

# THE 'MAGICAL ROLE' OF CHARISMA IN LEADERSHIP, POWER AND CONTROL: AN INTERPRETATIVE STUDY OF CONCEPTS

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to consider the concept and 'magical role' of charisma in leadership, power and control in the realisation of an expected or long awaited outcome by the followers (or sufferers) in a situation of distress. Charisma can be used by the leader in restraining evil and in promoting good and effective leadership for the common good of man and/or the general interest of society. In this article, the "interpretative study of concepts" method developed by Takala and Lämsä is used. A well known characteristic in interpretative research based on naturally occurring data is that the data exist regardless of the researcher, and the researcher does not interact with the producer of the data. The result of this study for example, is that a practical implication of pure personal charisma has been demonstrated in various ways (Schweitzer, A., 1974) and how such gifts can be used by modern leaders or corporate managers to achieve long awaited results. Max Weber invokes a 'spiritual' or 'super natural' concept of charisma and explores how it can be used by those who wield such 'rare gifts' to improve or mar the prevailing situation of their people under context. Plato adds that's charisma is something mystical which cannot be obtained by force or by training. It is of divine origin. Investigating the role of charisma in leadership can offer useful information and insights for clarifying certain corporate and political concepts and can help to shape the development of future theory as well as the procedure for data collection and testing.

**Keywords:** Charisma, Leader, Power, Leadership

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Greek word '*Charisma*' means "favour" or "gift". In English, it has been used in Christian contexts since about 1640 to refer to a gift or power bestowed upon an individual by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church (this sense is very rare now). The earliest non religious use of "Charisma" that we know of occurred in a German text, a 1922 publication by sociologist Max Weber. Charisma has been defined in several ways by various authors as follows: (1) A certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he or she is set apart from ordinary people and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities (Weber M, 1968). (2) A devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person and of the normative patterns revealed or ordained by that person (Weber, M., 1947). (3) An Endowment with the gift of divine grace (Bass, B.M., 1998). (4) Leadership that has a magnetic effect on people (James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, 1987). According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, '*Charisma*' is defined as a personal magic of leadership arousing special popular loyalty or enthusiasm for a public figure such as a political figure (Merriam-Webster dictionary). According to Weber, charismatic can mean the following: That the "natural" leaders in times of distress – whether Religions, political, economic, physical, psychic or metical – were neither office holders or appointed officials, nor "professionals" in the present-day sense of the word (i.e., persons carrying out their jobs against compensation a "profession" based on training and special expertise), but rather the bearers of specific gifts of body and mind that were considered "supernatural" (in the sense that not everybody could have access to them) (Weber, M., 1978). Furthermore, charisma is a "highly individual quality". Robert Tucker adds that in Weber's usage of the word, "the possessor of charismatic authority, who may be a religious, political, military, or other kind of leader, is in essence a saviour leader – or one perceived as such" (Weber, M., 1978). Tucker further explains that a leader "who comes forward in a distressful situation and presents himself or herself in a convincing way to the sufferers as one who can lead them out of their distress by virtue of special personal characteristics or formula for salvation may arouse their intense loyalty and enthusiastic willingness to take the path the leader is pointing out" (Tucker, R. C., 1977). In addition, "charismatic leadership carries potential hazards as well as benefits" depending on the time, place, and what means and ends are involved. This is because

for Weber, the charismatic leader goes against mainstream institutions or tradition, generates new things, and changes regular or institutionalised points of reference or frameworks, but can also be subversive, irrational, and unstable (Epley, 2015). In addition, there is a focus on the present moment. Charismatic leadership therefore carries within itself its own demise for it cannot last forever. In other words, charismatic leadership is self-destructive. There are also subsequent problems with the routinization and succession of charisma.

