

# The Business Education of Charismatic Leaders and Good Soldiers

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## ABSTRACT

This article describes how charismatic leaders inspire followers with a vision of a better future, but attaining that better future is not easy and requires hard work, extra effort, and sacrifice. In challenging organizational environments where crisis is present, one leadership style that emerges has been described as charismatic. Charismatic leaders have a tendency to create good soldiers, a loyal band of followers who engage in organizational citizenship behaviors. These good soldiers encourage others to join the effort to create a better world and achieve goals. The difficulty sets in when charismatic leaders and their good soldiers continually ask for more of their employees, take the spotlight, diminish the contributions of others, and create an environment where the performance of extra-role behaviors becomes the expected norm. When followers are pressured to perform citizenry behaviors, they no longer do so voluntarily, which places stress on employees and eventually dampens enthusiasm and motivation. Business educators preparing the next generation of leaders need to raise awareness of the strengths and possible weaknesses associated with charismatic leadership and organizational citizenship behaviors.

## KEYWORDS

Charismatic Leadership, Citizenry Pressure, Compulsory Citizenship Behavior, Good Soldier Syndrome, High Velocity Environments, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Stress, Work Role Overload

## INTRODUCTION

Advancements in technology and communication have changed business-to-business and business-to-consumer expectations, turning some industries into environments where hyper-competitive organizations are operating at high velocity. In order to survive, businesses today are in a constant state of organizational learning and adaptation (Davis, Morris, & Allen, 1991; Ganesh, Madanmohan, Jose, & Seshadri, 2004; Jennings & Seaman, 1994). Such a dynamic environment requires organizational professionals to be resilient (Hamel & Välikangas, 2003), agile (Fliedner & Vokurka, 1997; Roberts & Grover, 2012), perceptive of changing stakeholder expectations, and capable of continually implementing improvements (Pluta & Rudawska, 2016). Business schools must remain attentive to the pressures and tensions associated with high velocity environments in order to best equip leaders of the future.

People working in high velocity environments experience rapid and discontinuous change, which means “changes occur at intermittent times and are not related to what occurred most recently” (Jones

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& Mahon, 2011, p. 776). In the midst of rapid change, organizational decision-makers can become hyper-focused on solving pressing, shorter term issues such as decreasing sales or a shrinking bottom line, and they may have a tendency to continually raise expectations and require employees to do more and more with less. These conditions make it more important than ever for business educators to raise awareness of the benefits as well as the possible weaknesses associated with traditional business practices (Doherty, Meehan, & Richards, 2015). In order to prepare the next generation of leaders, business educators need to help future leaders identify trends in the marketplace, understand lived experiences in organizations, and reflect on what it means to work in a continually changing and competitive environment. Business educators must challenge students to consider the impact of their influence and decisions on employees and the sustainability of continually asking employees to do more with less.

## **CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP**

Across all industry sectors, the leadership style that has a tendency to emerge within hyper-competitive and high velocity environments, where change and going above and beyond the call of duty is critical for survival, has been identified as charismatic. Heifetz (1994) explains, “Particularly at the early stage of an adaptive process, charismatic authority is a very great resource for leadership” (p. 247). When there is a crisis in an organization, it is common for a charismatic leader to emerge (Pillai, 1995; Pillai & Meindle, 1991), and crisis management becomes critically important in these turbulent environments (Sheaffer, Bogler, & Sarfaty, 2011). Being responsive to crisis is one of the hallmarks of charismatic leadership (Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999).

In an organizational crisis, there is a sense that an unplanned event or set of conditions may affect the performance and survival of an organization (Coombs & Holladay, 2010; Holladay & Coombs, 1994; King, 2002). Charismatic leaders provide clarity to explain unclear circumstances (Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010), and they are able to convince followers to exert additional effort to achieve the goals that will bring about the leader’s vision of the future (Galvin, Balkundi, & Waldman 2010). Charismatic leaders “cause followers to become highly committed to their mission, to make significant personal sacrifices in the interest of the mission, and to perform above and beyond the call of duty” (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993, p. 577).

In order to avert crisis and overcome challenges, charismatic leaders craft frame-breaking strategies to avert crisis, and they are skilled communicators who inspire others with a shared vision. Charismatic people are influential and their followers tend to mimic the behavior of their leaders (Bass, 1985; Northouse, 2013). Charismatic leaders influence followers through the process of personal identification, social identification, and role modeling (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003; Shamir et al., 1993), linking the follower’s self-concept with the leader’s values (Kark & Shamir, 2013; Pratt, 1998). Over the years, charismatic leadership has been defined as personality-based (Eisenstadt, 1968; Etzioni, 1961; Weber, 1947), contextually determined (Blau, 1963; Chinoy, 1961; Friedland, 1964; Wolpe, 1968), as well as relational and perceptual (Dow, 1969; Marcus, 1961; Willner, 1984). Conger and Kanungo (1987) argue, “Charismatic leadership, like any other form of leadership, should be considered to be an observable behavioral process that can be described and analyzed” (p. 639). Oreg and Berson (2015) explain that charismatic leaders are best described using an interaction approach encompassing personality characteristics as well as situational context. Charismatic leaders have been observed providing an imaginative vision, motivating and inspiring followers, holding strong convictions in their beliefs, displaying positive emotions, and having confidence in themselves and their followers (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1998; House, 1977; Oreg & Berson, 2015; Shamir et al., 1993; Sosik, 2005).

Given the potential for marshaling resources and gathering the workforce around key issues, there is little wonder so many people are impressed with charismatic individuals, and it is also understandable why leaders strive to be magnanimous and charismatic in their interactions with

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