

EFFECTS OF PREVENTION-DRIVEN AND CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP STYLES ON MEDIUM-SIZED ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract

Medium-sized organisations operate in environments that require both stability and adaptability. This position paper examines the effects of prevention-driven and charismatic leadership styles on such organisations. Prevention-driven leadership prioritises risk management, operational stability, and compliance, thereby enhancing organisational resilience; however, it may also inhibit innovation and reduce employee motivation. This leadership style emphasises risk avoidance and procedural adherence, contributing to operational consistency while potentially constraining creativity. In contrast, charismatic leadership promotes inspiration, vision articulation, and employee engagement, thereby fostering innovation and organisational change. However, it may also introduce risks related to leader dependency and biased decision-making. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and case analyses, this study highlights the importance of balancing these leadership approaches based on situational demands. The paper recommends the adoption of situational leadership practices, the encouragement of balanced risk-taking, and the implementation of effective succession planning strategies to enhance organisational effectiveness. The findings suggest that medium-sized organisations benefit from leadership flexibility that aligns leadership style with contextual needs, thereby improving resilience, innovation, and employee engagement. By integrating both prevention-driven and charismatic leadership traits, organisations can achieve sustainable growth while navigating complex and dynamic environments.

Keywords: prevention-driven leadership, charismatic leadership, medium-sized organisations, leadership styles

Introduction

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping organisational direction and success. It guides decision-making processes, influences organisational culture, and affects employee motivation and performance. Over the years, leadership theories have evolved to reflect the complex and dynamic nature of effective leadership, recognising that different leadership styles produce varying outcomes depending on organisational context (Northouse, 2021). Among these styles, prevention-driven and charismatic

leadership have attracted considerable scholarly attention due to their distinct influence on organisational performance.

Prevention-driven leadership is rooted in **Regulatory Focus Theory**, which emphasises risk aversion, safety, and the maintenance of stability (Higgins, 2015). Leaders who adopt this style prioritise adherence to rules, compliance, and error prevention. This approach is particularly relevant in environments that demand operational stability and careful risk

management. In contrast, charismatic leadership is grounded in a leader's ability to articulate a compelling vision, demonstrate confidence, and inspire followers to achieve ambitious goals (Conger & Riggio, 2019). Such leaders energise their teams by fostering commitment, enthusiasm, and readiness for change.

According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2021), medium-sized organisations, typically defined as those employing between 50 and 250 individuals, occupy a unique position within the organisational landscape. They are sufficiently large to require formalised systems and structures, yet small enough to maintain flexibility and close interpersonal relationships. This dual characteristic presents distinct leadership challenges, including balancing innovation with operational stability, managing limited resources, and sustaining organisational cohesion during periods of growth (Cohen & Eimicke, 2020). Consequently, the leadership style adopted within such organisations significantly influences their capacity to address these challenges and achieve sustainable development.

This paper argues that prevention-driven and charismatic leadership styles exert significant but contrasting effects on medium-sized organisations. Prevention-driven leadership enhances stability, strengthens risk management practices, and promotes operational consistency; however, excessive reliance on this approach may suppress innovation and encourage rigid organisational cultures. Conversely, charismatic leadership fosters transformational change, enhances employee motivation, and supports adaptability, although it may also lead to overdependence on individual leaders and potential organisational instability, if not properly moderated.

By critically analysing relevant literature and empirical evidence, this paper seeks to explain how prevention-driven and charismatic leadership styles influence organisational performance, culture, and adaptability in medium-sized organisations. It posits that neither leadership style is inherently superior; rather, their effectiveness depends on contextual factors and organisational needs. Therefore, this paper advocates for a balanced and situational approach that integrates the complementary strengths of both leadership styles to address the evolving demands faced by medium-sized organisations.

Theoretical Framework

Leadership is a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing a range of styles and behaviours that influence organisational dynamics and outcomes. In medium-sized organisations, leadership plays a critical role in shaping operational effectiveness, innovation capacity, and organisational culture. Two leadership styles that have gained prominence in contemporary research are prevention-driven leadership and charismatic leadership. Understanding the theoretical foundations of these styles provides insight into their potential effects on medium-sized enterprises.

