THE BACKDROP OF LEADERSHIP:
HOW ENVIRONMENTAL AWE INFLUENCES CHARISMA ATTRIBUTIONS

ABSTRACT

Charisma is often attributed to leaders based on how they look, talk, and behave. Yet very little is known about the role of the physical environment in influencing attributions of leader charisma. The role of the physical environment is crucial because leaders inevitably occupy physical spaces that vary across contexts. In this research, we find that the grandeur of the physical environment, specifically in its ability to induce awe, enhances attributions of charisma for leaders who are not already known to be charismatic. First, in a field experiment, we show that a real business leader is attributed with more charisma when delivering a speech in an awe-inducing (vs. an ordinary) environment. In three follow-up experiments, we find that awe-inducing physical environments amplify charisma attributions and that this effect was diminished or absent for individuals already known for their charisma. Together, our findings contribute to the leadership literature by demonstrating the importance of the physical environment in influencing whether followers consider their leaders to be charismatic.

Keywords: Charisma, Awe, Leadership, Physical Environment

INTRODUCTION

When we think about the factors that shape whether a leader is considered charismatic, we often think about what the leader looks like (Friedman et al., 1988), how they behave (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), and how they communicate with their followers (Antonakis et al., 2011; Heracleous & Klaering, 2014; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996; Wasielewski, 1985). Leaders engage in behaviors that signal charisma to their followers (Antonakis et al., 2016; Bastardoz, 2020) and followers, in turn, attribute the leader with possessing charisma, thus occupying a crucial role in the charismatic leadership process (e.g., Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Klein & House, 1995). Hence, it is unsurprising that research to date has predominantly focused on these two key actors – leaders and followers – in furthering our understanding of charismatic leadership. This focus, however, has produced an important omission in the literature, namely, the role of the physical environment in shaping whether leaders are attributed with charisma or not.

Some research has acknowledged the importance of the *social context* in charisma attribution processes (Antonakis et al., 2016; House, 1977; Pillai & Meindl, 1998; Shamir & Howell, 1999; Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013), linking crisis situations (Bligh et al., 2004; House et al., 1991), organizational success (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999), follower arousal (Pastor et al., 2007), leader gender, network structure (Brands et al., 2015), and leader performance (Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015) to attributions of leader charisma. Empirical examination of the *physical context* - the immediate environment in which leaders and followers socially interact - however, is notably absent. Understanding how the physical environment influences charisma attributions is essential because leader-follower interactions occur in physical space, whether at the office, a town hall, or an off-site social venue. Physical environments bear vast differences (Bechtel & Churchman, 2003) and we suggest that particular

features of a physical environment can influence attributions of leader charisma. More specifically, we propose that physical environments which evoke awe in followers (e.g., grand lecture halls, beautiful natural environments, office spaces with vast views) can enhance attributed charisma.

Drawing from implicit leadership theories (Lord et al., 1982; Sy & Van Knippenberg, 2021), we propose that the charismatic *leader prototype* – "the abstractions of a set of characteristics common to leaders and unique to the leader category" (Lord & Shondrick, 2011) – can be activated by both features of the leader and the surrounding physical environment, with the elicitation of awe serving a pivotal role in this (Lipman-Blumen, 1996, p. 30; Menges et al., 2015; Spencer, 1973). More specifically, we argue that awe evoked by the physical environment triggers the activation of the charismatic leader prototype, heightening the likelihood that followers attribute charisma to leaders occupying awe-inspiring environments. This is because charismatic leaders are known to elicit awe in followers and experiences of awe stemming from the physical environment may be misattributed to leaders (Lipman-Blumen, 1996; White et al., 1981). At the same time, we maintain that leaders still serve a meaningful role in this process. When leaders evoke the charismatic leader prototype themselves (leader-directed activation) – for instance, through past or present charisma signaling behavior – the weight of the physical environment's capacity to induce awe in shaping attributions of charisma should diminish.

Our research makes several significant contributions to theory. First, we advance research on the role of contextual factors in influencing charisma attributions (e.g., Brands et al., 2015; Davis & Gardner, 2012; Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015; Pillai & Meindl, 1998), in addition to emerging research on physical work design (Khazanchi et al., 2018; Klotz & Bolino, 2021), by examining the role of awe-inspiring physical environments. Despite the enduring omnipresence

of the physical environment, management scholars have not adequately considered the interactions taking place between leaders and the environments they occupy, which have the power to shape follower judgments and behavior (Ashkanasy, Ayoko, & Jehn, 2014). Our findings demonstrate that charismatic cues can stem from both the leader and the physical environment when they are consistent with implicit charismatic leadership theories and prototypes (Lord et al., 1982; Sy & Van Knippenberg, 2021). Second, we add insight into the mechanisms by which distinct cues interact in influencing charisma attributions (Brands et al., 2015; Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015). Specifically, we demonstrate that awe induced by the physical environment enhances attributions of charisma but primarily for leaders who have not yet activated the charismatic leader prototype through other means (e.g., behaviorally signaling charisma). Thus, cues stemming from the physical environment carry more weight when information regarding the leader's charisma is uncertain or unavailable. Finally, while leadership and emotion scholars have theorized about awe as a response to powerful and charismatic leaders (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Menges et al., 2015; Chirico & Yaden, 2018), surprisingly little research has empirically examined awe's effects within organizational settings. This omission is of great theoretical importance because awe's proposed evolutionary function is to stabilize social hierarchies by promoting reverence and admiration for leaders among followers (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). We therefore contribute toward a growing need to integrate the phenomenology of awe into the management and leadership literatures.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Beginning with Weber's (1947) mystical notion of charisma, which attributed exceptional power to leaders over their followers, research on charisma has evolved from a leader-centric perspective (e.g., Bass, 1985; House, 1977; Weber, 1947) to a more holistic approach that also

emphasizes the role of followers. More recently, therefore, charisma has been conceptualized as a relational process between leaders and followers (e.g., Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Klein & House, 1995). Moreover, traditional definitions of charismatic leadership were criticized for insufficient differentiation from transformational leadership and leader effectiveness (Antonakis et al., 2016; Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Addressing these concerns, a new definition of charisma as leader *signaling* that is "values-based, symbolic, and emotion-laden" has been proposed (Antonakis et al., 2016, p. 304). This has importantly allowed for a separation between charisma signaling by a leader and follower attributions of charisma to a leader (Bastardoz, 2020). Leaders who signal charisma typically employ various tactics in the substance and delivery of their communication (Antonakis et al., 2011; Bastardoz et al., 2022; Den Hartog & Verburg, 1997; Ernst et al., 2022; Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015; Shamir et al., 1994). In turn, this is likely to increase their followers' attributions of charisma (Antonakis et al., 2016). Thus, research has considered *what* leaders say, *how* they say it, and follower responses to this; yet the question of *where* all of this happens and what effect this has on charisma attributions is poorly understood.

Building on the idea that leaders can actively use rhetorical tactics to move followers emotionally and appear charismatic (Antonakis et al., 2011), we propose that additional cues within the physical environment can also influence whether leaders appear charismatic. As we highlighted, research on the relationship between the physical environment and leader-follower processes is scant. In fact, the physical environment and its role in organizations has been largely overlooked as a whole (for an exception, see Klotz & Bolino, 2021), not merely in relation to its role in influencing charisma attributions. For example, in the case of work design, the physical environment has been "virtually ignored" in the field of management (Humphrey, Nahrgang, &

Morgeson, 2007, p. 1337). On the other hand, other aspects of work design, such as the content of one's job tasks, have attracted considerable interest (Parker et al., 2017). In the context of leadership, the "where" component has remained largely abstract, with research here focusing primarily on cultural, geographical, and social factors (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Ayman & Korabik, 2010). However, at the discrete level, the "where" component pertaining to the physical environment has been examined merely as a function of physical distance between leaders and followers (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002), but little beyond this. This is in stark contrast to the omnipresence of the physical environment and its potentially enduring influence on leader-follower interactions.

While not linked to charisma, some scholars have theorized about the potential importance of the physical environment in influencing how leaders are perceived. For instance, the '*scene'* where a leader-follower interaction takes place has been argued to interact with the *act* (e.g., delivering a speech), *agent* (e.g., the leader), *agency* (e.g., the leader delivers a speech through using his/her voice), and *purpose* (e.g., create organizational unity) of a given social event (Burke, 1966, 1989). The scene is "the background of an act, the situation in which it occurred" and is particularly important when it is complimentary with, and sometimes even generative of, the act (Burke, 1969, p. xv; Sharma & Grant, 2011). In essence, the scene takes on a performative role that influences the interpersonal dynamics of organizational members (Stephenson et al., 2020). As an example, Dick Hubbard, former CEO of Hubbard Foods, decided to take his employees to Western Samoa to celebrate the company's 10th birthday, knowing a large percentage of his employees are of Samoan and Polynesian descent (Walker & Monin, 2001). Hubbard partook in local customs and won favor with his employees. The scene in this example worked closely in tandem with the act of celebration and the purpose of

achieving organizational unity. Steve Jobs similarly placed huge importance on the 'scene' in which he announced the launch of Apple's new products. As Sharma and Grant (2011) note, "the typical set design for each of Jobs' performances comprises carefully arranged backdrops, screens and slide presentations, strategic positioning of the lectern and considered use of lighting, props and other effects" (p. 20). Jobs understood that features of the physical environment were crucial for obtaining the influence he desired. The physical environment therefore can serve as a scene through which leaders enhance the effects of their actions toward a given purpose.

Awe as an Emotional Response to Charismatic Leadership

When considering the role of the physical environment in attributing charisma to leaders, we need to ask which specific environmental features have the potential to arouse these attributions in followers. Emotions, particularly positive emotions (Bono & Ilies, 2006), have been recognized for their influence in promoting attributed leader charisma (House, 1977). The process by which charisma signaling brings about charisma attributions places emotions in a critical role (Banks et al., 2017; Bono & Ilies, 2006; Erez et al., 2008; Sy et al., 2018; Wasielewski, 1985). For example, charismatic leaders use emotional language to arouse followers' enthusiasm for their vision and to facilitate collective action (Shamir et al., 1993).

One emotion that shares a particularly significant relationship with charismatic leadership is awe. Despite its relevance to leadership, awe has been notably absent in management scholarship. The proposed evolutionary function of awe is to reinforce social hierarchies and promote collective coordination by instilling in followers reverence and admiration for a leader (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Indeed, awe is a self-transcendent emotion that encourages followers to prioritize group goals over individual ambitions (Piff et al., 2015; Stellar et al., 2017).

