

# Taking the Charisma Out of Transformational Leadership

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*Transformational and charismatic leadership are critically assessed. A theoretical exploration of each reveals contradictions and research limitations for the two constructs. Charisma is defined in its origins as a social phenomenon and as a "magical gift" possessed by leaders. Followers of charismatic leaders typically emulate or strongly identify with the leader. The transformational leader, in contrast, inspires followers to pursue organizational goals in lieu of self-interests. Followers of transformational leaders are empowered to pursue organizational goals. The paper moves towards a reconsideration of transformational leadership, by not requiring "charisma" and suggests that transformational leaders can operate and effectively "transform" an organization using inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Research implications are discussed.*

Leadership research over the past twenty years has contrasted transformational with transactional leadership (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978). Inherent in most researchers' articulation of transformational leadership is the concept of charisma. Many researchers have begun to treat and study both transformational and charismatic leadership as one in the same, assuming that if transformational leadership exists, so does charisma (Bass, 1985; Shamir, 1991). This presents a problem when considering the characteristics of each construct. A critical assessment of both constructs reveals two quite different, perhaps incompatible constructs, necessitating that clear distinctions be maintained.

According to most transformational theorists, charisma is believed to be the fundamental factor in the transformational process (Avolio, Waldman, & Einstein, 1988; Bass, 1985; Bass, 1990; Deluga, 1988; Howell & Avolio, 1993; Seltzer & Bass, 1990; Yammarino & Bass, 1990). Charisma is described as the leader's ability to generate great

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symbolic power with which to identify. Followers idealize the leader and develop strong emotional attachments (Bass, 1985). Charisma is often defined with respect to how followers perceive and act towards the leader (Bass, 1985). While the potential influence of a charismatic leader is well documented, there is clearly a difference between getting followers to pursue organizational goals (as transformational leaders do) (Bass, 1985) and gaining compliance from followers because of personal emulation or symbolic power (as charismatic leaders do) (Conger & Kanungo, 1987).

This essay takes issue with the charismatic and transformational leadership constructs as they are currently defined and operationalized in the literature. The purpose of this paper is not to argue the merits of charismatic leadership, as the ability of such leaders to influence followers is well illustrated (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Downton, 1973; House, 1977; Howell & Frost, 1989; Shamir, 1991; Stogdill, 1974; Weber, 1947). Instead this paper sets out to clarify the essence of transformational and charismatic leadership as two unique and, in many ways, quite different constructs.

This paper argues that leaders can influence followers in ways which can be uniquely charismatic, transactional, or transformational, and each of the styles can exist independent of the other. Leaders can be "transformational" without necessarily employing a "charismatic" style, just as "charismatic" leaders may not be "transformational." It is argued that by considering the effects on followers and the situations surrounding leaders, clear distinctions can be established and maintained between the two constructs. Further, it is suggested that inspiration and charisma are often described and operationalized interchangeably (Bass, 1985, 1990), when distinctions between these constructs are also valuable (Gardner, 1989; McClelland, 1975).

### **Charismatic and Transformational Leadership**

Sociologist Max Weber (1947) created the concept of charisma as stemming from subordinates' (or followers') perceptions that the leader is endowed with exceptional skills or talents. In its origins, charismatic leadership was a focus in studying political and world leaders (Burns, 1978; House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; Weber, 1947). In Weber's view, charisma was a result of a social crisis. Leaders with extraordinary appeal emerge with a radical vision that provides a solution to the crisis, attracting followers who strongly identify with the leader and believe in the cause (Avolio et al., 1988; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Weber, 1947). Followers of charismatic leaders may often perceive them as saviors (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; House et al., 1991). Since these leaders tend

to emerge in turbulent circumstances, they may often develop larger-than-life appeal from followers (House, 1977). As a result, followers show a great deal of commitment and often display unquestionable obedience to the leader (Trice & Beyer, 1993).

This construct differs from transformational leadership. Charismatic leaders foster dependency relationships with followers, relying on commitment and unquestioned obedience (Gardner, 1989; Graham, 1987; Hollander, 1978; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Transformational leaders seek to lift individuals from idolizing the individual to directing followers' commitment and energies towards the organization and its goals (Bass, 1985, 1990; Gardner, 1989; Graham, 1987).

