NARCISSISM AND LEADERSHIP[1]

If each of us were to confess his most secret desire, the one that inspires all his deeds and signs, he would say, 'I want to be praised.' Yet none will bring himself to do so, for it is less dishonorable to commit a crime than to announce such a pitiful and humiliating weakness arising from a sense of loneliness and insecurity, a feeling that afflicts both the fortunate and the unfortunate with equal intensity. No one is sure of who he is, or certain of what he does. Full as we may be of our own worth, we are gnawed by anxiety and, to overcome it, ask only to be mistaken in our doubt, to receive approval from no matter where or no matter whom

—*Corian, Désir et honneur de la gloire*

Whoever loves becomes humble. Those who love have, so to speak, pawned a part of their narcissism.

—*Sigmund Freud*

LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS

We still know little about what makes a good leader, though not for any lack of research on the subject. The late scholar of leadership, Ralph Stogdill, made the discouraging statement that 'there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept' (Bass, 1981, p. 7). In his classic *Handbook of Leadership*, Stogdill reviewed 72 definitions proposed by scholars between 1902 and 1967.

[1] Some material in this chapter has previously appeared in published form in the following: Kets de Vries, M.F.R. and Miller, D. 'Narcissism and leadership: An object relations perspective,' *Human Relations,* 1985, 38 (6), 583–601.

The proliferation of literature on leadership is reflected by the increase in the number of articles listed in the *Handbook*: in the 1974 edition of the *Handbook* 3000 studies were referred to but seven years later, the number exceeded 5000. And the latest count will not be the end of it.

Thus competing theories clearly abound. We find Great Man theories, trait theories, environmental theories, person–situation theories, interaction–expectation theories, humanistic theories, exchange theories, behavioral theories, and perceptual and cognitive theories. This confused state of affairs caused some scholars to abandon the subject altogether and focus on more specific problems such as power or motivation. Other researchers, however, are less pessimistic, anticipating that the wealth of results constitutes some basis for a cogent theory of leadership. They attempt to escape the labyrinth of contradictory findings and theories of leadership by proposing a contingency paradigm (House and Baetz, 1979). Some try to explain the discrepancies in the research, noting that 'leadership has an effect under some conditions and not under others and also that the causal relationships between leader behavior and commonly accepted criteria of organizational performance are two-way' (House and Baetz, 1979, p. 348).

Despite the quantity of material on leadership we would argue that far richer characterizations of leadership are still needed: those taking into consideration both its cognitive and affective dimensions. Such characterizations are suggested by the psychoanalytic and psychiatric literature. Using these orientations to analysis, the inner world of leaders can be analyzed and their personalities and characters related to their behavior and situation. Research that aims to decipher intrapsychic thought processes and resulting actions thus involves the study of 'psycho–political drama' (Zaleznik and Kets de Vries, 1975; Kets de Vries, 2001, 2006), which relates managerial personality both to role behavior and to administrative setting.

In my view what most leaders seem to have in common is the ability to reawaken primitive emotions in their followers. When under the spell of certain types of leader, their followers often feel powerfully grandiose and proud, or helpless and acutely dependent. Max Weber (1947) used the term *charisma* to elucidate the strange influence of some leaders over followers which, for him, consisted of:

> a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, super-human, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them, the individual concerned is treated as a leader (pp. 358–359).

We might not want to go so far as Weber, but whatever strange quality leaders possess, some have the power to induce regressive behavior among their followers by exploiting (not necessarily in full awareness) unconscious feelings of their subordinates. In this process, some followers may try to embrace an idealized, omnipotent leader, one who will fulfill their dependency needs, which may lead to the destructive suspension of their own rational faculties.

In spite of the regressive potential of some leaders, there are, however, others who are prepared to transcend their personal agenda, who are able to create a climate of constructiveness, involvement, and care, who engender initiative, and spur creative endeavors. This is the kind of person Zaleznik (1977) had in mind when he wrote:

> One often hears leaders referred to in adjectives rich in emotional content. Leaders attract strong feelings of identity and difference, or of love and hate. Human relations in leader-dominated structures often appear turbulent, intense, and at times even disorganized. Such an atmosphere intensifies individual motivation and often produces unanticipated outcomes (p. 74).

