

LEADERS AND THEIR CHARISMA

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***Abstract:** Leaders play a particular role in any field of activity that is why transformation process should take it in too. A leader’s charisma means more than an image because it generates the power that musters the followers’ desire for realizing the leader vision. Charisma has a dual nature because it is usually associated with power which sometimes corrupts and destroys the leaders. A leader with charisma but without integrity becomes a negative character. A successful leader is that one who “makes investments in the future”.*

***Keywords:** leadership, charisma, transformation, vision, team spirit, decision process.*

1. WHAT IS CHARISMA?

Dual nature of charisma has given rise to various opinions about its substance and definition which cover both image-making (what Anglo-Saxons call “appearance” or “look”) and deeper aspects going beyond the image and reflecting the human personality. No reputable specialist will define charisma as personal charm raised from the attractive features of the face and physical qualities.

There still is implemented in the subconscious of most of us the association between physical beauty and angels, which cannot be otherwise than good. On this line, the most relevant are, probably, Romanian fairy-tales where heroes are Prince Charming and Cinderella. It is also true that heroes of the Romanian fairy-tales are **characters**, people who fight for ideals and principles, without giving up their dignity and honor in order to upstart or to get material benefits. At the same time, they feel compassion for their neighbors, try to understand and help them, join them in their suffering, and usually they win the fight with evil forces just because they are pure, unselfish, strong – mainly morally – and do not give up on fighting until reaching the goals they aim at.

Therefore, a beautiful image (charm) is only a component of charisma, meant to make

a good impression which is to be confirmed by the other individual qualities designed to energize the followers, to muster up their optimism and draw them into realizing the vision (ideal, program, objective etc.).

Charisma dual nature originates in human nature which has contradictory sides. This aspect of dualism may be found both in ordinary people and leaders. Ordinary people seem too concerned of their problems and are not always willing to look beyond appearances, or image. This is why there are so many people for whom the first impression is that it counts. They follow their instincts, the emotion aroused by a charismatic character at their first meeting through a simple hand-shaking, few words exchanged or just as a result of a speech during a public event. Most frequently the first impression is influenced by the environment.

Based on these aspects and also on other aspects not so relevant but capable of determining the extent of the impact a leader’s charisma may have on the public opinion, a new subject of study appeared – science of using images – and a new profession – public image specialist.

A public image specialist is generally an expert in mass psychology who analyses the character whose image has to be improved, surveys the community to be influenced and

develops the strategy to follow. After completing the study, image specialist finds out the community expectations, problems it has to face, educational level of its members etc.

Following the study of “audience” (community, organization etc.), image specialist puts a plan of meetings with community representatives and members to the leader suggesting him topics to be approached, solutions to community problems, proper behavior on different occasions, appearance (haircut, clothing, shoes), gestures, facial expression etc.

Excessive concern about creating a favorable image associated with character features is the most important criteria generating the dual nature of charisma. Thus, a leader with negative qualities will be interested in a favorable public image and, therefore, will show “the man we need”, “man of Providence”, etc. But such a leader only pursues his own interests in his secret plans. Such individuals are referred to as “two-faced” (like Shakespeare’s Jago or Bareface in Romanian popular tales) and they reveal their purposes only when they think nobody and nothing can touch their interests.

One of the most interesting descriptions of charisma dual nature belongs to Patricia Sellers who said: “*Charisma is a tricky thing. Jack Kennedy oozed it – but so did Hitler and Charles Manson. Con artists, charlatans and megalomaniacs can make it their instrument as effective as the best CEOs, entertainers and presidents. Used wisely, it’s a blessing. Indulged, it can be a curse. Charismatic visionaries lead people ahead – and sometimes astray*” (Sellers, 1996).

2. CHARISMA AND LEADERS

One of the tendencies in leadership modern theory is the attempt to shift away the emphasis from the leaders toward the **relationship leader-performers** and team spirit which leaders should encourage (Rose, 1993:102). From this perspective, the leader role is subjected to slight changes because he should rule from inside the team and the team members should feel him like one of them.

This type of leadership is not easy to accept and adopt for a traditional charismatic leader and especially for a leader of hierarchical structures like military ones because he has got into the habit of being the “leader”, “commander”, “chief” or “boss.”

Although the servicemen are often labeled as rigid and conservative, there are numerous examples of military commanders who knew how to approach their subordinates, to motivate, encourage and lead them to fulfill the assigned missions.

A significant role in building the team spirit is taken by mutual trust based on training, common values such as honor, dignity, responsibility, integrity, mutual respect grounded in a system of relationships which “*should not necessarily be either that between a superior and a subordinate, or master and servant, or teacher and student*” (Cohen, 2001:79), as Lieutenant General John A. Lejeune, US Marines, declared.

