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Common Threads among Different Forms of Charismatic Leadership

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Introduction

Charismatic leaders have and continue to have the ability to mobilize people. Some start new religions, some unify citizens of a nation, and some lead business empires. What is charisma and what is it about charisma that attracts and mobilizes groups of people around one person? Though charismatic leadership has been a focus of leadership studies for decades, there remains a lack of clarity in determining precisely the characteristics that define charisma itself. Over a quarter century since its publication, Conger and Kanungo's treatment of charismatic leadership remains influential as a seminal understanding of the phenomenon.[1] Their paper most importantly illustrates the problem of what they term "mystical" elements of charisma; they argue that in order to understand charisma, these elements must be stripped away. Of course, the fact that little advance has been made in our understanding of charisma since their paper appeared suggests the abiding importance of just such features of charisma and the likelihood that ignoring the more ephemeral aspects of charisma does more harm than good to our ability to comprehend charismatic leadership fully. Recent studies have aimed to construct a theory of leadership that contrasts charismatic leadership with what can be termed ideological and pragmatic forms of leadership.[2] Though the observations made by Mumford, et al.[3] are useful and effective, gaps in what they tell us about the nature of charisma and charismatic leadership appear. Hunt and Davis, in particular,[4] have shown that while Mumford et al.'s theory[5] does well to account for charismatic leadership at the group and environmental levels, it has little to nothing to say about charismatic leadership at either the individual or organizational levels. In actuality, such studies tend to describe the ways in which charismatic leadership appears, especially in terms of leader-follower relationships, but shed little if any light upon the nature of charisma itself.

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[1] Jay Conger and Rabindra Kanungo, "Toward a Behavioral Theory of Charismatic Leadership in Organizational Settings," *Academy of Management Review* 12 (1987): 637-647.

[2] Michael D. Mumford, Alison L. Antes, Jay J. Caughron, and Tamra L. Friedrich, "Charismatic, Ideological, and Pragmatic Leadership: Multi-Level Influences on Emergence and Performance," *The Leadership Quarterly* 19 (2008): 144-160; Michael D. Mumford, Samuel T. Hunter, Tamara L. Friedrich, and Jay J. Caughron, "Charismatic, Ideological, and Pragmatic Leadership: An Examination of Multi-Level Influences on Emergence and Performance," in *Multi-Level Issues in Organizational Behavior and Leadership*, ed. Francis J. Yammarino and Fred Dansereau (Bingley, UK: JAI Press, 2009).

[3] Mumford, et al., "Multi-Level Influences," & Mumford, et al., "An Examination."

[4] James G. (Jerry) Hunt and John N. Davis, "Levels of Performance: Multi-Level Perspectives on Outstanding Leadership," in *Multi-Level Issues in Organizational Behavior and Leadership*, ed. Francis J. Yammarino and Fred Dansereau (Bingley, UK: JAI Press, 2009), 119.

[5] As described in Mumford et al., "Multilevel Influences."

We propose that charisma, through its appeal to emotion in an unstable world, is equivalent across such organizational structures as religion, politics, and business. Further, the similarities that can be identified across these fields of leadership, and among individual leaders, can help us to more clearly define the nature of charismatic leadership through recognizing the importance of charisma itself. This paper will explore the phenomenon of charisma in order to find common threads of charismatic leadership among religious or spiritual, political, and business leaders.

Defining Charisma

The first hurdle to clear is defining charisma. Jane Halbert writes that there have been many different interpretations and definitions of charisma proposed with scholars across multiple disciplines contributing to the discussion about what charisma is and how it should be defined.[6] This variety of opinions has naturally resulted in disagreements and misunderstandings. Sociologist Max Weber first introduced the term in the nineteenth century; he found charismatic leadership to be a non-rational form of authority, creating the sociological foundation for what continues to be debated today. According to Weber, charisma is defined as a "supernatural" trait that emerges in natural leaders in a time of distress.[7] Many modern scholars bristle at the mention of the supernatural. Conger and Kanungo, in their seminal work on the subject, sought to define a conceptual framework of charismatic leadership that would alleviate "its elusive nature and the mysterious connotation of the term," and to "strip the aura of mysticism from charisma and to deal with it strictly as a behavioral process."[8] However much one may wish to distance one's self from the notion of the supernatural as unscientific, the fact remains that the effects of charisma often feel innate, inexplicable, and even supernatural to those who experience them. And such recognition is in no way limited solely to the religious sphere. Behavioral models are fine for identifying behaviors associated with certain groups and types, but it does nothing to identify the inner workings of an individual, or those with whom he or she relates.[9]

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[6] J. A. Halpert, "The Dimensionality of Charisma," *Journal of Business and Psychology* 4.4 (1990): 399.

