

Leaders' Perspectives on Learning Proclivity of Narcissistic Employees

Arvind Subramanian & Sasmita Palo

Leaders play a significant role in determining the culture, direction, growth and sustainability of an organization. In today's volatile uncertain complex ambiguous (VUCA) world, it is imperative that leaders are cognitively agile and flexible. Globalization and digitization are two of the foremost phenomena that business leaders are grappling with. The leader's personality and characteristics must lend themselves to these complex and changing circumstances accordingly. The approach to managing complexity and adeptness at learning, not only impacts the leader personally, but also has a ripple influence across the organization. In the exploration of narcissism as a manifested behavior in business organizations, leaders of the stature of Chief Executive/Finance/Marketing/HR Officer (CXO) or above were interviewed. A verbatim presentation of their views on how narcissism interplays with humility, self-awareness, inclusiveness, diversity and curiosity, is juxtaposed with relevant literature.

Arvind Subramanian (arvindsubbu@gmail.com) is PhD scholar & **Sasmita Palo** is Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

Introduction

There is an increase in narcissism among Generation Y which has serious implications for organizations. Narcissism entails an inflated positive view of the self and a motivation to reinforce continuously the positive self-view (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004; Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007). Navis and Ozbek (2016) propose conceptually that narcissism inhibits learning and reduces the likelihood of opportunity realization in novel venture contexts characterized by high external uncertainties. Positive social cues such as social praise may motivate narcissists to take bold, positive actions such as adopting technological discontinuities (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2011; Gerstner et al., 2013). Some indirect evidence also implies that narcissists learn less from failure. For example, narcissists respond to failure with more anger and anxiety (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998) and they blame co-workers for their personal

failures (Campbell et al., 2000). Highly narcissistic individuals tend to believe that they have superior qualities over others (e.g. Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). As they are absorbed by their inner world and by their own sense of correctness (Campbell Goodie & Foster, 2004; Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007), they are likely to be inattentive to objective cues, including signals from current environment and their past experience.

Highly narcissistic individuals are motivated to interpret their past behavior positively so as to maintain their inflated positive self-view (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998), especially when their behavior is publicly visible (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002; Campbell & Miller, 2011). At the same time, highly narcissistic individuals are less likely to interpret negatively their strategic decisions and their consequences because such an exercise would undermine self-esteem (Zhu & Chen, 2015). This tendency impedes critical reflection whereby personal assumptions and behaviors are challenged, even though critical reflection is needed for higher-level learning to occur (Cope, 2011).

Narcissistic CEOs tend to have fantasies of unlimited brilliance and competence (John & Robins, 1994; Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998) and believe that they learn more than others from the same learning opportunity (Paulhus, 1998). Research suggests that narcissistic people tend to believe that they have superior intelligence, competence, and learning ability (John & Robins, 1994; Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998; Paulhus, 1998).

Narcissism – at an Individual Level

Narcissism of the individual, by itself, has attracted the attention of many researchers. Amongst the plethora of characteristics that narcissists have, two important ones are reflected in cognition and motivation (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007). Cognitively, narcissists have inflated self-views and tend to believe that they are endowed with superior abilities in an array of dimensions such as creativity, competence and leadership (Judge, LePine & Rich, 2006). Motivationally, narcissists feel an intense need to have their superiority continuously reaffirmed (Campbell, Goodie & Foster, 2004). Reaffirmation can be achieved to some extent from within, including through one's own exhibitionism or diminishment of others (Bogart, Benetsch & Pavlovic, 2004). More important, however, reaffirmations from others in the forms of applause, and adulation are eagerly desired and expected (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002).

While narcissism has both cognitive and motivational elements, some suggest that narcissism involves motivation more than cognition.

While narcissism has both cognitive and motivational elements, some suggest that narcissism involves motivation more than cognition (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). In other words, for narcissists, it is not so much about having a cognitive belief that they are endowed with supe-

rior abilities as about being motivated to maintain their superiority. As a result, narcissists have some general behavioral tendencies. On the positive side, narcissists feel good about themselves, and so they seek sensation, take bold actions and respond positively to positive feedback (Brunell et al, 2008; Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). On the downside, narcissists seek to protect and maintain an unrealistically high level of self-esteem (e.g., Vazire & Funder, 2006), and so they respond defensively and aggressively towards ego-threats (Judge, LePine & Rich, 2006; O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks & McDaniel, 2012).