It is obvious that lack of formalism (a non-rigid attitude) in commander (chief) – subordinates relationship will be beneficial to working environment by reducing the stress specific to rigid hierarchical relationships. On the other hand, commander (chief) should not be the “good guy” who ignores defaults and disorder just to gain in popularity. It is a firm obligation for any leader, pre-eminently a military one, to demand his people to obey the law and specific regulations. Actually, a real leader must be a good example, justified when saying “Do as I do!”

A charismatic leader is that who succeeds in turning his native qualities to a good account in order to influence (inspire) people, to find the shortest way to their minds and hearts, to discover those hidden triggers inside the human beings which activate and use unanticipated resources of energy, initiative and inventiveness. This enables ordinary people to be encouraged and get adequate support in topping their part and achieving goals, even at personal level, that they would never reach by themselves.

A charismatic leader should have the power to persuade those whom he leads that the distance between the starting point (initiation of an activity, program, plan etc.)

and the arriving one (goal) is shorter than it seems. Thus, people self-confidence increases; they do not feel weak, helpless, inefficient or self-conscious any more, and prove superior capabilities to those they show in an environment less favorable to displaying initiative and innovation.

As far as military area is concerned, self-consciousness and fear may be eliminated through knowledge and training leading to competence, performance and unity of concepts and actions.

All these qualities may be achieved through hard work and first-class training (Cohen, 2001:136), the latter leading to physical and particularly mental status improvement, i.e. a mentality of a winner who is "able to make the difference" by shifting the victory balance in favor of those most determined to win (Rourke, 1991:231).

It is almost a truism to say a leader needs a vision, but this should be more than creative imagination and good intentions because, to achieve something important, experience, tenacity, competence, courage and a winner mentality are required. A successful leader must be creative, animated by good intentions and, at the same time, must have the ability to assess new trends in his area of expertise, know his own and his subordinate structure capabilities, forecast evolving environmental tendencies and set realistic goals and timetables for them.

A well-known military leader in leadership theory said "*there are no bad organizations but bad leaders*" (Marshall, 1996:252). A similar point of view comes from antiquity, from Philip of Macedonia who considered "*an army of stags led by a lion is more dreadful than an army of lions led by a stag*" (Cohen, 2001:80).

An insight into the gallery of the greatest personalities of the world will show us that all leaders of high caliber had and still have something in common: charisma. The way they use their charisma and individual qualities, make their personality unique.

The American President **Abraham Lincoln** had a distinctive personality thanks to his moral strength. Although in the 19th century media and information transfer

technology were not so advanced, Lincoln made his mark through his imposing stature (almost 2m), his baritone voice, ability to address the large bodies of people and progressive ideas he advanced. Due to his strength of character proved by his deeds, tenacity in pursuing his creed - slaves emancipation and human rights - he succeeded in gaining people admiration and respect. The ideas he promoted and followed made him many enemies whose interests were to maintain slavery.

They strongly believed that physically eliminating President Lincoln would have led to slavery re-establishment that is why abolitionism hostile forces paid a murderer who shot him while at the theatre, shortly after the Civil War

Winston Churchill, British prime minister during World War II, was skilled at eloquence and persuasive discourse. Animated by his desire to focus British efforts on supporting the fight against German Nazism in its full expansion, Sir Churchill shifted the feeling of frustration, even treachery, caused by French capitulation in June 1940, to pride. Restoring the British self-confidence and dignity to go on fighting and even die to prevent Nazis from conquering their country, the prime minister gained the British adherence to his vision and made them endure extreme privation, scarcity and German bombing and led them to victory in "Battle of Britain" (Julian, 1968:264).

Charismatic leaders have normally a strong will, courage to take risks and ability to make their visions known in few words that may express an easy-to-perceive and comprehensive enough impetus to people from various social categories.

Such a personality was American pastor **Martin Luther King**, who succeeded in mobilizing millions of people, both black and white, with his "*I have a dream*" speech against racism. His dream became true but, similar to President Lincoln, King lost his life for daring to rise against Ku-Klux-Klan and apartheid followers.

Among those remarkable leaders tragically ending just because they wished their dream come true **Mohandas Gandhi** must also be retained. Most of the people remember him as

Mahatma (the Great) Gandhi. He militated for human rights (abolishment of apartheid) and India's independence through passive resistance (ahimsa) and soul strength (satyagraha) (Knauer, 1996:53). However the movement he led drove them to victory, the result was independence without unity because the British Crown made the decision to create two states: India, where most of the population is Hindu, and Pakistan where most of the population is Muslim. This outcome drew extremists to hate him and one of them, Hindu Rashtra newspaper editor, shot Gandhi.

Charisma dual nature is easier to notice when studying negative leaders' evolution. They have qualities that support them in their efforts to become famous, even to lead a nation. Unfortunately, their abilities and skills are only employed to fulfill their vanity – get the power. At the beginning of their development some of these leaders militated for noble goals such as: liberty, equality, democracy but after getting the power they turned the political regimes in their countries into personal dictatorships (Stalin, Mao, Castro (Accoce, Rentchnick, 2000:28-31)), promoting the cult of personality and murdering their political opponents (Pol Pot, Duvalier (Accoce, Rentchnick, 2000: 153-162), Sukarno) in the name of some noble ideals.