Prevention-driven leadership is grounded in **Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT)**, as proposed by Higgins (2015). RFT distinguishes between two self-regulatory systems: promotion focus and prevention focus. While promotion focus emphasises aspirations and growth, prevention focus centres on safety, responsibility, and the avoidance of negative outcomes. Leaders with a prevention focus prioritise risk minimisation, adherence to rules, and the maintenance of reliability and stability within the organisation. This leadership style is particularly suitable in contexts where the cost of errors is high and stability is essential (Lanaj et al., 2018).

In medium-sized organisations, prevention-driven leadership often manifests through meticulous planning, compliance monitoring, and risk-averse decision-making. Such leaders tend to enforce policies strictly, encourage thoroughness among employees, and proactively prevent potential crises (Kark & van Dijk, 2020). This approach aligns well with environments that require quality control and regulatory compliance, where consistency is critical.

Conversely, charismatic leadership is characterised by a leader's ability to articulate a compelling vision and inspire and energise followers (Conger & Riggio, 2019). Historically rooted in **Charismatic Authority**, this leadership style has evolved to emphasise emotional expressiveness, personal magnetism, and transformational influence (Shamir et al., 2020). Charismatic leaders often emerge during periods of change or uncertainty, motivating employees to exceed routine performance and embrace new strategic directions.

In medium-sized organisations, charismatic leadership can drive innovation, foster commitment, and mobilise teams toward ambitious goals (Chen et al., 2021). Such leaders communicate vision effectively, create a strong sense of purpose, and cultivate emotional connections with employees. However, reliance on charisma may create vulnerabilities, including overdependence on the leader and potential ethical risks if not adequately managed.

Medium-sized organisations occupy a strategic position between small start-ups and large corporations. According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2021), they typically employ between 50 and 250 individuals and require formalised processes while maintaining flexibility. Leadership in such organisations must balance operational risk management with the need to foster innovation. Consequently, integrating prevention-driven and

charismatic leadership styles becomes essential for navigating growth and competitive challenges (Cohen & Eimicke, 2020).

Research suggests that the effects of leadership styles are highly contingent on organisational size and context (Yukl, 2019). Medium-sized organisations often lack the extensive resources of larger firms for sophisticated risk management systems, making prevention-driven leadership valuable for mitigating disruptions. At the same time, their relatively flat structures enable charismatic leaders to exert more direct influence on employee attitudes and behaviours (Bass & Riggio, 2018).

In summary, prevention-driven leadership emphasises risk avoidance, stability, and compliance, thereby promoting operational consistency, whereas charismatic leadership focuses on vision, motivation, and change, enhancing innovation and employee engagement. Both styles exert significant but distinct influences on medium-sized organisations, underscoring the importance of understanding their interaction and situational applicability.

Understanding the Prevention-Driven Leadership and Charismatic Leadership Style

Leaders with a prevention orientation are primarily concerned with avoiding mistakes, ensuring safety, and preserving stability. They emphasise rule-following, accountability, and cautious planning.

In medium-sized organisations, where risk tolerance varies and growth must be strategically managed, prevention-driven leadership brings several critical effects:

1. **Enhanced Risk Management and Operational Stability:** Prevention-driven leaders are highly cautious and focused on mitigating organisational risks. In MSEs,

where a single financial misstep can have disproportionate consequences, this leadership style ensures processes are standardised and well-monitored. Kalama et al. (2024) found that autocratic and bureaucratic leadership styles, which share characteristics with prevention-driven leadership, positively correlated with performance in Mombasa-based SMEs due to the predictability they fostered.

2. **Process Efficiency and Compliance:** MSEs often face pressure to comply with industry regulations, especially in sectors such as manufacturing, healthcare, or finance. Prevention-driven leaders promote a culture of discipline and compliance, reducing the likelihood of regulatory infractions. Their emphasis on efficiency can lead to leaner operations, reduced waste, and better resource allocation.
3. **Employee Accountability and Role Clarity:** Leaders who adopt this style typically provide clear guidelines and structured tasks, making it easier for employees to understand their roles. This clarity reduces workplace confusion and enhances accountability. However, too much control can lead to a micromanagement culture that may stifle employee autonomy and creativity.
4. **Limited Innovation and Flexibility:** While prevention-driven leadership ensures stability, it can inadvertently suppress innovation. Employees under such leadership may fear the repercussions of failure and be less inclined to take creative risks. In fast-changing markets, this rigidity can disadvantage MSEs seeking to innovate or expand.