[7] Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 18-19.

[8] Conger and Kanungo, "Toward a Behavioral Theory," 637 & 639.

[9] We might note here as well that while Conger and Kanungo decry Weber's lack of specificity in using terms like "magical abilities," "heroism," and "power of the mind and speech," their model has done little to clarify the issue. For example, Gary Yukl follows Conger and Kanungo in identifying means by which a charismatic leader can induce social identification with the group, which include "the skillful use of slogans, symbols, rituals, ceremonies, and stories (about past successes, heroic deeds by members, and symbolic actions by the founder of [sic] former

Since then, many researchers have examined and redefined the nature of charisma. Burke and Brinkerhoff describe charisma, and charismatic leadership, as concepts that have been "criticized for being theoretically and methodologically imprecise."[10] They describe three different interpretations of the concept: the religious, sociological, and modern interpretations. The religious interpretation is mainly dominated by religious and spiritual leaders who experience "prophecies" and other direct communications with a higher power. Lorne Dawson describes how most apocalyptic movements, for instance, incorporate belief in at least two types of prophet: the original visionary founder and the contemporary figures who continue to expound this vision to followers.[11] The sociological aspect is based on Weber's theories, emphasizing that "both the exceptional characteristics of the individual invested with charisma and the social conditions fostering the emergence and recognition of charismatic leaders."[12] The modern interpretation is based on the same theory but has been expanded and improved through the scientific study of testable hypotheses. Charismatic figures are framed as "intelligent, innovative, persuasive, and magnetic leaders who emerge in situations where people are economically, socially, and politically oppressed."[13] Moreover, Burke and Brinkerhoff identify a need for a more accurate measure of charisma to allow comparisons between different fields of leadership.[14] They additionally claim that the foundation for such a measure can be observed though a ten-item index. This can be seen as a start to narrowly defining what charisma is in measurable terms. However, experts remain divided and no one scale of measure has received recognition across disciplines.

From a sociological standpoint, Worsley argues that charisma is a matter of recognition. The concept constitutes "a relationship, not an attribute of individual personality or a mystical quality," making it impossible to measure charisma with only one person.[15] Without followers, leaders are powerless, thus

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leaders)." See Yukl, "A Retrospective on Robert House's '1976 Theory of Charismatic Leadership' and Recent Revisions," *The Leadership Quarterly* 4.3 (1993): 371. Of course, "skillful" use of the above is not explained, though we expect that a charismatic leader would demonstrate just such skill.

[10] K. L. Burke, & M. B. Brinkerhoff, "Capturing Charisma: Notes on an Elusive Concept," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20.3 (1981): 274.

[11] Lorne Dawson, *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 152.

[12] Burke & Brinkerhoff, "Capturing Charisma," 274.

[13] Burke & Brinkerhoff, "Capturing Charisma," 274.

[14] Burke & Brinkerhoff, "Capturing Charisma."

[15] Quoted in P. Piovanelli, "Jesus' Charismatic Authority: On the Historical Applicability of a Sociological Model," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73.2 (2005): 403.

charismatic leadership cannot exist without a relationship between the two. Nonetheless, many non-charismatic leaders have ended up in positions of leadership through, for instance, heredity and seniority, by no means ensuring charismatic leadership. The leader-follower relationship simply explains the nature of leadership itself, indicating that the relationship is an important aspect of charisma, but not the core. More accurately, Barnes states that charisma is the "authority relationship which arises when a leader through the dynamics of a set of teachings, a unique personality, or both elicits responses of awe, deference, and devotion from a group of people."[16] Barnes also points out that much of the confusion surrounding our understanding of charisma has arisen from the blurry distinction between charisma and charismatic leadership. We ought to keep in mind his important distinction that a charismatic leader may be described as a display of its many different behaviors, while charisma must be recognized as a relationship between people and a leader. Moreover, it may seem obvious, but bears repeating, that while all charismatic leaders are charismatic, not every charismatic individual becomes a charismatic leader. Though many leaders may attempt to adopt the successful behaviors of charismatic leaders, without the personal attribute of charisma itself, they are bound to fail at being accepted as a charismatic leader.

