Charismatic leadership viewed from above: the impact of proactive personality

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Summary

We tested hypotheses regarding the relationship between proactive personality and perceptions of charismatic leadership. A sample of 156 managers completed measures of proactive personality along with measures of the five-factor model of personality and other individual differences. The managers' immediate supervisors rated their charismatic leadership and in-role behavior. Results suggest that self-reported proactive personality is positively associated with supervisors' independent ratings of charismatic leadership. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that proactive personality accounts for variance in a manager's charismatic leadership above and beyond that accounted for by an array of control variables (the Big Five personality factors, in-role behavior, and social desirability). Copyright © 2000 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

The concept of charisma has long been used in the social sciences to describe extraordinary leaders and leadership (House and Baetz, 1979). Charisma helps explain the effectiveness of a variety of political, religious, and social leaders (Conger and Kanungo, 1987). Organizational researchers argue that charismatic leadership can be found in business organizations as well (e.g., Bass, 1990; Conger and Kanungo, 1987; House, 1977), although there is disagreement on specific terms and theoretical treatments. This genre of leadership has been referred to as charismatic (Conger and Kanungo, 1987; House, 1977; Weber, 1947), transformational (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978), and inspirational (Yukl and Van Fleet, 1982). Charisma is a central component of all of these conceptualizations (House and Howell, 1992), and is the focus of the present research.

Until recently, little empirical research examined charismatic leadership. Bass (1990) suggested that this was because of the mistaken assumption that charisma is a rare phenomenon that cannot be validly measured. But charismatic leadership is found in varying degrees in managers throughout the organizational hierarchy; it is not limited to world-class leaders (House, 1977;

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Bass, 1985; 1990). And psychometrically-sound measures of charismatic leadership are now available (e.g., Conger and Kanungo, 1994) to further enhance the utility of more concerted efforts to uncover its predictors and consequences.

Based on the work of Conger and Kanungo (1987), we consider charismatic leadership as an attribution based on observers' perceptions of a leader's behavior. Charismatic leaders differ from other leaders by their ability to formulate and articulate an inspirational vision and by exhibiting actions that create an impression that they and their mission are extraordinary (Conger and Kanungo, 1994; 1987). Charismatic leadership results in positive follower outcomes, such as heightened motivation, job satisfaction, and performance (House and Howell, 1992; Shamir, 1991).

The study reported here departs from most previous leadership research by assessing leadership perceptions from above—that is, the leadership attributions made about managers by the managers' bosses. People at higher organizational levels, such as bosses, continuously make judgments about their subordinates, and distribute valued outcomes based on those judgments (Feldman, 1981; Freedman and Montanari, 1980). Whereas most research on person categorization (Feldman, 1981) has focused on the job performance domain, other important attributions from above potentially affect reward allocations, relationships, and careers (Shore, Barksdale and Shore, 1995). Empirical evidence has demonstrated that charismatic leaders are viewed by their bosses as higher performers than less charismatic leaders (Hater and Bass, 1988). In reviewing the literature on the effectiveness of transformational leaders, House, Woycke and Fodor (1988) concluded that transformational leaders are rated more frequently by superiors as having potential for advancement and excellent ability to manage. Thus, it is important to understand the predictors of supervisors' perceptions of their subordinates' leadership.

**Predictors of charismatic leadership**

Several theoretical models and empirical studies have sought to identify the predictors of subordinates' perceptions of charismatic leadership. Much of this work has focused on personality as a key factor differentiating charismatic from non-charismatic leaders. In their review of the literature, House and Howell (1992) concluded that there is support for the general proposition that personality traits differentiate charismatic leaders from non-charismatic leaders. Relevant traits include prosocial assertiveness, creativity and innovation, risk-seeking propensity, self-confidence, social sensitivity, and sensitivity to follower needs (House and Howell, 1992).

