The Roles of Leaders and Followers
What Matters to Whom? When?

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Leaders have emerged from groups since the beginning of time. The study of leadership has examined the characteristics of successful leaders and categorized their traits. Various leadership styles have been studied through the years in the context of the leader to follower relationship as well as within cultural and situational parameters. Leaders are classified into different categories such as authoritarian, democratic, inspirational, charismatic, transformational and transactional. Each leadership type may be effective depending upon the culture of the followers and the state of affairs facing the group. Closely examining the characteristics of the leaders and their followers, as well as the culture and circumstances in which they lead, makes it easier to understand why some leaders are more successful than others.

**Types of Leadership**

Authoritarian leaders command with a top down approach. They are “characterized as politically and religiously conservative, emotionally cold, power seeking, hostile toward minority groups, resistant to change, opposed to humanitarian values, and the like. (Bass, 1990, p. 124) Their followers tend to have authoritarian ideals as well. As emotionally cold, power seekers, authoritarian leaders focus more on the goals to be completed than on relationships with subordinates. In an organization authoritarian leaders are followed because they are the bosses and that is the expectation. Some employees prefer an authoritarian boss to take full control and responsibility thereby leaving the employee responsible solely for their own job.

Democratic leadership style considers the needs of the followers as well as those of the organization. Bass states that “the democratic cluster will emerge for leaders who are considerate, democratic, consultative and participative, consensual, employee centered, concerned with people and the maintenance of good working relations, supportive and oriented toward facilitating interaction, relations oriented, and group decision making” (Bass, 1990, p.
Followers in a democratic organization are encouraged to take part in collaborative decision-making. Democratic leadership engages all parties in the solution of problems thus giving the subordinates a strong sense of value in the organization.

Both authoritarian and democratic leadership focuses on the distribution of power. Authoritarian organizations focus the power on the leader whereas democratic organizations delegate power throughout the members. Authoritarian leaders share only as much information as the subordinate will need to complete their assigned task. Democratic leaders freely share information with the group so that group members are given the opportunity to examine better methods of execution or solutions to problems. While the two leadership styles are on opposite sides of the spectrum their effectiveness will largely depend upon their followers.

**Charismatic Leadership**

Although there have been leaders for thousands of years, the concept and study of charismatic leadership evolved during the twentieth century. Charismatic leaders existed prior to the 1900’s, but changes in communication, primarily the introduction of media, brought leaders into the homes of their followers. Irvine Schiffer, in 1973, compared the appeal of political leaders to that of celebrities in the entertainment industry (as cited in Bass, 1990, p. 185).

Weber argued that charismatic leaders possess five components: “(1) a person with extraordinary gifts, (2) a crisis, (3) a radical solution to the crisis, (4) followers who are attracted to the exceptional person because they believe that they are linked through him to transcendent powers, and (5) validation of the person’s gifts and transcendence in repeated experiences of success.” (as cited in Bass, 1990, p.185) Weber’s description of charismatic leadership became the basis for other researchers. Research in the 1980’s attempted to refine the definition by labeling the characteristics of charismatic leaders. Researchers such as Jay Conger, Rabindra
Kanungo Howard Friedman, Louise Prince, Ronald Riggio, and M. DiMatteo and Bernard Bass as well as others performed case studies, and carried out anecdotal and quantitative research to support the fact that charismatic leaders possess an expressive behavior, maintain strong self-confidence, and self-determination, possess great insight, maintain a freedom from internal conflict, communicate eloquently, and maintain high levels of activity and energy (Bass, 1990, pgs.189-191). Table 1, on page 5, summarizes the attributes that Conger and Kanungo believe are essential for charismatic leaders compared to their non-charismatic counterparts as they relate to various circumstances (Conger and Kanungo, 1987, p. 641).

Charismatic leaders possess qualities that give them an “extraordinary influence over their followers, who become imbued with moral inspiration and purpose. The followers experience a magnetic attraction that transcends their usual experience” (Bass, 1990, p. 184).