James MacGregor Burns (1978) probably had similar thoughts when he compared 'transactional' with 'transformational' leadership. While the first type of leader motivates followers by exchanging rewards for services rendered (whether economic, political, or psychological), the latter type recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But, beyond that, the successful transformational leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy their higher needs, and engages their full potential. The result of the most adept transformational leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents (Burns, 1978, p. 4).

To conclude, leadership can be pathologically destructive or intensely inspirational. But what is it about the leaders themselves that causes them to be one or the other? I believe the answer lies in the degree of narcissism in the personality of the leader in question.

THE NARCISSISTIC DISPOSITION IN LEADERS

Narcissists live with the assumption that they cannot reliably depend on anyone's love or loyalty. They feel they must rely on themselves rather than on others for the gratification of life's needs. While pretending to

be self-sufficient, in the depth of their being they experience a sense of deprivation and emptiness. To cope with these feelings and, perhaps, as a cover for their insecurity, narcissists become preoccupied with establishing their adequacy—whether in terms of power, beauty, status, prestige, or superiority. At that same time, narcissists expect others to accept the high esteem in which they hold themselves, and to cater to their needs. What is striking in the behavior of these people is their interpersonal exploitativeness. Narcissists live under the illusion that they are entitled to be served, that their own wishes take precedence over those of others. They think that they deserve special consideration in life.

It must be emphasized, however, that these characteristics occur with different degrees of intensity. A certain dose of narcissism is necessary in all humans in order to function effectively and so we all at times show signs of narcissistic behavior. Among individuals who possess only limited narcissistic tendencies, we find those who are very talented and capable of making great contributions to society. Those who gravitate toward the extreme, however, give narcissism its pejorative reputation. Here we find preoccupation with self, excessive rigidity, narrowness, resistance, and discomfort in dealing with the external environment. The leadership implications of destructive narcissism can be extremely dramatic.

Although the narcissistic type of personality has long been recognized, only relatively recently has it come under critical scrutiny. For example, the latest version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) lists a large number of diagnostic criteria to describe narcissistic personality disorders. Many of these characteristics are also applicable, albeit in smaller measure, to narcissistic individuals who adopt a more 'normal' mode of functioning. According to the manual, these people have 'a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning in early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

> has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements)
>
> is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love
>
> believes that he or she is 'special' and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)
>
> requires excessive admiration

has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations

is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends

lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others

is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her

shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.' *(American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 661.)*

The reason I dwell on narcissism is that if there is one personality constellation that best fits most leaders it is the narcissistic one. Freud (1921) identified this in his study of the relationship between leaders and followers, stating that 'the leader himself need love no one else, he may be of a masterful nature, absolutely narcissistic, self-confident and independent' (pp. 123–124). Later, he introduced a 'narcissistic libidinal personality,' an individual whose main interest is self-preservation, who is independent and impossible to intimidate. This individual may also show significant aggressiveness, which sometimes manifests itself in a constant readiness for activity. People belonging to this type impress others as being strong personalities. They are especially situated to act as moral ideological bastions for others—in short, as true leaders (Freud, 1921, p. 257).

In a similar context, Wilhelm Reich referred to a 'phallic-narcissistic character,' which he portrayed as 'self-confident, often arrogant, elastic, vigorous and often impressive ... The outspoken types tend to achieve leading positions in life and resent subordination ... If their vanity is hurt, they react either with cold reserve, deep depression or lively aggression' (Reich, 1949, p. 201).

Narcissism became a particularly important topic for study when new developments in psychoanalytic theory occurred in this area. The introduction of object relations theory in the 1940s and self psychology in the 1970s was especially fruitful. The most important revisions concerning narcissism were formulated by clinicians such as Otto Kernberg (1975) and Heinz Kohut (1971). I will not dwell here on the theoretical controversies about whether narcissism is a result mainly of developmental arrest or regression, or whether it possesses its own developmental lines. My aim is to explore the relationships between narcissism and leadership, a connection recognized by both Kernberg and Kohut. For example, Kernberg states that because 'narcissistic personalities are often driven by intense needs for power and prestige to assume positions of

authority and leadership, individuals with such characteristics are found rather frequently in top leadership positions' (Kernberg, 1979, p. 33). Kohut, in focusing on leaders as objects of identification, mentions that 'certain types of narcissistically fixated personalities with their apparently absolute self-confidence and certainty lend themselves specifically to this role' (Kohut, 1971, p. 316).