A number of non-personality-based predictors of perceived charismatic leadership have also been identified. House's (1977) theory suggested that charismatic leaders are likely to engage in impression management behaviors in order to create impressions of competence, to set an example by their own behavior, and to set high expectations for follower performance. Charismatic leadership is positively associated with ratings of the leader's ability and in-role behavior (Hater and Bass, 1988; Yammarino and Bass, 1989), expressive behavior such as non-verbal cues (Friedman et al., 1980), activity levels (Maranell, 1970), and eloquence (Bass, 1990).

Thus, research has identified a number of personality-based and behavioral predictors of perceived charismatic leadership. Our goal in the present research is to extend this literature by examining the extent to which leaders' proactive personality contributes to others' attributions of charismatic leadership, after controlling for a set of personality and non-personality based predictors. This aim is consistent with recent pleas for more research into the characteristics

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distinguishing charismatic from non-charismatic leaders (e.g., Dubinsky, Yammarino and Jolson, 1995; House and Howell, 1992).

Proactive personality

The proactive personality (Bateman and Crant, 1993) may be an important predictor of charismatic leadership. Managers, leaders, and people in general differ in their proclivity to take action to influence their environment (Bateman and Crant, 1993). This personal disposition toward proactive behavior distinguishes empirically among individuals, and predicts an array of behaviors and observer attributions. People who are proactive effect environmental change; they identify opportunities and act on them, show initiative, and persevere until they bring about meaningful change. They transform their organization’s mission, find and solve problems, and take it upon themselves to have an impact on the world around them. Less proactive people show little initiative, tending to passively adapt to their circumstances rather than change them.

Previous research has demonstrated that proactive personality is associated with a number of criterion outcomes. Bateman and Crant (1993) found proactive personality to be positively correlated with involvement in community service activities and the degree of constructive environmental change revealed in participants’ most significant personal achievements. Crant (1995) presented data from a sample of 131 real estate agents demonstrating that proactive personality predicted objective job performance, operationalized as the number of houses sold, number of listings obtained, and commission income over a nine-month period. Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer (in press) used a diverse sample of 496 employees to show that proactive personality predicted both objective (salary and promotions) and subjective (career satisfaction) career success. These findings were consistent using both self-reports and significant-other ratings of proactive personality.

Some empirical evidence suggests that proactive personality is associated with transformational and charismatic leadership. Bateman and Crant (1993) argued that transformational leadership was related to the prototypic characteristics of a proactive individual. Using a sample of MBA students, they found a positive correlation between proactive personality and independent peer nominations of transformational leadership. In another context, managers who champion technological innovation—a proactive behavior—were shown to exhibit more charismatic leadership behaviors than non-champions (Howell and Higgins, 1990). And ratings of U.S. Presidents’ proactive personality were associated with independent ratings of their charisma, greatness, and performance (Deluga, 1998). The present study extends these findings by investigating a sample of business managers’ perceptions of organizational supervisors, and a validated measure of charismatic leadership.

Several behaviors associated with charismatic leadership appear to have roots in proactivity, and thus give credence to the notion that proactive personalities could be expected to trigger attributions of charisma. For example, charismatic leaders are active innovators (Conger and Kanungo, 1987), are prosocially assertive (House and Howell, 1992), and seek to change the status quo (Conger and Kanungo, 1987). They have a vision for a different future, change their followers’ beliefs, and get them excited about the vision (Bass, 1990). Because a proactive orientation is presumed to underlie innovation, prosocial assertiveness, and change efforts, it is reasonable to predict that proactive personality will be positively associated with attributions of charismatic leadership. Thus.

Hypothesis 1: Managers’ proactive personality will be positively associated with their supervisors’ ratings of their charismatic leadership.
Control variables

To corroborate and validate more precisely the relationship described above, we tested the extent to which a leader’s proactive personality explained variance in attributions of charismatic leadership over and above the effects of other variables. Toward that end, we collected data on several control variables: the five-factor model of personality, in-role behavior, and social desirability.