Charismatic leaders are credited with "a special magnetic quality that fills followers with awe" (Lipman-Blumen, 1996, p. 30) and are only considered charismatic insofar as "the sentiments of the followers toward the leader are characterized by awe" (Spencer, 1973, p. 347). Indeed, leaders appear charismatic because of their "awe-inspiring" quality (House, 1977, p. 26), and the term "*charismatic* ha[s] come to represent many meanings in the media and the public mind: celebrated, flamboyant, exciting, rabble-rousing, magnetic, and awe-inspiring" (Bass, 1999, p. 19). We propose that the experience of awe, a quintessential emotion associated with charismatic leaders (e.g., Menges et al., 2015), can be elicited through the physical environment. In turn, this plays a key role in the activation of the charismatic leader prototype.

Awe is a profound feeling of wonder and amazement characterized by two central appraisals: *perceived vastness* and the *need for accommodation* (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). First, vastness appraisals can be generated by both physically and figuratively vast stimuli (Yaden et al., 2016). As an example, a high-rise office view of a city skyline will likely elicit an appraisal of physical vastness. On the other hand, beautiful artwork in the foyer of an office building will likely elicit an appraisal of figurative vastness because it evokes a sense of unbounded creative possibilities. Whether an awe-inducing stimulus elicits appraisals of physical or figurative vastness, it shapes how people perceive themselves in relation to others (Shiota et al., 2007), leading to profound benefits such as social cohesion and togetherness (Piff et al., 2015). In addition to appraisals of vastness, awe is also comprised of appraisals of the need for cognitive accommodation. Experiences of awe produce schema incongruence because new information – drawn from the awe-inducing stimulus – cannot be readily assimilated with previous experience (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Taylor & Uchida, 2019; Valdesolo, Shtulman, & Baron, 2017). This reflects awe's capacity to overwhelm an observer's comprehension but in a positive way,

igniting curiosity and a quest for knowledge (Anderson et al., 2020; McPhetres, 2019). A wide range of stimuli in the physical environment therefore hold the potential to elicit follower feelings of awe.

Environmental Awe Activates the Charismatic Leader Prototype

The physical environment gains significance in shaping leader charisma attributions through its potential to evoke awe, an emotional experience that followers may unconsciously associate with charismatic leaders (Lord & Shondrick, 2011; Menges et al., 2015). In implicit leadership theory (ILT), followers hold cognitive representations, or prototypes, of what leaders typically embody, which are stored as interconnected units within connectionist networks (Hanges et al., 2000; Lord et al., 2001). These leader prototypes represent abstractions of a set of characteristics common to a specific leader category, such as charismatic leaders. Connectionist models explain that knowledge is distributed across multiple neuronal-like processing units; each unit encodes a distinct feature, and when features co-occur, their units are co-activated, strengthening their association over time (Feldman & Ballard, 1982). In the case of charismatic leader prototypes, as these associations become reinforced, even a subset of leader traits—or environmental cues triggering feelings of awe—can activate the broader charismatic leader prototype. This partial activation, often driven by followers' implicit expectations rather than observed behaviors, can lead to "gap-filling" phenomenon, where missing elements of the charismatic leader prototype are unconsciously supplied by the follower's connectionist network (Bechtel & Abrahamsen, 1991; Lord & Shondrick, 2011). Thus, environmental cues that elicit awe can heighten charisma attributions by activating the charismatic leader prototype.

The physical environment leaders occupy vary in the extent to which they elicit awe. Within an organizational context, offices or buildings are salient sources of awe. Their height

(vertical vastness) have been shown to be positively associated with feelings of awe (Joye & Dewitte, 2016) and further features, such as *beauty* and *ability*, also contribute to figurative perceptions of vastness that are closely linked with experiences of awe (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). In an analysis of medieval pilgrimage experiences at Canterbury cathedral, researchers identified aspects of vastness in (a) the physical volume and the aesthetics of the Chapter House, (b) the fame and prestige of the Lady Chapel, and (c) the outstanding craftsmen's skills (Díaz-Vera, 2015). Indeed, monumental religious buildings are renowned for their awe-inspiring impact, due to their immense size and beauty, encompassing elements such as ornaments, shiny surfaces, geometric patterns, and bright colors (Joye & Verpooten, 2013). It is, however, equally plausible that monumental architecture in non-religious contexts, such as corporate skyscrapers, government buildings, and courthouses can elicit similar effects. Indeed, everyday experiences in office environments have been shown to elicit awe (Hu & Meng, 2022; Perez & Lench, 2018). Such experiences arise in response to office environments that utilize biophilic design elements, natural light, indoor plants, beautiful interior design, and large windows that enhance contact with nature outdoors.

Drawing from implicit leadership theories (Lord et al., 1982; Sy & Van Knippenberg, 2021), we argue that awe-inducing physical environments activate the charismatic leader prototype in followers, leading to greater charisma being attributed to leaders occupying these environments. When followers experience awe – perhaps from observing a breathtaking venue for a keynote speech – this strong emotional response activates various cognitive processes and associations (Lord et al., 1982). Here, because the leader giving the speech is the focal point in this awe-inspiring physical enviroment – and indeed the focal point of most follower-leader interactions (Shamir et al., 1993) – the grandeur and emotional impact of the environment

becomes cognitively associated with the leader (Lord & Shondrick, 2011). Followers very often experience awe in the presence of charismatic leaders (House, 1977; Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Lipman-Blumen, 1996; Sy et al., 2018). Thus, this linkage of associations in a follower's connectionist network serves to enhance the leader's attributed charisma because awe stemming from the physical environment is misattributed to the leader (Hanges et al., 2005). In essence, the leader's presence in conjunction with an awe-inspiring environment aligns with and activates followers' charismatic leader prototype. This brings us to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Environmental awe is positively associated with follower attributions of leader charisma.

The Moderating Role of Leader-Directed Activation of the Charismatic Leader Prototype

While an awe-inducing physical environment can enhance charisma attributions by activating the charismatic leader prototype, we argue that this effect is contingent on whether leader-direct activation of this prototype has already occurred. Leaders widely known to be charismatic or who signal charisma – for instance, through using charismatic leadership tactics (CLTs; Antonakis et al., 2011) – can activate the charismatic leader prototype through their past or current behavior, regardless of the environment's awe-inducing potential. CLTs are verbal tactics leaders can utilize – including, for instance, "the use of contrasts, stories, and metaphors" – that "have been known to move the emotions of crowds since antiquity" (Grabo & van Vugt, 2016, p. 401). Training on the use of such tactics has been shown to enhance one's attributed charisma (Antonakis et al., 2011). Leaders are highly salient and symbolic members of the organization (Shamir et al., 1993). Thus, in social interactions where leaders are present and oftentimes the focal point (e.g., issuing team updates), they will serve as the primary driver of attributions because central, leader-specific units in cognitive networks will take precedence over

peripheral units in prototype activation (Kenney, Blascovich, & Shaver, 1994). 'Gap-filling phenomena' are not relevant or needed because centrally relevant information is available (Lord & Shondrick, 2011). As a result, awe-inducing environments will be limited in influencing leader charisma attributions when leader-directed activation of the charismatic leader prototype has already occurred.

On the other hand, environmental awe's influence on charisma attributions, we argue, is significant in scenarios where the leader is not yet known to be highly charismatic to followers. In the absence of charisma-relevant knowledge about a leader, followers are more likely to rely on contextual cues in their environment to form their attributions (Zalesny & Ford, 1990). When followers lack intimate and direct knowledge about a leader's characteristics, competencies, and behaviors, there is a heightened sense of uncertainty in their evaluations (Martinko, Harvey, & Douglas, 2007). Here, the awe-inspiring nature of the physical environment can serve as a supplement for the absence of this knowledge, thus aiding with the establishment of associations between the attributes of the environment and the leader. This uncertainty creates fertile ground for the charismatic leader prototype to be activated by environmental factors, as individuals are more likely to rely on contextual information under conditions of uncertainty (Hanges et al., 2000; Lind & Van den Bos, 2002; Van den Bos et al., 1998). Thus, awe-inspiring physical environments are more likely to enhance attributions of leader charisma when the leader is not yet known to be charismatic. This leads us to hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 2: The positive effect of environmental awe on follower attributions of leader charisma is moderated by leader-directed activation of the charismatic leader prototype, such that this effect is stronger when the leader is not yet known (vs. known) to be charismatic.*

STUDY OVERVIEW

Across our package of four studies, we have adopted a full cycle research approach (Chatman & Flynn, 2005), testing our hypotheses using a mixture of methodologies and experimental designs. More specifically, we tested our hypotheses in both experimental and field settings to enhance the internal and external validity of our findings. Study 1 employed a field experiment to test Hypothesis 1. Specifically, we arranged for a business leader to deliver the same speech in both an ordinary and awe-inducing physical environment, enabling us to compare whether attributions of leader charisma vary as a function of the leader's physical environment. Study 2a was an experiment designed to test both Hypotheses 1 and 2. Participants were either shown (1) images of leaders who are widely known to be charismatic or (2) images of unknown individuals (black silhouettes). These images either had ordinary or awe-inducing background environments. This enabled us to test the interactive effect of environmental awe and leader-directed activation of the charismatic leader prototype on follower attributions of charisma. Study 2b was a follow-up experiment which sought to replicate the findings of Study 2a. However, instead of using images of black silhouettes, we used an artificial intelligence face swapping software to replace the face of a known leader with the face of an unknown person. In Study 3, we sought to conceptually replicate the pattern of findings found in Studies 2a-b. Here, instead of presenting participants with images of known charismatic vs. unknown leaders, we experimentally manipulated leader charisma signaling through the leader's speech (charismatic vs. not charismatic). Across Studies 2a-3, we therefore replicated our findings using distinct operationalizations of our focal study variables (i.e., images of known vs. unknown leaders in Studies 2a-b; manipulating whether leader speech is charismatic vs. not charismatic in Study 3).

STUDY 1

We conducted a field experiment to examine the effect of an awe-inducing physical environment on leader charisma attributions. To test this idea, we hired a retired executive to act as a guest lecturer at a European university. The leader delivered a guest lecture on his personal leadership experience in two different classes. To manipulate whether the environment was awe-inducing (vs. ordinary), we had one class take place in an ordinary lecture hall and the other in an awe-inspiring lecture hall. The content and duration of the guest lecture remained consistent across both conditions.