Bass (1985) espoused a theory of transformational leadership which built on the earlier works of Burns (1978). The degree to which leaders are transformational was measured in terms of the leader's effect on followers. Followers of transformational leaders are likely to feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward leaders, and are motivated to perform extra-role behaviors (Bass, 1985; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Transformational leaders increase followers' trust, satisfaction, and citizenship (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Morrman, & Fetter, 1990), and are able to achieve maximum performance from followers because of their ability to inspire followers to raise their criteria for success and develop innovative problem solving skills (Bass, 1985; Yammarino & Bass, 1990). Leaders transform and motivate followers by making them aware of the importance of task outcomes, inducing them to transcend their own self-interests for the sake of the organization or team, and activating their high-order needs (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leaders cultivate employees' acceptance of the work group mission (Deluga, 1988). Followers typically strive to emulate transformational leaders, placing faith in their leader's judgment, as well as the mission at hand (Gardner, 1989). They support the leader's values and typically adopt them, and frequently develop strong emotional ties to the organization's mission (Avolio et al., 1988).

The transformational leader/follower relationship is viewed as one of mutual stimulation and is comprised of four distinct characteristics. These include charisma, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration (Bass, 1985) and inspirational motivation (Bass & Avolio, 1990). With this four factor representation of transformational leadership, it is suggested that transformational leaders incorporate each of the four areas into their repertoire to be transformational (Bass, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1990). Individual consideration describes leaders acting in the role of employee mentors (Bass, 1985). Inspiration describes leaders passionately communicating a future idealistic organization that can be

shared (Bass, 1990). Intellectual stimulation describes leaders encouraging employees to approach old and familiar problems in new ways (Deluga, 1988).

By stimulating novel employee thinking patterns, leaders encourage employees to question their own beliefs and learn to creatively solve problems (Bass, 1985). Followers are supported for questioning both their own values, beliefs, and expectations and those of the leader and organization, which may be outdated or inappropriate for current problems (Bass, 1990). Here there is a fundamental difference between the purely charismatic leader, who has trained followers to blind obedience or habituated subordination (Graham, 1987). The transformational leader encourages followers to think independently, meeting challenges and gaining both personal and professional development (Avolio et al., 1988).

### **Inspirational Versus Charismatic Leadership**

By definition, charisma and inspiration are essentially similar, however inspiration does not have the social consequences of charisma and it does not require sacrifice or emulation on the part of followers (Gardner, 1989). In many ways, inspirational leadership resembles transformational leadership more closely than charismatic leadership does. Inspirational leaders raise the goals and values of followers to organizational missions or objectives, then empower followers to achieve them (McClelland, 1975). Inspiration is defined as the action or power of moving the intellect or emotions (Downton, 1973). It is the act of influencing or suggesting opinions, of enlivening, impelling, motivating others (Bass, 1990). Gardner points out that inspirational leaders conceive and articulate goals that lift people out of their petty preoccupations, carry them above the conflicts that tear a society apart, and unite them in the pursuit of objectives worthy of their best efforts. Charisma, in contrast, is often defined as an extraordinary power (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), a personal magic of leadership arousing special popular loyalty or enthusiasm for a leading figure (House, 1977; Weber, 1947).

Others have examined charisma and inspiration citing distinctions between the two. Downton (1973) and McClelland (1975) describe the difference between the two concepts as being in the way followers accept and comply with the leader's initiatives. McClelland reminds us that if the followers feel they are more powerful as a consequence of the leader's exhortations because leaders have pointed out desirable goals and how to achieve them, and not because the powerful leaders are their models, then the leaders are inspirational, not necessarily charismatic. Also, charismatic leaders are considered "god-like" and as such are not

subject to criticism. Inspirational leaders, although often regarded as symbols of the organization's beliefs and shared problems, can be criticized by followers (Downton, 1973).

Conceptually, differences between the two concepts seem clear, however, they have been nearly impossible to distinguish empirically (Bass, 1990). Studies have not been able to obtain consistent inspirational factors separate from charismatic factors (Bass, 1985, 1990). This suggests that an articulated vision such as that offered by an inspirational leader may be sufficient to motivate followers and fuel constructive change in the organizations. It may also suggest that leaders who articulate visions in an inspirational manner will be perceived as charismatic.

When operationalizing charismatic leadership, many researchers use variables which seem to resemble inspirational motivation more so than charismatic leadership (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Howell & Frost, 1989; Podsakoff et al., 1990). For example, Howell and Frost operationalized charisma as "articulating an appealing vision." Articulating an appealing vision captures the essence of inspirational leadership, but in this study this articulation is operationalized as charismatic behavior. Barling et al. (1996) grouped inspirational leadership and charismatic leadership together when studying transformational leadership, thus encompassing leader's articulation of vision and the follower's identification to the leader. For the leaders' styles to have been charismatic, the followers' identification or emulation of leaders would have been driving their behavior, as opposed to the vision itself (Gardner, 1989; McClelland, 1975). If followers' enthusiasms stem from identification with the mission at hand then this is not charisma, it is inspiration. If however, followers' enthusiasms stem from emulation or identification with the leader, then this is charisma, not inspiration.