Jerrold Post explains the leader-follower relationship as a type of extended narcissism.[17] This is significant since charisma then requires a leader with high self-esteem that attracts followers who admire him or her and that are willing to follow his or her teachings. Pathologizing charismatic leadership opens the door to another interpretation. In relation to the uncanny phenomena of mob mentality that Freud called the Primal Horde,[18] "charisma is a dangerous form of alienation, in which are involved a mentally ill leader, embodying the 'dreaded primal father,' and some disturbed followers, victims of their Oedipal complex, and in need of resocialization."[19] Certainly, an irrational willingness to follow based on such an intangible aspect as charisma has the potential for very serious abuse.[20] Still, a pathological explanation is insufficient seeing that charisma and charismatic leadership can be found across different institutions and have been

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[16] D. F. Barnes, "Charisma and Religious Leadership: An Historical Analysis," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17.1 (1978): 2.

[17] J. M. Post, "Narcissism and the Charismatic Leader-Follower Relationship," *Political Psychology* 7.4 (1986): 678.

[18] Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922).

[19] Piovanelli, "Jesus' Charismatic Authority," 417.

[20] See Al-Karim Samnani, and Parbudyal Singh, "When Leaders Victimize: The Role of Charismatic Leaders in Facilitating Group Pressures," *The Leadership Quarterly* 24 (2013), 189-202.

used for both negative *and* positive outcomes. However, the interpretation is partly supported by Post, who expresses charismatic leaders as self-obsessed individuals that attract insecure people looking for guidance.[21] Yet, the situation seems to expand in times of societal distress when all types of personalities tend to flock around charismatic leaders.

Additionally, "times of societal distress" represent the circumstance under which Weber claims that "natural" leaders emerge.[22] It seems that most experts attribute more to the societal situation than the personality traits of a charismatic leader. Research has suggested, for example, that the state of stress may itself evoke the feeling that a randomly chosen leader is charismatic rather than the need for a specific leader with charisma to emerge.[23] However, not everyone possesses charisma; hence, there needs to be a personality trait or aspect that plays a crucial role as well. This aspect needs to be proven through confirmation of the power and authority the leader possesses. According to Weber, charisma should not be taken for granted by a charismatic leader; if the followers think that the leader's "blessed" power has abandoned him, the individual stands to lose authority. This is likely to happen when the societal distress ceases.[24] Further, Weber writes that since charismatic leaders' authority stems from their personalities, contrary to an external source such as rank, they are under constant pressure to prove themselves. A prophet needs to prove his ability through miracles, a warlord needs to "perform heroic deeds," and, ultimately, matters must work out to the benefit of their followers.[25] This means that even though societal distress tends to initiate the emergence of charismatic leaders, it is only an instrument for gaining recognition and holds no real power to legitimize authority unless the charismatic leader proves him or herself continuously. Dawson has found that continued successes are necessary to mediate potential crises of legitimacy common when leadership is based on charisma rather than some institutional model. Likewise, Barnes' findings support the position that charismatic leaders emerge in times of societal distress when people are looking for a leader; however, he also notes that even though the social environment is key for charisma to exist, the direction or mission of the charismatic leader is up to the individual leader.[26] The personality aspect of leadership shines through in all areas of authority. Some leaders will choose a path based on where they think

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[21] Post, "Narcissism."

[22] Weber, *On Charisma.*

[23] Stefanie K. Halverson, Susan Elaine Murphy, and Ronald E. Riggio, "Charismatic Leadership in Crisis Situations: A Laboratory Investigation of Stress and Crisis," *Small Group Research* 35.5 (2004): 495-514.

[24] Weber, *On Charisma,* 49-50.

[25] Weber, *On Charisma,* 22.