Participants

We recruited 113 students from two cohorts enrolled in a business administration course at a large university. The participants had a mean age of 23.35 (SD = 2.48), with 47.8% identifying as female. All students participated in the experiment. Of them, 44 belonged to the class assigned to the ordinary environment condition, and 69 to the class assigned to the awe-inducing environment condition.

Procedure

To mitigate any potential bias caused by a change in location, we invited students in both conditions to a room that was different from their usual classrooms. We selected the rooms based on their vastness and adornment (or lack thereof), both of which are known antecedents of experienced awe (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Negami & Ellard, 2023). The awe-inducing environment was a spacious and prestigious-looking congregation hall with a vastly high ceiling, while the ordinary environment was a standard lecture hall, appearing considerably smaller in size and having a much lower ceiling (see Appendix A for visual references of both rooms).

Participants arrived in the classroom as they would for a regular lecture. The course instructor introduced the guest speaker as a business leader, emphasizing that questions would be addressed at the end to ensure there were no interruptions. Students were informed that a brief questionnaire would be administered after the talk and before questions, to evaluate the guest lecture. The leader, who was unaware of the research question, delivered a 55-minute talk on his personal leadership experience, presenting 10 key points he had learned about leadership throughout his career. The talk aimed to influence students' perspective on leadership and its application in their future careers. The speaker was instructed to conduct the exact same lecture in both classes. The slides, content, and timing of the lecture remained consistent, and the speaker's behavior was video recorded, transcribed, and coded for CLTs. Both lectures had similar word counts (8,359 *vs.* 8,690), number of sentences (633 *vs.* 645), and number of CLTs (299.57 *vs.* 315.41). Following the lecture, students completed the questionnaire in which they rated the leader's charisma and responded to some control measures. At the end, an unscripted question-and-answer session with the guest speaker took place, which has no relevance to this study.

Measures

Leader Charisma Attributions. To assess participants' attributions of leader charisma, we developed a two-item measure using a continuous slider from 0 to 100. The two items included (1) "To what extent do you perceive [the speaker] as a charismatic leader?", and (2) "To what extent do you perceive [the speaker] as an inspiring leader?" ($\alpha = .73$). The leader's actual name was inserted in place of "the speaker". Consistent with prior research (Grabo & van Vugt, 2016), we developed this measure to ensure we capture subjective ratings of charisma. Additionally, we utilized a four-item subscale of the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ,

α = .62) that measures attributes of idealized influence (Bass & Avolio, 1995). This enabled us to compare the results of our measure with an existing measure of charismatic leadership.

Leader Morality Attributions. We also collected attributions of leader morality to test whether our hypothesized effect also emerged for theoretically less relevant attributions. We included two morality items using the same continuous slider (0 to 100) used for charisma attributions: (1) "To what extent do you perceive [the speaker] as an ethical leader?", and (2) "To what extent do you perceive [the speaker] as a moral leader?" (α = .90). In the survey, "the speaker" was replaced with the leader's actual name.

Induced Awe. As a manipulation check, we measured the level of awe induced by the physical environment at the end of the questionnaire. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with three items: (1) "The room for the talk induces awe in me", (2) "Awe is the emotion I feel when I look around the room", and (3) "I experience awe in the room for the talk". Responses were provided on a 7-point Likert scale (α = .96). Additionally, we conducted a manipulation check in a separate sample (n = 100), using a within subjects design and the same awe measure.

Control Variables. Given the two classes occurred in different cohorts, we collected age and gender as control variables. We also collected perceptions of the degree to which the speech itself was considered charismatic for exploratory purposes.

Results

We provide descriptive statistics and correlations in Table 1. To confirm the effectiveness of our environmental awe manipulation, we conducted a t-test to compare induced awe in both conditions. Participants in the awe-inducing environment rated the room as more awe-inducing (M = 4.25, SD = 1.66) than participants in the ordinary environment (M = 2.61, SD = 1.27); F(1,

111) = 30.80, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$). Participants in the separate sample also rated the awe-room as more awe-inducing ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.58$) than the ordinary room ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.31$): $t(101) = 13.19$, $p < .001$). Thus, our environment manipulation had the intended effect of inducing awe.

Next, we tested Hypothesis 1, which proposed that an awe-inducing (vs. ordinary) environment leads individuals to attribute a leader with greater charisma. A one-way ANOVA was conducted and we found a main effect of the physical environment on leader charisma attributions. The awe-inducing environment led to significantly higher charisma attributions ($M = 82.63$, $SD = 11.27$) than the ordinary environment ($M = 77.94$, $SD = 9.95$; $F(1, 111) = 5.43$, $p = .022$, $\eta^2 = .05$). This effect was also found for the attributed idealized influence (MLQ) measure. Again, the awe-inducing environment led to higher attributed idealized influence ($M = 5.92$, $SD = .70$) than the ordinary environment ($M = 5.63$, $SD = .72$; $F(1, 111) = 4.64$, $p = .033$, $\eta^2 = .04$).

We repeated all analyses with the inclusion of age and gender as control variables. Our results do not change when controlling for age and gender. As part of exploratory analyses, we also checked if the findings held for charismatic perceptions of the speech itself (rather than the leader); results again remain the same.

Finally, we tested whether the effect of an awe-inducing environment was specific to charisma attributions or would also promote less relevant, positive leader attributions. For this, we repeated the analysis using morality attributions as the outcome measure. The awe-inducing environment did not have a significant effect on attributions of leader morality ($F(1, 111) = 0.68$, $p = .41$, $\eta^2 < .001$) and this result does not change when age and gender are included as control variables.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 support Hypothesis 1 in an ecologically valid environment. The business leader who delivered the same speech was attributed with higher charisma in an awe-inducing environment, relative to an ordinary one. This effect was specific to charisma attributions and did not hold for morality attributions of the same leader. Despite the clear strength of establishing initial support for Hypothesis 1 in a field experiment – examining attributions of leaders occupying real physical environments – there are some limitations that are important to build upon. While the design of Study 1 is useful for establishing external validity, it does not possess the internal validity of a more rigorously controlled experiment. As such, we cannot rule out alternative explanations associated with changes in the room, such as different seating arrangements, the temperature, or other idiosyncratic factors. Additionally, this study does not address whether this effect would also occur for leaders already known to be charismatic, given the guest speaker was initially unknown to all participants. To address these limitations, we next set out to conduct a controlled experiment that (1) enhances the internal validity of our hypothesized research model, and (2) experimentally manipulates whether the leader is known (vs. unknown) to be someone that is charismatic.

STUDY 2A

Study 2a tested Hypotheses 1 and 2 via a 2 (within subjects: awe-inducing vs. ordinary environment) x 2 (between subjects: known charismatic leader vs. unknown leader) mixed design study. To investigate the differential impact of an awe-inducing environment for known charismatic and unknown leaders, we used pictures of well-known leaders widely recognized as charismatic in two different backgrounds and created unknown leader equivalents of the same images by replacing the known leaders with black silhouettes.

Participants

We recruited 402 participants from Prolific Academic. Of these, 346 passed our instrumental attention check and their responses were retained for analysis. Participants were, on average, 38.4 years old (*SD* = 13.91) and 60.4% identified as female.

Procedure

After giving consent, participants were randomly assigned to either the known charismatic leader or unknown leader condition. We presented participants with a set of ten pictures, randomly showing each leader in an awe-inducing or ordinary background. For each picture, participants provided attributions of leader charisma and morality. The experiment concluded with the collection of demographic information.

We selected ten business and political leaders who are widely known for their charisma. The leaders were chosen based on their descriptions as charismatic in scientific and newspaper articles[1], in addition to ensuring diversity of age, gender, and race. To develop the experimental stimuli, we searched for photographs of these leaders, each in an awe-inducing and ordinary environment. Awe-inducing background environments included mountains, nature, large buildings, and city overviews, while ordinary environments included simple backgrounds, such as plain walls. Our initial stimuli included twenty distinct leaders for whom we were able to identify a photo in an awe-inducing and ordinary environment, and a pretest was conducted with 103 participants on Prolific (mean age = 32.42, 48.5% identified as female) to provide awe ratings of each photo. The ten photo pairs with the greatest difference in awe ratings between the awe-inducing and ordinary environment photos were used for the main study's experimental stimuli. The leaders selected for the main study were Aung San Suu Kyi, the Dalai Lama, Robert

[1] Amernic, Craig, & Tourish, 2007; Barnes, 2016; Decter-Frain, Vanstone, & Frimer, 2016; De Vries, 1998; Khan, 2021; Ladkin, 2006; Nordensvard & Ketola, 2022; Simpson et al., 2022; Subedi & Scott, 2021.

Iger, Richard Branson, Narendra Modi, Nelson Mandela, Greta Thunberg, Jack Welch, Jacinda Adern, and Elon Musk. Photos of these leaders in awe-inducing and ordinary environments constituted the known charismatic leader condition. To create the unknown leader condition, we used the same 20 photos but displaced the known leaders with black silhouettes. Together, Study 2a therefore had four different experimental manipulations, each containing ten different photos. See Appendix B for an example of the experimental stimuli used.

Measures

Charisma Attributions. We assessed leader charisma attributions with the same measure used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .95$), replacing the speaker's name (used in Study 1) with "the leader". Additionally, we included a third item to this scale, asking participants to what extent they perceived the leader to be enthusiastic. Whether this additional item is included as part of our measure does not affect the documented pattern of results. Thus, we retained the original two-item-scale for analysis, remaining consistent with Study 1.

Morality Attributions. We assessed leader morality attributions using the same measure used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .94$), replacing the speaker's name (used in Study 1) with "the leader".

Control Variables. We collected participants' age and gender as control variables.