Five-factor model of personality
Many scholars now believe that the domain of personality can be represented by five superordinate constructs (Digman, 1990), as represented by the five-factor model of personality. While there is not complete agreement concerning the labels assigned to the five factors (Barrick and Mount, 1991), representative labels are: (a) Neuroticism, or emotional instability; (b) Extraversion, represented by being sociable, gregarious, and ambitious; (c) Openness to Experience, described by tolerance of new ideas and flexibility of thought; (d) Agreeableness, or a compassionate interpersonal orientation; and (e) Conscientiousness, or the degree of organization, persistence, and motivation in goal-directed behavior. These five factors are at a higher level of abstraction than more specific personality variables, and can be considered a framework for interpreting other personality constructs rather than as a replacement for them (McCrae and Costa, 1989; Wiggins and Pincus, 1992). Because the Big Five capture such broad variance in the personality domain, controlling for them would afford a stringent test of the role of proactive personality.

While no research to our knowledge has systematically linked the Big Five personality factors to attributions of charismatic leadership, previous research linking personality to charismatic leadership provides some guidance. The personality variables described earlier that have been found to predict charismatic leadership would logically fit under three of the domains of the Big Five taxonomy. For example, prosocial assertiveness reflects the Big Five domain of extraversion; creativity and innovation reveal openness to experience; and social sensitivity indicates agreeableness. Proactive personality is related to several of the five factors, yet also captures, conceptually and empirically, some unique element of personality not accounted for by the five-factor model (Bateman and Crant, 1993; Crant, 1995). Thus, we expect proactive personality to account for variance in charismatic leadership beyond that explained by the five-factor model.

In-role behavior
Empirical research has demonstrated that levels of in-role behavior or expected job performance are associated with assessments of charismatic leadership (Bass, 1990). Studies with samples of U.S. Presidents (Maranell, 1970), managers (Hater and Bass, 1988), and naval officers (Yammarino and Bass, 1989) converge on the idea that a leader must competently perform a job before others will attribute charisma to the leader. Proactivity is conceptually separate from a performance-based measure like in-role behavior; thus, proactivity should explain variance in charisma beyond that explained by in-role behavior.

Social desirability
Social desirability may be viewed as a particular style of responding to instruments that contaminates or distorts the measurement of the underlying construct. Recent meta-analytic
results (Ones, Viswesvaran and Reiss, 1996) suggest that in the domain of personnel selection, social desirability is not a problem as pervasive as is often claimed in the literature. But a correlation between a scale and a measure of social desirability compromises the integrity of the scale, and thus should be controlled for in studies using self-report predictor variables (Nicholson and Hogan, 1990).

**Hypothesis including the control variables**

Based on the arguments presented above, proactive personality is expected to explain variance in attributions of charismatic leadership above and beyond the five-factor model of personality, in-role behavior, and social desirability. Because a large and diverse array of personality measures have been found to predict charismatic leadership, it would be cumbersome to measure and control for all of them. Instead, we measure the more molar five factors of personality as a proxy for other personality variables. We control for in-role behavior because it is an essential element of employee evaluations and has been shown to predict attributions of charismatic leadership. Finally, we control for social desirability in order to statistically correct for potential data contamination. Proactive personality is conceptually distinct from these other variables, and has the potential to capture elements of charismatic leadership not accounted for by the control variables. Thus.

**Hypothesis 2:** Proactive personality will explain variance in perceptions of a manager's charisma over and above the five-factor model of personality, in-role behavior, and social desirability.

**Method**

**Participants and procedure**

The participants for this study were 156 dyads comprised of managers and their bosses employed by a Puerto Rican financial services organization. The average age of the managers was 32 years, and the average amount of work experience was 10 years. The average age of the managers' supervisors was 39 years, and they averaged 15 years of work experience.

Participants received Spanish language versions of the surveys. With the exception of the items measuring the five-factor model of personality, the Spanish language version of the surveys was created following the translation-retranslation procedure (Brislin, 1980). We used a previously established Spanish language version of the Big Five personality factors.