On the other hand, Charismatic leadership is defined by the leader's ability to inspire and emotionally engage followers through compelling vision, personal charm, and persuasive communication (Abdullah et al, 2021). This style fosters deep commitment and often leads to transformative organisational changes.

In medium-sized organisations, charismatic leadership has a different, yet equally powerful, impact:

1. **Increased Employee Engagement and Motivation:** Charismatic leaders build strong emotional connections with their teams. By articulating a compelling vision, they give employees a sense of purpose and meaning in their work. According to Iyalla and Daniel (2023), charismatic leadership significantly enhances organisational performance in Nigerian MSEs due to its ability to foster loyalty and commitment among staff.
2. **Encouragement of Innovation and Creativity:** Charismatic leaders often challenge the status quo and empower their employees to think differently. This is particularly beneficial for MSEs in competitive industries that rely on adaptability to survive. A 2024 study by Salloum et al. in Lebanese IT SMEs found a positive link between charismatic leadership and employee innovation behaviour, especially when leaders emphasised work-life balance and ownership.
3. **Improved Organisational Culture and Cohesion:** By creating a shared vision and modeling desired behaviours, charismatic leaders shape strong organisational cultures. Employees are

often more cohesive, aligned, and motivated to work toward collective goals. The relational aspect of this leadership style can also reduce turnover rates, which is critical for MSEs with limited recruitment resources.

4. **Dependency Risk and Succession Challenges:** A potential drawback of charismatic leadership is over-reliance on the leader's personality. If the charismatic leader departs or loses credibility, the organisation may struggle to maintain momentum. This dependency can lead to organisational instability, particularly in MSEs that lack deep leadership benches or formal succession plans.

Characteristics of Prevention-Driven and Charismatic Leaders

Leadership styles greatly influence organisational direction, employee motivation, and overall performance. Two contrasting yet impactful leadership styles—prevention-driven and charismatic leadership—offer distinct frameworks through which leaders manage people and achieve goals. Understanding their characteristics is essential for assessing their suitability in various organisational contexts, particularly in medium-sized enterprises (MSEs) where flexibility and efficiency are critical.

Prevention-driven leaders operate with a heightened sense of risk aversion, emphasising security, rules, and the avoidance of negative outcomes. Their leadership style revolves around structure, discipline, and accountability.

1. **Risk-Averse Decision-Making:** Prevention-driven leaders are cautious and deliberate in their decisions. They focus on minimising errors and preventing losses rather than pursuing ambitious, high-risk opportunities. This

mindset is valuable in regulated industries or organisations undergoing crisis, where consistency and safety are paramount.

2. **Strong Rule Orientation:** These leaders emphasise adherence to policies, procedures, and standards. They often implement strict control systems and compliance measures to ensure the organisation operates within established guidelines. Their focus on orderliness enhances operational efficiency and reduces variability.
3. **Focus on Threat Avoidance:** Prevention-driven leaders often anticipate potential obstacles and proactively put controls in place to avoid them. They lead with a "better safe than sorry" attitude, ensuring that the organisation maintains stability and avoids exposure to unnecessary risks.
4. **Detail-Oriented Supervision:** Such leaders are usually meticulous in overseeing tasks and expect thoroughness and precision from their teams. Their attention to detail supports a quality-driven culture, especially in technical or manufacturing environments.
5. **Conservative Goal-Setting:** Instead of pushing for aggressive expansion or innovation, prevention-driven leaders tend to set modest and achievable goals. Their targets are guided by a focus on maintaining current performance and avoiding decline rather than disrupting the status quo.