[26] Barnes, "Charisma and Religious Leadership," 15.

they can get the most support while others have an ideological cause they find the most important in life.

All in all, one can infer that there is no one definition of charisma. The dilemma will be carefully examined through examples presented below. Whatever else it may be, most researchers agree that charisma arises from within an individual charismatic leader, though it must be recognized by a group in order to manifest, and emerges in times of societal distress, when a leader-follower relationship naturally arises as people seek for meaning and clarity.

Charisma in Religious and Spiritual Leaders

Historically, many recognized and influential charismatic leaders have been religious and spiritual leaders. Barnes writes that such "charismatic leaders usually have an intimate connection with a transcendent or immanent divine source."[27] Most interesting is that the root of the term charisma is in itself related to the mystical experience. Piovanelli writes that the word originates from the Greek word "charisma," which came to mean "spiritual gift," or more literarily, a gift that a member of the Christian society received from the Spirit. These gifts could include, but were not limited to, "inspired wisdom," "prophecies," and "healing and working miracles."[28] In early Christian societies, gifts from the Spirit were not limited to any particular group of worshippers. However, after the death of the apostle Paul, the Christian religion followed a different path set by new Christian authority figures, and "spiritual gifts" became reserved for its leaders. Eventually the use of the words "charisma" and "charismatic" came to include "a wide range of phenomena displaying a direct and unmediated contact between inspired individuals and supernatural beings."[29] This laid the foundation for more modern charismatic spiritual and religious leaders who claim to have a direct connection with the divine and use that ability to gain a position of power within their religion.

Barnes explains that religious charismatic leaders have been observed to take on various roles in existing religions, leading the creation of new branches, and establishing completely new religions. They have also been observed to have remarkably different personalities and leadership styles. However, their purpose stays the same, namely to help a group of people to cope with common issues, including the meaning of life, death, and suffering.[30] Groups have been seen to

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[27] Barnes, "Charisma and Religious Leadership," 3.
[28] Piovanelli, "Jesus' Charismatic Authority," 396.
[29] Piovanelli, "Jesus' Charismatic Authority," 396.
[30] Barnes, "Charisma and Religious Leadership," 2.

form, develop, and dissolve around these life questions and charismatic leaders often play a role in the changing structure of religions.

Andelson studied charismatic leadership in the Amana Society, a religious sect that originated in Germany, and found Weber's conclusions about charisma's non-permanent nature to be true, adding that charisma is a creative phenomenon. He explains that charismatic religious leaders gain support by combining older, recognized teachings with new ideas.[31] Thus, their strength comes from having a creative ability to "correct" a religion.

Furthermore, similarities can be seen among charismatic religious leaders. Barnes argues that there are four common principals needed for a charismatic religious leader-follower relationship to emerge. The first is what he calls "de-alienation," based on divine experience, meaning that the leader has come to realize that the world is unstable because it is a human construct. The second principle states that the leader is part of a minority group or lives during an era of social rearrangement. The third principle says the leader will have unprecedented teachings for the religion to continue. The fourth and final principle states that he or she either starts new religions or works within an existing religion.[32] This indicates that new charismatic leaders can emerge within or outside any existing religion not only in times of social distress, but also at any time within subgroups, as long as the charismatic leader has had a divine experience that reveals what he or she thinks is the true core of the divine mission.

Charisma in Political Leaders

Many non-religious leaders exhibit vast power and control over groups of people, often without leveraging a divine or spiritually inspired component. Now we see that charisma and charismatic leadership extends far outside the bounds of unmediated contact with the divine or supernatural. This type of non-religious leadership is best described as "the extraordinary relationship existing between a magnetic and (presumed) superhuman leader (as a political or military one) and his or her bewitched followers."[33] Horrifying examples of this type of charismatic leadership can be found in Adolf Hitler and other authoritarian dictators. As the Freudian interpretation of charisma holds, "a mentally ill leader" manipulates charisma and attracts followers independent of their inherent intentions,[34] thereby

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[31] J. G. Andelson, "Routinization of Behavior in a Charismatic Leader," *American Ethnologist* 7.4 (1980): 730.
[32] Barnes, "Charisma and Religious Leadership," 3.
[33] Piovanelli, "Jesus' Charismatic Authority," 397.
[34] Piovanelli, "Jesus' Charismatic Authority," 417.

opening the door to the realm of bad intentions that beg consideration when discussing charisma.