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Power is often considered a gift from God to mankind when God himself ordained that man should rule over his fellow humans. This power is manifested through leadership which can be defined as the capacity to influence others through inspiration generated by a passion motivated by a purpose – the common good of man. Nevertheless, leadership, in general, means the ability to ‘influence’ others’ behaviour to achieve goals in which respect their freedom and point of view entirely. It enables the group (managers/ employees) to work together in the process of development and exchange towards the vision of success and sustainability (Krume Nikoloski, 2015). On the other hand, power is considered to be the potential ability of one person to influence others to carry out orders or to do something they otherwise would not have done. Other definitions stress that power is the ability to achieve goals or outcomes that power holders desire (Krume Nikoloski, 2015). Man is endowed with the potential to overcome the many vices plaguing humanity. However, because of untold greed and the reckless pursuit of power and fame at all cost, there is too much pain and suffering in our world. God made man free and simple but man created slavery and malice. Most politicians and businessmen or corporate executives of our time fight to have power not to serve their people in the spirit of love and fraternity or for the general interest but to serve their ego and use their position for their own personal advantage at the detriment of the masses and people under their care. It is very common nowadays to see politicians or business tycoons use their positions to suppress the masses or to promote their personal interests.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to consider the concept and ‘magical role’ of charisma in leadership, power and control in the realisation of an expected or long awaited outcome by the followers (or sufferers) in a situation of distress. Making use of charisma in promoting good and effective leadership for the common good of man and/or the general interest of society is the concern of this article.

## 3. METHODOLOGY USED IN THIS ARTICLE

‘Methodology’ can be described in an arrow sense to refer to the various kinds of ways or techniques used for gathering data (Hirsjärvi, S. and Hurme, H., 1985). This study is guided by the epistemology of interpretivism and follows the ontological position of subjectivism. Based on the nature of the data, Interpretative research can be divided into two main groups. The basic idea is a classification of data into a naturally occurring manner and data collected only for the purposes of a given study. In this article, the “interpretative study of concepts” method developed by Takala and Lämäsä (Takala, T. & Lämäsä, 2002) was used. A regular feature in interpretative research based on naturally occurring data is that the data exist regardless of the researcher, and the researcher does not interact with the producer of the data. Interpretative study of concepts (i.e. one where data are written texts about concepts) is one of three types of interpretative research that belongs to the category of naturally occurring data. (Tuomo Takala, 2005). The data in this study consist of the works and written texts on charisma of other authors and the definitions of concepts in those texts.

This study thus lays emphasis on the interpretation and further development of concepts and their definitions as well as conceptual systems. The data in this study is ‘mute’ because they do not necessarily enable personal contact between the researcher and other people, as is usually the case in empirical interpretative research. Therefore, the data in this study was made to talk through a painstaking process of interpreting and developing concepts and theories on charisma as written and posited by other authors such as the works of Max Weber (1964); House (1977); Takala (1998); Epley (2015) just to cite a few of them. This method of research could also be called ‘desk research’ since it is concerned with written sources. The term emphasises the methodical aspect of this research method with respect to the collection and gathering of data. The researcher did not move out to the field to interview or to observe. Rather, the researcher collected written material and attempted an interpretation at his or her desk.

#### 4. THEORITICAL UNDERPINS OF CHARISMA AND LEADERSHIP

Recent studies on Charismatic leadership in organizations have been focused in several organizational studies even if the basic conceptual as well as empirical (like House, 1977) studies have been conducted in the field from the 1970's until now. Origins of charisma discourse dates as far back to Weber (1964). In general, there is nowadays a tendency to focus on personality issues like the leadership traits or charismatic style of the leader, in relation to organizational contexts more often compared to earlier times. At the same time, dramaturgical perspectives on leadership and charisma have emerged, and fantasies, intuitions, visions and other mental activities have been recognized to have a role also in leadership (Aaltio-Marjosola I. & Lehtinen J, 1998).

