



Reciprocal interactions between group perceptions of leader charisma and group mood through mood contagion

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ABSTRACT

Departing from the static perspective of leader charisma that prevails in the literature, we propose a dynamic perspective of charismatic leadership in which group perceptions of leader charisma influence and are influenced by group mood. Based on a longitudinal experimental study conducted for 3 weeks involving 116 intact, self-managing student groups, we found that T1 group perceptions of leader charisma mediate the effect of leader trait expressivity on T2 positive and negative group moods. T2 positive and negative group moods influence T3 distal charisma perceptions by affecting T2 proximal perceptions of leader effectiveness. The current findings offer critical insights into (a) the reciprocal relationship between group perceptions of leader charisma and group mood, (b) the dynamic and transient nature of group perceptions of leader charisma, (c) the importance of understanding negative mood in charismatic leadership, and (d) the mechanism through which charismatic leadership perceptions can be formed and sustained over time.

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1. Introduction

Researchers and practitioners alike have been interested in charismatic leaders because of their influence on group outcomes (Bass, 1998; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Charismatic leaders conjure images of masterful leaders orchestrating and channeling the mood of followers in unison to triumph over seemingly insurmountable challenges and to achieve performance beyond expectations. Although the efficacy of charismatic leaders is postulated to operate through this affect elicitation in groups, the body of research examining the emotional aspects of charisma is surprisingly small (Erez, Misangyi, Johnson, LePine, & Halverson, 2008; Jung & Sosik, 2006) despite hundreds of studies on the correlation and effects of charisma (e.g., see meta analyses of DeGroot, Kiker, & Cross, 2000; Fuller, Patterson, Hester, & Donna, 1996). Only a few studies have examined the link between leader charisma and follower affect (i.e., Bono & Ilies, 2006; Cherulnik, Donley, Wiewel, & Miller, 2001; Damen, van Knippenberg, & van Knippenberg, 2008; Johnson, 2008, 2009), and only one study has examined this link at the group level (Erez et al., 2008), which is the focus of the current research. Empirical research demonstrates that the interpersonal dynamics of dyads is qualitatively different compared with that of groups (Laughlin, Hatch, Silver, & Boh, 2006) because groups are governed by group norms and a complex network of past relationships among multiple members. The extent that the effects of charismatic leadership are manifested through group mood makes understanding the fundamental nature of this relationship imperative.

Leader charisma is identified as a driver of follower mood (Cherulnik et al., 2001) and group mood (Erez et al., 2008). The expressive communication style associated with charismatic leadership is presumed to precipitate this effect (Bono & Ilies, 2006; Johnson, 2008, 2009), although empirical validation of this relationship is rare. Thus, we investigate the extent to which leader

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expressivity (as a trait) explains the emergence of group mood by shaping group perceptions of leader charisma. Conversely, social constructionist views of leadership argue that experiences of groups constitute an antecedent of shared perceptions of leadership (Meindl, 1995), making it likely that group mood will influence group perceptions of charisma. Therefore, the idea that group perceptions of leader charisma influence group mood and group mood influences group perceptions of leader charisma is possible, resulting in a reciprocal feedback loop between leader charisma and group mood.

Extant research has only focused on one or the other side of this equation, leaving the issue on which between leader charisma and group mood is the cause and which is the consequence unresolved. A reliance on correlational and non-longitudinal experimental designs has exacerbated this problem (Bono & Ilies, 2006; Cherulnik et al., 2001; Damen et al., 2008; Erez et al., 2008; Johnson, 2008). In the current study, we test these relationships with intact, self-managing work groups (i.e., with existing norms and interaction histories) using a longitudinal experimental design unfolding over 3 weeks that offers both ecological validity and methodological rigor. Thus, we propose a recursive feedback loop between group perceptions of leader charisma and group mood (see Fig. 1 for the overall conceptual framework).

