

Study: Charismatic leadership can be measured, learned

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How do you measure charisma? That's the question UT professor Kenneth Levine seeks to answer.

Much has been written in business management textbooks and self-help guides about the role that personal charisma plays in leadership. But according to a newly published study co-authored by Levine, a University of Tennessee, Knoxville, communications studies professor, until recently no one was able to describe and measure charisma in a systematic way.

Levine said the large amount of academic literature on charismatic leadership never defined what it means to actually communicate charismatically.

"There's this illusion that we know what charismatic communication means, but in the research I reviewed, no one had ever really looked at that," he said.

Levine and his co-authors, Robert Muenchen of the UT Statistical Consulting Center and Abby Brooks of Georgia Southern University, surveyed university students and asked them to define charisma and pinpoint the behaviors of people they thought were charismatic.

"Everyone has a [leadership](#) capacity in something," Levine said. "But we found that if you want people to perceive you as charismatic, you need to display attributes such as empathy, good listening skills, [eye contact](#),

enthusiasm, self-confidence and skillful speaking," he said. Those are the attributes [social scientists](#) can measure to more fully understand charismatic communication.

Levine says the most surprising result was that the students felt that charisma was not just something you are born with, but something you can learn. "We asked the question 'What is charisma?' and their answers tended to start with 'the ability to...'. Well, abilities are believed to be acquired attributes rather than inbred traits, so a lot of people believe that charisma can be learned."

Levine says the research makes the case for incorporating these concepts to better measure the level of [charisma](#) of individual leaders.

More information: The study, "Measuring Transformational and Charismatic Leadership: Why Isn't Charisma Measured?," appears in the December 2010 issue of the academic journal "Communication Monographs," published by the National Communication Association.

Provided by University of Tennessee at Knoxville

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