Narcissism – at an Organizational Level

A leader's behavior influences the organization's culture significantly. Over time, the organization develops a certain behavior with which it responds to internal and external stimuli. First and Tasman (2004) inform the creation of criteria associated with organizational narcissism. There are conditions under which the quality of a leader's narcissism leads others to assume dependency roles in relation to that leader. Persons entertaining such a dependent role do not see themselves as leaders and effective problem solvers. Individuals many times arrive at the place where they just want to be taken care of by idealized authority figures who are expected to provide caring, nurturance, and shelter from stress in return for unquestioning loyalty and subservience. This paves the way for the evolution of a 'Dependent Organization' (First & Tasman, 2004). The dependent

The dependent organization suffers from the distorted worldview of its leaders and management.

organization suffers from the distorted worldview of its leaders and management, accepted and held by many of its executives, managers, and employees. Conditions prevail in such organizations under which the quality of a leader's narcissism leads others to assume dependency roles in relation to that leader. Persons entertaining such a dependent role do not see themselves as leaders and effective problem solvers.

Consequent to the formation of the dependent organization, interruptions in learning may occur as per March and Olsen (1975) and Kim (1993). Dysfunctional narcissistic behavior can result in Dependent Organizational Disorder and that the disorder carries symptoms associated with interruptions in organizational learning. Interruptions in learning resulting from dependent narcissistic behavior, disrupt organizational progress in their own right. Their introduction into the organization can become contagious, with disastrous results (Godkin & Allcorn, 2009). In organizations, conflicts arise among people with differing perspectives and beliefs. Social controversy promotes individual reasoning (Schwartzman, 1987; Weick, 1995) and improves the quality of information available to decision makers (Hage, 1980 cited in Weick, 1995). Behaviors such as this are uncommon in organizations and one should remain sensitive to the effects of narcissistic behavior here.

The Future Workforce

Considerable evidence exists that one of the characteristics of these so called Millennials is a propensity for narcissism (Bergman, Westerman & Daly, 2010). Twenge and Campbell (2008) list the following as observed characteristics of Millennials as opposed to previous generations: 1) higher self-esteem, 2) narcissism, 3) anxiety, 4) depression, 5) lower need for social approval, 6) more external locus of control and, 7) more agentic traits such as assertiveness, especially of women. Westerman and colleagues (2010) found that Millennial students from an AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business's) accredited business school (n = 536) had not only higher levels of narcissism than college students in the past, but also higher narcissism scores than students who were psychology majors at the same institution. These results led Westerman et al to ask the question "Are Business Schools Creating Narcissistic Employees?" A Newsweek story titled "Generation Me" (Kelly, 2009) stated "... we've created a generation of hot-house flowers puffed with a disproportionate sense of self-worth." Westerman et al (2010) also cite Hassett (2009) who wrote a piece titled "Harvard Narcissists with MBAs Killed Wall Street". Citing a number of studies that indicate problems with narcissism in organizational settings and with narcissists as managers, Westerman et al (2010: 3) conclude that "A rising tide of narcissism would present significant problems for organizations, their productivity and long-term viability."

A rising tide of narcissism would present significant problems for organizations, their productivity and long-term viability.

Narcissists in the Volatile Uncertain Complex Ambiguous World

Millennials are more comfortable in states of relative uncertainty and simplicity in the absence of information because of their inherent avoidance of complexity. As such, there is a danger that Millennials may be predisposed to lower the definition of what is considered as adequate standards of output/performance. This is problematic, since the world as we know it, is becoming more and more complex. The expectations of managers are not only to be able to manage the complexity, but also to predict or overpower the complexity. If we borrow from Cannon et al (2009), the complexity of a situation is expressed in the amount of information processing required to make effective decisions.

Narcissists have fragile self-concepts (Bergman et al, 2010). As such, they are hyper-sensitive to feedback that may disconfirm or threaten that fragile self-concept. This can lead to feelings of anger or embarrassment that can produce aggressive and/or anti-social behavior directed against the source of that perceived threat (Stucke & Sporer, 2002). Narcissists can perceive threats as coming from instructors as well as fellow students. As such, narcissists may be too

potentially volatile to function successfully in environments characterized by innovative or non-traditional learning.