Narcissism is often the driving force behind the desire to obtain a leadership position. Perhaps individuals with strong narcissistic personality features are more willing to undertake the arduous process of attaining a position of power.

THREE TYPES OF NARCISSIST

I will now consider three types of narcissistic orientation, beginning with the most pernicious or pathological, and proceeding toward the more adaptive or functional: these I call *reactive, self-deceptive,* and *constructive.* Each type is illustrated using examples from my clinical experiences, which demonstrate how executives with different formative backgrounds manifest narcissistic behavior in various leadership situations. However, I begin by briefly looking at where narcissism stems from in a child's early experiences, as explained by object-relations theory—one of the orientations we find in psychoanalytic theory.

As children grow from infants into adulthood over time, they develop relatively stable ways of representing their experience of themselves and others. They do this in terms of developing psychic representations in their private inner world, known as 'internal objects,' which represent accumulated perceptions. These are composed of fantasies, ideals, thoughts, and images that combine to create a person's cognitive map of the world (Klein, 1948; Fairbairn, 1952; Jacobson, 1964; Guntrip, 1969; Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975; Kernberg, 1976). Naturally, the earliest 'objects' are the parents, whose degree of nurturing of the child gives rise to different kinds of 'internal world' in that child. The term 'object relations' thus refers to theories, or aspects of theories, concerned with exploring the relationships between real, external people, the mental images retained of these people, and the significance of these mental residues for psychological functioning (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). Thus our interactions with actual people depend not only on how we view them, but also on our views of internalized others. These psychic representations profoundly influence our affective states as well as our behavior.

Good internal objects serve as a source of sustenance in dealing with life's adversities. They constitute the underpinnings of healthy functioning. But in the absence of good internal objects, various dysfunctions accrue. Therein lies the genesis of pathological narcissism. This can be displayed in three different forms, ranging in degree of pathology.

Reactive narcissism

In describing messianic and charismatic leaders, Kohut (1978) attributes their pathological narcissistic development to their failure during early childhood to integrate two important spheres of the self, namely 'the grandiose self' and 'the idealized parental image.' The first construct refers to early feelings of omnipotence, when a child wishes to display its evolving capabilities and to be admired for them. The second construct refers to the child's desire to experience a sense of merger with an idealized person. Typically, the child's 'I am perfect and you admire me,' gradually changes to 'You are perfect and I am part of you.'

Clinical studies indicate that these early experiences (which are a part of everyone's maturation process) become mitigated and neutralized through phase-appropriate development (Winnicott, 1975). By this process, the child is gradually able to reduce frustration from the inevitable failure of parents to live up to his or her archaic expectations and, through experience, comes gradually to understand the difference between the ideal of perfection and just being good enough. The child learns that the parent is neither completely good nor completely bad. A more balanced and integrated image of the parent is internalized to make for a more realistic appreciation. This fusion of originally split good and bad objects is said to be essential for the development of trust in the permanence, constancy, or reliability of the parental figures (Klein, 1948). In turn, this early success in creating secure interpersonal attachments makes for confident self-esteem and for stable relationships. Kohut (1971) believes this process to be the basis of the development of a permanent and durable psychic structure.

Unfortunately, phase-appropriate development does not always take place. When parents are insufficiently sensitive to the needs of the growing child, their behavior may be experienced as cold and unempathic, even at the earliest stage of development. In these cases, children acquire a defective sense of self and are unable to maintain a stable level of self-esteem. Consequently, childhood needs are not modified or neutralized, but continue to prevail. This, in turn, results in a persistent longing and a search for narcissistic recognition throughout adulthood.

The stage is thus set for 'reactive narcissism.' In a classic article, Kohut and Wolf (1978) refer to the fragmented self that results from too few stimulating and integrating parental responses during childhood.

The legacy of such deficient interactions for the child may be a lingering sense of inadequacy. To cope with such feelings some individuals create for themselves a self-image of 'specialness' as a compensatory, reactive refuge against an ever-present feeling of never having been loved by the parent. This illusion of uniqueness will vitally affect how the individual deals with his or her external environment. Any discrepancies between capacities and wants are likely to contribute to anxiety and to impaired reality testing (the inability to distinguish wish from perception or, in other words, 'inside' from 'outside'). Individuals with this reactive kind of orientation will frequently distort outside events and resort to primitive defense mechanisms to prevent a sense of loss and disappointment. If they are in a position of leadership—when they are acting on a public stage—this can have grave consequences. Thus we can classify reactive narcissism, caused by emotionally unresponsive, rejecting parents, as the severest type of narcissism.