Bad intentions in leaders can unfortunately be found in many places. The difference between a charismatic leader with bad intentions and any other type of leader is that the charismatic leaders possess an unusual power of attraction. Hanna Arendt presents a particular explanation for Adolf Hitler's attraction. According to her, his charisma was founded in an exceptionally strong belief in himself. Arendt writes that Hitler early on became aware that "Extraordinary self-confidence and displays of self-confidence [...] inspire confidence in others; pretensions to genius waken the conviction in others that they are indeed dealing with a genius."[35] Hitler did display immense self-confidence in a time of despair; however, it is not likely that this attribute was the single reason for his success. According to Arendt, Hitler's foremost advantage was that he always had an opinion, no matter the subject discussed.[36] Consequently, having an opinion made others believe that he possessed exceptional intelligence and clarity in life.

On one hand, it seems Hitler's own conviction that Jews and other minority groups were to blame for Germany's misfortunes allowed him to utilize his charisma to convince his followers to support his mission. On the other hand, Hitler's power may have come from a polarized view of the world, allowing him to convince the German people that what he stood for was good and that all opposition was evil.[37] This polarization has also been noticed in speeches given by other charismatic leaders, such as, Franklin Delano Roosevelt; some even go as far as to say that Roosevelt "identified himself with Moses" while often referring to biblical texts.[38] Through delivering such lines, he displayed behaviors similar to religious charismatic leaders. Post notes that charismatic leaders can be effective in their leadership because of their ability to communicate a black-and-white view of the world, and that the most effective leaders truly believe in the polarized view of the world they present to their followers.[39] Hitler came into power at a time when the Germans were looking for someone to blame for their misery, and there is also some suggestion that the German people were historically likely to idolize charismatic military and political leaders.[40] This, in

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[35] Quoted in R. Eatwell, "The Concept and Theory of Charismatic Leadership," *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 7.2 (2006): 141.

[36] Eatwell, "The Concept and Theory of Charismatic Leadership," 141.

[37] Post, "Narcissism," 680.

[38] Post, "Narcissism," 680.

[39] Post, "Narcissism," 681.

[40] M. Lepsius, "The Model of Charismatic Leadership and its Applicability to the Rule of Adolf Hitler," *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions* 7.2 (2006): 177.

turn, creates a cultural foundation relatively prone to support authoritarian dictators, especially when combined with social crisis.

The use of rhetoric is powerful in exerting charisma. A closer look at political figures claimed to evoke charisma reveals that many deny weaknesses in themselves and transfer blame to an external source.[41] Agreeableness, not to be confused with likeability, is negatively related to charisma, while dominance and a need for power are positively correlated – as Dean Simonton puts it: "These are pushy people."[42] It has also been said that political leaders usually have certain traits in common: they have a mission and a vision for accomplishing that mission; they use inclusive language such as "we" instead of "you"; they find or create an enemy within or outside the nation; and they have personal attributes that attract people to them.[43] When people feel that they belong, they are more likely to blindly follow a leader and fight for a specific cause. Charismatic leaders and their followers typically believe that they are fighting for a supreme cause and subsequently trust that they are defending good against evil. Smith argues that Hitler, similarly to other charismatic political leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr., and Winston Churchill, was convinced that he was bringing salvation to his people.[44] Nonetheless, there have been those, particularly with a Judeo-Christian background, who claim that "only virtuous people can be defined as charismatic."[45] This definition leaves out previously discussed group of authoritarian leaders; nonetheless, many of these leaders where successful in their leadership. Therefore, charisma cannot be defined as a virtuous trait, but rather a morally neutral one. Similarly to how religious leaders "save" people by helping a group to cope with issues, the political leaders see themselves as bringing salvation to the people by correcting injustices or defending them against an enemy.