Results

We provide descriptive statistics and correlations in Table 2. Hypothesis 1 predicted that leader charisma attributions will be greater in awe-inducing environments compared to ordinary environments. To test this hypothesis, we estimated a mixed-effects linear model predicting charisma attributions with our environment condition (awe-inducing vs. ordinary), including a random intercept for participant and the leader shown. In support of Hypothesis 1, leaders in awe-inducing environments received significantly higher attributions of charisma than the same

leaders in ordinary environments ($b_{awe-inducing\ environment}$ = 2.20, t(3181.66) = 3.60, p < 0.001; see Table 3, Model 1).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that only leaders not already known for their charisma will benefit from awe-inducing environments. We thus included our second experimental condition (known charismatic leader vs. unknown leader) and its interaction term with the environment condition. In support of Hypothesis 2, the interaction term was significant ($b_{awe-inducing\ environment\ x\ leader\ shown}$= -7.47, t(3201.82) = -6.14, p < 0.001; see Table 3, Model 2). Probing this interaction using simple slopes revealed that, as expected (see Figure 1), there was a significant effect of the environment condition on charisma attributions when the leader in the picture was unknown (b = 6.02, t(3203.41) = 6.91, p < 0.001). However, when the leader in the picture was a known charismatic leader, the effect of the environment was negative yet not statistically significant (b = -1.45, t(3199.81) = -1.70, p = 0.089). Including age and gender as control variables does not change the reported pattern of results (see Table 3, Model 3).

To test whether the effect of an awe-inducing environment is specific to charisma attributions, we conducted the same analyses using morality attributions as our outcome measure. Contrary to our finding in Study 1 that awe-inducing environments enhance charisma attributions but not other positive attributions, there was a main effect of the awe-inducing environment on morality attributions ($b_{awe-inducing\ environment}$ = 2.28, t(3194.51) = 3.33, p = 0.001). The interaction of our environment and leader conditions on morality attributions was also significant ($b_{awe-inducing\ environment\ x\ leader\ shown}$= -5.16, t(3215.65) = -3.79, p < 0.001), showing that awe-inducing environments increased morality attributions for unknown leaders (b

= 4.90, $t(3217.49) = 5.02$, $p < 0.001$) but not for known charismatic leaders ($b = -0.26$, $t(3213.46) = -0.28$, $p = 0.782$).

Discussion

Study 2a provides further support for Hypothesis 1. We again find that awe-inducing environments lead to greater charisma attributions, when compared with ordinary environments. We also find support for Hypothesis 2, demonstrating that the positive effect of awe-inducing environments on charisma attributions only occurs for unknown leaders (vs. known charismatic leaders). When known charismatic leaders were shown, the positive effect of an awe-inducing environment was not significant. Our findings support the idea that awe-inducing environments activate the charismatic leader prototype but this has limited impact when leader-directed activation of the charismatic leader prototype has already occurred. Leader-directed activation of this prototype happens because participants recognize that the leaders are widely known for their charisma.

In Study 2b, we sought to replicate the pattern of findings found in Study 2a. While we find support for both of our hypotheses in Study 2a – presenting images of charismatic leaders that vary in age, race, and gender – the use of black silhouettes to replace these known leaders in the unknown condition has limitations worth noting. For instance, black silhouettes do not reveal leader-specific information, which may have rendered participants particularly reliant on the background physical environment for charisma-relevant cues. To build upon this, in Study 2b, we developed new material that compares images of a known charismatic leader with unknown equivalents, where the known charismatic leader's face was replaced with an unknown face using artificial intelligence. This allows participants to draw from both leader-specific and

environment-specific information when forming their attributions of leader charisma. Study 2b may also help to address the inconsistent findings concerning morality attributions.

STUDY 2B

Study 2b tested Hypotheses 1 and 2 by employing a 2 (awe-inducing vs. ordinary environment) x 2 (known charismatic leader vs. unknown leader) between subjects design. To investigate the distinct effect of an awe-inducing environment on charisma attributions for unknown (vs. known charismatic) leaders, we used images of a widely known charismatic leader in both an ordinary and awe-inducing physical environment and created unknown leader equivalents of the same images using artificial intelligence software, replacing the face of the known leader with the face of an unknown person.

Participants

We recruited 400 participants from Prolific Academic. Of these, 369 participants passed our attention and manipulation check requirements (see below), leading their responses to be retained for analysis. Participants were, on average, 40.83 years old (*SD* = 14.34) and 59.6% identified as female. To bolster the likelihood that participants considered our chosen leader, Barack Obama, to indeed be charismatic, we also applied a prescreen requirement that participants resided within the United States and identified their political orientation as ‘liberal’.

Procedure

After giving consent, participants were randomly assigned to one of four condition groups. We presented participants with an image of a ‘leader’ in accordance with their assigned experimental condition. Participants were then asked to provide attribution ratings of charisma and morality with respect to the leader shown in the image. Participants were either shown an image of Barack Obama or an unknown person in an awe-inducing or ordinary background.

Following this, participants were asked whether they know the person in the image (yes/no) and to indicate who if the selected answer is 'yes'. Finally, as part of a further manipulation check, at the end, we asked participants to rate the extent to which the background in the image induces awe (*not at all* = 1; *to a great extent* = 7). The experiment concluded with the collection of demographic information.

We selected Barack Obama as a well-known charismatic leader. The selection was based on extensive evidence in the academic literature that has identified Obama to be a highly charismatic leader (Bligh & Kohles, 2009; Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015; Takala et al., 2013). To develop the experimental stimuli, we searched for photographs of Barack Obama in an awe-inducing and ordinary environment, settling on images with an expansive sea view (awe-inducing) or shelving (ordinary) in the background. To develop the experimental stimuli for the unknown leader conditions, we used the same images of Obama but replaced Obama's face with the face of an unknown person using artificial intelligence software (https://faceswapper.ai/). The face of an unknown person was obtained using a stock image of an unknown person who matched the characteristics of Obama. See Appendix C for the experimental stimuli used and the referent stock image used to develop images in the unknown leader conditions.

In total, 31 participants provided either an incorrect response to our instrumental attention check, failed to identify Barack Obama when his image was shown, or reported that they knew the person in the image in the unknown leader conditions.

Measures

Charisma Attributions. We assessed leader charisma attributions with the same measure used in Studies 1 and 2a ($\alpha = .92$). As in Study 2a, we included a third item to this scale, however, whether this additional item is included as part of our measure does not affect the

documented pattern of results. Thus, we retained the original two-item-scale for analysis, remaining consistent across all studies.

Morality Attributions. We assessed leader morality attributions using the same measure used in Studies 1 and 2a ($\alpha = .98$).

Control Variables. We collected participants' age and gender as control variables. In addition, we also obtained participants' ratings of the competence, warmth, and attractiveness of the leader presented in the image, as part of further control measures.

Results

We provide descriptive statistics and correlations in Table 4. First, our environmental awe manipulation check revealed that participants in the awe-inducing (vs. ordinary) environment conditions reported that the background environment indeed induced greater awe ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.65$ *vs*. $M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.75$): $F(1, 367) = 54.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .129$.

In support of Hypothesis 1, a 2x2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) on charisma attributions revealed, first, a significant main effect of our environmental awe manipulation [$F(1, 365) = 6.32$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = .017$]. In other words, attributions of leader charisma were positively impacted by the awe-inducing capacity of the background physical environment. In support of Hypothesis 2, this analysis also revealed a significant interaction between our awe-inducing environment and known charismatic leader manipulations on charisma attributions ($F(1, 365) = 4.60$, $p = .033$, $\eta_p^2 = .012$). Probing this interaction using simple slopes revealed that, as expected (see Figure 2), there was a significant effect of the environment condition on charisma attributions when the leader in the picture was unknown ($b = 6.99$, $t = 3.20$, $p = .002$). However, when the leader in the picture was a known charismatic leader, the effect of the environment was not statistically significant ($b = .56$, $t = .27$, $p = .788$). Including age, gender, and ratings of

competence, warmth, and attractiveness as control variables does not change the reported pattern of results.

Finally, to test whether the effect of an awe-inducing environment is specific to charisma attributions, we conducted the same analyses using morality attributions as our outcome measure. The main effect of an awe-inducing environment on morality attributions was not significant ($F(1, 365) = .73$, $p = .787$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$), nor was the interaction term between our experimental manipulations ($F(1, 365) = 1.14$, $p = .288$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$). This provides additional evidence, consistent with Study 1, for the distinct role of charisma attributions in this process.

Discussion

Study 2b provides further support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. We again find that awe-inducing environments lead to greater charisma attributions, but only when leaders were not already known to be charismatic. Our findings support the idea that awe-inducing environments activate the charismatic leader prototype but this has limited impact when leader-directed prototype activation has already occurred.

In Study 2a, the reported pattern of results was not unique to charisma attributions but also held for morality attributions. Participants in the unknown leader condition had little information to go by when forming their attributions because only black silhouettes of the unknown leaders were provided. This potentially encouraged participants to draw broad, undifferentiated inferences solely on the basis of the environmental background. In Study 2b, we resolved this limitation by providing participants with images of the unknown leader. To achieve this, we used artificial intelligence to replace the face of a known leader with the face of an unknown person. Here, participants were less reliant on environment-specific information because leader-specific information was provided, leading us to again report divergence in

participant attributions of leader charisma and morality, as originally found in Study 1. The findings appear to suggest that it is important for leader-specific information to be available for the unique effects of environmental awe on charisma attributions to emerge.

In Study 3, we planned to conceptually replicate the pattern of findings found in Studies 2a-b. More specifically, we examined whether the results found thus far would hold when leaders activate the charismatic leader prototype through other means. We thus experimentally manipulated leader CLTs through an audio recording of the leader's speech. This ensures we provide participants with a rich information base – specific to the leader – in all experimental conditions. Hence, in Study 3, we provide a robust and additive test of the unique effect of awe-inducing environments on charisma attributions.

STUDY 3

Study 3 utilized a 2 (awe-inducing vs. ordinary office environment) x 2 (high vs. low charisma signaling) between subjects design. We manipulated the office environment by presenting participants with a picture of an awe-inducing vs. ordinary office setting. To manipulate charisma signaling, we presented participants with a leader speech signaling high vs. low charisma.

Participants

We recruited 700 participants from Prolific. To be eligible for participation, participants were required to be fluent English speakers. Of these, 681 passed our instrumental attention check. To further ensure the validity of participants' responses, we included attention check questions regarding the leader's speech and excluded 158 participants for answering one or more of these questions incorrectly. This resulted in a final and analyzable sample size of 523 participants. On average, they were 40.8 years old and 36% identified as female.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to either an awe-inducing or ordinary office environment condition and received either a high or low charisma signaling speech from their leader. After providing their consent, participants confirmed their willingness to listen to the entire speech. They were then presented with a scenario in which they had recently started a job and were asked to manage an important project. Participants were instructed to imagine a scenario where their leader needed to discuss an important project for that day. They were shown a picture of their leader's office (representing either an awe-inducing or ordinary physical environment) and listened to their leader give a short speech. Following the speech, we collected participant's attributions of leader charisma and morality, in addition to their demographic information.