These traits apply not only to individualized learning. They may also manifest in groups or teams utilized in simulation and experiential learning. Given their tendency to externalize failure, narcissists may be a ticking time bomb in group efforts where the collaboration is fueled by a large number of alternatives under consideration and where information is exchanged freely and openly. Furthermore, the narcissists' tendency to a sense of self-entitlement (Beck et al, 1990) may attune them to only adopting, and perhaps also only considering, those choices that support their self-perceived status in the system. As a result, narcissists may not only become disengaged in a non-traditional classroom, they may also become a source of active resistance or even aggression.

Individual change and personalized learning are based on reaching new levels of attainment of self-knowledge and self-reflection. This process is described by many adult education authorities as transformative learning (Cranton, 1994 & Mezirow, 1991; 2000 for examples). Mezirow (1991:88) also provides the very descriptive phrase of "emancipatory learning" describing it as that "gained through critical self-reflection, as distinct from the knowledge gained from the technical interest in the objective world". It must be pointed out that "critical self-reflection" is almost impossible for the narcissist. Moreover, if it is not impossible, it is at least highly

improbable. This is because narcissists almost automatically and emphatically reject information that is not supportive of their inflated and grandiose self-image. This leads to the logical conclusion that it is very difficult for the narcissist to function successfully as an adult learner. This means that simulation and experiential learning practitioners may be left with the default condition of having to utilize parent/child pedagogical techniques with narcissists. Furthermore, these pedagogical applications have to be more or less forced upon narcissists because they have an inherent lack of intellectual curiosity when it comes to reality-based feedback relative to their performance, standing, level of importance, etc.

"Critical self-reflection" is almost impossible for the narcissist.

Many obstacles can block the path to the successful implementation of simulations and experiential learning exercises. Millennials in general and business school students in particular are demonstrating very high levels of narcissism not only in the classroom environment, but also in the workforce as newly hired employees. Millennials present a peculiar and almost self-contradictory set of characteristics. They are simultaneously more demanding of autonomy and individual discretion, while at the same time, less able to function without the need for supervision and control. This presents a unique problem for organizations looking to hire at leadership roles (Hoover, 2011).

Research Questions

As narcissism is here to stay and grow, we explored this phenomenon with respect to the learning propensity of narcissist employees. Our focused research questions were as follows:

1. What is a narcissist's approach to learning?
2. Is curiosity an observed behavior amongst narcissists?
3. Does self-awareness play a role in learning?
4. What are the skills that a leader needs to have to be effective?

Methodology

To understand the linkage between narcissism and learning, 16 leaders who have had more than 20 years of experience in roles like CEO, CHRO, Executive Council members and Independent Directors on the Board of blue-chip public listed companies were interviewed. The profiles of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The respondents were approached through mutual connections that were already existing, or they were recruited through requests on social media tools. Some of the leaders requested for the questions to be shared prior, in some cases the respondents were open to share their experiences impromptu. All the respondents were agreeable to the interview being voice recorded for subsequent transcription, analyses and review. The interviews lasted between 38 minutes and 52 minutes depending on

the respondent's eloquence. Interviews were started with pre-determined questions, however as the interviews progressed, the questions became extemporaneous based on the respondent's narration. This approach brought out the unique experiences that each respondent had, which might have otherwise been missed in a structured interview. The interviews with the leaders brought out aspects of how in the dynamic business context, learning is sine quo none for the sustenance of not only the leaders, but also the organizations as a whole. All the audio recorded interviews were then transcribed by professional transcribers. Each of the transcribed interview was then analyzed for themes that could be discerned from the following discussion.

'Know It All' Attitude

As one respondent said during the interview:

Narcissists do not keep pace with learning and reflection.

