

# I second that emotion: Effects of emotional contagion and affect at work on leader and follower outcomes<sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

While affect and emotion have been theoretically linked to leadership for decades, only recently has this relationship come under empirical scrutiny. The current research examines the effects of emotional contagion on follower affect at work and examines the outcomes of follower affect at work in a field setting. Leader positive and negative affect at work related to follower positive affect at work via emotional contagion. Follower positive and negative affect at work related to perceptions of charismatic leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. Follower perceptions of charismatic leadership related to organizational citizenship behavior.

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*Keywords:* Emotional contagion; Affect; Charismatic leadership; Organizational citizenship behavior

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Charismatic leadership is often associated with outstanding outcomes in terms of follower attitudes and performance, causing the charismatic CEO to be highly sought after and highly paid among top companies (Khurana, 2002; Tosi, Misangyi, Fanelli, Waldman, & Yammarino, 2004). Meta-analytic work strongly supports the link between charismatic leadership and positive outcomes (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996), although the mechanisms by which charismatic leaders achieve positive outcomes are less clear. Considering the investment companies put into charismatic leaders, and the potential impact of charismatic leaders on organizational outcomes, it is important to understand how charismatic leaders achieve success and the conditions under which success is more or less likely to occur.

One means by which charismatic leaders achieve outstanding outcomes is through the formulation and articulation of a vision (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), and in particular an inspirational vision (Sosik & Dinger, 2007). Another explanation is that charismatic leaders impact followers' motivation through their self-concepts (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). An additional mechanism by which charismatic leaders impact followers is through the emotional

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<sup>☆</sup> A version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, New Orleans, August, 2004. This research was funded, in part, by the National Academies of Sciences Ford Dissertation Fellowship and is based on the author's dissertation. I would like to thank my dissertation committee, Mikki Hebl, Mickey Quinones, D. Brent Smith, and, in particular my advisor, Robert L. Dipboye for all of their help on this work.

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attachment that they build with followers (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1995; Conger & Kanungo, 1994; Gardner & Avolio, 1998; House, 1977; Shamir et al., 1993, Weber, 1920). While transactional leaders emphasize the rational or exchange basis of a leader–follower relationship, charismatic and transformational leaders emphasize the emotional basis of this relationship (Bass, 1985). The current research examines the impact of affect in charismatic leadership.

Emotional contagion is examined as one way by which leader affect influences follower affect (Cherulnik, Donley, Wiewel, & Miller, 2001; Halverson, 2004; Lewis, 2000; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005). Follower susceptibility to emotional contagion is examined as a moderator of the impact of leader affect on follower affect. In addition, the relationship among follower affect, attributions of charismatic leadership, and organizational citizenship behaviors are examined. An analysis of these relationships is important for organizational leaders such that they should be aware of the potential effects that their affect can have on follower outcomes. Similarly, the importance of follower susceptibility to emotional contagion and follower affect in general are explored. Insofar as follower affect impacts organizational outcomes, leaders and other organizational members should work to ensure that followers experience positive affect at work. Theoretically, this research highlights the importance of leader and follower affect in charismatic leadership.

## 1. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Charismatic and transformational leadership theories, primarily based on the work of Bass (1985), House (1977), and Weber (1920) explain the emotional connection between leaders and followers that results in extraordinary increases in follower performance. House and Shamir (1993) include both of these types of leadership in what they call the neo-charisma paradigm because charisma is a central concept of both charismatic and transformational leadership theories. There are at least three central components of charismatic leadership: attributed charisma, idealized influence, and inspiration motivation (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Attributed charisma is the personal power that charismatic leaders possess. Idealized influence includes leader behavior related to serving as a role model for followers in which a leader stresses values and beliefs, moral behavior, and a strong sense of the collective mission. Inspiration motivation is comprised of those behaviors aimed at adding meaning to followers' work, typically resulting in an increase in follower enthusiasm.

As House, Woycke, and Fodor (1988, p. 101) suggest, "Transactional [exchange] leaders have their primary effects on follower cognitions and abilities. Charismatic leaders have their major effects on the emotions and self-esteem of followers — the affective motivational variables rather than the cognitive variables." Shamir et al.'s (1993) theory of charismatic leadership suggests that charismatic leaders achieve their motivating effects by linking follower self-concepts to organizational goals, so followers internalize the organization's mission and vision. The leader's specific behaviors include increasing the intrinsic value of effort, increasing the value of goal accomplishment, creating follower commitment to goals, expressing high expectations for followers to raise followers' self-esteem, and providing an optimistic vision of the future. As Connelly, Gaddis, and Helton-Fauth (2002) note, one of the major underlying assumptions of Shamir et al.'s (1993) theory is that when leaders are engaging in the described behaviors they are expressing positive emotions to motivate the followers.

For example, when charismatic leaders are crafting and delivering speeches to align followers' goals with the organization's goals, providing high expectations for followers, and conveying an optimistic vision for the future their speeches are infused with positive affect. Positive affect is communicated both through the content of what the leader says, and his or her nonverbal behavior during communication (Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000; Bass, 1985; Gardner & Avolio, 1998), which can result in the spread of that positive affect to followers through emotional contagion. Insofar as an emotional response occurs in followers, the leader's behavior can be conceptualized as an affective event for followers in terms of Affective Events Theory (AET, Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), which can impact followers' subsequent attitudes and behaviors (Dasborough, 2006).

### 1.1. Emotional contagion and leadership

Emotional contagion is the automatic and unconscious transfer of emotions between individuals (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1992) that is thought to occur as a result of individuals' tendency to mimic and synchronize the facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements of others which cues the target to experience the emotion that he or she is mimicking (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). A long line of research in social psychology has demonstrated that exposure to emotional stimuli can affect one's facial expressions (e.g. Lee & Wagner, 2002) and that exhibiting a

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