##### 4.1 Understanding the Concept of Charisma

Debates and several academic discourses in recent times on charismatic leadership in organizations and the society in general, has partly carried the tone of danger. Charisma has been seen as a politically dubious characteristics of individuals in the society and it has been searched as the psychological mechanisms which lead to the emergence of charismatic leaders and their attraction to the people that follow them. For instance, Lindholm has studied extremely destructive charismatic leaders like Hitler, Manson and Jim Jones and their impact on the society (Downtown, 1973, Conger, 1990 as cited in Tuomo Takala, 2005). Research has also been carried on destructive leaders like Mao Zedong, Mussolini who were seen to possess the gift of charisma by their followers. Totalitarian aspects of societies and truth manipulation practiced by charismatic leaders are seen negative and undesired consequences of it at societal level. Images of charismatic leaders are coloured by these gloomy examples taken from history. At the same time charisma is stigmatized by the gloria given to a few and rare. Charisma can serve not only the personal interests of the leader, but also the larger society (Allert, Chatterjee, 1997; and Robbins, 1992, p. 151 as cited in Tuomo Takala, 2005). Selfishness and narcissism of a charismatic leader may come together and lead to undesired consequences such as economic collapse, high unemployment, poverty and poor living conditions whereas unselfishness and scarifying features of a charismatic leader can be seen to cause desired and admirable consequences such as industrial & economic development and better living conditions of the people. The latter is the concern of this study i.e the use of charisma by those who possess it to restrain evil and promote the wellbeing of man. The nature of charisma is not very rational. It works between the leaders and the followers, it is evidently not very rational by nature, not based on authority of the leader given to him only because of his or her overwhelming knowledge or experience but more based on his or her personal features. Charismatic followership (Aaltio-Marjosola, 1996) can be seen very crucial in understanding the charismatic leadership and the processes where it takes place.

In general, discussions on charisma has been held from the beginning of the century, but even the ancient philosophers like Plato (see Takala, 1998) talked about charisma, society and leadership (Tuomo Takala, 2005). Political leaders were the focused of most discussions and academic works on charisma. Recent developments have brought insights that also emphasize the organizational contexts of charismatic leadership, as well as its consequences on the organizations and followers. It looks as if charismatic leadership comes in question especially when visionary, transformational role and emotional quality of leadership are explored.

Charisma, in terms used by Max Weber, means literally "the gift of grace". It is used by Weber to characterize self-appointed leaders followed up by people who are in distress and who need to follow the leader because they believe him to be extraordinarily qualified. The charismatic leaders' actions are euphoric, inspiring, enthusiastic, and in such extraordinary enthusiasm a way is given to fraternization and exuberant community sentiments. For this reason, charismatic heroes and prophets are viewed as truly revolutionary forces in history (see Gerth & Mills, 1964). Weber emphasizes that the charismatic leader is self-ordained and self-styled. The foundation for this self-styling is the charismatic leader's "mission". He sees his role and actions to be his destiny. The role of a follower is to acknowledge this destiny, and the authority of genuine charisma is derived from the duty of the followers to recognize the leader (Tuomo Takala, 2005). The very nature of charismatic authority is unstable; this is because the source of charisma is 'not well known' or continuously "moving on". It will never be stable and unchanging.

As Weber (1964) states, charismatic leadership usually arises in times of crisis when the basic values, institutions, and legitimacy of the organization are brought into question. Genuine charisma is connected with something "new". And in extraordinary situations this "new" thing calls forth a charismatic authoritarian structure so that charisma, at least temporarily, leads to actions, movements, and events which are extraordinary, not routine, and

outside the ordinary sphere of everyday life. The evocation of pure charisma and charismatic leadership always leads at least temporarily away from the world of everyday life; it rejects or transcends routine life (Gardner W. & Avolio B., 1998). Because pure charisma and charismatic leadership conflict with the existing established order, they work like a catalyst within an organization. But charisma is the specifically creative force in an organization only briefly before being unavoidably transformed or routinized into some more solid form.

Leadership, as a normative standpoint from Plato's view, was that a leader must be a man of power with a sincerely truth-seeking vision. This point of view comes close to the Weberian concept of charisma discussed above. According to Plato, for a leader to be successful in his actions, he must have charisma or the gift of grace. For without it, a leader would not be able to do his job or to be the head of an organization and lead it successfully. And this charisma is something mystical which cannot be obtained by force or by training. It is of divine origin (Takala T., 1998).

