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# **THE ROMANTICIZATION OF CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP IN THE ARTS**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the role, significance and impact of charisma in cultural leadership. By comparing empirical data with the literature on charismatic leadership, it investigates the role of charisma in the operation, reputation and strategic success of arts organizations. It highlights the importance of organizational context and reflects on the darker side of charisma.

The article questions the romanticization of charisma and the normative bias towards it by arts managers, policymakers and audiences, as well as within the literature. It concludes that charismatic leaders should be treated with caution, even cynicism, to temper negative impacts on followers and organizations.

## **KEYWORDS**

Charisma, charismatic leadership, cultural leadership, arts management, strategic management.

## **INTRODUCTION**

It has been argued that over the last two decades, a 'crisis' in cultural leadership has emerged in the UK (Hewison 2004). This can be evidenced through a range of high profile failures of leadership within flagship institutions such as the Royal Opera House, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the English National Opera. Such crises are attributed to a number of factors. For some, it is due to the precarious funding of the arts (Boyden 2000; Metier 2000; Selwood 2001). For

Colbert (2011), it is caused by the idiosyncrasies of the cultural sector and its uncomfortable relationship with management. For others, it is due to the difficulties in recruiting effective senior managers to leadership positions, owing to a lack of skills, training and support (Holland 1997; Metier 2000; Resource 2001; Hewison 2006; Leicester 2007).

These longstanding concerns around cultural leadership led to a series of new initiatives at a policy level. Dedicated new programmes and funding streams were developed and implemented such as the Clore Leadership Programme (2003 to present) and the Cultural Leadership Programme (2006-2010). In turn, cultural leadership became a burgeoning area of interest within the professional and academic spheres. Yet despite this newfound focus, charismatic leadership has received remarkably little attention in the context of the arts; and the dearth of research in the arts management field is perhaps indicative of the paucity of charismatic leadership scholarship in the wider public sector (Javidan and Waldman 2003).

Theories on various types of leadership (such as charismatic, transformational and visionary) share the view that 'outstanding leaders have the ability to make a substantial emotional impact on their subordinates' (Javidan and Waldman 2003:229). Yet to date, the leadership and management literature has largely focussed on leaders, neglecting the role of 'followers', as well as the process and organizational context of charisma. This paper explores the phenomenon of charisma within cultural leadership and in particular, the impact it exerts on followers. Prior to becoming academics, both authors were arts managers,

working within museum and theatre contexts. During this time, they worked with highly charismatic artistic directors, in the role of followers. Charisma appeared to be something that was integral to the success of the organizations, from engendering loyalty within staff members and driving forward an artistic vision to wooing funders and critics, and even selling tickets, which makes its absence in the arts management literature even more striking.

This exploratory study aims to redress the balance by engaging with ‘followers’ in their broadest sense: arts professionals, audiences and other external stakeholders such as policymakers and funders. It seeks to understand the impact of charismatic cultural leaders on followers and organizations; the role of followers within charismatic relationships; the applicability of the charismatic leadership literature to the authors’ empirical work; and the implications of charismatic leadership in the arts. The paper begins with a detailed and comprehensive critique of the secondary material, synthesizing various literatures pertaining to leadership from sociology, psychology, political science, management and leadership studies. The empirical data, which comes from two distinct research projects, is then presented and discussed in relation to the literature. The final section draws a number of conclusions, explores the implications of the research and sets an agenda for further study.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FROM WEBER TO NEO-CHARISMA**