We selected two office images that were similar in terms of their composition and the objects they depicted but differed uniquely in their ability to induce awe. Both pictures showed a desk with a chair and glass walls. However, the awe-inducing office environment displayed a vast view of a cityscape and the sea in the background, creating a sense of vastness (Yaden et al., 2016). The ordinary office environment did not possess any such views, where behind the glass walls were simply grey colored walls (see Appendix D). We pre-tested these images in an online sample of 60 participants from Prolific and found the awe-inducing (M = 5.37, SD = 1.28) environment to induce significantly more awe relative to the ordinary (M = 2.79, SD = 1.67) office environment ($t(59) = 12.45$, $p < .001$).

For the charisma signaling (high vs. low) manipulations, we tailored two speeches used in prior studies of charismatic leadership (Antonakis et al., 2022; Ernst et al., 2021; Meslec et al., 2020). Both speeches had equivalent content, number of sentences (38 for low CLTs, 37 for high

CLTs), and word count (550 for both). However, they differed in the number of CLTs used. One of the coauthors and a trained research assistant coded the speeches at the sentence level for the presence or absence of each CLT and met to resolve any inconsistencies. The charismatic speech contained 24 CLTs, whereas the non-charismatic speech included only 5. A professional voice actor recorded the speeches using an animated voice for the charismatic speech and a somewhat subdued voice for the non-charismatic speech (see Appendix E for the transcribed speeches). We pretested the speeches with 102 Prolific participants. We found that participants considered the leader to be significantly more charismatic when delivering the charismatic speech (M = 76.74, SD = 20.43) than when giving the non-charismatic speech (M = 44.79, SD = 26.34: $t(100) = 6.84$, $p < .001$).

Measures

Charisma Attributions. We assessed leader charisma attributions with the same measure used in Studies 1-2b. As in Studies 2a-b, we used the two-item scale for our analysis ($\alpha = .93$), though a third item was included. Importantly, the findings remain unchanged whether the two- or three-item scale is used.

Morality Attributions. We assessed leader morality attributions using the same measure used in Studies 1-2b ($\alpha = .95$).

Control Variables. We collected participants' age and gender as control variables.

Results

We provide descriptive statistics and correlations in Table 5. To test our support for Hypothesis 1, we regressed charisma attributions on our environment condition variable (awe-inducing vs. ordinary), controlling for our charisma signaling manipulation. In support of Hypothesis 1, the leader presented as giving his speech in the awe-inducing environment

received significantly higher attributions of charisma than the same leader in an ordinary environment, controlling for whether the speech was signaling charisma or not ($b_{awe-inducing\ environment}$ = 6.33, t(520) = 3.04, p < .002).

To test our support for Hypothesis 2, we interacted our charisma signaling condition variable (charismatic or non-charismatic) with the environment condition variable. The interaction was not significant ($b_{awe-inducing\ environment\ x\ speech\ condition}$ = -3.06, t(519) = -.73, p < .466). Thus, we did not find support for Hypothesis 2. See Table 6 for the full regression results.

As part of a series of exploratory analyses, we probed this interaction further despite the non-significance of the effect. To this end, we changed the factor levels of the charisma signaling manipulation, once looking at the effect of the awe-inducing environment for the high CLTs condition, and once for the low CLTs condition. Here, we found a significant effect of the environment when charisma signaling was low (b = 8.01, t(519) = 2.58, p < .010), but not when charisma signaling was high (b = 4.96, t(519) = 1.77, p = .078). Figure 3 depicts these results.

To test whether the effect of an awe-inducing environment was specific to charisma, we conducted the same regression analysis but used morality attributions as the outcome variable. There was no main effect of awe on morality attributions (b = 2.19, t(520) = 1.41, p = .158). There was also no interaction effect between our environment and charisma signaling manipulations (b = -2.63, t(519) = -0.84, p = .400); the effect of environmental awe on morality attributions was non-significant in both the high and the low charisma signaling conditions. Our reported pattern of results do not change when including age and gender as controls.

Discussion

Study 3 provides further empirical support for Hypothesis 1, demonstrating that an awe-inducing (vs. ordinary) environment increased attributions of leader charisma. We did not find full support for Hypothesis 2, such that the effect of an awe-inducing environment did not significantly interact with our charisma signaling manipulation. Despite the non-significant interaction, post-hoc analyses reflected findings that align with the prediction that awe-inducing environments enhance charisma attributions for leaders who have not already activated the charismatic leader prototype within followers. The effect of the physical environment was significant when the leader used few CLTs (i.e., low charisma signal) but not when the leader used many CLTs (i.e., high charisma signal). These results should, however, be interpreted with caution, given their exploratory nature. Importantly, as in Studies 1 and 2b, we also found that environmental awe did not promote unrelated positive leader attributions (morality), lending further support for environmental awe's unique relationship with attributed charisma.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this research, we examine the physical environment that leaders find themselves in, an easily overlooked but pervasive factor in leader-follower interactions. We set out to answer the following question: Does the physical environment that a leader inhabits influence whether followers attribute them with charisma? Across four studies, of which one was a field experiment, we find that an environment's capacity to evoke feelings of awe enhanced followers' attributions of charisma toward their leader. This effect was evident for leaders that were not yet known to be charismatic but not, however, for known charismatic leaders. This work sheds important light on the need for scholars to better understand the physical environment for its role in shaping how followers view their leaders. Below, we discuss the theoretical and practical

implications of our findings, in addition to directions for future research.

Theoretical Contributions

Our research makes several important theoretical contributions to research on emotions, leadership, and the physical environment. First, our findings contribute to a better understanding of what it means for leaders to appear charismatic and the attribution processes undergirding this. In line with implicit leadership theories (Lord et al., 1982; Sy & Van Knippenberg, 2021), we find that both leader-centric and environmental features can activate followers' charismatic leader prototypes. This finding, first, builds on the embodiment perspective of charisma (Reh et al., 2017). In this perspective, some consideration is given to the surrounding physical environment, including reference to the relevance of vertical position, size, and distance (e.g., speaking from an elevated podium), much greater emphasis is placed on a leader's physical appearance (e.g., face, physical strength). Thus, it is acknowledged that "cognition is grounded in the physical context of a person's body and the environment (Schubert & Koole, 2009)" (p. 489), yet the absence of a rich literature on the physical environment in organizational sciences has left this aspect of the embodiment perspective's theorizing underdeveloped (Humphrey et al., 2007; Parker et al., 2017). Physical space can in fact have performative qualities, where environmental features produce emotions that are conducive to the practices taking place (Burke, 1969; Sharma & Grant, 2011; Stephenson et al., 2020). We show that environmental awe – a theoretically novel feature of the physical environment – transmits a leaders charismatic appeal in moments where such appeal is desired.

Second, we further our understanding of the nuanced interactions taking place between cues in influencing attributed charisma. Research to date has identified various boundary conditions for when such contextual cues have significant effects. For example, gender interacts

with social networks (Brands et al., 2015), and clear performance cues interact with charismatic leadership tactics (Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015) in influencing charisma attributions. Similarly, we find that awe-inducing physical environments interact with leader-directed prototype activation in promoting attributed charisma. Connectionist models are highly susceptible to 'gap-filling phenomena' (Lord & Shondrick, 2011), where prototype activation can occur in the absence of complete information because units in the periphery are activated (Bechtel & Abrahamsen, 1991; Hanges et al., 2000). Our findings suggest that when leader-directed prototype activation has not already occurred, followers do not possess complete information regarding their leader's charismatic abilities. This uncertainty produces increased reliance on peripheral unit activation (Hanges et al., 2000). We therefore contribute to theory on charismatic leadership and implicit leadership theories by highlighting the importance of uncertainty in determining when followers rely more on contextual cues in the activation of leader prototypes. An understanding of this will better equip scholars to form predictions about the conditions under which contextual information is influential in shaping perceptions of leaders.

Third, we contribute to the nascent physical work design literature by demonstrating its significance in shaping employee judgments and behavior. The physical environment is a constant factor that leaders cannot avoid; however, they are able to change or tailor the environments within which they interact with followers with relative ease. This is in stark contrast to other contextual factors such as crises, organizational success, or network structure. Prior research in this area has theorized about the importance of privacy, proximity, and assigned workspaces in determining relational ties at work (Khazanchi et al., 2018), in addition to how open office environments may increase distraction and elevate noise, leading to negative emotions such as anger and frustration (Ashkanasy et al., 2014). What is missing from this

literature, however, is an adequate consideration of environmental features for their role in (1) eliciting discrete positive emotions and (2) how this helps to enhance a leader's appeal and influence. We therefore build on emerging research on physical work environments by expanding the scope of inquiry to include the elicitation of positive emotions, such as awe, and evidence why such emotions can alter how followers perceive their leaders.

Fourth, we theoretically contribute to the management literature by reinforcing the fundamental role of awe as a follower response to charismatic leadership. Research on awe in management is surprisingly scant, which is in opposition to the proposed evolutionary function of awe: to establish stability among social hierarchies by promoting reverence and admiration for leaders among followers (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). This is why scholars recognize awe as an emotion that promotes collective engagement and the attainment of goals that benefit the group, above and beyond the attainment of goals that benefit merely the self (Piff et al., 2015; Stellar et al., 2017). Hence, awe is referred to as a self-transcendent emotion (Jiang & Sedikides, 2022). Awe possesses all the necessary ingredients to mediate a charismatic leader's influence over their followers, thus ensuring that they effectively collaborate within organizations (Shamir et al., 1993; Sy et al., 2018). By establishing environmental awe as a means through which leaders can enhance their charisma, we draw attention to the relevance of this transformative emotion. An emotion, nonetheless, that has leader-follower dynamics residing within its evolutionary core.

