade Center site (September 14).) It included posing his facial features in a more determined look, with the same determination of a Churchill or FDR (presidents who had rallied their followers in times of national crisis) [See [Antenarrative Framing of President Bush in Post-11](#)].

Staging - charismatic leaders stage-manage their performances. General George Patton always his pearl-handled pistols. General Douglas MacArthur wore strangely formed hats and a long pipe. Both wore uniforms that were dramatic in their stage-effect. Mahatma Gandhi, Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Mother Teresa are also often called charismatic. What did they have in common? Not just passion for a cause, commitment, vision, energy, courage; they all have dramatic stage-effect. General MacArthur would get himself photographed on the front lines, and sometimes ahead of those lines, to be an charismatic inspiration to his troop. Gandhi wore clothing he knit himself as an inspiration and example to others to defy British colonial rule; at that time Gandhi and his followers were prohibited from manufacturing their own cotton clothing

Performing - Show time. The charismatic leader takes the stage to enact scripted dialog and set up the frame to construct their charismatic character. Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi are examples of exemplifying trustworthiness and moral responsibility; to be examples to their followers of the non-violent characters they expected followers to imitate. Gandhi's fasting and dress were examples of the self-sacrifice and discipline it takes to change the world. Charismatic leaders sometimes engage in self-promotion to appear competent, powerful, determined, innovative, etc. They may also perform in ways that promotes their vision of the future, and promote the organization or cause they lead/serve/embody. Performing according to Goffman (1967) also includes "facework." Facework can be the defensive protection of self-image, as in saving-face. This includes

giving accounts that control the damaging of scandals. It can also be the personalization of a cause. Public face and personal face relate to leadership, saving-face after a faux pas.