The etymology of charisma lies in the ancient Greek word for ‘divinely inspired gift’ (Yukl 1993). The concept was adopted by the early Christian church to describe these gifts or ‘charismata’, which enabled recipients to carry out

extraordinary feats (Conger et al 1997). The pioneering work of Max Weber (1864-1920) is often the starting point for studies into charismatic leadership. Weber borrowed the concept of charisma from theology and 'secularised' it (Nur 1998:21). He was interested in modern society and, in particular, processes of domination and freedom. As a sociologist, he sought to understand the circumstances that enabled some people to dominate and others to be dominated. He theorised three concepts of authority: 'traditional' (for example, the monarchy); 'rational-legal' (for example, democratic bureaucratic systems such as parliament); and 'charismatic' (for example, self-nominated individuals). For Weber, charisma was not the key focus *per se*; rather it was simply the means by which traditional authority was challenged. An example might be feudalist societies, in which charismatic movements challenged and replaced aristocratic rule with the bureaucratic authority of the industrialised modern state (DiTomaso 1993). Hence, Weber's theory was one of 'grand historical transformation' (DiTomaso 1993:260), an evolutionary process that posited charisma as the mechanism for social revolution (Weber 1978). According to Weber, social revolution came from charismatic individuals. It was drawn from the power of the human mind and its emotions, as opposed to what Weber saw as impersonal power, as in the case of traditional and rational-legal modes of authority, which were bound up in positions of office, status and rules. Weber thus regarded charisma as a disruptive, precarious and unstable force that occurred in moments of social crisis; and this was a macro theory of charismatic leadership – one in which the existing social order was overturned and the world re-orientated (Conger 1993).

For Weber, charisma referred to extraordinariness. Charismatic leaders had a special gift that was of divine rather than human origin, setting them apart from ordinary men. He did not elaborate on the nature of the gift of charisma, nor the personality traits or behavioural characteristics of charismatic leaders. His main position was that such leaders were extraordinarily heroic, possessing the ability to command respect, love, trust, devotion, compliance and personal sacrifice (House and Howell 1992). These religious overtones clearly correspond to the origin of the term itself. Weber initially argued that these exceptional qualities could not be learnt or taught, but merely *awakened*. He later perceived charisma as something that could be learnt through long, intensive and strict training (DiTomaso 1993).

More recent conceptualisations of charisma have shifted its meaning. Critics of leadership theory have accused scholars of reducing Weber's notion of charisma from 'the embodiment of a social movement' to a mere 'management style' (DiTomaso 1993:269). In other words, the understanding of charisma has been removed and reduced from its central position in Weber's theory of social revolution to an analysis of personality traits and behaviours within the business world. Beyer shares this view, arguing that Weber's conception has been 'domesticated' by leadership theorists, who have 'diluted its richness and distinctiveness' (1999:308). This seems reasonable, as the new genre of work on charisma that emerged in the 1970s and 80s certainly signals a break with Weberian conceptualisations of charismatic authority. Whilst the more recent literature begins with the acknowledgment of Weber's 'divine connotations' (Nur 1998:25), the theoretical development over the last forty years across the

management sciences has inevitably resulted in a broader conception and attribution of leadership that bears no resemblance to Weber's grand formulation.

The 1970s theories on leadership primarily focussed on the traits and behaviours of charismatic leaders. House's (1977) speculative interpretation of charismatic leadership proposed a multi-dimensional model, which explored the personality traits and behaviours of leaders and followers together with the processes of influence and their contexts (Yukl 1993). House's theory presented leaders as rather clichéd confident and power-hungry individuals, who arouse followers' motivations by appealing to shared values. This was followed by the so-called 'neo-charismatic' leadership theories, which incorporated notions of vision, inspiration, role-modelling, empowerment, expectation and collective identity (Conger 1999).

In the late 1970s, theories of transformational and transactional leadership emerged. At the positive end of this dichotomy, transformational leaders are presented as ethical, graced with the ability to inspire and motivate their followers to achieve outcomes that transcend self-interest; focus on the good of the collective; and create mutual stimulation and elevation (Burns 1978). These transformational leaders are described as the ultimate change agents and charisma is posited as a core component of their leadership style (Conger et al 1997). As the theory developed, so did the binary distinctions. Howell (1988) makes the division between 'socialized' leaders, who act in the interests of the collective, empowering and developing their followers through egalitarian and

non-exploitative methods; and 'personalized' leaders, who are authoritarian and narcissistic, demanding obedience from followers and setting goals which are based on their own self-interest. Whilst socialized leaders may attain new heights of collective achievement (Sosik 2005) and a reduction in 'deviant' behaviour (Brown and Treviño 2006), the methods of personalized leaders may result in individual and/or collective ruin (Howell 1988). Such dichotomies do not allow for any blurring between these two extremes, although it seems fairly obvious that most leaders would not fit neatly into one category or the other.

