

Leadership in the College Classroom: The Use of Charismatic Leadership as a Deterrent to Student Resistance Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relation between teachers' charismatic leadership (i.e., strategic vision and articulation, sensitivity to the environment, sensitivity to members' needs, personal risk, unconventional behavior) in college classroom environments and resulting student resistance strategies. Participants were 165 college students who completed a survey and reported on their tendency to use resistance strategies in the classroom and their teachers' use of charismatic leadership behavior. Results of a canonical correlation analysis indicated that charismatic leadership is significantly and inversely related to both teacher-owned and student-owned resistance behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Instructors employ a variety of behaviors in the classroom that help foster a positive learning environment for their pupils (Nussbaum, 1992). While there are a number of teacher behaviors that affect student learning outcomes, of interest in the current study is the notion of what teachers can do as leaders to influence their students. The idea that teachers can serve their students through leadership roles is not a new one. In their examination of teacher behavior in the classroom, Baba and Ace (1989) mentioned that "existing leadership theory might be applicable in the university classroom to enhance teaching effectiveness" (p. 509). Since then, research on teacher leadership and its effects on students has elucidated a variety of relations between teacher behaviors and student

outcomes. Among other things, these results indicate that leadership behavior in the classroom is positively related to cognitive learning, affective learning, motivation, communication satisfaction, and participation (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009), student involvement (Harvey, Royal, & Stout, 2003), and students' extra effort, perceived instructor effectiveness, and student satisfaction (Pounder, 2008).

Although research on leadership in college classrooms has recently begun to take shape (e.g., Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Pounder, 2006; Harvey et al., 2003; Walumbwa, Wu, & Ojode, 2004) scholars have yet to explore the link between the notion of *charismatic* leadership in the classroom and student outcomes. Moreover, the research on leadership in the classroom that does exist typically examines its effect on positive student behaviors, such as extra effort (Pounder, 2008) and participation (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009). What has yet to be studied is how leadership behaviors in general, and charismatic leadership, specifically, can deter potentially disruptive student behaviors in the college classroom.

RATIONALE

Charismatic Leadership

According to Conger and Kanungo (1994), charismatic leadership "is an attribution based on followers' perceptions of their leader's behavior" (p. 442) and the central difference between charismatic leaders and other leaders is their "ability to formulate and articulate an inspirational vision and by behaviors and actions that foster an impression that they and their mission are

extraordinary” (p. 442). Charismatic leaders are agents that bring about change through their behaviors, and followers are “influenced largely by perceptions of the leader’s extraordinary qualities” (Conger, 1999, p. 157). Subsequently, “charisma must be viewed as an attribution made by followers who observe certain behaviors on the part of the leader” (Conger & Kanungo, 1987, p. 639). These behaviors are the constellation of five components including: (a) sensitivity to the environment, (b) sensitivity to members’ needs, (c) strategic vision and articulation, (d) personal risk, and finally, (e) unconventional behavior (Rowold & Laukamp, 2009).

Proponents of charismatic leadership report that it functions as a process with three distinct stages. These are the environmental assessment stage (stage one), the vision formulation stage (stage two), and the implementation stage (stage three). In stage one, charismatic leaders demonstrate their sensitivity to organizational opportunities and followers’ needs (Conger & Kanungo, 1994). In this stage, charismatic leaders use their sensitivity to the abilities and needs of their followers and to the resources and constraints in the environment. Leaders use these assessments to promote a change in the status quo (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). In stage two, leaders articulate a vision of an idealized future and do so in an inspirational fashion to push an organization toward some end goal (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). This goal is typically perceived by followers to be extraordinary, yet attractive and achievable. By articulating this goal, leaders both motivate and challenge subordinates toward change. Finally, in stage three of the leadership process, leaders act as examples and lead by making sacrifices for the good of their subordinates and taking risks for the benefit of their organizations.

In the past, charismatic leadership has been reported to stem from referent and expert power (as opposed to legitimate, coercive, or reward power; Conger & Kanungo, 1987) and has been associated with a variety of positive outcomes for organizations. These outcomes include indirect associations with employee trust, satisfaction, and empowerment, and direct associations with employee reverence in a leader, perceived group performance, and collective identity (Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000). Charismatic leadership has also been associated with subordinates’ positive affect at work (Erez, Johnson, Misanugi, LePine, & Halverson, 2008) and their sense of belongingness to the organization (Den Hartog, De Hoogh, & Keegan, 2007). Moreover, charismatic leadership has been associated with more objective measures of organizational success, as well. For example, Rowold and Laukamp (2009) found associations with charismatic leader-

ship and employee development, organizational profit, and a lack of absenteeism. Other studies have found that charismatic leadership is associated with cooperative organizational behaviors (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002), such as subordinates’ willingness to help others in the organization and their willingness to comply with the rules of the organization (Den Hartog et al., 2007).

