

CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

The present paper provides insight into ways of crafting and conveying charismatic body language image that is specific to influential leaders. We will examine powerful notions such as charisma, charismatic and transformational leadership, confidence, attitude and trust in order to see how all these elements instill belief and change in followers for the better if accompanied by adequate movements of the body.

***Keywords:** leadership charisma, interpersonal bonding, nonverbal behavior, positive attitude*

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1. Introduction

Communication is more than words

There are three commonly accepted elements in any face-to-face human communication: words, tone of voice, and body language. Nonverbal communication accounts for two-thirds of all communication and can portray a message both verbally and with the correct body signals which include physical features, conscious and unconscious gestures and signals, and the mediation of personal space. Every time we communicate with someone else, the body supplements our words with dozens of micro gestures, eye movements, changes in posture and facial expressions.

Most people are not fully aware of how much they use this unspoken language or of the fact that they use it subconsciously. Bowden (2010, 6) states that “the nonverbal elements have been found to be particularly important for communicating the information that forms a receiver’s understanding of the *feelings, attitude, or intent*

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behind a communication. Indeed, this is true to such an extent that body language accounts for 55 percent of that understanding, tone of voice accounts for 38 percent, and the verbal content, the words, supplies only 7 percent of the perceived overall feeling, attitude, or intent that a communicator communicates. This implies, first, that the feeling, attitude, or intent that we might communicate is *almost entirely dependent* on the nonverbal message (93 percent), not on what we say". He continues by explaining that in the business world the intellect is always given the highest status. Still, when delivering any kind of business presentations although the *intellectual content* is conveyed entirely verbally "the nonverbal cues are more than 10 times as important in your audience perceiving your *belief* or *conviction* concerning that material. (Bowden, 2010, 7)". From these we can conclude that it is not what you say that makes the most difference but the manner in which you say it. The way we say things nonverbally (facial expressions, body language, voice quality, intonation, and other subtle characteristics that fall under the rubric of nonverbal communication) triggers an emotional response from our audience. Many theorists as we will mention further into our research have emphasized the fact that emotion is one of the most potent sources of motivation that drives human behavior.

2. The magic of charismatic leadership

Charismatic leadership is a superior type of leadership which has lately begun to be increasingly discussed, theorized and explained. These studies are not a return to the old theory of charismatic leadership that analyses leadership as a set of characteristics, or traits, possessed by leaders, but a foreshadowing of new explanations to the results of empirical research and, especially, the extension of management organizational behavior that examines the interactive nature of the relationship between leaders and followers. Research findings have stressed that leaders are dynamic agents because they *mobilize, arouse, engage* and *satisfy*. The mutual dependency of leaders and followers can be simply explained: leaders only exist because others follow them due to their ability to resonate with them. This is what literature calls *transformational leadership*. Charteris - Black (2007, 6) states that "transformational leadership is measured by *the effect that leadership has on followers* as people are in some ways 'transformed'. The transformational leader has the ability "to *change followers for the better* (...) Transformational processes usually involve the *upgrading* of needs. As a consequence of this *upgrading* of needs, subordinates and followers become self-directing and self-reinforcing. The transformational leader's influence is based on the leader's ability to inspire and raise the consciousness of the followers by appealing to their *higher* ideals and values."

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The magical power of leadership is central to the concept of charisma. Charisma is a term derived from the Greek word *χάρισμα* (*charisma*) which means "favor freely given" or "gift of grace" and has two senses according to New Oxford American Dictionary (2010): (a) compelling attractiveness or charm that can inspire devotion in others, (b) a divinely conferred power or talent. If the older theories of charismatic leadership focused more on the leader – his/her exceptional attributes and qualities - under which he/she would successfully achieve remarkable results, more recently the focus is more on the followers. According to this reversal paradigm, charisma no is longer considered almost exclusively an attribute of the leader, of the person, but a social relation. People find it easily to commit to a charismatic person due to the feeling of trust they experience when communicating with him/her. Bowden (2010, 15) explains this phenomenon in a simply, yet alluring way: “They are watching you, and they need to experience a feeling of *trust* in what they see and hear from you first—for their own comfort. It is not what you say that builds that trust; it is what you do for them that allows them to feel it.

As the American novelist Carl Buechner said, “They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.” Help people to feel trust in you through your nonverbal communication, and whatever the substance of your content, it’s going to get deep into their hearts and minds, and they are quite likely going to *do* whatever you ask! In the end, it is what people *do* alongside you that will build the lasting connections between you. Shared experience of action is the glue for any group, tribe, or society. The greatest trust is built when people go beyond their individual survival, rise above the selfish gene, and advance to the evolutionary level of joining in “a movement” together.” Thus, interpersonal bonding, empowerment and emotional intelligence are imperative attributes to a charismatic leader who must be able to demonstrate he understands, supports and cares about the people in his charge. This collaborative approach to leadership is what bring added value to any employee/follower.