Although the vast majority of research into charismatic leadership emphasizes its positive traits and outcomes, some studies question this 'normative bias' (Hunt and Conger 1999:341) and point to the 'dark side' of charisma. Chaleff (2001) notes that the way that many societies glorify leaders means that counterproductive or dysfunctional behaviour is often tolerated. Charisma is frequently associated with vanity, egotism and narcissism (see, for example, Bass and Stogdill 1990; Sankowsky 1995; Conger and Kanungo 1998; Agle, Nagarajan, Sonnenfeld and Srinivasan 2006; Chamorro-Premuzic 2012). Indeed, according to Galvin, Waldman and Balthazard (2010), the combination of charisma and narcissism in particular has been associated with fear, cruelty, manipulation and the abuse of power. Similarly, Samnani and Singh (2013) draw upon the work of Kets de Vries (1993) to explore the dangers of personalized leadership styles, whereby the need to accumulate personal power may result in victimization, exploitation and manipulation, leading to alienation and anxiety. Other scholars have warned of the potential for visionary or creative leadership to culminate in overly bold strategies that are often disconnected from an organization's



capabilities (Bilton 2007; Burkus 2014). All of this has implications, not only for the wellbeing of followers, but for organizations and their development.

Most of the standard classifications of leadership styles seem to hinge on the behaviour and personalities of leaders. However, the role of followers in the charismatic leadership paradigm is under-researched and there is little focus or data on the personalities, behaviours and predispositions of followers. This may be due to the fact that followers are seen as less important than leaders, as argued by Chaleff (2001), who considers the resources devoted to creating inspirational leaders, asking why followers are not similarly trained to be strong and supportive. Rather than seeing followers as weak, compliant and passive, as can be observed in the literature, Chaleff instead emphasises their courage and responsibility to serve and challenge their leaders.

The small body of literature that exists on followers is based on rather crude caricatures. Research in the 1980s largely came from political science and psychoanalysis, where polarised conceptualisations prevailed. The earlier work in this period saw followers depicted as submissive, vulnerable, passive and dependent (Kets de Vries 1988), whilst later work portrayed followers as those who enjoyed challenge and risk-taking, and who shared the vision and style of the leader in a quest for personal development and growth. Many arts workers seem to identify with this later conceptualisation (Bridgstock 2005). It is widely recognized that even those working in junior positions in the arts are highly qualified, often holding postgraduate degrees and having a wealth of professional experience upon entry into the cultural sector. For example,

Boerner and Freiherr von Streit's study of the relationship between orchestral conductors and musicians recognized the latter as 'well trained professionals with a high degree of intrinsic motivation' (2005:33), arguing that:

*a directive leadership style would endanger the followers' intrinsic motivation, and thus the quality of performance [...] a delegative or participative leadership style is therefore recommended. Empirical results show that in fields where creativity is crucial [...] generally a non-directive style of leadership is considered functional to success.*