The studies mentioned above seem to indicate that the behaviors of leaders can influence subordinate activities by promoting desirable behavior and restricting undesirable behavior. It is our contention that the same thing may be true in college environments. Some studies have found that organizational theories of leadership are applicable in the classroom (e.g., Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Pounder, 2008). Perhaps by employing certain leadership behaviors in the classroom, teachers, as leaders, can build learning environments that are associated with student development in general and student compliance in specific. Therefore, this study was designed to examine how charismatic leadership influences students’ use of resistance strategies in the college classroom.

Student Resistance

Student resistance strategies reflect the types of behaviors students employ to resist their instructors’ influence attempts and can be thought of as off-task behaviors, misbehaviors, or behaviors that reflect disobedience (Burroughs, Kearney, & Plax, 1989). Student resistance strategies were originally conceptualized as 19 compliance-resisting strategies, which function as either constructive or destructive activities, depending on their impact on “on-task” behaviors. Kearney, Plax, and Burroughs (1991) revealed that the 19 types of student resistance behaviors could be condensed into two factors representing teacher-owned resistance strategies and student-owned resistance strategies. Teacher-owned resistance strategies reflect the behaviors students enact when they consider teachers to be the source of interference with their classroom needs and objectives, whereas student-owned strategies reflect behaviors students enact when they perceive themselves to be at fault (Kearney et al., 1991). The teacher-owned resistance strategies include teacher advice (e.g., communicating a desire for change in teacher behavior), teacher blame (e.g., criticizing the teacher), appealing to powerful others (e.g., communicating to higher authorities who are capable of solving a student’s problem with a teacher), modeling teacher behavior (e.g., using similar negative behaviors that a teacher uses in the classroom), and modeling teacher affect (e.g., mimicking a teacher’s attitude about

the classroom). The student-owned strategies include deception (e.g., lying to the teacher or pretending to comply), ignoring the teacher (e.g., continuing to perform a behavior by neglecting the teacher's request), priorities (e.g., explaining that other academic obligations are more important), hostile defensiveness (e.g., using hostile communication to challenge a compliance request), and student rebuttal (e.g., arguing with a teacher to refute the request using evidence).

Previous research has associated student resistance with both teachers' behaviors and students' outcomes. For example, student resistance has been linked to a lack of instructors' procedural justice (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004), a lack of interactional justice (Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005), instructors' use of anti-social behavioral alteration techniques (Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2004), and instructors' use of nonverbal immediacy (Burroughs et al., 1989; Kearney et al., 1991; Burroughs, 2007). Student resistance behaviors affect student learning outcomes as well. For instance, student resistance behaviors have been empirically linked to diminished cognitive learning and affective learning (e.g., Burroughs, 2007). Previous investigations of student resistance make it clear that instructors' behaviors influence these activities and that these resistance activities are detrimental to student learning. Therefore, it is our contention that an important addition to the literature is an investigation into the types of leadership behaviors that might limit this activity. Research suggests that teachers who misbehave or use antisocial forms of power will increase teacher and student owned resistance (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009; Plax, Kearney, Downs, & Stewart, 1986). Because students' decisions to resist their instructors are a function of teachers' behaviors (Kearney et al., 1991) and because charismatic leadership has been reported to be associated with cooperative organizational behaviors (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002) and also with subordinates' willingness to comply with the rules of the organization (Den Hartog et al., 2007), it is likely that teachers who promote charismatic leadership will de-motivate students to use resistance strategies in the classroom. Therefore, the following hypothesis is forwarded:

H: Teachers' charismatic leadership (i.e., strategic vision and articulation, sensitivity to the environment, sensitivity to members' needs, personal risk, unconventional behavior) will be related inversely to students' use of both teacher-owned and student-owned resistance strategies.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Participants ($N = 165$) were recruited from a mid-sized Eastern University to take part in this study in exchange for minimal extra credit. Participants were enlisted from eight upper and lower communication studies classes and were instructed to respond to the items on their questionnaires as they referred to the teachers from the classes immediately prior to data collection (Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986). Participants were instructed to provide the initials of the instructor to ensure procedures were followed. Data collection occurred in the last two weeks of the semester to ensure certain participants were familiar with their instructors. Our sample was comprised of 64 men and 101 women with ages ranging from 18 to 30 ($M = 19.95$, $SD = 1.72$).