In making these inferences, we should bear in mind that early experiences in themselves rarely have a direct, final, causal impact on adult functioning. There are many mediating experiences during everyone's life and humankind is very resilient. Early experiences do, however, play a substantial role in shaping the core personality, which then influences the kind of environment sought out by the individual. This has an effect on experience and, in turn, will influence personality. We are thus talking about an interactive cycle of personality, behavior, and situation (Erikson, 1963; McKinley Runyan, 1982).

Self-deceptive narcissism

There is also a second type of early childhood development that leads to a different kind of narcissism. Leaders with this background were once led by one or both parents to believe that they were completely lovable and perfect, regardless of their actions. Unfortunately, what may appear as indulgence on the part of the parents is, in fact, exactly the opposite. The parents use their children to take care of their own needs, overburdening them with their implicit desires. When parents impose their unrealistic hopes on their children, they engender delusions. They confuse the children about their true abilities. Self-deceptive leaders probably suffer from what Kohut and Wolf (1978) describe as an 'over-stimulated' or 'overburdened' self. Because the responses of the figures

of early childhood were inappropriate, given the child's age, the child never really learns to moderate the grandiose self-images or its idealized parental images. These ideals of perfection have been too demanding to allow the child to internalize soothing, stabilizing internal objects. These children become the proxies of their parents, entrusted with the mission to fulfill many unrealized parental hopes. All too often, this turns out to be 'mission impossible.'

Sometimes these people's unrealistic beliefs may act as an impetus that then differentiates them from others and does indeed make them successful. Perhaps Freud (1917, p. 156) had this in mind when he noted that 'if a man has been his mother's undisputed darling, he retains throughout life the triumphant feeling, the confidence in success, which not seldom brings actual success along with it.' In those rare instances when such encouragements work out, the child may be sufficiently talented to live up to the parents' exaggerated expectations. A person who in more normal circumstances might have led an ordinary life, has used the expectations imposed on him as a child as a basis for excellence.

Self-deceiving narcissists are likely to suffer from interpersonal difficulties due to their desire to live up to the now internalized parental illusions of self-worth. They tend to demonstrate emotional superficiality and poverty of affect. Their behavior has an 'ideal-hungry' quality resulting from difficulties in identity formation.

Conceptually, it is fairly easy to differentiate between the etiology of the reactive and self-defective modes of narcissism. In practice, however, a distinction is more difficult to make because each parent might have responded differently toward the developing child. One parent might have taken a cold, hostile, rejecting attitude, while the other might have been supportive. Moreover, as I pointed out earlier, learning experiences later in life may also have buffering effects on an individual's personality development.

Constructive narcissism

In describing the childhood object-relations of healthy or constructive narcissists, Miller (1981) stated:

> Aggressive impulses [were] neutralized because they did not upset the confidence and self-esteem of the parents. ... Strivings toward autonomy were not experienced [by parents] as an attack. ... The child was allowed to experience and express 'ordinary' impulses (such as jealousy, rage, defiance) because his parents did not require him to be 'special', for instance,

to represent their own ethical attitudes. ... There was no need to please anybody (under optimal conditions), and the child could develop and exhibit whatever was active in him during each developmental phase. ... Because the child was able to display ambivalent feelings, he could learn to regard both himself and the subject [the other] as 'both good and bad', and did not need to split off the 'good' from the 'bad' object (pp. 33–34).

Constructive narcissists do not behave in a reactive or self-deceptive manner. They do not feel the same need to distort reality to deal with life's frustrations. Nor are they so prone to anxiety. They make less frequent use of primitive defenses, and are less estranged from their feelings, wishes, or thoughts. In fact, they often generate a sense of positive vitality that derives from confidence about their personal worth. Such people have internalized relatively stable and benign objects, which sustain them in the face of life's adversities. They are willing to express their wants and to stand behind their actions, irrespective of the reactions of others. When disappointed, they do not act spitefully, but are able to engage in reparative action. That is, they have the patience to wait, to search out the moment when their talents will be needed (Erikson, 1978). Boldness in action, introspection, and thoughtfulness are common.

DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS IN NARCISSISTS

So how do these three types of narcissistic leaders use their defensive systems? What strikes one most in observing their behavior is how primitive the defenses of the first two types tend to be (Kernberg, 1975). At the core of the defensive system is the mental process 'splitting'. All other defenses can be seen as derivatives of this very primitive mechanism.

Splitting is the tendency to see everything as either ideal (all good) or persecutory (all bad). When the individual has not sufficiently integrated the opposite qualities of internal objects, these representations are kept separate to avoid contamination of good or bad. Individuals with a strong tendency toward splitting possess affective and cognitive representations of themselves and others that are dramatically oversimplified. They fail to appreciate the real ambiguity of human relationships. Relationships are polarized between unbridled hatred, fear, or aggression on the one hand, and over-idealization on the other. Splitting thus avoids conflicts and preserves an illusory sense of one's self as being all good. All evil is ascribed to others. The price of maintaining this illusory sense of goodness is, of course, an impaired conception of reality.

Closely related to this defense are the primitive defenses of *idealization* and *devaluation*. First, there is need to create unrealistic, all–good, all–powerful representations of others. This process can be viewed as a protection against persecutory objects. A sense of intense helplessness and insignificance creates the need for all-powerful protectors. In the long run, however, no one can sustain these exaggerated expectations. Thus, a vengeful devaluation of the idealized figure then occurs when needs are not met.

Other derivatives of splitting are *projection* and *projective identification* (Ogden, 1982). Both projection and projective identification reduce anxiety by allowing the expression of unwanted unconscious impulses or desires without letting the conscious mind recognize them. The main difference, however, between projection and projective identification is that the former belongs to intrapsychic dynamics, while the latter applies to interpersonal dialogue.

Projection implies attributing our own feelings, thoughts, and motives to others and usually involves unacceptable or undesirable impulses. For example, an executive, unable to accept her competitive or hostile feelings toward a colleague, says that she doesn't like him. In contrast, projective identification describes a very primitive, pre-verbal mode of communicating and relating. The archetypical model of projective identification is the mother-child interface. Infants cannot say how they feel; instead, they make the mother experience the same feeling. And although projective identification can be viewed as a very archaic psychological process, it is also thought to be the basis of more mature psychological processes, like empathy and intuition.

For the receiver, projective identification is far more disturbing and more difficult to deal with than simple projection. In both defense mechanisms, however, there is never any sense of personal responsibility. Instead, there are distortions of reality. The frequency, severity, and intensity of these defensive mechanisms vary between the types of narcissism. The reactive type shows the highest frequency and intensity, the constructive type, the lowest. (In Chapter 4, I elaborate further on projective identification.)

NARCISSISTS WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

I detailed the clinical indicators of narcissism earlier but it is important to stress that the first two types of narcissistic leaders show these indicators to a different extent. In my experience, reactive narcissists tend to be cold, ruthless, grandiose, and exhibitionistic. They may show a desire

to dominate and control and can be extremely exploitative. Self-deceptive narcissists are milder; they want to be liked and are much less abrasive. However, they still lack empathy, are obsessed mainly with their own needs, and are given to discreetly Machiavellian behavior. Their behavior has an 'as if' quality, because they lack a strong sense of inner conviction and identity (Deutsch, 1965). Finally, constructive narcissistic leaders are also ambitious and can be manipulative and hyper-sensitive to criticism. But they have enough self-confidence, adaptability, and humor to stress real achievements. They get on well with others because of their insights into relationships.

I will now describe two managerial situations in which I have seen the two personalities in operation. The first is in *leadership* or interpersonal relations. The second relates to how they try *to make sense* of their external environment and how they make *decisions*.

The reactive narcissist at work

The reactive narcissist (RN) can be an extremely demanding taskmaster. The arguments of others are ignored if they run counter to the boss's ideas. Only solicitous subordinates are tolerated by a reactive narcissist; all others are 'expelled.' The followers play politics simply to survive. Caring little about hurting and exploiting others in pursuit of their own advancement, RN leaders surpass all other types in their formidable lack of empathy. Their fluctuations in attitude toward their people will be extreme, and, consequently, the level of employee turnover in organizations they lead tends to be very high. Projects that require teamwork or subordinate initiative are seriously jeopardized.