"A good leader can be extremely firm without being rude. They must renounce 'Know it all' attitude and learn from others. Narcissists tend to speak more and speak less. When leaders speak more, they lose out on understanding the pulse of the audience/team, their learning gets plateaued as they are not taking in new ideas/facts/concepts from the team members, they tilt the discussion towards their own preferred outcomes (which will have their inherent biases), they stifle the expression of

Table 1 Profile of Respondents

S No	Name**	Age	Gender	Sector	Current Role
1	David Beckham	45	M	Oil & Gas	C L O
2	Nanda Kumar	52	M	Conglomerate	Grp Sr Exec Pres
3	PK Ojha	53	M	Consulting	Promoter
4	Ram Tendulkar	76	M	Conglomerate	Indep Director
5	PK Iyer	55	M	Consulting	Promoter
6	Alka Gupta	45	F	IT	CHRO
7	Roshni Venkatesh	47	F	Services	C L O
8	Gopinath K	55	M	IT	Co-Founder
9	Madhav Rajan	50	M	Private Equity	Co-Founder
10	Mohan Sinha	52	M	Consulting	Partner
11	Sumit Chatterjee	64	M	Consulting	Indep Director
12	Lakshminarayan M	62	M	Oil and Gas	Group Controller
13	Y S Ram	64	M	Conglomerate	CHRO
14	R Sudheer	68	M	Advertising	Co-Founder
15	G P Narendra	46	M	Automobiles	CHRO
16	S P Kunwar	77	M	Insurance	Ex-CMD

** Names have been changed to protect the identity of the individua

contrary views by shy team members and they do not explore multiple solutions to a problem”.

The organizational credo that promotes a ‘know-it-all’ culture creates and fosters leaders who do not listen. The culture must shift to a ‘learn-it-all’ mindset, which encourages active listening and reflection. The leaders who admit to not knowing everything, set the agenda for listening. Even though the leader may know all the answers or the right decision to take, it is advisable to listen to the team’s inputs and consider them, before taking the decision. It is possible that the quality of the decision is improved, and the team’s capability is also improved. Listening increases observation and keen observation is an important skill set for leaders.

Self-awareness

Narcissist’s lack of self-awareness makes them go astray. They have an inaccurate self-assessment. With feedback and self-awareness, narcissism becomes dormant.

Managing a narcissist and wanting to help him, requires empathy, along with objective and keen observation. It requires a deep sense of caring without having any other vested interest or stake in the narcissist. Maturity comes with age is what we say; which is, greater self-awareness - coming with age, experience and failures. While there are many communication and collaboration tools available in organizations, the connect with empathy and emotion should be stressed upon by leaders. Self-confidence with self-awareness makes a leader humble.

A significant portion of leadership development is focused on increasing the self-awareness of the leaders using psychometric assessment instruments, development centers, coaching and exercises like reflection and journaling. The blind spots that leaders have make them ineffective and the challenge in today's world is to accelerate the process of becoming more self-aware. With narcissism on the rise, a parallel vaccine to administer at a relatively young and impressionable age could be exercises in increasing self-awareness.

Inclusiveness

“As talent that comes into organizations is expected to be more and more narcissistic, an organization needs to be inclusive and empathic while engaging them. However, narcissistic leaders are not inclusive, and in fact they value exclusivity. ... The best of leaders in peace time are the most inclusive..... The best of leaders in war time are the ones who will be remembered after the war. These leaders make the war a personal agenda, rather than having a larger collective purpose. It is challenging to be inclusive for the narcissist leaders”.

“The inclusiveness should be an embedded behavior of the leader, and it must happen always. Unless you are inclusive, you cannot learn..... Collaborative, inclusive leaders build for the long term”.

“Some of the narcissistic leaders have actually a successful track record of being right. But that should not stop them from learning from others”.

“Even though the leader may know all the answers or the right decision to take, it is advisable to listen to the team's inputs and consider them before taking the decision”.

In today's complex world, a leader cannot be expected to know the answers to all questions and provide solutions to all problems. The dependence on teams constituting relevant experts is a wiser approach. However, the leader's skills in getting all the team members to participate and contribute effectively depends on how 'included' the team members feel. The leader must not only be inclusive himself/herself but also foster a culture in the team where every member feels valued and heard.

Diversity

“Due to an inflated sense of self-worth emanating from low self-esteem and insecurity, narcissists are constantly in a search for source of admiration; therefore, they like cajolery. In order to keep the narcissistic supply going, they surround themselves with yes-men. In the bargain narcissistic leaders side-line naysayers and an inner circle of yes men is formed. Decision making is influenced by this inner circle. These leaders and some of the inner circle members are charismatic and many would want to emulate them. Very late the true colors are revealed about how inflexible they are about their views. If you want to be in the in-circle, you cannot have differing viewpoints. Since the narcissistic leader and the inner circle are constituted with people of similar traits, the thoughts

are also similar. There is no diversity in thoughts and ideas”.