This could indicate that the relationship between leaders and followers in the arts may well be at odds with other sectors. This study also demonstrated that charisma itself involves trust and competence, which ultimately leads to credibility, a quality that is highly prized in the arts. According to Michaelis, Stegmaier and Sonntag, 'trust in senior management has a stronger impact on commitment than charismatic leadership' (2009:411). Empirical research consistently demonstrates that charismatic leaders cause followers 'to become highly committed to the leader's mission, to make significant personal sacrifices in the interest of the mission, and to perform above and beyond the call of duty' (Fiol, Harris and House 1999:451). In the academic and business literatures, this process is ubiquitously presented as one of the charismatic leader's greatest assets. However, this has the potential to negatively impact on employees (for example, through manipulation, group-think and work-related stress). So if charisma is something that can be taught, idealized and learnt (Antonakis, Fenley and Liechti 2011), some moral prudence and responsibility must be exercised in

any ethically minded organization. This is especially important if charisma is viewed as a performance – a perspective on charisma that would substantiate Goffman's (1959) depiction of the self as a social process and perhaps encapsulate his notion of the 'façade self'. If we accept the potentially performative (and therefore transient and inauthentic) nature of charisma, then it could be argued that those working in the arts are uniquely placed to excel as charismatic leaders.

Goffman's work on sincerity, 'region behaviour' and audience segregation is also illuminating in the context of charismatic leadership, explicating as it does the act of tailoring behavioural traits to specific and discreet audiences. This focus on the diverse recipient groups of presentational behaviour is supported by Fanelli and Misangyi (2006), who note that the literature on followers concentrates too closely on the effects of charisma upon *employees*, thus hindering a deeper understanding of the diverse range of charismatic *relationships* developed by certain leaders. Fanelli and Misangyi acknowledge that followers can be 'distant', in other words, that they can exist outside of organizations; and this is particularly apposite in the arts context, where many audience members have a strong connection to cultural institutions, alongside other stakeholders such as external funders, policymakers and the media. This requirement to cultivate relationships with staff as well as with multiple external stakeholders signals a particular challenge for cultural leaders.

Jermier argues that charisma is 'not a thing that can be possessed by an individual' (1993:221) but rather that it exists *in the relationship* between the

leader and the follower, which Steyrer refers to as 'charismatic interaction' (1998:810). Some scholars (for example, Bass 1988) regard the charismatic relationship as dyadic (that is, existing between one leader and one follower), whereas others see the relationship as collective, played out between one leader and many followers (for example, Shamir, House and Arthur 1993). Although the influence of leaders on group processes is woefully under-researched (Samnani and Singh 2013), there has been some effort to explore this through a networks effects model (for example Pastor, Meindl and Mayo 2002) and by analysing social exchange relationships (for example Galvin, Balkundi and Waldman 2010). Gardner and Avolio (1998) propose a dramaturgical perspective of the charismatic relationship, arguing that leaders and followers *jointly construct* the leader's charismatic image through 'impression management' strategies. In a similar vein, Klein and House (1995) see charisma as equally reliant on the 'magnetizability' of the follower as on the allure and appeal of the leader.

Meindl (1990) goes further, arguing that charisma is simply a state of mind that is highly contagious, which suggests that charisma is a social construct of followers (Meindl and Thompson 2005; Schyns, Felfe and Blank 2007). This view is supported by Keyes (2002), who claims that followers endow leaders with charisma: 'Only when followers have accepted the leader as a symbol of their moral unity can the leader have charisma' (cited in Antonakis, Fenley and Liechti 2011:375). Therefore, as followers are actually bestowing charisma onto their leader, a more complex power dynamic is hinted at.

For Bass and Stogdill (1990), subordinates may struggle to develop charismatic perceptions about a leader, and Galvin, Balkundi and Waldman (2010) propose that these vacuums can be filled by 'surrogates', who provide second-hand facts and stories to defend and/or promote the leader, which can be even more influential than first-hand interactions with the leaders themselves. This again suggests that there is more complexity in the relationship between leaders and followers, which could be especially useful in informal networks that may be based on discretionary relationships (Ibarra 1993) and populated by 'distant followers' (Goffman 1959). This leads us back to Weber's dilemma regarding whether charisma can be taught and learnt, which some modern leadership scholars see as wholly viable (see, for example, Antonakis, Fenley and Liechti 2011) – a viewpoint which prevails in management studies.