All managers (N = 205) were sent via intra-company mail a copy of the survey along with a cover memo from the president of the organization indicating the firm's interest in the project and requesting the managers' participation. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and they sealed their surveys in a manilla envelope before returning them to a secretary who forwarded the unopened surveys to the authors. Participants were informed that individual responses would not be seen by anyone from their organization, and would not be used to make any personnel decisions. Participants were also notified that completing the survey was optional, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, we stressed that we would be collecting additional information from their direct supervisors, and that this information would also be held in strict confidence by the research team. Eighty-two per cent of
the managers contacted \( N = 168 \) returned completed surveys. A four-digit coding system was used to match surveys by dyads.

After receiving the surveys, we provided a contact person with the four digit codes from the completed surveys. He then sent the direct supervisor of each manager a separate questionnaire asking them to rate the manager’s charismatic leadership and in-role behavior, and to provide some demographic information. The procedure described in the paragraph above was again followed to collect these data. After twice following up with non-respondents, 93 per cent of the supervisor surveys were returned, yielding data from 156 dyads.

**Measures**

The managers completed measures of proactive personality, the five-factor model of personality, and social desirability response bias. The managers also provided demographic information. The managers’ immediate supervisors completed measures of the managers’ charismatic leadership and in-role behavior.

**Proactive personality**

Proactive personality was measured using Bateman and Crant’s (1993) 17-item self-report measure. Responses are indicated on a 7-point scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. Sample items are ‘I excel at identifying opportunities’ and ‘No matter what the odds, if I believe in something, I will make it happen’. The items were summed to arrive at a proactive personality score. Factor analysis and reliability estimates of the scale across three samples supported its unidimensionality (Bateman and Crant, 1993). The initial study also demonstrated the scale’s convergent, discriminant, and criterion validities.

**Charismatic leadership**

Charismatic leadership, as perceived from above, was measured with Conger and Kanungo’s (1994) 25-item instrument. This scale measures the perceived behavioral dimensions of charismatic leadership based on Conger and Kanungo’s (1987) model. Using four organizational samples, Conger and Kanungo presented evidence for the measure’s reliability (estimates ranged from 0.88 to 0.91), convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Responses are indicated on a 6-point scale ranging from ‘very uncharacteristic’ to ‘very characteristic’. Sample items are ‘Exciting public speaker’ and ‘Shows sensitivity for the needs and feelings of other members in the organization’. We summed the 25 items to arrive at an overall index of perceived charismatic leadership.

**Five-factor model of personality**

The Big Five personality factors were each measured with the 12-item self-report scales from the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa and McRae, 1992). The NEO-FFI is the short version of the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI), which Briggs (1992) claims is the best measure of the five-factor model developed to date. The test manual reports correlations between the NEO-FFI and NEO-PI scales of between 0.75 for Conscientiousness and 0.89 for Neuroticism. The manual reports NEO-FFI reliability coefficients ranging from 0.74 to 0.89, and also presents evidence for the scales’ construct validity. The NEO-FFI has been used
extensively in organizational research, and is psychometrically sound. The participants completed a Spanish language version of the NEO-FFI, created by extracting the relevant items from the Spanish language version of the NEO Personality Inventory.

In-role behavior
In-role behavior was measured with the seven-item scale used by Williams and Anderson (1991). The scale includes three items used by O’Reilly and Chatman (1986), and is based on the definition of in-role behavior as those formal job requirements that are recognized by the formal reward system. Williams and Anderson (1991) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.91, and presented evidence for the construct validity of the measure.

Social desirability
A 10-item short form of the Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960) was used to measure social desirability response bias. Short versions of the scale have been extensively used in self-report data collection with sound reliability and construct validity (Ballard, 1992).