Typically, political charismatic leaders stand outside traditional politics and confront the rational political system. Some political leaders are even seen as too radical and are treated as outcasts until a societal crisis arises. An example is Winston Churchill, whose charismatic authority did not emerge until there was a common enemy to be found in the Germans, thus allowing him to claim that he could bring salvation to the British people.[46] Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr.'s

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[41] Post, "Narcissism," 682.
[42] Dean Keith Simonton, "Presidential Leadership Styles: How Do They Map on Charismatic, Ideological, and Pragmatic Leadership?" in *Multi-Level Issues in Organizational Behavior and Leadership*, eds. Francis J. Yammarino and Fred Dansereau (Bingley, UK: JAI Press, 2009), 127.
[43] Eatwell, "The Concept and Theory of Charismatic Leadership," 144-148.
[44] P. Smith, "Culture and Charisma: Outline of a Theory," *Acta Sociologica* 43.2 (2000): 103-105.
[45] Halpert, "The Dimensionality of Charisma," 400.
[46] Smith, "Culture and Charisma," 107.

charisma did not surface until an opportunity to fight for salvation arose through Rosa Parks's arrest. It should be noted that there is no guarantee that a charismatic leader will appear as a leader by simply using the language of charisma when a country is in social crisis. Evidence of this can be found in various cases – for instance, in one study, President Clinton was not considered charismatic despite employing charismatic rhetoric to unite the American people against Hussein and Milosevic, thereby illustrating that behavior alone is not enough.[47] The supernatural personality aspect is important as well, which supports Barnes' conclusion that mimicking charismatic leadership does not create charisma. Thus, charisma still has an internal component that is nontransferable.

Political charismatic leaders have shaped the world we are living in through their extensive impact on people and societies. Aberbach writes that charisma is morally neutral. It is neither good nor evil; the motive is irrelevant, charisma is non-rational and unpredictable and therefore it can be used for any purpose.[48] One way to explore this irrational impact is to imagine how the world would have looked if some of the most historically influential leaders had died before they came into power.[49] Although, we cannot know for certain how the world would have looked without Adolf Hitler, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Martin Luther King Jr., or Winston Churchill, since it is possible that someone else may have taken their place, their impact in the world is impressive and their authority extends outside of rationality.

Charisma in Business Leaders

Charismatic leadership in a business environment has many similar features to religious and political charismatic leadership. Cray, Inglis, and Freeman show that charismatic business leaders are often seen in new or changing organizations and they present high self-esteem along with strong conviction.[50] Accordingly, these leaders present properties that are similar to those of charismatic religious and political leaders.

Charismatic leadership translated into the business world can be interpreted in different ways. Worden writes that charisma "involves the

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[47] Smith, "Culture and Charisma," 109.

[48] D. Aberbach, *Charisma in Politics, Religion and the Media* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 108.

[49] Aberbach, *Charisma in Politics, Religion and the Media,* 1.

[50] David Cray, Loretta Inglis, and Susan Freeman, "Managing the Arts: Leadership and Decision Making under Dual Rationalities," *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society* 36.4 (2007): 299.

perception of 'energy' and 'connection' because it draws on a 'larger matter,' such as fundamental principles or visions touching on something felt as real or sacred."[51] This connects back to the religious roots of the word in indicating that charisma "has a spiritual non-rational dimension."[52] Worden also claims that some religious business leaders allow elements of their religion to influence their leadership style and adopt a religiously appropriate style of charisma. Although, charismatic leadership does not have to be related to any religion, it encourages religious or spiritual aspects in followers, such as a transferal of responsibility and worship-like behavior. The co-dependence between a charismatic leader and his or her followers can become a liability in a corporate environment due to an immense trust in the leader's judgment and the fear of letting him or her down.[53] Babcock-Roberson and Strickland found that there is a strong correlation between charismatic leadership in business and worker engagement.[54] Just like followers becoming increasingly engaged in their religious group, workers tend to be more engaged at work if a charismatic leader is present. In fact, the narcissistic tendency of the charismatic leader may manifest a need for increasing levels of commitment and sacrifice. This may both reflect loyalty to the leader as well as a sense of unity that arises in working towards a common goal during times of crisis or change.