RN leaders exhibit characteristic dysfunctions when making important decisions for the organization. They tend to do very little scanning or analysis of the internal and external environment before making decisions, feeling that the environment is somehow beneath them, and poses no challenges that cannot easily be met. RNs' grandiosity, exhibitionism, and preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success cause them to undertake extremely bold and adventurous projects often doomed to fail. The quality of their leadership style is transformational rather than transactional. They want to attract the attention of an invisible audience, to demonstrate their mastery and brilliance.

First, their overblown scale reflects the personal desires of the leader more than the realities of the situation, and too many resources are placed at risk for too little reason. Second, RN leaders are not the type to really listen to their advisors, peers, or subordinates. They

truly believe that they alone are sufficiently informed to make judgments. A potentially crucial forum to help in decision-making is thereby lost. Third, even when it is clear that things are not going well with a project, RN leaders are reluctant to admit the evidence. They believe strongly in their infallibility. They will not own up to having made any errors and become especially rigid and sensitive to criticism. Thus, they initiate a momentum that is difficult to reverse (Miller and Friesen, 1980, 1984). When these leaders finally realize how fast the situation is deteriorating, their penchant for splitting causes them to blame others, never seeing themselves as being responsible for anything at all negative.

The self-deceptive leader

These individuals have many of the traits of reactive executives, but they are less evident in a managerial situation. As leaders, self-deceptive (SD) executives are much more approachable than their RN counterparts. They care more about their subordinates, are more given to listening to the opinions of others, and are much less exploitative than the RNs. However, they also show a hypersensitivity to criticism, extreme inse-curity, and a strong need to be loved. SD leaders, however, are more tolerant of dissenting opinions in that they may seem to react sympa-thetically when the opinions are expressed. But they tend to bear grudges, to be less available to habitual critics and to promote weaker-willed subordinates over their more vocal peers.

However, while SD leaders will often express interest in their sub-ordinates' preoccupations, this will be out of a desire to appear sympa-thetic rather than out of a genuine sense of concern. They will want to do the right thing, but will not really feel very enthusiastic about it. An exception to this pattern occurs in cases where leaders become attached to a subordinate whom they come to idealize. They will do all in their power to 'bind' this person, to develop and bring him or her along in their own image. It is not surprising, of course, that this treasured sub-ordinate generally idolizes the boss and is not usually a very strong individual—certainly not very strong within the sphere of his or her boss. If the subordinate were to show personal initiative, it could be interpreted as treason. The leader's idealization would then quickly change into devaluation, and even rage, with predictable results for the subordinate's future in the organization.

SD leaders, in contrast to their RN counterparts, may be eager to discover opportunists, and particularly threats, in their environment.

They are insecure and therefore spend a considerable amount of time analyzing the internal and external environment to make sure that they will be able to neutralize threats and avoid costly mistakes. Competitors are watched, customers are interviewed, and information systems are established. A good deal of analysis and assessment takes place, so much so that it may paralyze action.

In making strategic decisions, SD leaders have a degree of performance anxiety. They want to do the best job they possibly can so that they will be respected and admired, but they worry about their ability to do so. Being afraid of failure tends to make them much more conservative than the reactive executive. SD executives study the situation very thoroughly and solicit the opinions of others. Decision-making is done in response to exchanges of various types, in contrast to the pernicious transformational style of the reactive leader. SD leaders' orientation is predominantly transactional. Conservative (like-minded) executives are much more likely to be given a receptive hearing than more adventurous executives. SD narcissists have a general tendency to procrastinate, and their perfectionism and hesitancy can give rise to organizational stagnation. Note that RN narcissists work to impress the broader political or business community, to be revered, to fulfill bold, impossible, visionary dreams. SD narcissists just want to be loved and admired by the people with whom they interact. Their symptoms will wax and wane, corresponding to the degree of anxiety they are experiencing, to a greater extent than those of the RN leader.

The constructive leader

Constructive leaders are no strangers to manipulation and not beyond occasional acts of opportunism. But they are generally able to get on fairly well with their subordinates. Constructive narcissists have a high degree of confidence in their abilities. Being highly task-oriented they may sometimes come across as lacking in warmth or consideration.

Although constructive leaders enjoy being admired, they have a sufficiently realistic appreciation of their abilities and limitations to recognize the competence of others. Constructive leaders can be good listeners and appreciate the opinions of their subordinates, even though they are content to assume the ultimate responsibility for collective actions.

