

THE EFFECTS OF VISIONARY AND CRISIS-RESPONSIVE CHARISMA ON FOLLOWERS: AN EXPERIMENTAL EXAMINATION OF TWO KINDS OF CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

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A single factor, seven-level, repeated measures, unbalanced experiment was conducted with 191 college undergraduates to test Boal and Bryson's (1988) assertions that: (1) there are at least two forms of charismatic leadership under crisis conditions—visionary and crisis-responsive; and (2) once the crisis condition has abated, the effects of crisis-responsive leadership deteriorate comparatively faster than other forms of charismatic leadership. The experiment consisted of four crisis condition leadership treatments (crisis-responsive, visionary under crisis, exchange under crisis, and low expressiveness under crisis) and three no-crisis condition leadership treatments (visionary no crisis, exchange no crisis, and low expressiveness no crisis) at time one followed by low expressiveness no crisis at time two. Two graduate student “leaders” who memorized carefully prepared scripts delivered the leadership treatments. Analysis consisted of 28 *a priori* comparisons of cell means and repeated measures ANOVA to determine significant main effects as well as interactions. We found support for our hypothesis that there are two forms of charisma (visionary and crisis-responsive) and that, in the absence of crisis, the effects of crisis responsive charisma decay faster than do the effects of visionary charisma.

Some men see things as they are and ask why? I dream things that never were and ask, why not?

—Robert F. Kennedy as quoted in
Ted's eulogy for Robert (Kennedy, 1968, p. 58)

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There are no great men. There are only great challenges which ordinary men are forced by circumstances to meet.

—W. F. “Bull” Halsey in Lay and Gilroy (1959)

The quotes above capture the essence of much of the current literature concerning charismatic leadership. Is charisma primarily based on the vision of an extraordinary leader or does it evolve from rising to face extraordinary circumstances, such as a crisis? Strong adherents of Weber (e.g., Beyer, 1999; Trice & Beyer, 1986, pp. 118–119) argue that he considers the following five interacting elements as crucial in producing charisma:

1. An extraordinarily gifted person;
2. A social crisis or situation of desperation;
3. A set of ideas providing a radical solution to the crisis;
4. A set of followers who are attracted to the exceptional person and who come to believe that he or she is directly linked to transcendent powers; and
5. The validation of that person’s extraordinary gifts and transcendence by repeated successes.

Trice and Beyer (1986) viewed charisma as a sociological phenomenon that emerged from the interaction of all of these elements, and argued that all of them must be present to some degree for charisma to occur.

For such scholars, in a necessary but not sufficient conceptualization, charisma involves the essence of *both* of the previous quotes in the form of a highly gifted leader with a radical vision to deal with a clearly perceived crisis. Much of the “new leadership” literature (a term coined by Bryman, 1992) is equivocal about these alternative views. For some, vision is the key while for others crisis plays a critical role. (For a thorough discussion of these studies, see, Yukl, 1998.)

Boal and Bryson (1988) addressed this issue by proposing that there are really two kinds of charismatic leadership—visionary (the first quote) and crisis-responsive (the second quote). The purpose of this article is to empirically examine in an experimental setting Boal and Bryson’s (1988) contention that visionary and crisis-responsive leader behaviors are each perceived as different but related kinds of charismatic leadership and that their impact differs across time.

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Following Brickman’s (1978) phenomenological notions, Boal and Bryson (1988) argue that the essential function of charismatic leadership is to help create a new or different world that is both “phenomenologically valid” or real to the followers and different from the one before. The visionary charismatic does this by linking followers’ needs to important values, purposes, or meanings through articulation of vision and goals. This articulation helps create a phenomenologically valid world, a form of interpretive scheme or theory of action that is different from the followers’ previous world. The visionary charismatic also shows how follower behavior can

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