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# CHARISMA AS A FACTOR OF THE FORMATION OF LEADERS IN THE MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION ON THE TERRITORY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

## ABSTRACT

This article aims to study and present charisma as a factor of the formation of the leader, taking as an example the municipal administration in the Republic of Bulgaria. The author has used data from her own online survey of mayors of municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as of district mayors of the cities Sofia, Plovdiv and Varna. The survey started in June 2022; by the time this article was written, responses had been received from 55 mayors. The author's emphasis will be on one of the survey questionnaires, composed of questions grouped into six blocks. The analysis methods are: descriptive statistics, calculation of mean values, testing of statistical hypotheses, and analysis of open-ended questions. The analysis identified factors of charisma and the respective personal characteristics. The identified personal features and behavior of the

surveyed mayors may be used to design a profile to be applied when selecting candidates for public positions.

**KEYWORDS:** charisma, leadership, personality factors, local self-government, Bulgaria

**JEL:** H7, R5, Z00

## INTRODUCTION

The management of any economic organization is a complex process which requires a certain set of knowledge and skills that the senior managers and their employees should possess. In order to achieve success in governance, a leader must coordinate activities and direct the team members' efforts to achieving the organization goals. In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted to the personality of an organization's leader as a factor of success for that organization. The emphasis is on the qualities that a leader should possess, on his/her ability to motivate and engage the team members in the organization goals, on the leader's associating and identifying with the organization's vision and mission, its social and economic success.

Leadership is a basic element of effective management. The effectiveness of leadership is undoubtedly determined by some basic human qualities. This has been confirmed by research on the behavior of outstanding leaders in the last one hundred years.

Many researchers in various fields have addressed the question whether a leader is born or made, but no straight answer has yet been found, though a possible one is "both".

This article aims to study charisma (a gift from God, an innate quality of the person) as a factor of a leader's formation, taking the municipal administration in the Republic of Bulgaria as a case in point.

The subject of the research is charisma as a unique trait of an individual who possesses strong charm and magnetism, a quality that attracts followers. The research focuses on mayors of municipalities and districts within the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria as personalities having the highest public support. They embody institutional responsibility and stability within the state, demonstrate personal concern and understanding of the needs of citizens whose interests they represent and the expectations for resolving societal issues directed towards them.

The topical importance of this study of charismatic leadership and of the personal characteristics a leader should possess is supported by the fact that not every person holding a position of leadership has the skill to lead: certain personal qualities and social skills are required for the purpose. On the other hand, in order for leadership qualities and skills to be demonstrated, there must be a group of people whose joint activity requires an internal organizer.

The focus of this article is on exploring the phenomenon of "charismatic leadership" and its manifestation in public administration in Bulgaria. Specifically, it aims to prove the hypothesis that charisma is a crucial factor in shaping the personality of a leader in municipal administration in the Republic of Bulgaria. This influence is most prominently reflected in the relationships between the mayor and the individuals he governs. The choice of this public sector as the subject of research is based on the observation that the possibility of developing leadership potential in the public/municipal administration is considerably more restricted than in the sphere of business organizations, because the former seeks to satisfy public needs and improve the living standard of the population, while the latter seek profit. Moreover, we found that no in-depth studies of this public sphere had been conducted in Bulgaria. The relevant studies we found concern the management style of leaders in the private sector or in the military; or concern leadership theories examined through the optic of Bulgarian organizational culture (e.g., Dimitrov & Karastoyanov, 2012; Manolov, 2011; Petkova-Gurbalova, 2020, 2021; Petkov & Encheva & Atanasova, 2018; Radev, 2020; Stoyanova, 2015; Uzunov & Zhivkov, 2020; Bobina & Sabotnova, 2022; Chankov, 2023; Islam & Ali & Shahzad, 2018; Tzokov, 2019). Another reason for our choice is that mayors of municipalities and districts are elected by majority vote and mainly in consideration of their personal qualities – for they are the people who interact directly with citizens, whose problems they are expected to solve. An additional reason for this choice was the instability of the political environment in Bulgaria in the last few years. The combination of these factors comes close to the theoretical definitions of the phenomenon of leadership.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In theory and also in practice, leaders are classified according to various criteria. Some authors divide them into the categories authoritarian and democratic, successful and unsuccessful, people-oriented or results-oriented, liked and hated. Leadership as such is also viewed in various perspectives: it may be natural, prestigious, institutional, voluntary or professional. The best-known theoretical classifications of types of leadership divide them thus:

- **Charismatic** (based on the qualities and charm of the person);
- **Followership** (based on the expectations of supporters and followers);
- **Situational** (as a function of situations and threatse);

- **Behavioristic** (related to behavior);
- **Emotional** (as a function of the specificity of interpersonal communication in the emotional, cognitive and behavioral aspects);
- **Relational** (based on the specificity of the groups and conditions in which leadership is effectuated).

It is assumed that the theory of charisma is a theory of the so-called “great” person (Ivanov, 2014). The term charisma comes from the New Testament and signifies “grace, favor” (Goleman, 2010).

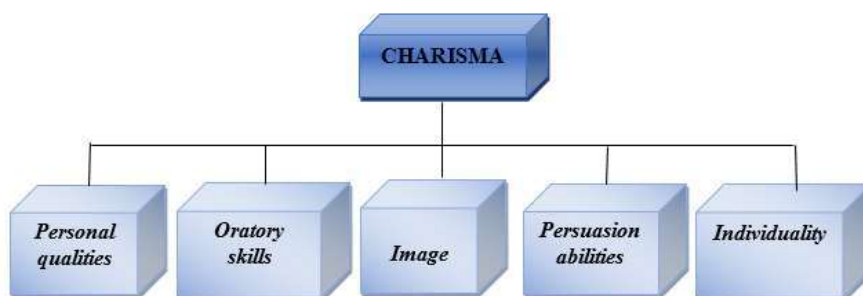
The founders of the theory of charisma are considered to be Charles Darwin and Max Weber. Darwin’s theory of evolution continues to serve as an explanation of charismatic leadership (Ivanov, 2014). Max Weber was the first to introduce “charisma” as a term. According to him, charisma is “a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural powers” (Ivanov & Chavdarova 2013, Leadership and Charisma, p. 101). Weber believed that an individual endowed with charisma is believed to possess supernatural, superhuman qualities that enable him to exercise a kind of “domination” over others (Ivanov & Chavdarova, 2013).

In the inception of the theory of charismatic leadership, it was assumed that a leader is born rather than gradually formed, i.e., a leader’s qualities are psychologically inherited and are not created through ethical pedagogy. The proponents of this theory ascribe several categories of characteristics to leaders. The charismatic leader must be **physically healthy; socially formed; socially complete and effective in behavior** (Ivanov, 2014).

Charisma has been pointed out by scholars as one of the most important and most interesting characteristics of a person, a characteristic that is particularly important for governance, as difficult as it may be to study and describe. Weber himself asserts that a leader must be charming and possess charisma. He claims that, thanks to this personal quality, an individual who does not have wealth, great physical strength or any other form of power, is able to exert strong influence on large groups of people, to “subject” their willing behavior to his will. Followers are attracted by the leader’s magnetism, his celestial gift. (Ivanov & Chavdarova, 2013).

In recent years, the theories of charismatic leadership have been applied to the sphere of public life and business. Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy have devised a system of factors in order to explain the phenomenon and sum up all significant previous definitions. Their system encompasses the personal traits of leaders, the specificities of their followers, and the characteristics of the situation. The elements of charisma are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Elements of charisma



Source: Designed by the author based on: Iliev, Tsv. 8/2016, “Leader and leadership nature and theoretical constructions”, Scientific Works. International Business School – Botevgrad, Bulgaria, p. 168 (in Bulgarian)

Not least, the environment largely determines the mutual relations between leader and followers. The situation is a factor that in some cases favors and in others obstructs the growth of charismatic leadership. Two favorable factors for the development of charismatic leadership are *the existence of a crisis* and/or *the existence of interconnected tasks* (Paunov, 2008).

Parsons was the first to discuss the connection between individual charisma and the charisma of the normative order. His idea was supported by Shils, who in turn argued that individual and institutional charisma have a common nature. What they have in common becomes evident when the individual endowed with charisma is able to create a new order in destroying the old (Ivanov & Chavdarova, 2013).