## 4.2 Charisma and Leadership

"Leadership" is a term that has numerous meanings in different contexts, definitions as well as various connotations. A leader may be defined by who he or she is (the personal) and by the responsibilities, obligations, and tasks he or she is charged with (the position). Leaders' authority can be great or limited and their legitimacy can rest on moral, rational, or practical foundations. Social psychologists usually distinguish between "affective" and "instrumental" leadership. "Affective" here refers to maintaining good relations among a group or members, while "instrumental" deals with advancing the interest of a group in the performance of a common objective or task (Epley, 2015). Depending on the nature of the organization, leaders can be labeled as affective, instrumental, or both. Leadership can be further classified as "transactional" such as party, opinion, group, legislative, judiciary or executive leadership or "transforming" like that of reform, revolutionary, heroic, or ideological leadership, terms that James Macgregor Burns includes in his book *Leadership* (Epley, 2015).

One of such kind of leadership is "charismatic leadership." Like leadership in general, charismatic leadership has a wide range of definitions, especially since the word "charisma" has varied meanings in different cultural and temporal settings. Putting aside normative judgments about whether a leader is good or bad, just or not, and moral or immoral, one might say that there is something about certain leaders that make them unique and exceptional. This "something" has been the subject of intense intellectual debates and sociologists like Max Weber paved much of the way in terms of identifying this special something as "charisma." His theories laid important groundwork for how we might think about and understand charismatic leadership.

When Max Weber explored and examined the topic of political obligation and why one should obey the state in his work « *Economy and Society* », which was published posthumously in 1922, he made contrary points to the traditional arguments of the time (1978). He did not think self-interest (i.e. material, economic), fear (against punishment mostly), and habit or socialization were legitimate reasons for obeying the state. Weber instead believed that we obey because of validity, meaning that the state or authority is perceived to be good, right, or just. We evaluate the state as an order that is good and therefore obey, but we make such evaluations subjectively. In an effort to understand and classify these subjective approaches, Weber created three models of legitimacy: tradition, charisma, and legal rational (Weber, M., 1978). The first focuses on past behavior, which gives validity and meaning to the present laws and state. The second is personalistic and emphasizes the right and power of a "special" individual while the third points to instrumental rationality, which is choosing the appropriate means for particular ends while acting in accordance with utility.

## 4.3 The Psychological, Social, and Relational Dimensions of Charismatic Leadership

Though Weber emphasizes the psychological component of charisma more than the social and relational components, there are elements of the latter two spread throughout his work. What is suggested in this article as borrowed from Dr. Jennifer L. Epley's work on « *Weber's Theory of Charismatic Leadership* » is a succinct and cross-sectional analysis of the psychological, social, and relational aspects in order to provide a more simple and straightforward description and understanding of charismatic leadership. First, the psychological dimension of charismatic leadership refers to the intrinsic or inter-personal and "natural" qualities attributed to an individual leader. Here, charisma is defined "as a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or exceptional powers or qualities"



(Schweitzer, A., 1974). According to Martin Spencer, Weber's concept of charisma has been used in at least three senses: "(a) the supernatural 'gift' of the leader, (b) charisma as a sacred or revered essence deposited in objects or persons and (c) charisma as the attractiveness of a personality" (Spencer, M. E, 1973). This exceptional quality is found in a particular individual person. The origin of charisma is somewhat elusive, though. Just where the "gift" comes from is debatable. Is it genetic, learned, or acquired by some other process or from a higher spiritual source? Weber claims that the gift can come from some divine being or certain physical and mental states induced by drugs or disease (e.g., epilepsy). He does not go into detail about the origins of charisma, presumably because what matters most for him is that charisma exists in the eyes of the followers, hence his statement that charisma must be used in a value-free sense (Weber, M., 1978).

