# Charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic leaders: An examination of leader–leader interactions

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Although a number of researchers have examined and demonstrated the unique relationships different types of leaders develop with their followers (Dansereau, F., Graen, G.B., & Haga, W.J. (1975). A vertical dyad linkage approach to leadership within formal organizations: A longitudinal investigation of the role making process. Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 13, 46–78.; Dienesh & Liden, 1986; Mumford, 2006), relatively little is known regarding how outstanding leaders interact or work together (Hunter, Bedell-Avers, Mumford, 2009-this issue). Given the particular importance of such questions, especially when considering leaders who have the potential to influence national and worldwide developments, the intent of the present study was to examine the leader–leader exchange relationships of charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic leaders. Due to the difficulty associated with examining high-level leader–leader exchanges, a hybrid qualitative–quantitative approach was taken to assess the interactions of Frederick Douglas, W.E.B. Dubois, and Booker T. Washington – three high-level leaders who responded to the same crisis, in the same time period, in the same region of the world. The results provide preliminary evidence regarding the interactions of charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic leaders; in fact, they indicate that leaders interact in a manner consistent with their mental model.

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## 1. Introduction

Outstanding leaders, the masters of influence who play a pivotal role in the success or failure of large organizations, also have a substantial impact on the broader social system and world in which we live (Bass, 1990). Given their impact on our lives, the study of outstanding leaders seems to be of considerable importance. In fact, an examination of the literature indicates that leadership researchers are devoting increased attention to the study of outstanding leaders and, more specifically, the alternative forms of outstanding leadership (Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999; Mumford, 2006). Although traditional theories of outstanding leadership have focused on charismatic or transformational leaders (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993), the more recent literature suggests the existence of at least two alternative forms of outstanding, historically notable leaders, ideologues (e.g., Mumford, 2006; Mumford, Espejo, Hunter, Bedell-Avers, Eubanks, & Connelly, 2007; Strange & Mumford, 2002, 2005) and pragmatics (e.g., Mumford & Van Doorn, 2001; Tsui, Wang, Xin, Zhang, & Fu, 2004). In fact, substantial effort has been committed to theory development and validation of these alternative pathways to leadership (i.e., establishing the cognitive and behavioral differences of charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic leaders) (Mumford, 2006).

**Table 1**
Summary of differences among charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic leaders.

|  | Crisis conditions | Sense-making | Type of experience | Targets of influence | Locus of causation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Charismatic | Ordered | Future vision | Positive | Masses | People's actions |
| Ideological | Chaotic | Past vision | Negative | Base Cadre | Situational influences |
| Pragmatic | Localized | Problem-solving | Both | Elites | Both people and situation |

Integral to the distinctions drawn between these alternative forms of outstanding leaders is the notion that underlying these three forms – charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic – are differences in how leaders construe, or make sense of, crises that give rise to the opportunity for outstanding leadership (Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2004; Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjain, 1999; Halverson, Holladay, Kazra, & Quinones, 2004; Hunt et al., 1999; Mumford, 2006). Accordingly, substantial evidence indicates that charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic leaders are, indeed, characterized by differential cognitive orientations and use different methods of influence (Bedell-Avers, Hunter, Angie, & Vert, 2006; Ligon, Hunter, & Mumford, 2008; Mumford, 2006; Mumford et al., 2007; Bedell-Avers, Hunter, & Mumford, in press; Mumford, Bedell-Avers, Hunter, Espejo, & Boatman, 2006; Strange & Mumford, 2002). Despite the clear observable distinctions witnessed among these three leader types, it should be noted that instances of mixed type leadership do occur (e.g., leaders evidencing both charismatic and ideological behavior) (Strange & Mumford, 2002). That said, to obtain a clear understanding of these three pathways, most studies have only considered leaders that could unambiguously be classified as charismatic, ideological, or pragmatic (e.g., Bedell-Avers et al., 2006; Bedell-Avers et al., 2008; Ligon et al., 2008; Mumford, 2006; Mumford et al., 2007; Mumford et al., 2006;). Accordingly, Mumford (2006) and colleagues (Bedell-Avers et al., 2008) summarize the underlying cognitive differences in terms of five key mental-model features that seem to dictate the charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic leader's response to crises: (1) crisis condition, (2) sensemaking, (3) type of experience, (4) targets of influence, and (5) locus of causation. A summary of these differences may be seen in Table 1.

### 1.1. Charismatic leaders

To understand the differences that exist between charismatic, ideological, and pragmatic leaders, one must consider the cognitive framework that appears to shape each leader's method of influence. Charismatic leaders, for example, are defined by their focus on a future-oriented timeframe – a focus that is most often evidenced by their use of an emotionally evocative, future oriented vision. In fact, charismatics appear to use their vision to provide a sense of shared experience and shared future as they appeal to the masses (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Fiol, Harris, & House, 1999). President John F. Kennedy provides an excellent communication sample that reveals his cognitive orientation in his unforgettable challenge to every citizen to "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."(Kennedy, 1961). In this instance, Kennedy demonstrates his (1) future-orientation, (2) influence over the masses (American citizens), and (3) identification of people's actions as critical change agents. In fact, an examination of the empirical literature provides additional evidence bearing on the charismatic leader's method of influence. For example, charismatic leaders tend to be unusually skilled at engaging others in the vision they are advocating and most often use emotional persuasion, eloquence, a focus on followers' personal needs, or a focus on followers' social needs to appeal to followers (e.g., Deluga, 2001; Mumford, 2006).

### 1.2. Ideological leaders

Although similar in some ways (i.e., use vision-based leadership), ideologues make sense of situations using a very different cognitive framework (Strange & Mumford, 2002). In fact, an examination of ideological leaders indicates the ideologue's vision is based or founded on the past rather than the future. For example, ideological leaders develop emotionally evocative, tradition-oriented visions that place an emphasis on a shared collective past and the values and standards necessary for a just society (e.g., Mumford et al., 2007; Strange & Mumford, 2002; 2005;). Characteristically, ideologues rally follower support by actively rejecting situational causes of injustices. Accordingly, the ideologue's visionary appeal is often focused toward developing a base cadre of followers willing to make strong commitments to *the* cause. In fact, the ideologue's vision is often framed in terms of a mission that emphasizes the importance of shared values and is particularly dependent on groups that share and reinforce the vision he articulates. Thus, it is not surprising to find that ideologues are rigidly committed to beliefs, maintain tight group boundaries, and exhibit an oppositional character that makes it truly difficult to develop a relationship unless trust, loyalty, and attitudinal similarity have been demonstrated (Mumford, 2006).

### 1.3. Pragmatic leaders

Pragmatic leaders, on the other hand, do not articulate a vision for their followers. Rather, pragmatic leaders focus on current issues and exert their influence through an in-depth understanding and sensitivity to the social system and the causal variables operating (Mumford & Van Doorn, 2001). Pragmatics are often considered to be functional problem solvers that consider both situations and people when examining a problem and need for solution (Mumford & Van Doorn, 2001; Mumford, 2006). In addition, the pragmatic's method of influence is most often targeted toward elite individuals invested in the problem and the solution. In such situations, the pragmatic places a premium on performance and appeals to followers' functional needs through