

**ON LEADER EVALUATION AND SELECTION:
INFERENCES, ATTRIBUTIONS, AND AMBIGUITY**

by

Philippe Jacquart (EM Lyon Business School, FR)

Co-written with John Antonakis (Université de Lausanne, CH)

The psychological processes underlying top-level leader evaluation and selection when an incumbent is pitted against a challenger are not well known. We focus on understanding how observers integrate inferential cues pertaining to stereotypical information about a leader's charisma with attributional cues due to organizational performance. We used an experimental between subjects design, and manipulated cues about the charisma of two leaders (i.e., a company CEO and a potential contender) along with organizational performance cues of the CEO's company to examine how best to model observers' decisions. We compare various decision strategies; we used multiple regression as the benchmark, which explained the data patterns best. In terms of, participants' (n = 928) selection decisions, a simple unit-weight model—à la Dawes' Rule—appears to capture how participants' decide. They seem to simply sum, but do not weigh, cues stemming from these two distinct psychological processes. We find too that charisma matters most consistently under conditions of attribution ambiguity. However, contrary to previous theorizing, our findings suggest that attributions regarding performance cues do not necessarily override inferences regarding charisma. We discuss the limitations and practical implications of these findings.