Charisma is also related to *the leader's authority; his demonstrated level of competence; organizational skills* and *the ability to find convincing arguments* (Iliev, 2016).

Generally speaking, the charismatic leader never leaves people indifferent: they either love him or hate him (Stoyanova, xxxx).

Charisma is hardly subject to quantitative measurement, but it can be felt by the people around, by different people to different degrees (Wilink, 2021).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Data was collected through an independent online survey among mayors in municipalities throughout the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria (265), as well as regional mayors in the cities of Sofia, Plovdiv, and Varna (35). The total sample size is 300 individuals. The research commenced in June 2022, and at the time of article preparation, it is still ongoing. Responses have been received from 55 mayors, comprising 44 males and 11 females. One difficulty encountered in the course of the study was establishing personal contact with all mayors of municipalities and districts.

This article emphasizes one of the questionnaires used for the survey. That questionnaire contains 24 questions grouped in six dimensions: 1. Vision and articulation; 2. Environmental sensitivity; 3. Unconventional behavior; 4. Personal risk; 5. Sensitivity to member needs; 6. Does not maintain status quo.

The model for studying charismatic leadership was designed in 1994 by Conger and Kanungo (Conger and Kanungo, 1994). It was structured into three stages. In the first stage, the environment is assessed through questions aimed to reveal the leader's ability to see the particularities and needs of his/her subordinates, the possibilities and restrictions of the environment, and the challenges arising to the established order. The leader's vision is studied in the second stage. The questions here are meant to reveal the leader's ability to construct an inspiring vision and transmit it effectively to his/her subordinates. The third stage deals with the exercise of leadership. Here, the questions are related to two dimensions: risk and unconventional behavior. The aim is to establish the degree to which a leader is able to take personal risks and to demonstrate his commitment and uniqueness through his conduct.

Conger and Kanungo analyze the collected data using the method of principle component analysis. They thereby define six dimensions of charismatic leadership, each of which can be used as a separate subscale: vision and articulation, sensitivity to the environment, unconventional behavior, taking personal risk, sensitivity to the needs of others and does not maintaining the status quo (Conger and Kanungo, 1994).

Basing our study on their model, we have adapted and tested their questionnaire in a survey of public sector leaders, specifically, leaders in municipal and district administrations on the

territory of Bulgaria. We used 24 questions related to the six dimensions indicated above. A five-degree Likert scale was applied, ranging from 1 – “fully agree” to 5 “disagree entirely”.

The methods used in processing the results are: descriptive statistics, calculating of mean values, testing statistical hypotheses (Goev et al., 2019) and analysis of open-ended questions.

### 3. RESULTS

Analysis of the results has identified the factor that has the strongest influence for charismatic leadership among the surveyed mayors. It is “**Sensitivity to member needs**” (4.42). Table 1 shows the mean values by factors and the total number of mayors having the highest score on the respective factor.

**Table 1.** Mean values by dimensions and numbers of mayors

Vision and articulation	Environmental sensitivity	Unconventional behavior	Personal risk	Sensitivity to member needs	Does not maintaining the status quo	Total mean value
4.28	4.36	3.33	4.04	<u>4.42</u>	3.13	3.93
18	19	6	14	<u>34</u>	7	Total number of mayors by factors