**Inspirational Leadership**

Inspirational leadership is quite similar to charismatic leadership although the relationship between the leaders and the followers is different. The followers, of the charismatic leader, are inspired by the person, whereas the followers of an inspirational leader are drawn to his or her mission. Inspirational leaders use symbols and imagery to connect their followers to their causes. Similar to the charismatic leader the inspirational leader has a vision and uses emotional cues to draw followers into that vision. When charismatic leaders share visions of higher order end products such as peace, equality, freedom, honesty, respect, and human dignity they fall into the category of inspirational leader.

**Followers Make the Leader**

The connection between leaders and their followers cannot be separated. Expressive behavior connects leaders to their followers. Leaders who demonstrate expressive behaviors
may use facial expressions and a tone of voice that is reassuring to followers. In situations of personal contact the leader may touch the person he or she is speaking with and may establish strong eye contact. One researcher, A. R. Willner, described this eye contact as a magnetic attraction (cited in Bass, 1990). Political leaders are taught to exhibit expressive behavior as a way to increase the attraction of their followers. Expressive behavior by a leader may make the follower feel that he or she has a personal connection to the leader.

Self-confidence sends a message of strength to the followers. Leaders who display self-

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### Behavioral Components of Charismatic and Noncharismatic Leaders

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Noncharismatic Leader</th>
<th>Charismatic Leader</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relation to Status quo</strong></td>
<td>Essentially agrees with status quo and strives to maintain it</td>
<td>Essentially opposed to status quo and strives to change it</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Future Goal</strong></td>
<td>Goal not too discrepant from status quo</td>
<td>Idealized vision which is highly discrepant from status quo</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Likability</strong></td>
<td>Shared perspective makes him/her likable</td>
<td>Shared perspective and idealized vision makes him/her a likable and honorable hero worthy of identification and imitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trustworthiness</strong></td>
<td>Disinterested advocacy in persuasion attempts</td>
<td>Disinterested advocacy by incurring great personal risk and cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expertise</strong></td>
<td>Expert in using available means to achieve goals within the framework of the existing order</td>
<td>Expert in using unconventional means to transcend the existing order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior</strong></td>
<td>Conventional, conforming to existing norms</td>
<td>Unconventional or counternormative</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental Sensitivity</strong></td>
<td>Low need for environmental sensitivity to maintain status quo</td>
<td>High need for environmental sensitivity for changing the status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Articulation</strong></td>
<td>Weak articulation of goals and motivation to lead</td>
<td>Strong articulation of future vision and motivation to lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power Base</strong></td>
<td>Position power and personal power (based on reward, expertise, and liking for a friend who is a similar other)</td>
<td>Personal power (based on expertise, respect, and admiration for a unique hero)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader-Follower Relationship</strong></td>
<td>Egalitarian, consensus seeking, or directive</td>
<td>Elitist, entrepreneur, and exemplary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nudges or orders people to share his/her views</td>
<td>Transforms people to share the radical changes advocated</td>
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confidence project to followers that they are in control of situations and that the followers need not be concerned. Self-confidence may be more important at a time of crisis when followers need someone who they believe will fix the problem. Robert J. House stated, “They must be able to present themselves as miracle workers who are likely to succeed when others would fail” (as cited in Bass, 1990).

Similar to self-confidence, self-determination is the ability to determine one’s own fate, and allows the leader to have a vision and belief system that they pursue. Followers are attracted to the self-determined leader because they believe the leader is not at the mercy of those around him or her and that the leader will be able to carry out his or her vision. The followers believe completely in their leader and the vision, which will be in the best interest of all.

Charismatic leaders often make decisions based on the insight they possess into the needs, values and hopes of their followers (McClelland, 1975 as cited in Bass, 1990). The leaders use this insight to determine the best ways to handle situations so that the followers feel their needs are being met and their concerns addressed.