Finally, while we draw from research on implicit leadership theories and connectionist models to explain our findings, it is important to consider alternative theoretical explanations. Specifically, though we explain our effects, in part, through misattribution processes, scholars have also drawn from response facilitation as a way to explain why peripheral factors influence attributions (Pastor et al., 2007). Misattribution of arousal occurs when arousal from one source

(e.g., the environment) is mistakenly attributed to another source (e.g., the leader), thereby inducing a more positive evaluation of the leader (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; White et al., 1981; Williams et al., 1982). In contrast, response facilitation predicts that arousal increases the *dominant* response of an individual (e.g., attributing charisma) in situations where that response is expected (Allen et al., 1989). For example, previous research has found that *only* leaders already attributed with charisma received higher charisma ratings from aroused (vs. not aroused) followers (Pastor et al., 2007). This finding supports a response facilitation hypothesis because attributed charisma is a likely response to charismatic leaders and arousal strengthens this response. Our findings, however, differ because leaders who are not yet known to be charismatic benefit the most from an awe-inducing physical environment. For known charismatic leaders, we do not find support for this relationship. Response facilitation, therefore, cannot provide an adequate explanation for our results. The present research, therefore, indicates that scholars should not expect discrete positive emotions to reveal similar effects to that of physiological arousal. In fact, this work highlights that full consideration should be given to discrete positive emotions for their respective and unique relationships with the physical environment and how this affects leader-follower dynamics.

Practical Implications

Our findings have important practical implications for the way leaders, followers, and organizations think about awe and the physical work environment. First, we provide practical insights for leaders aiming to enhance their charisma, emphasizing the strategic use of awe-inspiring environments. By conducting events or meetings in settings that naturally evoke awe, leaders, especially those not traditionally known to be charismatic, can foster a stronger charismatic impression among their followers. In turn, enhanced attributed charisma may help to

promote engagement, identification with the organization, and higher performance (Babcock-Roberson & Strickland, 2010; Cicero & Pierro, 2007; De Hoogh et al., 2004), among other things. Leaders can also strategically utilize awe-inspiring environments for events of particular organizational importance, such as when onboarding new recruits, outlining a change in company vision or direction, or joining a new organization (Sauer, 2011; Sluss & Thompson, 2012). These initial encounters can potentially yield positive downstream effects. Thus, for leaders hoping to expand their influence and charismatic presence, leveraging the power of awe-inspiring environments is a novel strategy that can be applied from this research.

In addition, the limited effect of environmental awe where leaders and employees have regular, repeated contact raises questions about the sustainability of it as a tool for enhancing leader charisma. While our research shows that awe-inducing settings elevate charisma attributions for leaders who are not yet well-known to their followers, this effect diminishes when leaders are familiar and have already activated a charismatic leader prototype through consistent behavior. This highlights that awe-inducing environments are most useful in settings where leadership interactions are new or rare, such as during press conferences, recruitment sessions, or major announcements to external audiences. Nonetheless, our recommendation is that employees should be aware of awe's effects as a precautionary safeguard against potential leader manipulation. This is because some leaders may choose to use awe-inducing environments to enhance their persuasiveness toward ill-intended causes (Morse, 2010). Understanding that certain environments can amplify a leader's charismatic appeal, though artificially, can thus help followers critically assess whether a leader might be exploiting this to their advantage. As one example, cult leaders are widely known to use awe-inspiring settings to enhance follower impressionability, which in turn produces obedient and oftentimes even fanatic

followership (Shapshay et al., 2018).

Finally, organizations, broadly speaking, can benefit from designing physical workplace environments in ways that promote feelings of awe. Our findings suggest that environments which elicit awe are conducive for leader-follower interactions because they indirectly facilitate a leader's ability to influence followers toward the atainment of organizational goals. This could be particularly useful in moments where leaders need to inspire or unite teams, such as aligning followers with a new strategic organizational vision (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). For example, investing in the biophilic design of corporate campuses can enhance the charisma of leaders during key meetings or presentations, fostering stronger engagement and influence over employees (Klotz & Bolino, 2021). Furthermore, this work demonstrates the value of holding corporate retreats or important gatherings in awe-inspiring natural settings, such as mountains, forests, or lakeside venues. Given these potential benefits, organizations can justify the expenses related to such initiatives. Thus, this work serves as reminder for organizations to carefully consider the physical environment as much as their human capital when it comes to pursuing organizational goals.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

Our studies have several strengths worth highlighting. By conducting a field experiment (Study 1) in which we validate the positive effect of environmental awe on leader charisma attributions, we find support for our first hypothesis in a setting with strong external validity (Cruz, 2021). Moreover, our multi-study package provided mostly robust support for our hypotheses, not only across both experimental and field settings, but also across distinct operationalizations of our independent and moderating variables (Derksen & Morawski, 2022). This includes using experimental stimuli that vary in (1) the age, gender, and race of the leader,

(2) the awe-inducing environmental setting (e.g., office, nature, grand lecture hall), and (3) the means through which leader-directed activation of the charismatic leader prototype occurred (e.g., historically known to be charismatic vs. behaviorally signal charisma through charismatic speech).

Despite these strengths, however, our work is not without limitations. First, we did not find a significant interaction effect between the physical environment (awe-inducing *vs.* ordinary) and charisma signaling (high *vs.* low) in Study 3. There are several plausible explanations for why this was the case. This finding may be due to the fact that participants did not observe the leader inhabiting the awe-inducing environment but only received a recorded speech and instructions to imagine the leader occupying this environment. It could also be that the high charisma signaling condition was not perceived as charismatic enough for prototype activation to occur. Next, across all studies, we did not compare awe-inducing environments to environments that evoke other positive emotions, such as joy or amusement. This prevents us from drawing the conclusion that awe uniquely activates the charismatic leader prototype, above and beyond other known discrete positive emotions. Given that charisma has been shown to elicit a variety of positive affective states (Erez et al., 2008; Sy et al., 2018), the documented effects reported here may be due to awe, yet they may not be unique to awe.

Building on these limitations, our findings offer several avenues for future research. First, we recommend future research to build further on the prototype perspective we have advanced and develop a comprehensive framework for explaining when and why various environmental factors influence how charismatic leaders are perceived. A series of broad contextual factors, whether crisis situations (Bastardoz et al., 2022; Bligh et al., 2004; Davis & Gardner, 2012; Pillai & Meindl, 1998; Williams et al., 2009), organizational success (Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015), the

clothes leaders wear (Maran et al., 2021), or social networks (Brands et al., 2015), could neatly be explained by the degree to which present cues activate a follower's charismatic leader prototype. Importantly, our work suggests that these contextual factors should hold greater influence when central leader-specific information is lacking or unclear. Given that implicit leadership theories vary across individuals (Offermann, Kennedy Jr, & Wirtz, 1994), there is also the question of whether distinct environmental features vary in their importance across cultures in leader prototype activation (Lord et al., 2020). Thus, scholars should pursue this future research direction so that the conditions under which other environmental factors, in addition to environmental awe, can promote charisma attributions (and beyond) can be identified.

A second promising area for future research involves exploring the conditional effects of the leader's message content and valence on the relationship between environmental awe and charisma attributions. While the current research demonstrates that awe-inducing environments enhance attributions of leader charisma, particularly for less-known leaders, it remains unclear whether this effect holds across different types of messages. For instance, the emotional tone or valence of the message—such as delivering positive news (e.g., announcing bonuses) versus negative news (e.g., layoffs)—may interact with the awe elicited by the environment. It is plausible that a leader's charisma could be perceived differently depending on the valence of the message being conveyed, with positive messages amplifying the effect of environmental awe but negative ones diminishing this effect. Investigating how these factors shape leader charisma attributions would deepen our understanding of the interactions between leader communication, physical environmental cues, and follower attributions.

We also did not exhaustively test all environmental properties that induce awe. First, there are other aspects of the physical environment, particularly as this pertains to physical work

design, that warrant examination within organizations. For instance, biophilic design, natural light, and beautiful artwork may also elicit follower feelings of awe (Klotz & Bolino, 2021; Negami & Ellard, 2023; Perez & Lench, 2018). There is also the question of whether environmental awe is equally applicable to virtual environments. Many important organizational events now take place in virtual settings, such as regular team meetings, performance appraisals, and town hall sessions (Raghuram et al., 2019). As an example, leaders may be able to use a Zoom or MS-teams background that induces awe to their advantage. Given that Zoom and MS-teams provide functionality for the use of virtual backgrounds, where a leader need not be restricted to the physical environment of their actual workspace, the possibilities here are vast. Next, while these facets focus on the physical dimension of the environment, whether virtual or in-person, consideration should also be given to audio. Charisma and emotions are strongly intertwined (e.g., Bono & Ilies, 2006; Erez et al., 2008; Menges et al., 2015; Sy et al., 2018; Wasielewski, 1985), and music, which has been termed the "language of emotions" (Trainor & Schmidt, 2003, p. 310), is a known elicitor of awe (Pilgrim et al., 2017). For instance, leaders may benefit from choosing to play certain kinds of music ahead of taking the stage when communicating to followers. Again, a wealth of opportunities await scholars who explore these facets of the environment further.

Finally, given that we examine charisma attributions at only one point in time, this calls into question the longevity of our reported effect. Leaders and followers share numerous social interactions that span long periods of time. During this time, it is reasonable to assume that leaders will have ample opportunity to behaviorally signal charisma or not (Balkundi, Kilduff, & Harrison, 2011; Jacquart & Antonakis, 2015). If charisma-relevant information specific to the leader's behavior is available, and thus no longer uncertain, employees may rely less on

environmental cues when forming their charisma attributions (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002; Van den Bos et al., 1998; Zalesny & Ford, 1990). Environmental awe could therefore be best positioned to influence first impressions. New leaders entering the workplace have an opportunity to appear charismatic in their first encounters with followers by choosing to hold these encounters in awe-inspiring environments. At the same time, future research should also test whether awe-inspired charisma attributions are 'sticky' and help to sustain high charisma attributions over time (e.g., Aversa, Huyghe, & Bonadio, 2021; Mann & Ferguson, 2015), even if leaders do not behaviorally signal charisma in subsequent interactions with followers. This could be the case because partially activated leader prototypes tend to 'fill in' components of the prototype that are missing, resulting even in the formation of memories that include accounts of these missing components (Lord & Shondrick, 2011). In this way, initial prototype activation could have an enduring effect on how followers view their leader. It is therefore important that scholars investigate how these effects evolve longitudinally and test whether leaders can reap lasting benefits from the effects of environmental awe.