Measurement

The *Revised Conger and Kanungo Scale of Charismatic Leadership* was taken from Conger, Kanungo, Menon, and Mathur (1997) and adapted for a classroom scenario (e.g., items such as "Provides inspiring strategic and organizational goals" were adapted to read "Provides inspiring strategic and classroom goals"). This measure contains 20 items with five subscales tapping people's perceptions of others: strategic vision and articulation (seven items: e.g., "Inspirational; able to motivate by articulating the importance of what class members are doing"), sensitivity to the environment (four items: e.g., "Recognizes the limitations of students in the class"), sensitivity to members' needs (three items: e.g., "Often expresses personal concern for the needs and feelings of members of the class"), personal risk (three items: e.g., "Often incurs high personal cost for the good of the class"), and unconventional behavior (three items: e.g., "Uses non-traditional means to achieve class goals"). Previous studies have used both six-point (e.g., Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000) and five-point response formats (e.g., Rowold & Laukamp, 2009). Responses in this study followed a five-point Likert format and ranged from (0) *strongly disagree* to (4) *strongly agree*. Alpha reliabilities for the subscales were as follows: strategic vision and articulation ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.04$), sensitivity to the environment ($\alpha = .87$, $M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.00$), sensitivity to members' needs ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.12$), personal risk ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 1.51$, $SD = .99$), unconventional behavior ($\alpha = .85$, $M = 1.36$, $SD = 1.05$).

Table 1*Canonical Correlation Analysis*

Variable	Canonical Loadings
Set 1: Teachers' Charismatic Leadership	
Strategic Vision and Articulation	.96
Sensitivity to the Environment	.78
Sensitivity to Members' Needs	.92
Personal Risk	.61
Unconventional Behavior	.42
Redundancy Coefficient	[.59]
Set 2: Student Resistance Strategies	
Teacher-Owned Resistance	-.97
Student-Owned Resistance	-.77
Redundancy Coefficient	[.19]

Note: Wilk's $\Lambda = .74$, $F(10, 316) = 5.04$, $p < .001$

The *Student Resistance Scale* (Burroughs et al., 1989) includes 10 items with five items measuring students' propensity to use teacher-owned resistance behaviors (i.e., offer the instructor advice on teaching; tell the instructor he/she is boring; complain to the department chair about the instructor; tell the instructor that I would make more effort in class if he/she did too; and tell the instructor that if he/she does not care about me, why should I care about him/her) and five items measuring students' propensity to use student-owned resistance behaviors (i.e., deceive the instructor; ignore the instructor's requests; tell the instructor I have other priorities than his/her class; tell the instructor that my behavior is my business; argue that I do not need the instructor's advice). Responses were solicited using a Likert-type format ranging from (0) *extremely unlikely* to (4) *extremely likely*. Cronbach's alpha reliability for the two scales were as follows: teacher-owned resistance ($\alpha = .78$, $M = .74$, $SD = .77$), student-owned resistance ($\alpha = .86$, $M = .70$, $SD = .80$).

RESULTS

We conducted a canonical correlation analysis to examine our hypothesis. The five components of charismatic leadership (i.e., strategic vision and articulation, sensitivity to the environment, sensitivity to members' needs, personal risk, unconventional behavior) were combined to form the first set of variables, and the two student resistance types (i.e., teacher-owned resistance and student-owned resistance) were combined

to form the second set. We discovered one significant root (see Table 1). In support of Hypothesis 1, these results show that when students perceive their instructors to articulate a strategic vision, to be sensitive to the learning environment and the needs of the class, and – to a lesser extent – when students perceive their instructors to take personal risks and demonstrate unconventional behavior for the good of the class, they are less likely to resist their instructors ($R_c = .24$; see Table 1).

DISCUSSION

Generally speaking, our results indicate that charismatic leadership can work as a deterrent to student behavior that resists their instructors' influence attempts. In particular, our results indicate that sensitivity to members' needs, sensitivity to the environment, and strategic vision articulation, are the behaviors of charismatic leadership most strongly associated with student resistance behaviors. Although not as strongly associated, personal risk and unconventional behavior were also negatively associated with student resistance behaviors.

Despite the notion that effective leadership in organizations has been studied for some time, the idea of applying leadership theories to classroom settings has only recently begun to take shape. The current study adds to this body of knowledge by indicating that charismatic leadership is an important classroom management technique insofar as it can work to deter student resistance behaviors. This study corroborates previous findings that suggest the behavior of teachers can serve as a powerful motivator of student behavior in the classroom and it adds to the literature on instructional communication by articulating a set of behaviors that are associated with decreased student resistance.

Although the results of our study indicate that charismatic leadership is associated with a reduction in students' self-reported resistance behaviors, we still do not know why this may be the case. A study conducted by Groves (2005) may shed some light on the relationship which includes the notion that charismatic leadership may be influential in the college classroom due to its ability to influence students' openness to change. In a study of business environments, Groves (2005) demonstrated that openness to organizational change mediated the effect of charismatic leadership on leadership effectiveness. The researcher reported that followers of charismatic leaders were more open to organizational change and also had a more positive outlook regarding that change compared to

subordinates with non-charismatic leaders. Groves suggested that the ability to foster openness to organizational change could be one of the reasons that charismatic leaders are able to overcome resistance. Thus, if students can be made more open to changes in their environment based on the behaviors of a charismatic teacher, they may be less likely to resist the influence attempts of their instructors.