As a result, this study makes several contributions to the current literature. First, we examine the effects of leader trait expressivity as a driver of group perceptions of leader charisma and group mood, answering the call to examine leader traits that influence perceptions of charisma (Walter & Bruch, 2008) and group mood (Erez et al., 2008). Second, we investigate for the first time the reciprocal and dynamic relationship between group perceptions of leader charisma and group mood in a longitudinal design, highlighting the transient nature of charisma perceptions and exploring the extent to which a single affective event can change group perceptions of leader charisma. This investigation departs from past research that primarily characterized leader charisma as a stable construct that endures over time. Third, although previous research largely ignored the role of negative moods among charismatic leaders, we examine the extent to which charismatic leaders are equally effective at sending positive and negative moods, providing a more complete understanding of charismatic leadership. Fourth, this research is the first to test the differential consequences of positive and negative group moods on distal group perceptions of leader charisma through the proximal group perceptions of leader effectiveness. This research reveals the extent to which positive and negative group moods amplify and attenuate distal group perceptions of leader charisma as well as the responsible mechanisms.

2. Leader as the primary source of group mood

In the current study, we answer the call to examine how leader characteristics influence the moods of others (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008), particularly group mood (Erez et al., 2008). We focus on the leader trait of expressivity as a driver of mood contagion. Mood contagion is the transfer of moods between individuals, and it tends to occur at an automatic and subconscious level (Neumann & Strack, 2000). The mood contagion process includes two stages in which followers unintentionally mimic the public affective displays (e.g., facial, postural, or vocal mimicry) of leaders, and then afferent feedback from the mimicry induces a corresponding mood response (Duclos et al., 1989; Strack, Martin, & Stepper, 1988). Mood contagion is particularly salient among groups with high membership stability and task and social interdependence (Bartel & Saavedra, 2000).

Given that leaders are particularly salient, powerful, and central organizational figures (Dasborough, 2006; George, 2000), they have the capability of influencing follower positive and negative affect (Dasborough, Ashkanasy, Tee, & Tse, 2009), which in turn have implications for employee outcomes such as task coordination, customer service, creativity, and group performance (George, 1995; George & Zhou, 2007; Ilies et al., 2007; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005). Although the idea that followers can influence the moods of leaders is theoretically possible (Hsee, Hatfield, Carlson, & Chemtob, 1990; Tee & Ashkanasy, 2008), leaders have greater influence on the moods of group members than non-leaders (Bono & Ilies, 2006; Fredrickson, 2003; Walter & Bruch, 2008). This is likely true for all

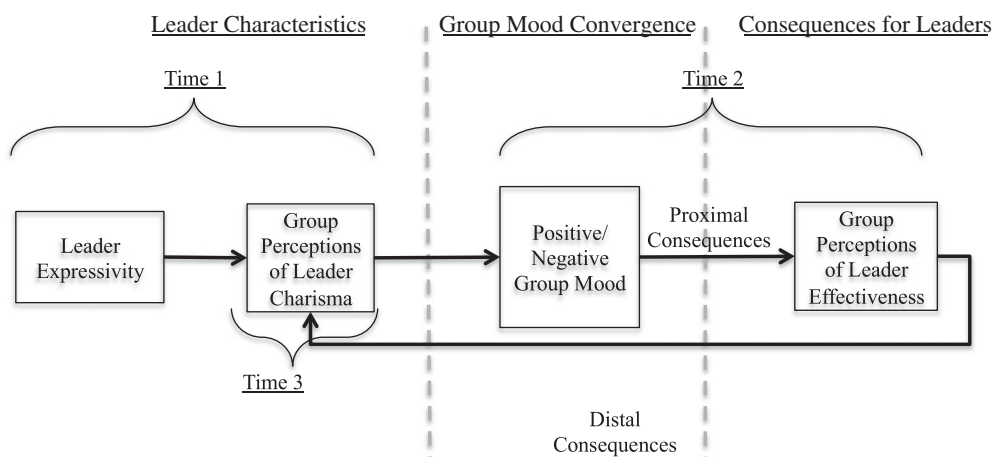


Fig. 1. Cyclical model of group perceptions of leader charisma as the antecedent and consequence of group mood.

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