These leaders possess a sense of inner direction and self-determination that gives them confidence. They radiate a sense of authenticity. They have the ability to inspire others and to create a common cause,

transcending petty self-interest. Their inner directedness, however, can also be reflected by coldness, arrogance, or a stubborn insensitivity to the needs of others. Abstract concerns, such as 'the good of the company' or 'helping the worker,' may replace reciprocity in interpersonal relations and the building of a team. In general, however, constructive narcissists have a sense of humor, which makes it possible for them to put things in perspective. Their independence can make for the creativity and vision necessary to energize subordinates to engage in ambitious endeavors. Since it lacks the rigidity of the other two types, the dominant leadership style of these people has both a transformational and transactional quality.

Constructive leaders vary a good deal in their decision-making styles, which are more reflections of the situation facing the firm than the personal foibles of the executive. Their adaptability allows them to do a good deal of analysis, environmental scanning, and consultation before making strategic decisions of far-reaching consequences. But it also enables them to handle more routine situations with dispatch, entrusting matters to subordinates. Thy also tend to avoid extremes of boldness and conservatism, operating more in the 'middle range.'

MANAGING NARCISSISTIC LEADERS

Clearly, constructive narcissistic leaders pose relatively few problems for organizations. But what can a firm's more healthy executives do when faced with the two more dysfunctional types of leader? Where the organization is centralized and the narcissistic leader is dominant, poor performance and subsequent dismissal by a strong, watchful board of non-executive directors may be the only effective catalysts for change. And even these mutative influences are ruled out when a leader has strong financial control—like being in an ownership position. However, the outlook is much brighter where organizational power is more broadly distributed or where the narcissist occupies a less elevated position (Kets de Vries and Miller, 1984).

In fact, there are a number of organizational measures that can be taken to minimize the damage done by narcissistic leaders working at a lower level. The first might be simply to try to become aware of their existence. In this pursuit, it may be useful to bear in mind that single indicators of each of these types are not sufficient to warrant a diagnosis of narcissism. But when these combine to form a syndrome this may indicate trouble.

It must be emphasized that it is not easy to change a narcissist's personality. Although we can engage in a dose of behavior modification—making narcissists aware of the implications of their actions, and demonstrating other ways of handling specific situations—the core of the personality will retain its dominance. If behavior modification doesn't work, the focus should be on transferring the individual out of harm's way or reducing his or her influence. A number of structural devices can be used to accomplish the latter. For example, power can be more broadly distributed in the organization so that many people become involved in strategic decisions, and lower-level executives are allowed to take responsibility for more routine concerns. Cross-functional committees, task forces, and executive committees can provide a useful forum in which a multitude of executives can express their viewpoint, providing opportunities for the narcissistic leaders (and especially their subordinates) to learn from, and have their influence mitigated by, others. Monolithic and unrealistic perspectives are thereby discouraged.

Regular executive appraisals or multi-party (360-degree) feedback activities, in which subordinates have a chance to express their opinions about their superior to other parties, can also be useful. Where a consensus of dissatisfaction emerges, particularly if it coincides with poor unit performance, it might be time to engage in some form of leadership development, or transfer, and eventually dismiss the leader. In fact, the existence of such assessment policies might inhibit any overtly narcissistic exploitation.

When the top decision-makers in an organization become aware of the narcissistic proclivities of some of the organization's executives, they can use this information in carrying out their leader and leadership development activities. This is especially true when assigning subordinates to a narcissistic leader. One of the greatest dangers lies in engaging insecure, inexperienced executives to work for the narcissist. As the African saying goes, 'Under a great tree grows very little.' While it can be seen as a great learning experience, these employees will have too little strength or resolve to be able to cope, and still less potential to act as useful counterbalancing forces. It is therefore useful to assign strong, confident, and secure personalities to work with the narcissistically inclined executive, those who are not afraid to express their opinions and can help to introduce more 'reality' into the decision-making process.

It is particularly important, also, to look for signs of excessive narcissism when recruiting and making promotions. Psychological assessments by trained clinicians or leadership coaches and interviews with a candi-

date's previous superiors and subordinates might flag up a narcissistic leader. However, there is no doubt that the easiest way to deal with these executives is to avoid hiring them altogether, or failing that, to refrain from giving them much power. The writer, Oscar Wilde—no stranger to narcissism himself—once said, 'To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance.' And a romance it is, but at what price!