3. TRANSFORMATION OF LEADERS

In this century of transformation and information, traditional leader and pyramidal decision-making structures (rigidly hierarchical) have to adjust to the new trends. The course of transformation is given first of all by promoting a new type of relationships between the leader and those to be led similar to a partnership. At a first glance it seems nonsense that the leading individual be a partner of those to be led but only if traditionally (i.e. rigid hierarchy) approach the subject. Considering the current theory of leadership in its spirit, **team work** and **authority delegation** enable the partnership between a chief and his subordinates.

Team work has been often blamed during the communist epoch due to its association to lack of effectiveness and responsibility (there still subsist in some of us minds the idea that “if you want a goal not to be fulfilled then assign the task to a working group (!)” Team work makes goal achievement fail unless animated by the team spirit which is mainly defined by working together as colleagues, competence and wish to reach high performance.

Team spirit is not to be mistaken for caste spirit, gang spirit or fraternization (The Military Commander and the Law, 1998: 101-104). This spirit is based on a new approach of the relationships within a collectivity (organization, military structure) focused on efficient goal accomplishment, not on formalism or rigid hierarchy.

Leader partnership with those to be led does not mean to deny (turn upside down) hierarchy by diminishing the due respect to the leader (commander) or the leader to give up his prerogative.

This new type of relationships aims at improving communication, increasing permeability of hierarchical barriers by giving the performers a better access to the leaders and a faster exchange of opinions. To communicate strictly through hierarchical channels is time-consuming and frequently leads to opportunity loss.

Time has always been a barometer for effectiveness and, therefore, shortening the information-decision cycle will allow sooner and faster debates on and achievement of new projects. The more rings decision-making chain has, the longer time is wasted through hierarchical bureaucracy. Any delay could cause critical effects, particularly during warfare.

In general, “*an efficient leader correlates subordinates' and organization objectives*” (Organizational Behavior and Human Resources Management, 2002:32). On the other hand, “*subordinates will reject a leader whose behavior is perceived as useless and who does not support them*” (Organizational Behavior and Human Resources Management, 2002:32).

Any individual needs certain independence when accomplishing his job. The leaders take active part into personality, responsibility and initiative developments of those whom they lead through partnership and authority delegation.

Understanding and especially a proper application of centralized command and decentralized execution principles will be a significant step forward in transforming the leader and execution personnel mindset. It has been already proven that information blowup may cause decision-making mechanism to be overloaded or blocked unless a pre-selection of information is done. Any individual who is part of the organization (community, military structure), not only the leading team, should perform such a selection. Information “filtering” by leading team only could act like a brake, and that is why delegation of authority and assignment of responsibility to every employee is required. Some information has to be submitted directly to the leader if it critically impacts on the course of action. Consequently, communication channels should be established thus enabling information to be timely delivered to the decision-maker by using real-time collection, processing and transmission technology. Particularly when dealing with military operations, information delivery and decision-making in due time may lead to victory or prevent casualties. Otherwise, fights, battles or even wars may be lost and, implicitly, many human lives.

Transformation of leaders and leadership in general entails both to reconsider the relational system between the members of the organization (military structure) and to re-assess their competence. To this end, delegation of authority will eliminate micromanagement and sometimes almost functional dependency between the leader and his subordinates. When approaching leadership this way, the leader bears major responsibilities in developing the vision and the strategy for it (that well-known phrase WHAT MUST BE DONE) and subsequently in evaluating evolutionary trends of those factors that may act upon his area of activity as well as adjusting the strategy, if required. Another important responsibility of the leaders

is to ensure the correlation between objectives and allocated resources and to adjust objectives in the event that those resources significantly change in amount.

Leaders’ style should be dominated by **flexibility** to allow permanent adaptation to situations and by **determination** in pursuit of the objectives. Maintaining the objectives makes the operation and perspective more substantial and coherent but they may change if initial data basically change.

The leaders should not take over the subordinates’ right of deciding how to accomplish the assigned objectives (Guidelines for Command, Air University Press, 2003:25) but have the obligation to control their activity in order to evaluate the implementation status of the strategy, plans, and programs, and to intervene, if required, for improving efficiency, reset timescales, or re-ordering priorities.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Traditional leader mainly differs from that leader who is to control transformation of the military by the way they approach the leading process. The first places the emphasis on individual leading while the latter bases on a team and has also responsibilities in facilitating the process conducted within the structure (organization) he (she) leads, as well as in motivating and stimulating his staff to improve their knowledge and skills and become proficient. Partnership with subordinates and team work do not exonerate the military leader of responsibility. It is him who makes major decisions and controls their implementation. But, taking advantage of a larger participation of his subordinates in information or in decision-making process as well as in identifying the solutions to increase their work effectiveness, it will be easier for him to reach a more durable **unity of concept and action**.

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