Results
Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations for all variables are presented in Table 1. Social desirability was positively associated with two of the personality variables, Neuroticism and Agreeableness, but not with proactive personality, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, or Openness to Experience.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that charismatic leadership would be positively associated with proactive personality. As shown in Table 1, there was a positive correlation between charismatic leadership and proactivity (r = 0.35, p < 0.01). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

To test Hypothesis 2, which predicted an effect for proactive personality on charisma over and above the effects of all control variables, a hierarchical regression procedure was employed. Following the recommendations of Cohen and Cohen (1983), we entered the control variables in the regression equation before entering the variable of primary interest. Table 2 presents the results of the hierarchical regression in which proactive personality was the last variable entered. This analysis provides support for Hypothesis 2. Proactive personality explained an additional 5.7 per cent (p < 0.01) of the variance in charismatic leadership. This effect was in the expected direction: managers reporting a more proactive orientation had higher charismatic leadership ratings than those scoring low on this dimension. The completed model accounted for 39.4 per cent of the variance in charismatic leadership.

Discussion
Managers who scored themselves higher on proactive personality were rated more highly by their bosses on a measure of charismatic leadership. This relationship was strong, and held true even
Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>95.22</td>
<td>17.42</td>
<td>(0.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>100.55</td>
<td>11.45</td>
<td>0.35†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>40.21</td>
<td>6.70</td>
<td>0.51†</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>7.03</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.16*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>22.93</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>−0.15</td>
<td>−0.24†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>40.44</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
<td>0.37†</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>−0.25†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>33.23</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.24†</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
<td>−0.21†</td>
<td>0.28†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>38.58</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.38†</td>
<td>−0.44†</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>49.78</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.29†</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>−0.49†</td>
<td>0.29†</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.32†</td>
<td>(0.71)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Values in parentheses represent coefficient alphas. Pairwise deletion of missing data. *p < 0.05; †p < 0.01.
after controlling for a number of other variables including in-role performance and the Big Five personality dimensions.

The study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it extends our knowledge of the predictors of perceived charismatic leadership. Second, it adds to our understanding of proactive personality, indicating that perceptions of charismatic leadership are a possible consequence of a proactive behavioral orientation. Third, the study takes the perspective of the managers’ organizational superiors—the view from above, rather than from subordinates below.

The ‘view from the top’ angle to this study is an important departure from previous research. Virtually all previous research, appropriately, has studied charismatic leadership from the vantage point of followers or organizational subordinates. What it takes for a manager’s boss to perceive charismatic leadership has received little attention. In other domains, managers’ behaviors have been shown to influence their bosses’ ratings of performance but also attributions of other constructs or categories. For example, Shore, Barksdale and Shore (1995) found that managers performing organizational citizenship behaviors were rated by their supervisors as being more committed to the organization. And leaders rated as more transformational by followers have been shown to be seen by their superiors as being top performers (Hater and Bass, 1988) and having greater advancement potential (Avolio and Bass, 1985, Charisma and Beyond, Paper presented at the Meeting of the Academy of Management, San Diego, CA, U.S.A.). Now, perceptions of charismatic leadership, from above, have been shown to be associated with managers’ proactive personality along with extraversion and in-role behavior.

Importantly, these findings held after controlling for important other predictors. In-role behavior was highly correlated with perceptions of charismatic leadership, but proactive personality explained variance in charismatic leadership beyond that explained by in-role behavior. In addition, the proactive personality scale predicted charismatic leadership above and beyond extraversion and the complete constellation of Big Five personality factors, commonly considered the most comprehensive taxonomy of individual differences. Both bivariate correlations and the multivariate regression results confirmed that the proactive personality scale was a more powerful predictor of perceived charismatic leadership than all of the Big Five personality factors.

The proactive personality scale has been shown to predict several other criterion variables; perceived charismatic leadership can now be added to the array. Previous studies found relationships with career success (Seibert, Crant and Kraimer, in press), the nature of major