Charismatic leaders avoid internal conflict by believing in their ideals and fitting their actions into this framework. When leaders make decisions within the framework of their ideals, they have no reason for remorse. The framework of ideals is based on the vision the leader has for the group. People who do not doubt their decision-making will appear to be more self-confident which as discussed earlier appeals to the followers.

The media of the 21st century has increased the need for leaders to be eloquent. Speechwriters may assist in helping leaders to speak more clearly as well as to be more considerate of the audience. Political leaders often find themselves in the spotlight and eloquence keeps them there.
The final characteristic exhibited by charismatic leaders is a high activity and a high energy level. Leaders with a high energy level are viewed as people who are more capable of finishing things. Followers may believe that these leaders will be able to achieve more.

Charismatic leaders may possess all or some of the aforementioned qualities, which help establish the intense bond with their followers.

The relationship between the leader and the follower is inseparable. Just as charismatic leaders possess certain qualities, so do their followers such as the need to fully trust and believe in a leader. Through the qualities of emotional expressiveness, self-confidence, self-determination, freedom from internal conflict, insight and eloquence the leader is able to capitalize on the needs and voids found in the followers. Leaders can give purpose to a life that is without direction or purpose. When an organization is in the midst of change members may look to a leader for psychological comfort in order to reduce their stress and anxiety. The follower’s connection to the leader may reach a level beyond emotional and cognitive attraction. A. R. Willner stated, “followers have an unqualified belief in the man and his mission about what is, what should be, and what should be done” (as cited in Bass, 1990 p.192) The followers are what give the leader elevated status. Bass, 1990, substitutes into the old adage by saying charisma is in the eye of the beholder and, therefore, is relative to the beholder (Bass, 1990). The connection between leader and follower is a cyclic process where each continuously builds upon the other.

Leaders may don the title of charismatic leader at one point in time yet not at another. Although the leaders themselves may not change, the situation that the leader and followers are dealing with may drastically change the way the leader is viewed by the followers. In times of great crisis followers are often worried about the situation at hand. A leader who espouses a plan
and emanates an air of self-confidence and a strong determination will rise to the status of charismatic leader. Greg Devereux (1955) wrote, “Individuals who feel that they have lost control over their environment are more ready to accept the authority of a charismatic leader” (as cited in Bass, 1990, p.196). Bass (1990) gives the example that Adolph Hitler rose to power in response to the military defeat of the Germans in World War 1 and the depressed economic state of the country in the war’s aftermath (Bass, 1990). The German people found themselves in the midst of crisis and the charisma Hitler exhibited gave them someone to believe in. As with Hitler, desperate times may permit people to follow a leader’s vision yet overlook the actions he takes to reach his goals. During a more stable time period, the German people may not have supported Hitler. This example shows how situations affect the rise of a charismatic leader. Raelin (2003) stated that “that we would ever find that charismatics are persuasive in all environments and for all times. The post war demise of Winston Churchill is a sufficient case” (Raelin, 2003, p. 47).

Culture plays another important role in the hailing of a charismatic leader. Some cultures may look at the characteristics of a charismatic leader and refute them as weaknesses. For example, in some cultures emotional expressiveness signifies weakness. Bass, 1990, explains how societies that traditionally respect charismatic leaders are looking for charisma in their emerging leaders (Bass, 1990). In some Eastern societies charismatic leadership would be extremely difficult to achieve as the qualities of charismatics, such as expressive behavior might be viewed as a weakness. The culture of the society or organization will also dictate the type of leader who will rise to the top.

**The Impact of Charismatic Leadership on an Organization**

Charismatic leadership can have positive and negative effects on organizations and
society. Charismatic leaders have the ability to bring people together for a common cause.