Source: author's own sources

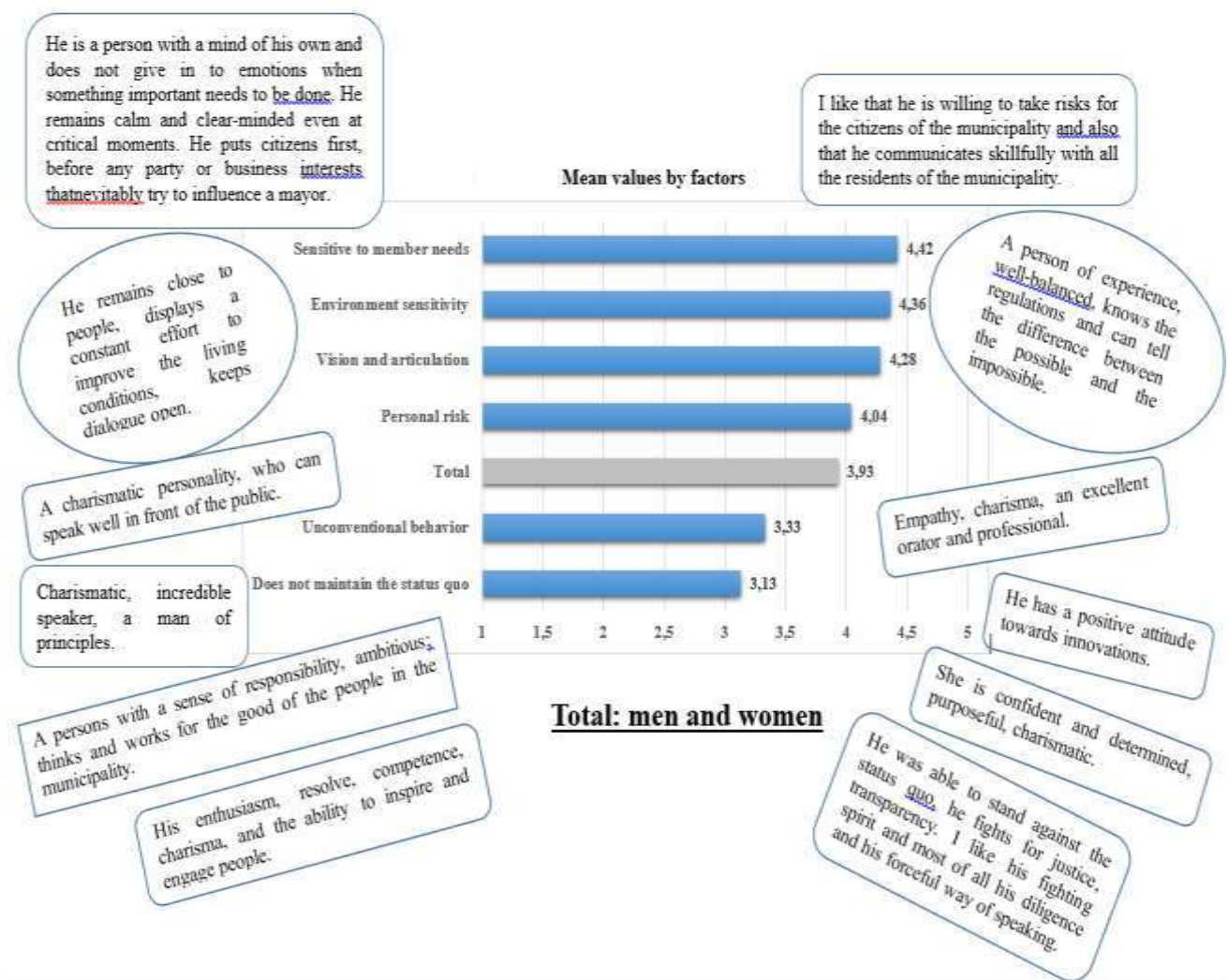
Base: 55

It is evident from the data that charismatic leadership of the surveyed mayors is most prominent with regard to “sensitivity to the needs of others” (the employees of the municipal/district administration and the residents of the municipality/district). This is confirmed not only by the mean value but also by the number of mayors with highest percentages in this specific dimension – 34; in other words, the highest share - 61.82 % of all surveyed mayors - is related to this indicator. The indicator “unconventional behavior” is the leading factor of a mayor’s charismatic leadership in only six cases. It should be noted that some of the surveyed mayors have equal mean values for more than one dimension, and in some cases all the leadership dimensions of a mayor have the same mean value. In other words, charismatic leadership of some mayors is evident in several or all dimensions.

Figure 2 presents the mean values by each dimension of charismatic leadership for men and women in ascending order, as well as several quotes from the responses of surveyed employees in the municipal/district administrations to the open-ended question: *Briefly describe what you like and value most in your leader*. This question was included in an anonymous questionnaire (which contains 8 blocks of questions: energy and determination; vision; challenges and encouragement; taking risks; open-ended questions: personal qualities, mutual relations and style of leadership) randomly sent to the municipalities/districts whose mayors gave consent for participation. The highest mean values on the questionnaire for self-assessment of charismatic leadership filled in by mayors is evident for the dimension “sensitivity to the needs of others” (4.42), and the lowest, for the dimension “maintaining the status quo” (3.13). The total mean value on all dimensions of all surveyed mayors is 3.93.