Charismatic leadership, rooted in Weber's theory of authority and later expanded by Abdullah et al (2021), emphasises influence through personal charm, compelling vision, and emotional resonance. These leaders inspire devotion and performance by connecting with followers on a

deeply motivational level. Also, charismatic leaders communicate a compelling vision for the future that resonates with followers' values and aspirations. Their ability to present goals with optimism and confidence energises their teams to work toward ambitious outcomes such as:

1. **Emotional Intelligence and Empathy:** These leaders are highly attuned to the emotional dynamics of their teams. They build strong interpersonal relationships, showing genuine concern for employee welfare. This trait fosters trust and loyalty.
2. **Confidence and Presence:** Charismatic leaders exhibit high levels of self-confidence and possess a magnetic presence that draws people toward them. Their communication style is often passionate, persuasive, and authentic—qualities that contribute to their ability to rally support and unify teams.
3. **Challenge to the Status Quo:** Rather than maintaining stability, charismatic leaders are often transformational change agents. They encourage innovation, creativity, and calculated risk-taking. Employees under charismatic leaders are often more willing to go beyond their formal roles and take initiative.
4. **Personal Sacrifice and Role Modeling:** These leaders lead by example, often demonstrating commitment through personal sacrifice. Whether staying late to meet a deadline or accepting accountability during crises, their actions inspire similar dedication in others.

Effects of Prevention-Driven and Charismatic Leadership Styles on Medium-Sized Organisations

Comparing and contrasting—prevention-driven and charismatic leadership styles offer unique advantages and challenges that shape the growth

trajectory and internal dynamics of these organisations.

Prevention-driven leaders focus on minimising risks, ensuring compliance, and avoiding errors. This leadership style is often rooted in defensive strategies and cautious decision-making. In medium-sized organisations, such leaders foster environments centred on stability, predictability, and long-term risk mitigation. One key effect of this style is enhanced operational control. Prevention-driven leaders tend to implement robust systems for monitoring performance, enforcing policies, and ensuring quality standards. This can be particularly beneficial in industries with regulatory constraints or where errors carry significant consequences (e.g., healthcare, manufacturing). Moreover, prevention-driven leadership helps medium-sized organisations manage growth sustainably. These leaders avoid overextension by carefully weighing expansion plans and maintaining financial discipline. Employees in such environments often experience clarity in expectations and structure in daily operations. However, this style can sometimes stifle innovation and limit flexibility. A risk-averse culture may discourage employees from taking initiative or experimenting with new ideas. In dynamic markets, this may lead to stagnation or slow responses to change, making the organisation vulnerable to more agile competitors.

On the other hand, charismatic leaders inspire and motivate through vision, personal magnetism, and strong inter-personal skills. In medium-sized organisations, this style often translates into a highly energised and unified workforce, particularly when the leader articulates a compelling mission. One of the most prominent effects of charismatic leadership is increased employee engagement. Workers are more likely to align with organisational goals and go the extra

mile when they believe in the leader's vision. This often results in higher productivity, better customer service, and improved morale. Charismatic leaders also foster innovation by creating a culture of enthusiasm and possibility. Their confidence can stimulate bold decisions and creative solutions. In competitive environments, this dynamism can help medium-sized firms seize new opportunities and pivot quickly in response to market changes.

However, there are potential downsides. Over-reliance on the leader's personality can lead

to centralised decision-making and a lack of institutional resilience. If the leader leaves or loses credibility, the organisation may struggle to maintain cohesion or direction. Additionally, without sufficient checks, charismatic leaders may inadvertently encourage risky behaviour or overlook operational rigour. The comparison between these two leadership styles is summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Prevention-Driven and Charismatic Leadership Styles

Aspect	Prevention-Driven Leadership	Charismatic Leadership
Focus	Risk aversion, stability, compliance	Inspiration, innovation, employee engagement
Decision-Making	Cautious, rule-based	Visionary, flexible
Employee Motivation	Driven by structure and clear expectations	Driven by emotional connection and shared vision
Innovation	May be limited due to strict adherence to procedures	Encourages creativity and adaptability
Organisational Culture	Formal, control-oriented	Open, trust-based
Adaptability	May struggle in dynamic environments	Better equipped to handle change and uncertainty

Case Studies on the Effects of Prevention-Driven and Charismatic Leadership Styles in Medium-Sized Organisations

Leadership styles significantly influence the performance, adaptability, and sustainability of medium-sized organisations (MSEs) (Yukl, 2019). This section presents two case studies illustrating the effects of prevention-driven and charismatic leadership styles in such organisations.