This detailed overview of the neo-charismatic literature across several disciplines reveals a complete abandonment of Weber's theory of social revolution. For example, if charisma lies in the relationship between leaders and followers, or merely resides in the minds of followers, then the idea of the 'gift' being endowed on exceptional individuals is irrevocably challenged. Equally, the notion of surrogate leaders further negates Weber's concept of extraordinary and heroic individuals. In these models, authority is replaced by circumscribed roles within group dynamics, as both leaders and followers obtain, or are assigned, roles, which they then act out in order for charisma to be formed. This reflects both Goffman's theories on 'idealization' and 'impression management' (1959:208) and Gardner and Avolio's notion of social actors and charismatic

'contagion processes' (1998:51). Such theorisations herald a wholesale rejection of Weber.

### **EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS OF CHARISMA IN THE ARTS**

The empirical element of this paper is based on the meta-analysis of two distinct data sets, derived from existing studies. The methodology was based on interpretative content analysis (Seale 2012) and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) of data from existing studies. The first data set was taken from a study that examined the role of cultural diplomacy (the use of the arts as a political tool of 'soft power' within international relations) within arts policy and its relationship to the management of museums. The second data set came from a project that explored audiences' motivations for attending the theatre and the impact that theatre had on their lives. Both studies involved extensive qualitative depth interviews as a means of 'accessing experiences' (Kvale 2007:xi) and eliciting rich and 'thick' descriptions (Geertz 1973:26) to capture first-hand accounts and convey these from the perspectives of participants.

The first project comprised interviews with policymakers, arts managers, curators, artists and museum directors in the UK and the second study consisted of interviews with theatre managers and audiences in Australia and the UK. The 57 interviews were transcribed and coded into key themes using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis tool *NVivo*. This process facilitated an iterative process of conceptual mapping (Braun and Clarke 2006), which enabled the authors to distance themselves from the data, which in turn supported reflexivity and the emergence of an 'etic voice' (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993:352). To add

to this, each author examined the other author's data, which offered further distance from the original material and engendered a fresh approach to the analysis. Qualitative approaches are strongly advocated in the literature on charisma. For example, Murphy and Ensher (2008) discuss the ability of interviews to achieve depth and richness, whilst Conger (1998) notes that the complexity of the leadership phenomenon lends itself to qualitative methods.

Whilst neither project set out to examine the phenomenon of charismatic leadership *per se*, it strongly emerged as an underlying theme in both projects. Despite the data sets being relatively small, this is significant for research that had not intended to study leadership or charisma. The interview data from these two unrelated projects highlighted the dramatic effect of charisma on the primary stakeholders of arts organizations. The interviews revealed both a dependency on and a distorted interest in charismatic leaders. Within both theatre and museum contexts, participants appeared to be captivated and seduced by the charm and vision of charismatic leaders, who had a meaningful impact on both their behaviour and degree of organizational loyalty. In line with the literature, the cases presented here indicate that charismatic cultural leaders hold a considerable degree of power and influence over their followers, which, in these cases, ranged from government officials and the media to employees and audiences.

There is an important distinction to be made between power and influence here. 'Influence' is understood to be a mechanism of persuasion that requires knowledge, credibility, respect and trust. 'Power', on the other hand, is the

exertion of authority to create an outcome. From a scholarly perspective, these terms are analytically distinct, yet are often conflated and blurred, as can be seen across the literature both cited in this article and elsewhere. Again, Weber offers a useful point of orientation through his notion of 'parties' (Latimer and Munro, 2014). 'Parties' are associations of people that attempt to influence social action by coming together to achieve an aim. Those involved share a common purpose towards a specific goal or purpose. Courses of action are carefully considered, selected and planned, as opposed to being the side effect of social interaction, although Weber also noted the possibility for unintended consequences. (Indeed there are plenty of cases throughout history of followers that are drawn to charismatic leaders, with sad or even devastating consequences. The examples of Jim Jones, Charles Manson and Adolf Hitler come to mind. Our earlier, albeit brief, discussion of the dark side of charisma gave a flavour of the less extreme but still unsavoury aspects of charismatic leadership and hinted at what can happen when things go wrong). In this article we are largely referring to the influence that charismatic leaders have on their followers, although we do understand the power harnessed through communal, collective action, driven by a particular type of leader, as the empirical data below demonstrates.