An often bandied term that typically connotes gender distribution ratio, diversity is usually spoken of in the same breath as inclusiveness. The spirit behind having a diverse team is to generate ideas from various perspectives, generate credible alternate hypotheses and solve problems in a holistic manner. Diversity prevails only when the leader encourages debate, disagreement and democratic decision making.

Curiosity

Thinking that they are right all the time which is a manifestation of intellectual arrogance, the narcissistic leader misses out on many learning opportunities due to this attitude. “One of the unquestionable signs of narcissism is when you break off learning. A good learning person, a learning CEO, or a learning human being is unlikely to be a narcissist.”

Curiosity is an important differentiator between intelligence and intellectual capacity. According to DeYoung et al (2014), intellect is part of a broader trait of openness/intellect and reflects intellectual engagement with semantic and abstract information, enjoyment of cognitive activity, and one’s perceived cognitive abilities. Zajenkowski (2021) reported that SAI (self-assessed intelligence) was positively associated with the trait intellect, which is consistent with other research on adults (e.g., Zajenkowski & Matthews, 2019).

However, in contrast with previous studies (DeYoung, Quilty, Peterson & Gray, 2014; Zajenkowski et al., 2019), intellect was unrelated to objective intelligence. Thus, to some extent intellect overlaps with self-assessed abilities. However, it also contains a more specific element related to intellectual curiosity. Zajenkowski et al. (2019) suggested that this element might differentiate narcissism from intellect in their relations with SAI. This view was supported by the finding that individuals with high intellect report high motivation and concentration on IQ tests, whereas highly narcissistic people do not genuinely engage with demanding cognitive tests (Zajenkowski et al., 2019). Thus, intellectual curiosity seems to partially reflect a non-narcissistic attitude towards SAI that might be linked with cognitive engagement.

Future Skills

The critical skills of a good leader in the future are listed below. As we have seen earlier in the literature, the future workforce, which is going to constitute Millennials, is going to require many facets of leadership to be effective.

(1) *Handling Complexity*: Narcissist’s hunger for grandiosity can only be fed from external sources. However, at the same time, narcissists suffer from a lack of empathy and a generalized lack of a capacity to see things as others see them. The combination of these two factors yields a set of dynamics wherein narcissists have a harder time hearing feedback from others while they simultaneously

need the feedback that confirms their grandiosity. Complexity avoidance yields an inherent conservatism that makes effective organizational innovation and individual change/ learning, less probable. Therefore, narcissists are particularly challenged when it comes to both generating and utilizing information directed towards learning and individual change (Hoover, 2011).

Narcissists are particularly challenged when it comes to both generating and utilizing information directed towards learning and individual change.

- (2) *Critical Thinking*: Engaging in cognitive reflection seemingly requires a level of inward criticality that might be less available in individuals higher in narcissism, particularly given their propensity for biased introspection and exaggerated self-assessment (Carlson, Vazire & Oltmanns, 2011; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001).
- (3) *Creativity*: Narcissists may not be creative, but their high levels of self-confidence may nevertheless influence the way others evaluate their ideas. Although researchers have numerous tools at their disposal for measuring creativity, there are many contexts in which creativity is judged by observers who lack rigorous criteria (Amabile, 1982) and are subject to attributional biases (Kasof, 1995). Elsbach and Kramer (2003) found that judgments of creativity were influenced by perceptions of the

“pitcher” and the extent to which they matched the prototypical traits of a highly creative person, such as “charismatic” and “witty.” As one executive explained: “Someone who is fervent and fanatical can make an ordinary story extra ordinary”.

In the absence of any objective information about an idea’s creative quality or criteria on which to base such an evaluation, narcissists’ self-aggrandizing behaviors may be persuasive, particularly because they match evaluators’ prototypes of how highly creative people tend to behave (Elsbach & Kramer, 2003). This social influence process, more than the objective creativity of the idea itself, could help explain why narcissists have been described as “visionaries” by people who have observed them in innovative contexts (Deutschman, 2005: 44).