Charismatic leadership may be enacted through a variety of actions; however, two sets of behaviors may be particularly important for would-be classroom leaders. Recall that charismatic leadership was a constellation of five leader behaviors, including strategic vision and articulation, sensitivity to the environment, sensitivity to members' needs, personal risk, and unconventional behavior. According to Groves (2005), these behaviors are a function of leaders' social and emotional skills. This designation is an important one as it illustrates the significance of charismatic leaders' social and emotional intelligence (Groves, 2005). In specific, Groves reports that social control (i.e., the ability for a person to adjust "behavior to fit with what they consider to be appropriate to any given social situation;" Riggio, 1986, p. 651) is an important contributing factor to subordinates' perceptions of charismatic leadership. According to Riggio (1987), social control is reflected in the behavior of individuals who can play a variety of social roles and who are also "tactful and socially adept" (p. 38). Because our findings suggest that charismatic teachers can help deter student resistance strategies (which have been found to detract from both cognitive and affective learning), our results may indicate that while it is important for instructors to be competent in their subject matter, it is also important for them to be competent in social interaction. As Groves (2005) suggests, "leaders must be adept in social situations and adjust their behavior to the changing dynamics of the work group" (p. 273). The same is undoubtedly true for college instructors. Instructors need to be sensitive to the needs of their students and to the context of their interactions to ensure that their classroom behavior fits within the expectations of their students. For example, this may be reflected in teacher behavior that favors flexibility over rigidity and behavior that reflects concern for students as opposed to disregard, two behaviors that have been associated with detrimental teaching practices in the past (Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991).

Second, instructors should be aware of their nonverbal delivery in the classroom as it relates to charismatic leadership. This conclusion is corroborated by research indicating that charismatic leadership is often associated with – and predicted by – behaviors similar to communi-

cation scholars' operationalization of nonverbal immediacy (e.g., Groves, 2005; Holladay & Coombs, 1994). For example, Groves reports that emotional expressivity (i.e., "animated" and "energetic individuals" who can express emotional states, attitudes, and cues of interpersonal orientation "spontaneously and accurately;" Riggio, 1986, p. 651) is a central component of charismatic leadership. Holladay and Coombs (1994) report that the delivery of a message (e.g., eye contact and vocal variety) has a bigger impact than the content of a message, as it relates to perceptions of leader charisma. Furthermore, Burroughs et al. (1989) indicated that when teachers are more immediate, students tend to use less resistance strategies and subsequent analyses have lent support to this notion (e.g., Kearney et al., 1991; Burroughs, 2007). Thus, one of the reasons that charismatic leadership may be beneficial in the college classroom is because it utilizes effective delivery techniques (i.e., nonverbal immediacy), which instructors would be wise to utilize.

As with most studies our investigation is not without limitations. Our results are limited due to the scope of our investigation. That is, our study only examined how charismatic leadership is associated with student resistance behaviors. Therefore, conclusions about the benefits of charismatic leadership in the classroom beyond their association with student resistance remain untested. Other theories of leadership (e.g., transformational leadership) have been studied with more rigor in the college classroom and, unlike those studies, results from our investigation cannot speak to the general impact of charismatic leadership on general student learning outcomes. In addition, our study suffered from a relatively small sample size taken from a single university. Although the results may reflect the sentiments of the sample we tested, it is unclear if these results would replicate across a different sample of individuals.

Future research in this area may want to more fully examine the impact of charismatic leadership in a college classroom environment. For example, charismatic leadership may be investigated to determine whether it can impact student cognitive learning, affective learning, motivation, participation, and communication satisfaction. In addition to deterring potentially disruptive behavior, future research may want to investigate the positive function of charismatic leadership in the classroom. Future researchers may also consider delineating the differences between charismatic leadership and transformational leadership more clearly. Although Yukl (1999) asserts that the two ideas are conceptually distinct, future research

may want to elucidate those distinctions in a classroom environment. Finally, future researchers may consider examining charismatic leadership as it relates to known beneficial teaching behaviors in college and K-12 classrooms. It may be important for future researchers to demonstrate that charismatic leadership contributes unique explanatory power to our knowledge of how teacher behaviors influence student learning. College teachers need to be aware that students do view them as potential lead-

ers and role models and that classroom communication is not merely a transactional process where teachers lecture and students merely listen. Rather, teachers who are viewed by students as charismatic appear to be promoting effective and engaging instruction, which in turn, discourages students from resisting their compliance-gaining attempts. Teachers who desire a comfortable and supportive classroom without student hassles might reflect on their use of charismatic leadership with students.

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