Participants in the first study on museums revealed a huge sense of admiration for particular charismatic leaders. For example, of the fifteen interviewees questioned about cultural diplomacy, seven referred directly to Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, despite the interviewer not mentioning him or his organization (or even asking questions that sought to seek out responses concerning individuals). Indeed 'Neil' was mentioned 55 times in the interviews



and 'MacGregor' 19 times; and in one 45 minute interview with the Special Advisor to the UK's Culture Minister, Neil MacGregor was mentioned 14 times – representing an average of one name-check every three minutes. Participants referred to MacGregor as 'erudite', 'brilliant', 'charming', 'persuasive' and 'a marvellous cultured force for good'. When questioned about a new £3 million government policy for cultural diplomacy, participants shared a perception that the fund belonged to MacGregor himself. Even civil servants reported that the idea for cultural diplomacy came from 'the likes of Neil MacGregor'. Participants paid careful attention to his actions and words, with some even adopting his phraseology. For example, one interviewee said: *'to use the words of Neil, this is a museum of the world and for the world'*. Another participant spontaneously discussed MacGregor's virtues:

*What Neil has done particularly well with this museum [...] is to look at what actually is the core purpose of this place [...]. If you listen to a lot of what Neil has said or if you read a lot about what he's written, he refers back to our founding principles from 1753 [...]. That is Neil's purpose and I think as soon as you've got the security of knowing what the purpose is and this ambition [...] that just opens up all sorts of possibilities.*

The interviewees were clearly influenced and inspired by this leader's vision, which was found to be both exciting and reassuring. They evoke the sense of avid followers, noting what MacGregor says and writes. When the UK Culture Minister's Special Advisor was questioned about how the cultural diplomacy policy was devised, the participant replied: *'It really was sitting on aeroplanes*

*going around America going 'look, we've got the Comprehensive Spending Review [...] what shall we do? What shall we do for Neil?'"* Another civil servant also expressed similar sentiments: *'Neil is a very persuasive person who, if you look across the cultural sector as the whole, there's probably only a handful of people, of whom Neil is one, who can walk into Number 10 [10 Downing Street in London, the UK Prime Minister's Office] and who the Prime Minister will listen to about cultural activity'.*

This admission indicates the influence that charismatic arts leaders can have, even on the highest echelons of society. MacGregor's ability to persuade and enthuse others leads to actual policy being created to satisfy individuals, rather than the general tax-paying populace. These insights paint a picture of a sector that extols charismatic leaders. This represents a departure from the normative view of policymaking, as a series of actions intended to generate the maximum positive impact for the highest number of people. In addition, in contrast to the theory on charismatic relationships, our research supports Weber's original concept of charisma as residing within extraordinary individuals and exemplifies Antonakis, Fenley and Liechti's depiction of charismatic leaders as those who can 'federate collective action around a vision' (2011:376).

Similarly, the participants in the second project consistently made reference to particular artistic directors, despite the research not exploring, or even remotely focusing on, leadership. When asked to discuss their relationship to their respective theatres, interviewees repeatedly discussed the leaders instead of focussing on the artistic programme or the organizations themselves. Figures such as Simon Phillips (the former Artistic Director of Melbourne Theatre

Company) were eulogised with an abundance of positive descriptions such as 'clever', 'charming' and 'charismatic'. Interviewees appeared to be personally excited by chance encounters with such individuals, emphasising any exchange or interaction with the artistic directors – from a brief passing in the foyer after a production to even observing what colour socks a particular director wore!