Conger and Kanungo, 1994, stated “Charismatic leaders differ from other leaders in their ability to formulate and articulate an inspirational vision and by behaviors and actions that foster an impression that they and their mission are extraordinary. As such, individuals choose to follow such leaders in management settings not only because of formal authority but out of expressions of extraordinariness” (Condor & Kanungo, 1994, p.442). If the mission and beliefs of the leader are of a positive nature the effects can be extremely positive. Leaders with missions that are evil, immoral or self-serving may have a tremendously negative impact on an organization or society as a whole. Adolph Hitler exemplifies this concept. His mission to create a superior race was supported initially by the German people due to his rise to power in a time of crisis.

Charismatic leadership can also become unbalanced leading to negative consequences. Leaders who become too narcissistic may fail to consider new evidence and ideas. When self-confidence becomes too great they may fail to see other points of view, which may be necessary in handling a situation in a manner that is best for the organization. In an organization, failure to recognize other’s ideas may result in the organization losing talented members. If a leader becomes too self-absorbed he may become insensitive to the needs of others. It is likely that this type of leader would not make a good mentor because he would expect that his is the only right way to do things. Mentors do not clone themselves but rather cognitively coach their mentees to bring out their best qualities.

**Transformational versus Transactional Leadership**

Political scientist James McGregor Burns (1978) extended the views of leadership to include both transformation and transactional leadership (as cited in Burns, 1990). These terms describe the different types of relationships that exist between the leader and his or her followers.
Transactional leaders offer contingent reinforcement, positive rewards and reinforcement when their subordinates do well and reprimand when the subordinate performs poorly or fails to comply with codes that are in effect within the organization. Transactional leaders “take corrective actions and intervene only when failures and deviations occur,” which is known as management by exception (Bass, 1990 p. 323). Transformational leaders are more closely involved with their subordinates. Transformational leaders are charismatic and inspirational, intellectually stimulate subordinates and give personal attention to those who need it.

Transactional leaders may be very successful as their expectations are known ahead of time and their actions are predictable. Bass (1990) explains that a transactional leader assists his or her subordinates by “(1) clarifying what is expected of the employees, particularly the purposes and objectives of their performance, (2) explaining how to meet such expectations, (3) spelling out the criteria for the evaluation of effective performance, (4) providing feedback on whether the individual employee or work group is meeting the objectives, and (5) allocating rewards that are contingent on their meeting the objectives” (Bass, 1990, p.339). Transactional leaders need followers who do not need social interaction or collaborative working conditions. Transactional leaders must find a difficult balance when offering contingent rewards. A leader who rewards every little action may raise the expectation of his or her followers to expect a reward for all work. Similarly if reinforcements are not distributed equally subordinates may grow to resent one another. Some researchers, including Burns (1978), believe that Transactional and Transformational Leadership are complete opposites (Bass, 1990). Bass, however, believes that Transactional Leadership is a first step toward Transformational Leadership and that the first augments the latter (Bass, 1990).

Transformational Leadership extends the concept of charismatic leadership.
Transformational leaders are charismatic, often inspirational leaders who intellectually stimulate their followers. Transformational leaders would not be able to have the same influence on their subordinates without charisma. Transformational leadership further pushes the leader, follower cycle to produce the highest levels of productivity. Congor and Kanungo, 1994 stated that “(James McGregor) Burn’s transformational leader engaged with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality…Their purposes which might have started out as separate but related… become moral in that it raises the level of conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus has a transforming effect on both” (Conger & Kanugo, 1994, p. 441).

**Conclusion**

Culture and events, within organizations and society as a whole, have shaped the role that a leader must fill. When people are highly concerned or frightened they will look for a leader whom they can trust. A charismatic leader may, through personal characteristics, immediately gain the trust of subordinates. Insight into the needs and desires of subordinates may change the leader’s tactics to better address the needs of the group. Other leadership styles, such as authoritarian may rise from organizations in need of more structure or a history of success following an authoritarian. Once unconditional trust is established, and the leader/follower cycle is in place, the leader may follow his vision and mission. Nevertheless, the leader/follower cycle will dictate the style of the leadership found in an organization.
References