Concluding Remarks

Our research demonstrates that awe evoked by the physical environment promotes follower attributions of leader charisma. In addition, we also found that this effect appears to occur only for leaders who have not yet activated the charismatic leader prototype through their past or current behavior. These findings support the idea that experienced awe, a prototypical response to charismatic leadership, serves as an important cue *even* when elicited by the physical environment, not the leader. Our research also offers practical implications for leaders, showing that the physical environment is something they can use to their advantage, choosing which spaces to inhabit for different types of social interaction. Choosing a space that is physically vast

or beautifully designed can help unfamiliar leaders appear more charismatic. Leaders should thus wisely choose where they make their next company announcement or hold their next meeting. Taken together, our research has made important strides in obtaining a more nuanced view of the charismatic leader effect. Leaders and physical environments are in constant interaction with one another and examining this dynamic, we believe, can open up a wealth of future research opportunities for scholars.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 1).

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Awe-inducing environment	.61	.49						
2. Perceived awe	3.61	1.72	.47**					
3. Attributed charisma	80.90	10.99	.22*	.32**				
4. MLQ charisma	5.81	.72	.20*	.35**	.57**			
4. Attributed morality	82.93	11.40	.08	.25**	.50**	.48**		
6. Age	23.35	2.48	-.55**	-.29**	-.15	-.12	-.11	
7. Woman	.48	.50	-.07	-.07	.12	.11	.08	-.06

Note. N = 113; M = Mean; SD = standard deviation. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 2a).

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Known charismatic leader	.51	.50					
2. Awe-inducing environment	.50	.50	.01				
3. Attributed charisma	56.67	24.23	.34**	.06**			
4. Attributed morality	53.60	26.90	.30**	.05**	.73**		
5. Age	38.45	13.62	-.06**	-.02	-.08**	-.08**	
6. Woman	.61	.49	-.07**	-.01	-.02	-.03	.04*

Note. *M* = Mean; *SD* = standard deviation. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3:

Mixed-Effects Linear Regression for Attributed Charisma and Morality (Study 2a).

Dependent variable	**Charisma**			**Morality**		
Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Awe-inducing environment	2.20***	6.02***	6.01***	2.28***	4.90***	4.89***
	(0.61)	(0.87)	(0.87)	(0.68)	(0.98)	(0.98)
Leader shown		19.99***	19.81***		18.67***	18.45***
		(1.71)	(1.72)		(1.80)	(1.81)
Awe-inducing environment		-7.47***	-7.47***		-5.16***	-5.17***
x leader shown		(1.22)	(1.22)		(1.36)	(1.36)
Gender			-0.11			0.31
			(1.60)			(1.67)
Age			-0.10			-0.11
			(0.05)			0.16
Intercept	55.57***	45.38***	50.06***	52.47***	42.95***	45.38***
	(2.20)	(2.32)	(10.82)	(3.31)	(3.40)	(11.53)

Note. N= 346. Standard errors are specified in brackets below the effect. A random intercept for participant and leader was included in each model in order to account for correlated responses within participants as well as for the same leader. We report mixed-effects linear regressions on charisma (Models 1-3) and morality (Models 4-6) attributions. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 2b).

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Awe inducing environment	.50	.50								
2. Known charismatic leader	.53	.50	-.02							
3. Competence	6.06	1.07	.03	.35**						
4. Warmth	5.82	1.16	.08	.28**	.68**					
5. Physical attractiveness	4.80	1.45	.07	.22**	.44**	.49**				
6. Women	.43	.54	-.06	.09	-.04	-.08	-.06			
7. Age	40.83	14.34	-.06	.04	.11*	.08	.27**	-.05		
8. Charisma attribution	80.37	17.01	.09	.52**	.64**	.66**	.52**	-.03	.13*	
9. Morality attribution	75.98	20.61	.01	.22**	.65**	.60**	.39**	-.03	.24**	.67**

Note. *M* = Mean; *SD* = standard deviation. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 3).

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Awe-inducing environment	.51	.50					
2. Charisma signaling	.55	.50	.05				
3. Attributed charisma	68.57	27.05	.14**	.47**			
4. Attributed morality	80.96	17.73	.06	.07	.59**		
5. Women	.38	.49	.02	.03	.06	.07	
6. Age	40.80	13.13	.00	.02	.09*	.12**	.21**

Note. M = Mean; *SD* = standard deviation. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 6:

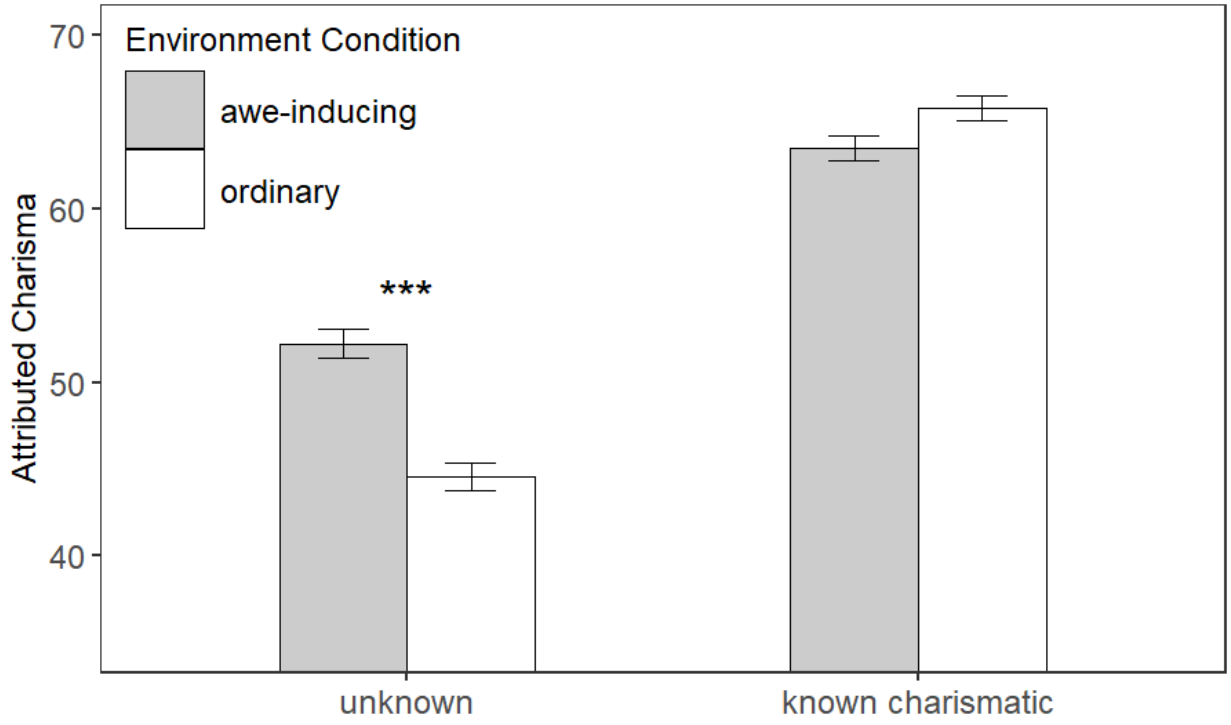
Mixed-Effects Linear Regression for Attributed Charisma and Morality (Study 3).

Dependent variable	**Charisma**			**Morality**		
Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Awe-inducing environment	6.33**	6.02*	7.82*	2.19	3.64	3.48
	(2.08)	(0.87)	(3.10)	(1.55)	(2.31)	(2.30)
Leader shown	25.07***	19.99***	26.48***	2.33	3.66	3.59
	(2.09)	(1.71)	(2.98)	(1.56)	(2.22)	(2.21)
Awe-inducing environment x leader shown		-3.30	-2.92		-2.63	-2.61
		(4.03)	(4.20)		(3.12)	(3.11)
Gender			-2.06			-2.63
			(0.08)			(1.49)
Age			0.15			0.14
			(0.08)			(0.06)
Intercept	51.48***	50.34***	58.58***	78.56***	77.85***	89.86***
	(2.20)	(2.09)	(10.82)	(3.31)	(1.62)	(10.81)

Note. $N = 523$. Standard errors are specified in brackets below the effect. We report linear regressions on charisma (Models 1-3) and morality (Models 4-6) attributions. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1

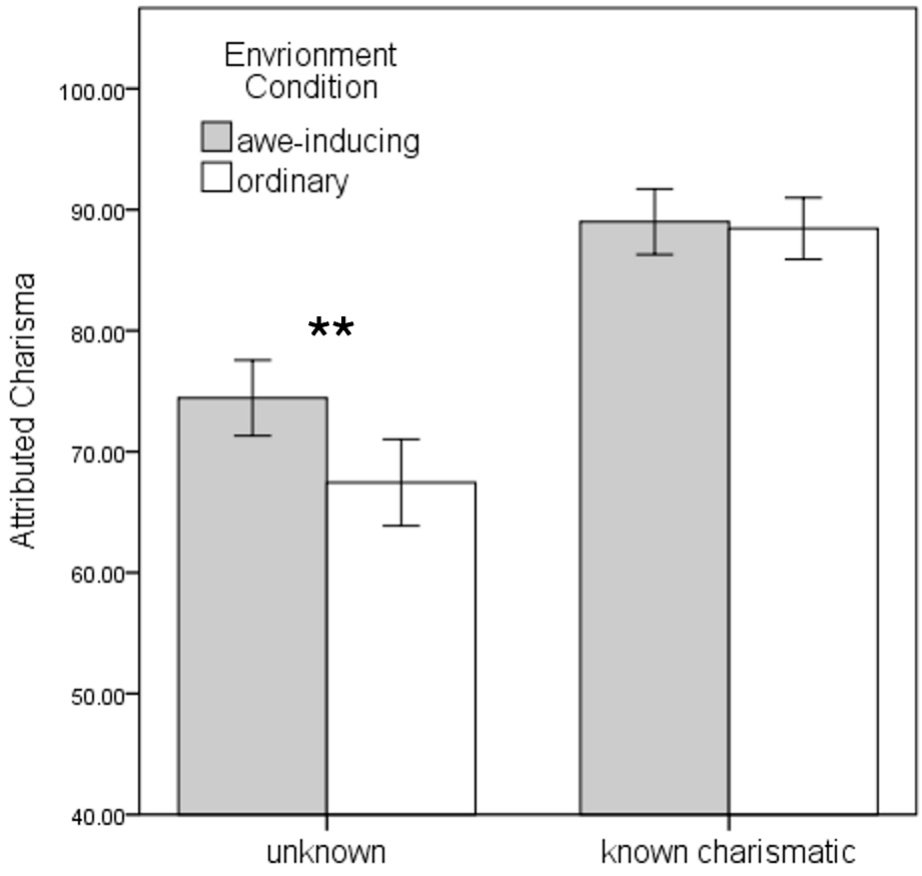
The Effect of an Awe-Inducing Environment on Charisma Attributions for Unknown versus Known Charismatic Leaders (Study 2a).