Despite being 'distant followers' who had little direct or personal contact with the cultural leaders, participants in this study appeared to convey a pseudo intimacy, observing and scrutinising the actions of leaders and referring to them on first name terms. They praised popular directors for their perceived skills in entrepreneurship, diplomacy and their respect for audiences. Many interviewees revealed an extreme sense of loyalty towards these leaders, presenting themselves as devoted fans. For example, one participant admitted to subscribing to a season programme through a sense of loyalty to an artistic director, despite no longer enjoying the actual productions. Participants also discussed previous directors with nostalgic affection, speaking about them sentimentally and reflecting on their tenure with a pronounced sense of fondness. This is surprising considering that the interviewees did not know the directors personally and enjoyed little, if any, personal interaction with them. Participants emphasized fleeting – but clearly significant – moments, such as when particular directors personally introduced performances or post-show discussions: *'I could sit and listen to him every night. He has such charm, enthusiasm and charisma. He knows how to work a crowd [...] I love it when he's in charge'*.

The overall relationship between the participants and their organizations and work seemed to be largely dictated by their attitude towards their leader. For example, one interviewee felt that her theatre's artistic programme had lost its experimental edge and explained how the move towards a more commercial business model had resulted in less flexibility in buying tickets. However, she did not attribute this to the artistic director, instead praising him for having 'revolutionised' the company. She continued to subscribe to ensure that she did not miss a production, but due to the inflexibility around purchasing tickets, she now 'works her calendar around the theatre dates'. So paradoxically, despite enjoying the performances less, her loyalty had increased and this seemed to be largely dependent on how she felt about the leader. Conversely, interviewees did not spontaneously discuss artistic directors who would conventionally be regarded as less charismatic. If they were mentioned at all, it was generally to state that they had no opinion or impression of them, or to compare them unfavourably with more charismatic leaders. This raises the question of where this might leave those leaders who are less ostensibly charismatic or worse still, completely lacking in charisma.

The meta-analysis highlighted the participants' overriding focus on the individual. From distant audience members and employees through to policymakers and government officials, stakeholders in arts organizations appeared to value charismatic leaders highly and this directly influenced a range of follower behaviour, from engendering loyalty and purchasing theatre tickets to creating policy and awarding funding. Meindl and Thompson define charisma as 'a publicly created persona' and 'a simplified archetypal image that results

from the celebration and romance of leadership' (2005:18). The accounts of charismatic leaders provided by participants in these studies suggest that the art world enjoys celebrating and romanticizing its leaders as much as (if not perhaps even more than) any other sector and exhibits a particular form of fandom that is significantly absent from the extant arts literature.

There was a further revealing synergy between the two unrelated studies. One theatre-goer described Simon Phillips as 'clever, charismatic and naughty', with a 'sense of fun', while the media have revelled in Neil MacGregor's 'delightfully irreverent giggle' (Campbell-Johnston 2008:33). This connection between charisma and irreverence is evocative of the cultural leadership theory, which extols the transgressional leader:

*While political leaders primarily make rules and administrative leaders primarily enforce rules, cultural leaders [...] find principled and imaginative ways to transgress those rules that inhibit the emergence of cultural sovereignty and creativity (Omer 2005, cited in Leicester 2007:18).*

Whilst this suggests that there may be some specificity around charisma within an arts context, Conger and Kanungo (1988) emphasize that charismatic leaders engage in behaviours that are novel, unconventional and counter-normative. They argue that such figures employ unconventional behaviours to transcend the existing social or organizational order. This view not only highlights the 'attributions of special talents and special powers to the leader' (Shamir

1991:90) but once again foregrounds a distinctly Weberian conceptualization of charisma. This raises the question of whether creative-minded followers might prefer (and perhaps even expect) an artistic leader to break the rules. The literature is limited here, since the role of context or organizational environment is under-explored (Beyer 1999). Regardless, it points towards the need for further research into charismatic leadership from a follower perspective and within an arts context.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The neo-charismatic literature reveals that whilst there is much overlap in terms of how charisma is conceptualized, there is a lack of consensus around how it manifests in practice. There is also a lack of agreement as to whether charisma resides in leaders, followers or in the relationship between the two. Furthermore, the theory seems to have developed reductively around somewhat crude dichotomies, such as 'transformational' or 'transactional' and 'personalized' or 'socialized'. Personality traits and behavioural types are rarely so neat; hence a more sophisticated rendering of charisma is required.