However, there are many people who have charisma and are not leaders. As Bass (1985) puts it: ‘as an attribute, charisma is in the *eye of the beholder*. Therefore, it is relative to the beholder.’ Bowden (2010, 12) adds that: “unless an audience sees the right *image*, it doesn’t hear the right *message*. The audience members may even make up their own message to fit the picture that they see, because the reality of this whole human communication system is that the receiver is ultimately in charge of the message received; it all gets translated in the receiver’s head.” Consequently, charisma is a mental state that exists in the perception of followers. Goman (2011, 106) describes charisma as “personal magnetism or charm. Charismatic people are more outgoing, but they also spend more face-to-face time with others—picking up cues and drawing people out. It's not just what these leaders project that makes them charismatic; **it's how they make others feel about themselves**. Good leaders make

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employees believe in them. Great leaders make employees believe in themselves. It's all about dealing compassionately and effectively with people: listening, empathizing, and encouraging others to achieve outstanding results. So learning to read and respond to body language signals is crucial to leadership charisma. But, of course, charisma is also about an individual's infectious positive attitude, personal energy, and enthusiasm, as projected through his or her body language." The author continues by stating that "learning body language skills isn't just helpful for communicating effectively to an audience; it also trains you to adopt positive, powerful, and uplifting postures and movements that in turn affect *your* mental state. As you assume the posture, gestures, expressions, and stance of confidence and charisma, you actually become more charismatic." (p.107). Leaders and indirectly their conduct and body language have always been under scrutiny. As a rule, people will always follow those whose body movements can project signs of warmth and empathy, and power and authority at the same time. Following and relationship building is all about the body language of trust, inclusion, and rapport as we will see in the last chapter of this study.

3. The impact of injecting excitement into your gesture

It is fundamental to all social species to react positively to nonverbal expressions of confidence, inclusion, expressivity and agility. Nothing is more attractive and influential than a high degree of confidence projected both verbally and nonverbally. Driver, Aalst (2011, 222) argue that "we are drawn to confident people. Their belief in themselves is more attractive than perfect features or careful grooming. Confident people come across as certain and ready to take action. They instill in us a much-desired sense of security; a feeling that, no matter what happens, we can count on them to make decisions and act in a manner that produces an acceptable outcome. Confidence is magnetic, powerful, and profound. It's the calm voice amid chaos. (...) It's what legends and leaders are made of." Everybody responds positively to "speed, agility and energy expenditure as indicators of potency. By contrast, lethargy and torpidity are associated typically with weakness and ineffectualness. Thus, any nonverbal action that entails a high degree a high degree of intensity and dynamic action is likely to connote power and to secure avoidance, flight, or submission from less dominant others." (Burgoon, Dunbar, apud Manusov, Patterson, 2006, 288).

In life, people who appear confident, active, optimistic, likable, and enthusiastic in their nonverbal behavior are given by others better ratings. Why? Because they have most of the time open body postures, full frontal body orientation, warm smiles, rapid head nods, prolonged eye contacts which convey expressiveness and energy. In terms of gesture classification that express a wide range of attitudes and emotions Paul Eckman and Wallace Friesen (1969) group them into five categories: emblems

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(movements that are substitutes for words), illustrators (movements that accompany speech), regulators (body movements that maintain or signal a sign in a person's listening or speaking role), adaptors (for example fiddling with objects, which tend to cast light upon a person's emotional state) and affect displays (especially facial expressions that reveal emotions). However, the type of gestures individuals use is related to his personality and self-expression. Openness and confidence body movements have a greater effect than closed and hesitant ones. It is unwise for leaders to constantly show nonverbal display of anger, irritability, or annoyance as people are more likely to hold back their opinions, limit their comments, and look for ways to shorten their interaction. It is not the purpose of our study to review most of the gestures that show inclusion or exclusion but to draw attention to the impact of such behavior. In any organizational environment, employees/followers consciously or unconsciously search for cues from leaders and mimic their behaviors.

Conclusion

Charisma is a mental state that exists in the perception of followers and can only be known through their reactions to an individual labeled as "charismatic leader". Like good manners, nonverbal behavior is a tool for expressing you *best* self in a certain situation. It is an extension of one's character. If it is ineffective, it can be changed through self-analysis and continuous training: "you can add more effective gestures, postures, and expressions to your leadership repertoire. But the most charismatic, influential, and powerful body language will always be that which is totally congruent with who you are, what you stand for, and what you truly believe. (Driver, Aalst, 2011, 308). Body movements are the most charismatic when they are organic and naturally enhance the verbal message. Open and positive gesturing is a useful way of communicating warmth, trust and friendliness despite the fact that most of us see words as primary persuaders. Facial expressions should be lively and expressive rather than too controlled and restricted. We should never forget that body cues provide others with information about us. Charismatic leaders seek to develop both themselves and the others. Consequently, they will always try to convey active interest and involvement by avoid defensive and barrier gestures. Empathic leaders display at the same time friendliness, power, status and confidence. Constructive leaders know that emotions (positive or negative ones) are contagious. Emotional contagion is predominantly seen as a nonverbal process. When a person is angry or depressed, his negative body language spreads like a virus to his interlocutors, affecting their attitudes and lowering their energy. In contrast, relaxed and optimistic leaders are aware that their facial expressions and bodily cues have an impact on the interlocutor's nervous system, emotions and behavior.

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As a final conclusion to the article we quote Mother Teresa's words that should reflect, in our opinion, every charismatic leader's creed: "Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty". Leaders with inclusive body language and a charismatic leading style have the ability to create an emotional environment that supports cooperation and high performance.

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