### Table 2. Results of hierarchical regression analysis entering proactive personality last

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
<th>Charismatic leadership $p$ of $\Delta$</th>
<th>Overall $R^2$</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-role behavior</td>
<td>0.279</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.279</td>
<td>0.549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social desirability</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>0.281</td>
<td>-0.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five-factor model:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>0.288</td>
<td>-0.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.320</td>
<td>0.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to experience</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>0.321</td>
<td>-0.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>0.335</td>
<td>-0.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>0.337</td>
<td>-0.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive personality</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.394</td>
<td>0.268</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
personal achievements and the nature of students’ extracurricular and civic activities (Bateman and Crant, 1993), and objective measures of job performance (Cran, 1995). In the leadership domain, the proactive personality scale had previously been shown to predict peer nominations of transformational leadership potential (Bateman and Crant, 1993) and Presidential leadership (Deluga, 1998). The results of the present study extend the leadership findings to include specifically charismatic rather than the broader construct of transformational leadership, empirical scales rather than nominations, and supervisors’ rather than peer assessments.

A key question is whether the same perceptions and relationships among variables would hold if the assessments were taken from below. That is, would subordinates rate the managers in the same ways as bosses do on the charismatic leadership scale? And would proactive scores predict perceived charismatic leadership scores? At the most general level, the outlook from above is notoriously different from that below (Likert, 1961). But perceptions of specific individuals may be shared, and the perceived contributors to charismatic leadership may not depend on position in the hierarchy. On the other hand, behaviors seen in a positive light from above may be viewed more negatively, e.g., as political, from below.

Impression management may be a central issue here. It is known that some behaviors, such as organizational citizenship behaviors, can result in positive performance evaluations above and beyond what in-role performance generates (e.g., MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Fetter, 1991; Werner, 1994). But behaviors can be performed sincerely or insincerely, and can be perceived as sincere or as manipulative and ingratiating (Ferris et al., 1995). Moreover, these behaviors can have different targets or directions. These contingencies may moderate the relationships found in this study.

Thus, proactive and leadership behaviors aimed in many directions, and done sincerely and naturally, could have similar and consistent positive effects on perceptions of bosses, subordinates, and others. But exhibited toward the boss and not toward others, or perceived by some with ingratiating as the intent, they will generate differing evaluations depending on the observer. In addition, proactive behaviors aimed downward may generally impress subordinates more than subordinates, and those aimed upward could impress differently (in terms of magnitude and valence) subordinates and superiors depending on the nature of the proactive behaviors. Future research is needed to shed more light on these issues.

Therefore, not only should the present study be replicated with subordinate perceptions, but perceptions from multiple sources should be compared and contrasted. In general, more organizational behavior research should employ designs that consider the possibility that observer role could affect the findings (e.g., Puffer, 1990), and capture important differences. Research in the domain of performance appraisal has wrestled with this issue, but most management research has ignored this reality and not dealt with it directly.

What implications do this study’s findings hold for managers? Proactive personality was positively associated with supervisors’ perceptions of charismatic leadership. Assuming that charismatic leadership is valued, managers might engage in proactive behaviors to enhance such perceptions, although not at the expense of in-role performance. Subsequently, what are the payoffs? Previous research has found transformational leadership to pay off in terms of supervisors’ evaluations of performance and advancement potential (cf. Conger and Kanungo, 1988). The present research thus suggests some previously unstudied, potential personal consequences of proactive personality. Future research can go further by explicitly incorporating career-related consequences into the design.

One limitation of the study was the concurrent data collection. It was presumed that perceptions of charismatic leadership would be a consequence of proactive personality, and ideally a longitudinal design would have tested the predictions. While the results are consistent with the
prosecrption, the static design cannot rule out alternative causal sequences. Moreover, the finite number of variables in any study never can preclude the possibility of unmeasured variables creating spurious relationships. While the present study included a number of appropriate controls, and the presumed causal sequence is logical and likely, future research should deal more thoroughly with these issues.

Finally, generalizability is always an important issue. We have already discussed questions of generalizability to subordinate and other perceptions. In addition, there would be utility in testing the relationships in different types of organizations and at different levels. Further research should test the measures and the relationships in other languages and other countries. The extent to which the behaviors of interest are valued positively, and the impact of the control variables, could vary significantly across organizational and national cultures. Thus, far-reaching generalization of the findings, and the implied practical implications, await further test.

References


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