**Figure 2.** Mean values by factors



Source: author's own sources

The testing of hypotheses regarding mean value differences on the six dimensions, related to various characteristics of the respondents indicated a statistically significant difference by gender, by the size of the respondent's municipality (small, medium, large) and by the category "municipality or district". The level of significance is ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 2 presents the basic characteristics for each of the dimensions of charismatic leadership:

**Table 2.** Basic characteristics by factors

Dimensions	Characteristics of mayors with highest results on the respective dimension	Number of surveyed mayors
Vision and articulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- they are good speakers;</li> <li>- they have good presentation skills;</li> <li>- they can inspire and motivate people;</li> </ul>	18

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- they have a vision for the future;</li> <li>- they are constantly generating new ideas;</li> <li>- they set inspiring strategic and operative goals.</li> </ul>	
<b>Environment sensitivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- they are able to easily recognize the social, cultural, administrative and physical restrictions in the environment that can obstruct the achievement of goals;</li> <li>- they can easily recognize opportunities that may help achieve goals;</li> <li>- they are aware of the weak points of their subordinates and recognize their strong points;</li> <li>- they have an enterprising spirit.</li> </ul>	19
<b>Unconventional behavior</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- they engage in unconventional behavior in order to achieve goals;</li> <li>- they often behave in unconventional ways, thereby surprising their subordinates.</li> </ul>	6
<b>Personal risk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in order to achieve goals, they often engage in activities requiring considerable self-sacrifice;</li> <li>- they take high personal risks;</li> <li>- they often invest their personal financial resources for the good of the municipality.</li> </ul>	14
<b>Sensitivity to member needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- they are understanding towards their employees' needs and feelings;</li> <li>- they set an example for others;</li> <li>- they create an atmosphere of mutual respect and sympathy;</li> <li>- they often express personal concern for the needs and feelings of their employees.</li> </ul>	<u>34</u>
<b>Does not maintain the status quo</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- they try to preserve the status quo and the traditional way of doing things;</li> <li>- they are supporters of the traditional methods of management, established over time, by which goals are achieved.</li> </ul>	7

*Source: author's own sources*

The data presented in this table indicate that charismatic leadership is most prominently displayed in the relation of mayors to their employees and the citizens of their municipalities. We see that the largest accumulation is in the dimension "sensitivity to member needs". Thus, a mayor's attitude to people is indicative of his/her social skills and empathy. Empathy and the possession of social skills are a leading factor of governance of the municipalities/districts.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article aims to study charisma as a “unique” factor influencing a person’s being perceived as a leader.

Charisma is a unique feature of an individual who possesses strong charm and magnetism, and thereby attracts followers. This characteristic in a leader is considered to be a unique set of supernatural, superhuman qualities, an endowment from above. According to theory, it is a factor acquired at birth; when combined with factors acquired through life (education, upbringing, professional skills, etc.), it influences the formation of a leader’s personality. This combination of factors is particularly important in the selection of candidates for high public positions, as they are the ones who will be managing public resources.

The analysis of the results reveals the dimension that is most significant in the charismatic leadership qualities of the surveyed mayors. The results obtained thus far show that the dimension “sensitivity to other people’s needs” is the predominant dimension of leadership charisma among the mayors of municipalities and districts in Bulgaria. This dimension, related to the social commitment of mayors, was confirmed by the responses employees of municipal and district administrations gave to the open-ended questions. No gender-related differences were observed in the study of charisma, but such differences were registered in the study of the personality profile of the same mayors. In both cases, no differences related to the size of the municipality/district (small, medium, large) or in terms of the category municipality as opposed to district.

Based on the identified personality traits and behavior of the surveyed mayors, we may deduce a profile that should be applied when selecting candidates for public office.

In the future, the correlation between innate personality characteristics (charisma etc.) and acquired personality traits (education, professional skills, etc.) will be studied, as well as their impact on the management style the leader applies in his/her work at the municipal/district administration and their impact on the financial results of the municipality/district. Not least, the impact of the aggregate of these qualities and the mandate of the mayors will also be analyzed.

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