Chapter 10

New Methods Exploring Facial Expressions in the Context of Leadership Perception:
Implications for Educational Leaders

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to add to our knowledge of the contribution of facial expression to educational leadership perception. Although there is a considerable amount of studies investigating leaders' emotional displays, the majority of this research does not use the sophisticated facial expression coding methods available in other psychological settings. However, research using such sophisticated methods shows that even subtle facial actions can result in significantly different impressions, indicating that credibility of facial expression interpretation might depend on the accuracy of facial expression description (see Rosenberg, 2005). In this chapter, the few leadership studies that have used sophisticated facial expression coding methods are reviewed. On the basis of these studies, it is recommended that educational organizations should be aware of the added value of these methods in order increase research credibility and provide educational leaders with specialized knowledge and skills that could eventually increase their effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Facial expressions appear to have a powerful influence on person perception, impressions, and image (Aguinis, Simonsen, & Pierce, 1998; Cohn & Ekman, 2008; Glaser & Salovey, 1998; Krumhuber, Manstead, & Kappas, 2006; McArthur & Baron, 1983; Zebrowitz & Montepare,

2008). Several professions such as such as flight attendants (Hochschild, 1983) or bill collectors (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987) require the display of emotion as part of their organizational role. Leadership is also a role that expression of emotional display is considered important. Specifically, the significance of leaders' emotional expressions is underlined in studies on educational, business,

charismatic, transformational, political, and authentic leadership (Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000; Beatty, 2000; Bono & Ilies, 2006; Bucy, 2000; Goffee & Jones, 2005; Trichas, 2011). Nevertheless, our understanding regarding the impact of leaders' emotional displays is still narrow.

Even though, to the writer's knowledge, there is lack of research investigating facial expressions in the context of educational leadership, there is a considerable number of studies, which has contributed to an understanding of leaders' emotional displays, that explored leaders' emotional expressions in other contexts such as politics and business (e.g., Bucy, 2000; Bucy & Bradley, 2004; Bucy & Newhagen, 1999; Damen, Van Knippenberg, & Van Knippenberg, 2008; Gaddis, Connelly, & Mumford, 2004; Glomb & Hulin, 1997; Lewis, 2000; Masters & Sullivan, 1989; Medvedeff, 2008; Stewart, 2010; Sullivan & Masters, 1988). However, the majority of these studies do not use the sophisticated facial expression coding methods available in other psychological settings (e.g., Ekman, 1992; Ekman & Rosenberg, 1997; Hess, Blairy, & Kleck, 2000). Contemporary research using such sophisticated facial action coding analysis (see Ekman, Friesen, & Hager, 2002) shows that subtle facial actions can result in significantly different perceptions (e.g., Surakka & Hietanen, 1998). Consequently, incorporating detailed facial expression coding analysis in leadership studies might contribute to increasing research credibility (see Rosenberg, 2005).

The mission of the work presented here is to add to our knowledge of the contribution of facial expression to leadership perception. An additional aim of the current book chapter is to argue that the integration of sophisticated methods and principles of facial expression coding and decoding (e.g., Ekman, Friesen, & Hager, 2002) can provide educational leaders with knowledge and skills that could eventually increase their effectiveness.

In the following, after a general introduction to facial expressions perceptual concepts, the main literature on leaders' facial expressions is discussed. Additionally, an argument is constructed supporting that using sophisticated coding analysis of facial expression might be an approach to increasing credibility of educational leadership research designs. Furthermore, leadership studies that included such sophisticated facial expression techniques are presented. Finally, the general discussion and conclusions follow together with implications and recommendations for educational leadership research and practice.

BACKGROUND

Perceiving Facial Expressions

Facial expression is an area that receives a lot of research attention (e.g., Camras, 2000; Frijda & Tcherkassof, 1997; Scherer; 1992; Smith & Scott, 1997) and a reason for that might be that the face contains many of the sensor organs plus the brain in its region (Cohn & Ekman, 2008). In addition, people seem to begin realizing the communicative significance of facial expression from a very young age (Gladwell, 2005). Specifically, research shows that even newborns are able to perceive and react according to others' facial expressions (Field, Woodson, Greenberg, & Cohen, 1982; Tronick, 1989).

Facial expressions have also been demonstrated to influence person perception and impressions of trait characteristics (Aguinis, Simonsen, & Pierce, 1998; Cohn & Ekman, 2008; Glaser & Salovey, 1998; Hendriks & Vingerhoets, 2006; Krumhuber, Manstead, & Kappas, 2006). Darwin (1872/1965) stresses the critical importance of information received via facial expressions for the inferences people make regarding the underlying emotions of others. Furthermore, Van Kleef (2009) proposes a social model where emotional facial expressions influence observers' behavior through emotional procedures such as emotional contagion and/or inferential processes such as inferring that someone is happy because of the observation of a

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