Second, the social dimension of charismatic leadership refers to possible external factors that contribute to an individual rising to a position of power and authority. In other words, charismatic leadership may have social sources. For example, family background, educational background, religious affiliation, work, and community life based on certain cultural identities that can influence whether or not an individual becomes a leader and the nature of that leadership once that person is in power. Charisma also undergoes a transformation over time. It becomes depersonalized through the process of routinization. Routinization comes about because of the "desire to transform charisma and charismatic blessings from a unique, transitory gift of grace of extraordinary times and persons into a permanent possession of everyday life" (Weber, M., 1978)." The leader, disciples, and charismatic subjects all seek to "maintain the purity of the spirit." In efforts to maintain the status quo and in light of the need to find "a successor to the prophet, hero, teacher or party leader," people merge the forces of charisma and tradition. For Weber, the charismatic message becomes "dogma, doctrine, theory, regulations, law or petrified tradition" (pp. 1122-1123). Charisma "becomes a legitimation for 'acquired rights' and essentially changes from a 'unique gift of grace' into a quality that is 'either (a) transferable or (b) personally acquirable or (c) attached to the incumbent of an office or to an institutional structure regardless of the persons involved'" (pp. 1122 and 1135). Charismatic leadership can then find its sources in social factors such as family lineage, educational orientation and/or political office. Weber states that once charisma becomes an impersonal quality, it can be taught and learned. It may be added that the "monopolization of charismatic education by the well-to-do" (p. 1146) is not only possible, but rather frequent since the upper class and elites are usually the ones who have the time and means to "cultivate" charisma and leaders. But can «Pure or original Charisma» be cultivated by means of education or social background? This remains an ongoing debate in scholarly circles.

Third, the relational dimension of charismatic leadership refers to the relationship between the leader and followers. Some authors like Martin Spencer (1973) stretch the boundaries of Weber's theory of charisma and state that it is not just psychological or sociological. Instead, charisma is the emotional or effectual relationship that exists between the leader and his followers developing as the historical product of the interaction between person and situation (Spencer, M. E, 1973). Weber might not have disagreed much on this point, however. In discussing the inherent instability of charismatic authority, Weber notes that followers may abandon a leader if he or she does not deliver the promised goods, services, or some other goal for "pure charisma does not recognize any legitimacy other than one which flows from personal strength proven time and again" (p. 1114). Weber explains that charismatic leaders must prove their powers or 'gifts of grace' in practice: "He must work miracles, if he wants to be a prophet. He must perform heroic deeds, if he wants to be a warlord. Most of all, his divine mission must prove itself by bringing well-being to his faithful followers; if they do not fare well, he obviously is not the god-sent master" (p. 1114). Charismatic leadership is thus relational because if "the people withdraw their recognition, the master becomes a mere private person" (p.1115). In this way, charisma may not necessarily be something that an individual leader possesses or perhaps the leader only partially possesses the attribute since there is a dependence on others' recognition and support.

In the final analysis, Arthur Schweitzer provides a reference table for classifying different forms of charismatic leadership (Schweitzer, A., 1974). It is constructive for helping us to think more concretely about the combined psychological, social, and relational dimensions of charismatic leadership. Further examples have been demonstrated in this reference table as follows;

Table 1: Types of Pure Personal Charisma

Types	Examples			
Situation	Military	Magic	Religion	Politics
Personality	WarLord	Socerer/Magician	Prophet	Politician/Statesman
Quality	Great Courage	Ectasy	Ascetic	Inspiring Speaker
Attitude of followers	Hero Worship	Awe, Fear	Reverence	Loyalty
Achievement	Military Conquest	Oracle	Revelation	Good Governance
Group Organisation	Brave Soldiers	Sacrificial Community	Community of Disciples	Fanatical militants or party followers
Organisation	Army	Secret Societies	Sects	Political Party

Schweitzer also condenses Weber's theory into nine propositions (p. 178) as follows:

- Supernatural:** If a particular personality experiences an inner calling and great self-assurance that enables him to develop exceptional capacities, then these abilities will be recognized by others who feel it as their duty to recognize him as their charismatic leader.
- Natural:** The exceptional capacity consists in the self-belief of the personality and his magnetic ability – by means of ecstasy, euphoria, resentment, and political passion – to establish a communal bond between leader and followers.
- New style:** The extraordinary ability expresses itself in exemplary living or a new political style that gives direction to his policies and political symbols, which expressions become the hallmark of a charismatic movement, although it falls short of any distinct political or philosophical doctrine.
- Mission:** The charismatic leader received some special mission containing doctrinal elements that provide the basis for a political program. It becomes the duty of leader and followers to devote their lives to fulfilling this program in the political and possibly also the social spheres of life.
- Political types:** Within the political framework, the charismatic leader works mainly through the 'accessibility to the masses' and obtains through their enthusiasm the position of a demagogue satisfied with the mere resemblance of power, or as an ideologist committed to his cause, or as a party leader also controlling a political machine, or as a Caesarist leader acclaimed either by civilians or soldiers or both.
- Instability:** A charismatic regime is of short duration either because the extraordinary quality is diluted or the emotional anxiety of the followers diminishes so that charisma is usually incapable of creating or maintaining durable political system.
- Revolution:** In situations of 'emotional revolutions' the leader can express the resentment of the disprivileged masses and lead a political revolution or direct a social revolution. More religiously inclined charismatic leaders tend to employ violence only in defense of their religious beliefs or the integrity of their movement.
- Violence:** If a charismatically led revolution is successful, then there usually ensues an unintended revolutionary self-destruction because revolutionary violence breeds counter violence by the regular armed forces that destroy the revolutionary regime.
- Reutilization:** If charismatic movements do come to power peacefully, then they are bound to lose their original purity because the regime requires an administrative staff and economic support which it can obtain only if the charismatic leader becomes a mere figurehead of a primarily bureaucratic and interest-oriented regime.

#### 4.4 Contemporary Examples of Charismatic Leadership and their Impact on Society

Charismatic leadership has plenty of historic examples in a range of fields including politics, social justice, Religion and business (Martin Luenendonk, 2016). Martin Luther king Jr. Who fought relentlessly for negro rights and freedom in the USA and Adolf Hitler who is known to have caused world war II and the deaths of about 60 million people worldwide are two opposite and extreme examples of political charismatic leadership. Mother Theresa and Charles Manson are also two extreme examples of religious charismatic leadership. Mother Theresa might not be a conventional example of leader, but she perfectly fits the definition of a Charismatic Leader. While Mother Theresa showed what good charismatic leadership could achieve as she was dedicated to a single cause and had a vision to help the lives of the needy, Charles Manson on the other hand, used his Charisma for doing bad. Charles Manson was leader of a cult called 'The Family' who used his charisma and managed to captivate the attention of young girls, only to end up killing them (Martin Luenendonk, 2016). Gandhi is also a celebrated

charismatic figure. He is well known for his fight for social justice and independence in India using non-violent means that worked so well. Gandhi was a crowd pulling magnet. Charismatic leaders have also appeared in the business world such as Jack Welch (worked as CEO of General Electric) and Steve Job (worked as CEO of Apple). Both these men use their charisma in making their respective companies among the best in the world. In Cameroon, the key to the SDF's (Social Democratic Front Party) success lies in what has been described as its 'Charismatic and grassroots leadership' incarnated in leader Ni John Fru Ndi (Untold Story of the SDF at 25, 2015). Fru Ndi's eloquence and gestures in public were magnetic and crowd pulling. He is known as the one who braced the odds in 1990 in Bamenda, Cameroon and in defiance introduce democracy in Cameroon by launching the first opposition political party, known as the 'Social Democratic Front' in the midst of heavy military presence.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

'Charisma' can have a kind of 'magical', 'magnetic' if not a very strong and inexplicable force from 'higher sources or places' that is unknown to the followers and even to the leader that wields the power of control over his or her followers. Reviewed literature and works aforementioned in this article have demonstrated that charisma is a special 'gift of grace' that someone receives from above to accomplish a particular mission. Indeed, charisma can be used by leaders or people who possess such quality to have a very strong impact and bearing on people's lives, the life of a country or the performance of a corporate entity. According to this research, charisma can have unimaginable positive (or negative) outcomes. This kind of leadership is possible if the leader can detect the trends of time and know when to use authority and influence, when to ask and when to tell, when to take over and when to let go. In every case, it is crucial for leaders (political, traditional and Religious) and managers (CEO's and Corporate Executives) to understand the range and power of influence techniques they can use, know when and how to use them and build their power bases so that they have the capacity to be influential and have the highest possible positive (not negative) outcome in the course of their reign or accomplishment of their mission.

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