### **Rethinking Transformational and Charismatic Leadership**

Although there is a tendency to group charismatic and transformational leadership into the same theory (Bass, 1985; House, 1977; Stogdill, 1974), transformational leaders differ from charismatic leaders in several distinct ways which requires a clear separation of the two in the literature and in research applications. Transformational leaders arouse strong emotions (Graham, 1987); increase follower identification with the leader (Bass, 1985; Howell & Frost, 1989); serve as coaches, mentors to the followers; and empower followers to become champion problem solvers (Gardner, 1989) who are able to function effectively without the presence of the leader (Bass, 1990). Charismatic leaders tend to keep followers weak and dependent (Downton, 1973), relying on personal loyalty and unquestioned obedience (Downton, 1973; Graham, 1987),

all stemming from social fears and crises (Gardner, 1989; Graham, 1987; Trice & Beyer, 1993).

It is recommended that in the leadership literature clear distinctions between transformational and charismatic leadership be maintained to preserve the theoretical constructs from which each were developed. Terming leadership as charismatic may ideally characterize those rare situations when a dynamic individual rises to power in an organization during a perceived crisis or trauma (Burns, 1978; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Weber, 1947). It is with fear and desperation that followers transcend their own beliefs and attitudes and blindly, but passionately, follow the charismatic leader with high levels of commitment and at times, unconditional obedience (Hollander, 1978; Trice & Beyer, 1993). While this representation of charisma may seem extreme, it is consistent with the concept's origins. More recent interpretations of charismatic leadership have classified any situation where followers emulate or identify with the leader as charismatic (Gardner, 1989). Even this interpretation of charisma, focusing on interpersonal connectedness and leader emulation, contrasts with an inspirational or transformational leadership style, where the emphasis is not on the leader but on the articulated mission at hand (Bass, 1985). More recently, several theorists have loosely operationalized charismatic behavior as leaders articulating appealing visions (Barling et al., 1996; Howell & Frost, 1989; Podsakoff et al., 1990). These behaviors may well be classified as inspirational leadership, but based on the conceptual distinctions made earlier, are not necessarily charismatic.

In publications by Avolio and Howell (1992), Avolio et al. (1988), Bass (1985, 1990), Bass and Avolio (1990), Podsakoff et al. (1990), Seltzer and Bass (1990), and Yammarino and Bass (1990) transformational leadership has developed into a four-factor model including charisma, inspiration, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation. It is argued that charisma should not exist within the definition of transformational leadership. The incompatibilities discussed earlier demonstrate that being transformational and charismatic simultaneously is a questionable endeavor. In summary, it is recommended that transformational leadership be operationalized featuring inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration.

## CONCLUSIONS

Considering the social aspects and manifestations of charisma, as it relates to leadership (Weber, 1947), and the personal identification that charismatic leaders rely on to gain compliance, it is suggested that the motivational influence of inspiration will be sufficient along with indi-

vidual consideration and intellectual stimulation to account for transformation in followers and organizations. Recognizing that inspirational motivation, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation are three essential attributes for being a transformational leader will enable leaders to excite followers to: pursue organizational goals, recognize the importance of their contribution towards the organization's goal attainment, and encourage followers to creatively solve problems as they arise (Trice & Beyer, 1993). By separating the constructs, scholars can advocate transformational leadership as a robust and exhilarating leadership style to motivate followers to pursue organizational goals.

The difference between inspirational and charismatic leadership requires further research as well. Conceptually, distinctions between the two constructs are clear, however, most research efforts have found the two to be empirically the same. No studies to date have been undertaken to specifically differentiate the two constructs. This distinction between inspiration and charisma offers a salient research opportunity.

Understanding the different effects that inspirational, charismatic, transformational and transactional leaders have on followers will offer some research opportunities. Whether instrumentally motivated workers respond better to transactional leaders employing material inducements (Barnard, 1938) than transformational leaders is a possible research question. Whether charismatic leaders are more effective gaining compliance when followers are motivated interpersonally or from referent influences (Ashford & Mael, 1989; French & Raven, 1959) as opposed to instrumentally motivated or value driven (Katz & Kahn, 1978) is another possible direction for future research. Will transformational leaders be most effective with followers morally committed to the organization (Etzioni, 1961) or with internalized organizational values (Katz & Kahn, 1978) as opposed to interpersonally (Ashford & Mael, 1989; French & Raven, 1959) or instrumentally (Barnard, 1938) motivated followers?

By researching the questions discussed, practical and pedagogical implications are abound. It is my hope that this distinction between transformational and charismatic leadership may elicit research designed to separate the constructs and understand their differences, as opposed to their similarities, in future research efforts.

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