Similarly to citizens and believers looking for a cause to fight for, people in a corporate environment search for a higher mission, especially in new, emerging organizations or in organizations in crisis. Philip Smith describes a complex cultural dilemma around a "charismatic hero" such as a political leader or a business leader, by suggesting that the "leader's charisma is ultimately dependent upon the actions and representations of his or her imagined enemy."[55] This is in line with the black-and-white language used by other groups of charismatic leaders encouraging the creation of an "enemy" and establishing a mission to mobilize people against or around. Another risk with charismatic business leaders is that employees may become loyal to a specific person within the organization instead of the organization itself.[56] This can potentially cause problems when a leader's goals and ideals are not perfectly in line with those of the company, or when a leader decides to leave the organization.

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[51] S. Worden, "Religion in Strategic Leadership: A Positivistic, Normative/Theological, and Strategic Analysis," *Journal of Business Ethics* 57.3 (2005): 223.

[52] Worden, "Religion in Strategic Leadership," 223.

[53] Cray, Inglis, & Freeman, "Managing the Arts," 299.

[54] M. Babcock-Roberson & O. J. Strickland, "The Relationship between Charismatic Leadership, Work Engagement, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors," *Journal of Psychology* 144.3 (2010): 322.

[55] Smith, "Culture and Charisma," 110.

[56] Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, "The Relationship between Charismatic Leadership."

The Core of Charisma

Much of the current scholarly discussion around the definition of charisma comes down to the societal situation in which it emerges rather than the actual individual. There is, however, no doubt that some people are more effective at mobilizing others; and this attribute seems to be inexplicable, often described as supernatural. Nevertheless, a charismatic personality is not all that is needed; a leader without a cause, and without followers, is no leader at all. House's theory of charisma defines the following nine traits: "follower trust in the correctness of the leader's belief, similarities of followers' beliefs to those of the leader," "unquestioning acceptance of the leader," "affection for the leader," "willing obedience to the leader," "identification with emulation of the leader," "emotional involvement of the follower in the mission," "heightened goals of the follower," and "feeling on the part of followers that they will be able to accomplish, or contribute to the accomplishment of, the mission."[57] These traits both include the follower's relationship to the leader and to the mission he or she is trying to accomplish, which can be easily applied within the religious, political, or business contexts, considering that the mission could refer to any common goal the leader is trying to accomplish.

Criticism of Charisma

Ever since Weber popularized the term, "charisma" has been a problematic area of study for various reasons – one being the popularization of the term in society and the media. Most scholars wish to remove any sense of the supernatural from the discussion despite the experience of followers. Some hold that charisma is a trait only held by a few leaders in the world while others use it to describe people on a daily basis. Some, such as Arthur Schlesinger Jr., do not believe it to be relevant today, and prefer to describe present-day politics as too complicated for the concept of charisma to explain any effects.[58] Eatwell writes that some critics even argue that the concept is only useful for analysis of "medicine men, warrior chieftains, and religious prophets;" and, other critics go even further, claiming that "charisma is nothing more than an amorphous and soggy 'sponge' concept [...] that [...] should be banished from the historical and social science lexicons."[59] Some also choose to blame the media and a "cult of personality" for trivializing the word through everyday usage to the degree that it has become a synonym for

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[57] R. J. House, "A 1976 Theory of Charismatic Leadership," in *Leadership: The Cutting Edge*, eds., J. G. Hunt & L. L. Larson (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977).
[58] Per Eatwell, "The Concept and Theory of Charismatic Leadership," 142.
[59] Eatwell, "The Concept and Theory of Charismatic Leadership," 142.

attractive.[60] All of this naturally adds to the confusion about what is considered charisma and how it can potentially be measured. Still, charisma and charismatic leadership are present and continue to transform lives and societies.

Conclusion

Many would consider charisma to be a personality trait that few possess and most lack, yet that explanation does not address reasons for its emergence nor why people follow charismatic leaders at the times they do. Charisma presents itself as equivalent across religion, politics, and business; it appeals to people's emotions by presenting a black-and-white world with a particular mission for a group to accomplish. Charismatic leaders invite their followers to become part of a group, giving them a sense of belonging and meaning in life. They display immense self-confidence, convincing their followers to trust in the leader's judgment. Their personal attributes allow them to gain non-rational authority, which presents itself as a mystery to researchers and followers alike. Whether or not that personal attribute of charisma originates from a divine source, it displays supernatural aspects that seem to be inexplicable. The phenomenon's lack of acceptance across disciplines displays it's mysterious and complex nature, which is itself a major obstacle to our forming a clearer understanding of exactly what is at work.