Case Study 1: Prevention-Driven Leadership at Htoo Group of Companies

The Htoo Group of Companies, a diversified conglomerate based in Myanmar, operates across sectors including construction, trading,

hospitality, aviation, and agriculture. With a workforce of over 40,000 employees and an estimated annual revenue of approximately \$65 million USD, the organisation demonstrates characteristics of a complex growing enterprise.

Leadership Approach

The leadership structure of the Htoo Group incorporates elements of prevention-driven leadership, characterised by risk aversion, strict adherence to established procedures, and a strong emphasis on operational stability. This approach supports the effective management of diverse business units and ensures regulatory compliance across industries.

Effects on Organisational Performance

1. **Operational Stability:** The emphasis on standardised procedures and risk management contributes to consistent performance across subsidiaries.
2. **Compliance and Control:** Strict adherence to regulations and internal policies minimises legal and operational risks.
3. **Limited Innovation:** The strong focus on control may constrain innovation, as employees may be less inclined to propose novel ideas or take initiative.

Overall, prevention-driven leadership has been effective in maintaining stability and control within the organisation. However, integrating more flexible leadership elements may enhance innovation and adaptability in dynamic market conditions.

Case Study 2: Charismatic Leadership in Lebanese IT SMEs

A study conducted among 342 Lebanese Information Technology (IT) small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) examined the role of charismatic leadership in enhancing productivity and innovation.

The findings indicate that charismatic leadership significantly improves employee motivation, organisational commitment, and innovative behaviour. Leaders who effectively communicate vision and inspire employees contribute to increased adaptability and competitive performance. However, the study also highlights potential risks, including overdependence on leadership and reduced critical feedback mechanisms.

Comparative Effects on Organisational Dimensions

A comparison of both leadership styles across key organisational dimensions is presented below.

Table 2: A comparison of both leadership styles across key organisational dimensions

Dimension	Prevention-Driven Leadership	Charismatic Leadership
Risk Management	High – Risk-averse and structured	Moderate – Encourages calculated risk-taking
Innovation	Low – Limits experimentation	High – Promotes creativity
Employee Autonomy	Low – Emphasis on control	High – Encourages empowerment
Organisational Culture	Formal and rule-based	Vision-driven and engaging
Performance Outcomes	Stable and predictable	Dynamic and growth-oriented
Adaptability	Low – Resistant to change	High – Supports transformation

Limitations of Prevention-Driven Leadership

Although prevention-driven leadership enhances stability and risk management, its limitations often arise from excessive control and avoidance of uncertainty. In medium-sized organisations,

overemphasis on error prevention may lead to rigidity, where adherence to rules overrides adaptive problem-solving (Lanaj et al., 2018). Employees under such leadership may experience reduced intrinsic motivation and increased stress

due to fear of mistakes (Kark & van Dijk, 2020). This environment can suppress creativity and discourage proactive behaviours that involve risk-taking. Additionally, avoiding failure may limit opportunities for learning and continuous improvement (Yukl, 2019).

Given the dynamic nature of medium-sized organisations, this rigidity may reduce responsiveness to market changes and limit competitive advantage (Cohen & Eimicke, 2020).

Limitations of Charismatic Leadership

Despite its strengths, charismatic leadership presents notable risks. Its reliance on the leader's personal influence may create organisational dependency, making continuity difficult if the leader exits (Bass & Riggio, 2018).

Charismatic leaders may also unintentionally suppress dissent, leading to overconfidence and flawed decision-making (Shamir et al., 2020). This can result in strategic errors, particularly when critical feedback is limited.

Furthermore, the high emotional demands associated with this leadership style may contribute to employee burnout (Chen et al., 2021). Ethical concerns may also arise if charismatic influence is misused (Conger & Riggio, 2019).

Comparative Discussion

Prevention-driven and charismatic leadership styles exert distinct yet complementary effects on medium-sized organisations. Prevention-driven leadership promotes stability, risk control, and consistency, which are essential in regulated or high-risk environments. In contrast, charismatic leadership fosters innovation, engagement, and adaptability, which are critical for growth and transformation.