Note. Leader Condition (unknown vs. known charismatic) is depicted on the x-axis, Environment Condition (awe vs. ordinary) is represented by the grey (awe) versus white (ordinary) bars. Attributed Charisma is shown on the y-axis, depicting part of the scale ranging from 0-100.

Figure 2

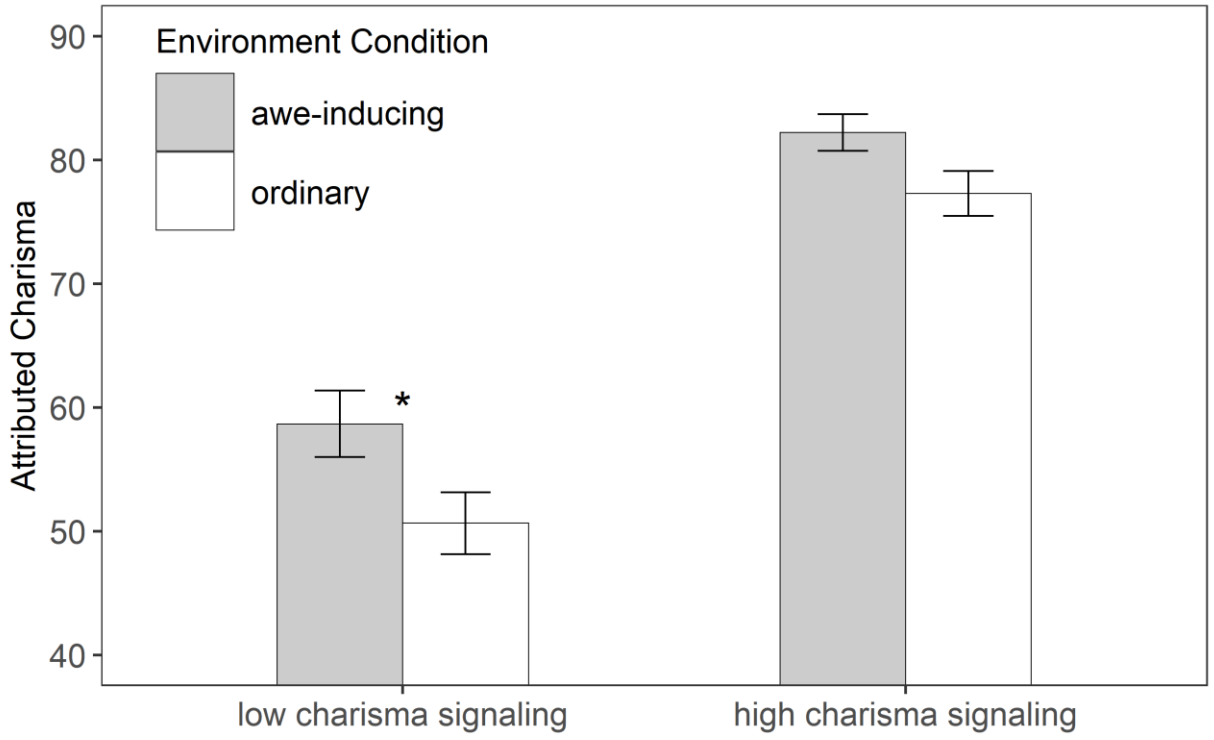
The Effect of an Awe-Inducing Environment on Charisma Attributions for Unknown versus Known Charismatic Leaders (Study 2b).



Note. Known charismatic leader Condition (unknown vs. known charismatic) is depicted on the x-axis, Awe-inducing environment condition (awe-inducing vs. ordinary) is represented by the grey (awe-inducing) vs. white (ordinary) bars. Attributed Charisma is shown on the y-axis, depicting the scale ranging from 0-100.

Figure 3

The Effect of an Awe-Inducing Environment on Charisma Attributions for Leaders Signaling Low versus High Charisma (Study 3).



Note. Leader Condition (low charisma signaling vs. high charismatic) is depicted on the x-axis, Environment Condition (awe-inducing vs. ordinary) is represented by the grey (awe) versus white (ordinary) bars. Attributed Charisma is shown on the y-axis, depicting part of the scale ranging from 0-100.

Appendix A

Study 1: Example Stimuli of the Same Charismatic Leader in an Awe-Inducing and Ordinary Environment

Note. The picture on the left shows the room used for the awe-inducing condition, the picture on the right shows the room used for the ordinary condition.

Appendix B

Study 2a: Example Stimuli of the Same Picture of a Known Charismatic vs. Unknown Leader in an Awe-Inducing vs. Ordinary Environment.

Note. Nelson Mandela is shown in an ordinary environment on the left and in an awe-inducing environment on the right. The images in the top row show the unknown leader condition, where black silhouettes were used to replace the known leader. The images in the bottom row show the known charismatic condition with the known charismatic leader shown.

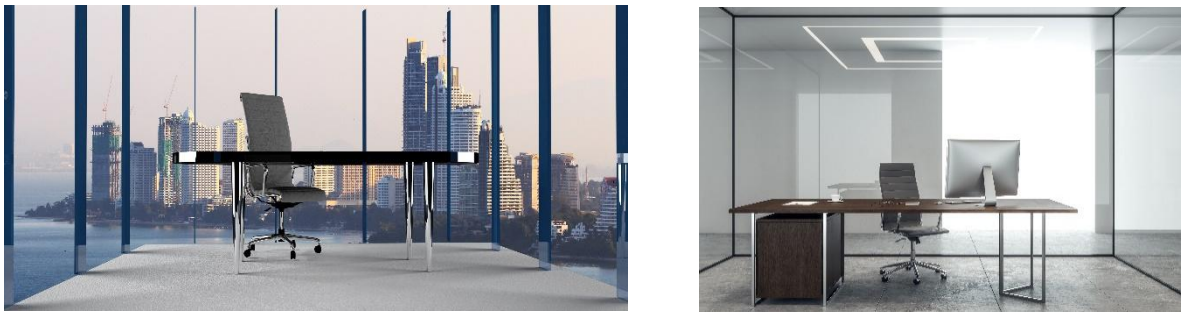
Appendix C

Study 2b: Experimental Stimuli of Known Charismatic vs. Unknown Leaders in an Awe-Inducing vs. Ordinary Environment.

Note. The images in the top row depict the unknown leader equivalents of the images of Barack Obama used, which are located in the second row. The final image at the bottom depicts the stock image used to develop the unknown leader images. More specifically, an artificial intelligence software was used to swap the face of Barack Obama with the face of the unknown person found in the stock image.

Appendix D

Study 3: Stimuli showing an awe-inducing and ordinary office environment of the leader.



Note. The awe-inducing environment is shown on the left. The ordinary environment is shown on the right.

Appendix E

Study 3: Transcribed speeches presented in the low vs. high charisma signaling conditions.

Low-Charisma Signaling Condition

I just want to tell you a few points about the new project. Of course, you are assigned to manage this project to develop a new medical product. That much is clear. At the same time, your efforts will help the company achieve what is a noble mission; that is to help people with injuries or illnesses to regain certain physical abilities. In the case of the current project, it's the ability to walk. This means the job you are doing is really important to help some people.

You will help people because the product you will develop can help people return to more normal lives. Let me tell you why. Many individuals who can't walk can't participate in many activities with others in their age group. This is obviously difficult for them. Thus, a product that helps them to regain the ability to use their legs would provide opportunities for them. Let me give you an example. They could go out with friends again. Or they could play with their children again. Therefore, the product would improve their daily lives.

So you might think, well, this is just a single product we are developing; it won't really help given the number of illnesses and disabilities there are. Yes, it will help. Think of the many products our company has developed. Every product helps a particular group of people. The more products we have, the more groups of people with diverse illnesses and disabilities we help. At the end of the day, this means that each product we develop can increase the number of people we can help, which is really what matters most of all. This is why our goal is to develop more and more products for different conditions. It is key that we develop this one product as part of this process. This will contribute to reaching a larger group of people with our products.

The product will thus make a difference to people who can't currently walk. So I want you to manage the project professionally to help these individuals. The sooner the product is developed the faster we can help. Also, the fewer mistakes that occur in the product design the less they will struggle. Thus, working fast and exact will be beneficial. Besides, please think of the people the product may be able to help when managing the project. You have managed similar projects before so you will know what to pay attention to.

Do let me know if you have any questions; I will be more than willing to contribute my share. Let's have our first review meeting on Friday and make this project one of our key priorities!

High-Charisma Signaling Condition

I just want to tell you a few points about the new project. Why did I ask you to manage this project? You may think this is just a project that's part of your job. However, by managing it, you are helping our company achieve its mission; and this is a noble mission. Your efforts will make a difference in the lives of people who cannot walk, who cannot run, and who cannot dance. It is worth doing this; I think it is the right thing to do.

How is this special? Well, the product you and your team will design may seem like just another technological innovation for you. For our customers, however, it is a set of wings that allows

them to fly. Some of these people have been unable to walk for years. What must that be like? For children whose peers are running around all day? For young adults whose friends go dancing every weekend? For elderly individuals who've walked around their whole lives and suddenly no longer can? We can make a difference in their lives.

Yet, we sometimes feel that given the numerous illnesses and disabilities in this world that cannot be treated, a single product cannot actually change anything. I say yes, it will! This reminds me of a story about an old man who, while walking along the seashore, noticed a girl picking up starfish and throwing them into the sea. The old man approached her, saying: "what are you doing?" She replied: "I am throwing starfish into the sea because the sun is coming up and the starfish will die." "But," said the man, "there are thousands of starfish, the sun is high, and the tide is going out. How can you possibly make a difference?" The girl bent down, picked up a starfish, threw it into the sea, and said: "well, I made a difference to that one."

And this also shows how important it is to work hard for the project. Each day the product is on the market is another day our customers can fly. Every technological mistake we make means a broken wing for them. So, work hard, work conscientiously, and think of the customers whose life you'll be able to change. Yes, it's a huge challenge. But your work quality, passion, and attention to detail convince me you are the right person for the project. The person who can succeed in creating wings for our customers.

Do let me know if you have any questions; I will be more than willing to contribute my share. Let's have our first review meeting on Friday and make this project one of our key priorities!