

Charismatic Leaders: Too Much of a Good Thing?



If your organisation is in the process of selecting candidates for leadership positions, it may be worth considering this finding from a new behavioural study: While charisma may be important in a leader, having too much of it may hinder a leader's effectiveness.

Researchers took a trait perspective on charisma by measuring charismatic personality using 56 questions, which focused on four personality tendencies: bold, mischievous, colourful and imaginative.

For this study, researchers compared the charisma scores of nearly 600 business leaders with their effectiveness as reported by peers, subordinates and superiors. It was found that as charisma increased, so did perceived effectiveness, but only up to a point. At a certain level, as charisma scores continued to increase, perceived effectiveness started to decline.

"Our findings suggest that organisations may want to consider selecting applicants with mid-range levels of charisma into leadership roles, instead of extremely charismatic leaders," said Jasmine Vergauwe, a doctoral student at Ghent University and lead author of the study, published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Further analysis of the data suggests that the point at which the relationship between charisma and effectiveness turns negative can be moderated by an individual's level of adjustment, or ability to cope with stressful events. The researchers also discovered that low-charisma leaders were seen as less effective because they were not sufficiently strategic, while high-charisma leaders were seen as less effective because they were weak on operational behaviour.

An operational leader is able to guide the team to get things done in the near term by managing the tactical details of execution, focusing resources, and managing with process discipline. Strategic leadership, on the other hand, involves effectively communicating a vision for an organisation and persuading others to share that vision. Because they appeared to exhibit both of these behaviours in adequate amounts, moderately charismatic leaders were rated most effective, Vergauwe theorised.

Current and potential leaders may benefit from more specialised training based on their level of charisma, the research team said. Highly charismatic leaders can enrol in a coaching programme focused on addressing operational demands such as attending to day-to-day operations and managing an orderly workflow. Low-charisma leaders, on the other hand, could benefit from training in more strategic behaviour such as spending more time and energy on long-term planning, taking a broader perspective on the business as a whole, and creating a safe environment for trying new things.

Source: [American Psychological Association](#)

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