The key challenge lies in achieving an appropriate balance. Overreliance on prevention-

driven leadership may result in stagnation, whereas excessive dependence on charismatic leadership may lead to instability. Research supports a contextual approach, where leadership style adapts to situational demands (Yukl, 2019). For instance, prevention-driven leadership may be more suitable during routine operations, while charismatic leadership may be more effective during periods of change or crisis (Kark & van Dijk, 2020).

Ultimately, medium-sized organisations benefit from integrating both styles to create a balance between control and innovation.

Emerging Perspective: Ambidextrous Leadership

Recent studies highlight the relevance of ambidextrous leadership, which integrates both prevention-driven and charismatic traits. This approach enables leaders to switch styles depending on contextual needs, thereby achieving both operational efficiency and innovation (Rosing et al., 2011).

During periods of regulatory pressure or crisis, prevention-driven behaviours such as risk assessment and compliance are critical. Conversely, during growth or disruption, charismatic behaviours such as vision articulation and motivation become essential.

Conclusion

Prevention-driven and charismatic leadership styles offer distinct benefits and challenges for medium-sized organisations. Prevention-driven leadership promotes operational stability and effective risk management, which are essential for maintaining compliance and ensuring consistent performance. In contrast, charismatic leadership fosters innovation, organisational change, and employee engagement, all of which are critical for growth and competitive advantage.

The effectiveness of leadership in medium-sized organisations lies in the ability to integrate these approaches. Leaders who adopt a flexible and context-sensitive style are better positioned to respond to dynamic organisational demands. By promoting balanced leadership development and cultivating adaptive organisational cultures, medium-sized organisations can enhance resilience and sustain innovation.

Prevention-driven leadership provides structure, minimises risk, and ensures consistency, which are particularly important in managing complex operations and limited resources. However, excessive reliance on this style may restrict innovation and adaptability. Conversely, charismatic leadership energises employees, strengthens emotional commitment, and stimulates creativity, especially in uncertain and rapidly changing environments. Nevertheless, overdependence on charismatic leadership may introduce risks related to leader centrality and decision-making bias.

Medium-sized organisations operate within a unique context that requires both agility and control. Therefore, effective leadership is not achieved through the exclusive application of a single style but through a balanced and situational integration of both approaches. Leaders who successfully combine cautious governance with visionary direction are more likely to achieve sustained organisational success.

It is also important to recognise that effective leadership often involves blending multiple styles. Prevention-driven leadership contributes to structured and predictable work environments, while charismatic leadership introduces vision and dynamism. Medium-sized organisations, in particular, benefit from leaders who can strategically balance risk management with inspiration to meet evolving organisational needs.

Evidence from Lebanese IT SMEs further illustrates the value of charismatic leadership in promoting innovation and sustaining productivity in challenging environments. Leaders' ability to connect emotionally with employees and communicate a compelling vision plays a significant role in achieving organisational objectives.

Recommendations

1. Adopt a situational leadership approach:

Medium-sized organisations should encourage leadership flexibility by integrating prevention-driven and charismatic leadership styles in response to organisational needs and environmental conditions. Leadership development programmes should emphasise emotional intelligence, risk assessment, and adaptive decision-making (Yukl, 2019).

2. Foster a culture of balanced risk-taking:

Organisations should maintain necessary controls while creating an environment that supports experimentation and innovation. Encouraging calculated risk-taking and framing failure as a learning opportunity can help mitigate the restrictive effects of prevention-driven leadership (Kark & van Dijk, 2020).

3. Implement succession and leadership continuity plans:

To reduce dependence on individual charismatic leaders, organisations should establish formal succession strategies and promote distributed leadership. This enhances organisational resilience and continuity (Bass & Riggio, 2018).

4. **Encourage open communication and feedback:**

Leaders should cultivate environments where diverse perspectives and constructive dissent are valued. This approach helps prevent groupthink and overconfidence often associated with charismatic leadership (Shamir et al., 2020).

5. **Utilise leadership assessment and development tools:**

Organisations should employ tools such as psychometric assessments and 360-degree feedback to identify leadership strengths and development needs. Targeted coaching can support the effective integration of prevention-driven and charismatic leadership traits (Cohen & Eimicke, 2020).

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