Still, whatever the personal attribute may be, it does not evolve into charismatic *leadership* unless some type of crisis arises. Religious leaders deal with life-and-death crises, often literally dealing with questions of mortality and existential angst; political leaders normally find an enemy to defeat; and business leaders are found in organizational crises, sometimes self-inflicted. In all cases, moving from one crisis to another provides a means of maintaining charismatic authority and avoiding the routinization that can lead to other forms of leadership. All of these three organizational structures present their followers with a mission and a path to achieve it. A crucially important aspect of charismatic leadership is the leader-follower relationship. Charisma is based in the relationship between leader and follower, where the follower transfers control and accountability to the leader, often in a worship-like manner. In itself, the phenomenon is morally neutral; however, with the non-rational transfer of authority, individual responsibility follows. And this can be leveraged to achieve good or evil, but always displays the same unifying nature. Certainly, efforts to incorporate stake-holder theories of management into any discussion of leadership is valid, but the focus remains on the actions of the leaders.[61]

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[60] Aberbach, *Charisma in Politics, Religion and the Media,* 75.
[61] See Scott J. Reynolds, Frank C. Schultz, and David R. Hekman, "Stakeholder Theory and Managerial Decision-Making: Constraints and Implications of Balancing Stakeholder Interests,"

Given the possibility for charismatic leadership to be used just as easily for harm as for good, scholars would be well-advised to spend more time focusing efforts on educating people in the recognition of the behavioral traits being used to manipulate followers rather than focusing on the needs of the leader. The market for texts suggesting that anyone can learn to be charismatic – from Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*[62] to Olivia Fox Cabane's *The Charisma Myth: How Anyone Can Master the Art and Science of Personal Magnetism*[63] – feeds on the desire to gain the intangible trait of charisma in order to be liked and, more importantly, get what we want from others. One much-publicized set of research has suggested that specific behaviors can be linked directly to an increase in charisma.[64] However, in each case, experimenters worked with business executives and their ability to influence other business executives. Given the fact that behavioral models of leadership theory have been dominant, it is understandable that those who have had training in such theory would not only model it in order to convince others, but would also respond to it. An executive who demonstrated the desired behaviors "skillfully" might be recognized as "charismatic" since such behaviors had been used to define the trait itself, thereby creating a vicious circle. More impressive would be repetition of such studies with varied populations. For now, it is clear anecdotally that few demonstrate charisma, a trait still so mysterious in its origins, and even less become charismatic leaders. As such, rather than encouraging people to chase the dragon of becoming charismatic, it would be much more widely beneficial to encourage them to recognize the dragon itself, and to respond rationally before irrationally investing in the dreams of a charismatic leader.

In conclusion, all charismatic leaders need followers that believe and trust in them and their mission; they emerge in times of societal distress or in suppressed subgroups of the society; and involve a seemingly supernatural person. The state is volatile, and, typically, the authority bestowed upon the charismatic leader dissolves once he or she fails to please his or her followers, perhaps by failing to maintain inclusiveness of the group, the distinctness of its difference from the

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Journal of Business Ethics 64 (2006): 285-301; Thomas Maak and Nicola M. Pless, "Responsible Leadership in a Stakeholder Society – A Relational Perspective." *Journal of Business Ethics* 66 (2006): 99-115.
[62] Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936).
[63] Olivia Fox Cabane, *The Charisma Myth: How Anyone Can Master the Art and Science of Personal Magnetism* (New York: Penguin, 2012).
[64] Alex (Sandy) Pentland, "To Signal is Human: Real-time Data Mining Unmasks the Power of Imitation, Kith and Charisma in our Face-to-Face Social Networks," *American Scientist* 98 (2010): 210.

purported enemy, or the meaningfulness of the mission. Alternately, the end of societal stressors which allowed the charismatic leader to emerge in the first place can just as easily remove the influence of charisma in leadership. These observations are true across disciplines, being found in charismatic religious, political, and business leaders. Recognizing the similarity of effect across organizational types, all linking back to the ephemeral nature of charisma itself, ought to help us move forward with our understanding of this enigmatic concept.

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