In our analysis, charisma in the arts is highly rarefied and depicted as a romanticized social illusion. Arts workers displayed a strong attraction towards, and, at times, a misplaced idolisation of popular arts leaders. This signals a move away from the more recent neo-charismatic literature and a return to a more Weberian conception of extraordinary individuals and exceptionalism. Perhaps more surprisingly, even audiences or 'distant followers' bought into the ideal of charisma and used it to personify (and therefore romanticize) cultural

organizations, regardless of the degree of personal interaction with the leaders themselves, which in some cases was seen as minimal or even non-existent. The latter reveals the potentially insidious dangers of charisma, which can supplant ethics, strategy and reason. Indeed the management literature distils charisma down into something that can be measured and managed; whilst the data presented in this article reveals the less rational side of the concept. To quote Gardner and Avolio, charisma can be a 'potent force' (1998:55) and, as such, it is something that should be wielded ethically and with a high degree of responsibility.

Despite the empirical evidence that charismatic leaders thrive within the arts, this exploratory analysis remains inconclusive on the importance of context in governing culture, expectation, behaviour, communication and values. However, a hypothesis has begun to emerge that suggests that the arts context is both significant and unique. For example, the value of trust, vision and credibility within the arts – and their connections with charisma – have already begun to emerge. Additionally, Bass and Stogdill (1990) point out that in conditions of uncertainty and crisis, followers feel the need for greater direction and guidance. In the current Western arts context, where cultural labour is notoriously precarious (Gill and Pratt, 2008) and public funding continues to decline in light of the present austerity measures, this point is particularly resonant. What is more, if we look to Weber, such instability may actually provide fertile ground for charismatic leaders to emerge and charismatic relationships to flourish. Additionally, arts workers tend to be motivated intrinsically and according to Pastor, Meindl and Mayo (2002), in a transformational leadership process,

leaders and followers transcend their own personal interests for the benefit of higher-order values and principles. These strong, shared values may mean that those in the arts may be particularly susceptible to charismatic leadership, which in turn suggests that context is key to any comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Weber's notion of the extraordinary divine gifts of charismatic individuals presupposes that such figures are rare; yet within the cultural sector, charismatic leaders are commonplace. Since charismatic leadership is rife within the arts, this 'mainstreaming' of charisma may even go against Weberian notions of exceptionalism. It would therefore be fruitful for future studies to focus on gaining a better understanding of the conditions that create and cultivate charisma; and whether what we are witnessing here is charismatic contagion (Gardner and Avolio 1998) or, indeed, whether the observed phenomena represent a veil for something else. For example, this may also be connected to the cult of the personality or the veneration of artistic directors in the creative and cultural sectors. The discipline of sociology and, in particular, theories around power and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), have the potential to provide further explanation and a better understanding in relation to charisma generally, and, in particular, within the arts. Future avenues of enquiry could also seek to analyse the variations within charisma and their different expressions and responses. For example, leaders as rhetoricians and visionaries require further exploration, as do specific phenomena such as magnetism and fandom. This would assist in developing a more sophisticated understanding of charisma that avoided the binary traps created and replicated by the literature.



Although charisma has perhaps been overstated and overrated in the neo-charismatic paradigm, in the arts context at least, it has clearly not lost its Weberian connotations of exceptional individuals, who have the ability to challenge authority and upset the status quo – as manifest in the depiction of transgressional leaders who were described and portrayed as ‘naughty’ and ‘irreverent’. This emerging and ambivalent evidence demonstrates that there is much more work to be done if scholars are to truly understand the phenomenon of charisma, its application within the cultural sector, and its genuine long-term implications for arts management and cultural leadership.

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