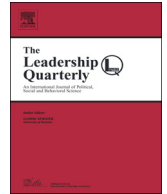




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## The Leadership Quarterly

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/leaqua](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/leaqua)

## A meta-analytic review and future research agenda of charismatic leadership

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 30 October 2015

Received in revised form 24 December 2016

Accepted 27 December 2016

Available online xxxx

#### Keywords:

Charisma

Leadership

Meta-analysis

### ABSTRACT

Charismatic leadership is a critical construct that draws much attention from both academic and practitioner literatures. Despite the positive attention received by the charisma construct, some have criticized its conceptualization and measurement. These critiques have, in turn, cast doubt on what we know regarding the antecedents and outcomes of charismatic leadership. In this review, we adopt a recently developed definition of charismatic leadership and then conduct a meta-analysis of its antecedents and objective outcomes. Following an examination of 76 independent studies and 36,031 individuals, results indicate that the Big Five traits and cognitive ability vary in their association with charismatic leadership. Other findings show that dimensions of charismatic leadership predict outcomes of interest, such as supervisor-rated task performance, supervisor-rated citizenship behaviors, and group or organization performance. Several shortcomings are identified, however, in testing theoretical and methodological moderating variables. The present research ultimately provides a roadmap for new frontiers in theoretical, measurement and empirical work on charismatic leadership.

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### Introduction

In an organizational context, it is difficult to downplay the real or perceived importance of leadership in influencing important individual- and firm-level outcomes. This statement is particularly true when considering the almost romantic perceptions of charismatic leaders as “larger than life” characters with a “mysterious gift” (Shamir, 1992). Ever since the introduction of charismatic leadership by Robert House (1977), a voluminous amount of theoretical and empirical work has ensued in this domain (e.g., Bryman, 1992; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; House, 1999; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Indeed, it appears that the study of charismatic leadership itself has taken on a larger than life and mysterious character in the organizational sciences.

Specifically, charisma has neither been defined consistently nor robustly in nearly six decades of theory and research on inspirational forms of leadership in the organizational sciences (see Antonakis, Bastardo, Jacquart, & Shamir, 2016; Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013 for reviews). The most heavily cited definitions of charismatic leadership on Google Scholar (e.g., Bass, 1985: 13,758 citations; Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1998: 3872 combined citations; House, 1977: 2466 citations & Shamir et al., 1993: 2875 citations as of May 2015) reveal two overarching themes: a) The definition of charisma has typically included outcomes or antecedents and/or b)

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charisma has been defined as some unknown quality or miraculous ability. As discussed elsewhere in the literature (Antonakis, Simonton and House, 2016; Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013), these two themes are particularly problematic. The former confuses the consequences or antecedents of charisma with the construct itself, while the latter is simply a useless way of defining a construct from a scientific standpoint as it could neither be operationalized nor researched in a systematic manner.

Indeed, Van Knippenberg & Sitkin (2013) called for a complete return to the drawing board with regard to the conceptualization of charisma in the organizational sciences. While we echo their concerns regarding the construct space of charisma, we do not believe that a complete return to the drawing board is a fruitful next step without first conceptually and empirically reviewing existing findings in the domain with a proper definition of charisma. For such a definition to be viable, at a minimum, it has to surpass the two critiques noted above concerning a definition that is a) free from antecedents and consequences and b) clearly and specifically measurable.

Incidentally, Antonakis et al. (2016) conducted an exhaustive examination of the definitions of charismatic leadership spanning six decades of research (1954 - 2014) with the explicit goal of offering a definition that surpasses the two criteria above. More specifically, these authors reviewed the definitions of charisma across these six decades and included all of the most frequently cited definitions noted above (e.g., Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987, 1998; House, 1977 & Shamir et al., 1993; See Table 1 of Antonakis et al., 2016; Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Antonakis and colleagues offered a definition that encompasses the common denominator across all, while maintaining construct integrity by overcoming tautological issues as well as vast overlap with transformational leadership (MacKenzie, 2003).

As explained below, their definition of charisma specifically stands alone in that it does not rely on contextual conditions, consequences for the leader, followers or the organization, and leader antecedent traits, such as ability or personality. Further, given the recency of this definition and the lack of empirical reviews of its predictive substantive validity, it would not be efficient or prudent for us to reinvent yet another scientific definition of charisma. To be clear, we adopt this definition as it largely improves on many noted critiques of charisma in the past. The goal and contribution in this review is to determine if such a definition of charisma relates to important follower outcomes and /or is a function of leader antecedents, such as personality and ability.

Charismatic leadership is thus defined as “*values-based, symbolic, and emotion-laden leader signaling*” (p. 304; Antonakis et al., 2016). Further, Antonakis et al. (2016) stated: “There is a sore need for a well-done meta-analysis using correct measures of charisma, and this in models that are properly and causally specified” (p. 311). Consistent with these authors, we assert that a comprehensive review of charismatic leadership based on this latest, more rigorous literature is needed. With this definition as the backdrop, our primary purpose in the current paper is to map this new definition on to existing measures of charismatic leadership and then conduct a meta-analytic review of the antecedents of charismatic leadership as well as a select group of objective, individual- and unit- level outcomes. The theoretical model we test is depicted in Figure 1.

Our review makes the following four contributions to the scholarly conversation in charismatic leadership. First, we align existing measures from current science with the Antonakis et al. (2016) definition of charismatic leadership. Second, we offer a comprehensive test of antecedents of charismatic leadership across more than 30 years (1985–2016). Our review is the first of its kind that investigates a range of stable individual differences (e.g., leader cognitive ability, leader gender, education, and age) as antecedents to charismatic leadership at the dimension level, as called for by several scholars (Antonakis et al., 2016; van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013; Yukl, 1999). For example, we found that certain individual differences predict dimensions of charisma to a greater extent than in past reviews.

Our review highlights new findings regarding charismatic leadership when conceptualized free from tautological and endogeneity biases (see Antonakis et al., 2016; Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010a, b). We only examine outcomes (where plausible) that are somewhat free from endogeneity bias because they are reported from a different source (e.g., group performance, supervisor-rated task performance). Big Five traits and cognitive ability are mostly exogenous. Evidence exists of cross-situational consistency in the measurement of such traits in adulthood. For instance, test-retest reliability serves as a reasonable indicator of this consistency (Cobb-Clark & Schurer, 2012; Hampson & Goldberg, 2006; Hertzog & Schaie, 1986), as would estimates of heritability from behavioral genetics studies (Plomin, DeFries, Knopik, & Neiderhiser, 2016; Polderman et al., 2015). Still, the relationships observed here could be explained by omitted variables or simultaneity.

Third, we consider the predictive validity of charismatic leadership of common yet objective work-related outcomes, such as supervisor-rated task performance, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), and group- or firm-level performance. Critically, this third contribution also highlights that despite all the attention charismatic leadership has garnered over the years, it has not been systematically studied as an antecedent to such objective outcomes. Past meta-analytic reviews have not explicitly investigated charismatic leadership as the focal construct as opposed to transformational leadership (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2004;

**Table 1**

Conceptual overlap between Antonakis et al. (2016) charisma components and dimensions in the CL-TL literature.

Antonakis et al. (2016) charisma component	Conceptually similar dimension in existing CL-TL literature
Justifying the mission by appealing to values that distinguish right from wrong and engaging in emotional displays	Idealized influence (Attributions)
Communicating in symbolic ways to make the message clear and vivid, and also symbolizing and embodying the moral unity of the collective per se	Idealized influence (Behaviors)
Demonstrating conviction and passion for the mission	Inspirational motivation Articulating a vision

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