Even group creativity depends heavily on the open expression of ideas because people may extend, combine, and improve on the contributions made by others (Nijstad, Stroebe, & Lodewijkx, 2002). Unfortunately, many good ideas remain unexpressed, leading groups to underperform compared to individuals who work alone (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987). Competition can serve as an effective stimulant of creative ideas because the need for superiority motivates people to express ideas they might otherwise withhold from the group discussion (Dugosh & Paulus, 2005; Munkes & Diehl, 2003). Given that narcissists crave attention and recognition for their valued attributes and contributions, competition between narcissistic group members may lead the

group to uncover new sources of information and new perspectives that can then be recombined to generate novel ideas (De Dreu, Nijstad & van Knippenberg, 2008).

Groups with lower levels of competition may be more efficient and more capable of coordinating their efforts.

As more narcissists join the mix, competition can escalate to the point of obstructing the group's ability to reach closure, synthesize new ideas, and complete tasks on time (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Groups with lower levels of competition may be more efficient and more capable of coordinating their efforts, which would be an advantage when the group moves beyond the idea-generation stage to actually select an idea and bring it to fruition (Rietzschel, Nijstad & Stroebe, 2006).

(4) *Emotional Intelligence*: Emotional Intelligence was found to be the strongest predictor of narcissism (Deliè, Novak, Kovaèiè & Avsec, 2011). Self-reported emotional and social intelligence and empathy as distinctive predictors of narcissism; the narcissists possess abilities to perceive, express, label, understand and manage emotions of others as well as their own. It seems that EI is a necessity for individuals with highly expressed narcissism in order to exploit and manipulate their environment. In previous studies, EI was recognized as an important element

in emotional manipulation when narcissists exhibited manipulative behaviors towards others (Petrides et al., 2011). Given that low empathy, which is positively related to low EI (Ciarrochi et al., 2000), is one of defining qualities of narcissism (Campbell & Miller, 2011, Czarna, Wróbel, Dufner & Zeigler-Hill, 2015; Ritter et al., 2011; Watson, Grisham, Trotter & Biderman, 1984), a negative association between narcissism and EI might be expected.

Increased levels of entitlement and narcissism to lead to increased levels of interest in community service.

(5) *Serving Humanity*: Usually (a) narcissists lack empathy (Watson et al., 1984), and (b) empathy for others is associated with volunteerism (Unger & Thumhuri, 1997). Research indicates that volunteering and community involvement activity has increased among the younger generation (Dalton, 2008). Millennials believe their time makes a uniquely meaningful contribution and that they are personally responsible for making the world a better place (McGlone, Spain & McGlone, 2011; Winograd & Hais, 2014). Considering the evidence of the relationship between narcissism and engagement, millennials may be driven to make a meaningful contribution because of their narcissism and entitlement rather than in spite of it. Thus, we expect increased levels of entitlement and narcissism to lead to increased

levels of interest in community service.

- (6) *Compassionate*: Individuals displaying a high degree of compassionate love will perceive a higher purpose in striving for communion and, once promoted to leadership positions, will engage in servant leadership behaviors in line with their prosocial motivation. Narcissistic leaders do not show servant leadership, because they do not strive for social affiliation, but have a very strong self-relation and are the psychological antithesis of leaders who show compassionate love towards their employees.
- 7). *Listening Skills*: Narcissists are intolerant to others perspectives. They have poor listening skills. They adopt an instructional style of dealing with people. They struggle to change and cannot handle contrary views. They are closed to taking others' views or perspectives and they never seek others' opinions.

Discussion

Talent acquisition and talent management strategies would be areas to review and ensure that the process does not bias itself to the selection of narcissists. Current process steps like group discussions,

Current process steps like group discussions, case presentations and interviews, are perfect settings for the narcissist to thrive and succeed.

case presentations and interviews, are perfect settings for the narcissist to thrive and succeed. Deeper evaluation procedures need to be envisaged which take in to account the candidate's willingness to learn, change, reflect, collaborate and give credit to others, are ascertained. Coaching is an effective strategy, only when the candidate to be coached, is willing to be coached. Invariably, it has been observed that narcissists are not receptive to feedback and hence may not accept a coach 'intruding' into their professional lives.

Narcissism was found to be the strongest correlate of SAI (self-assessed intelligence) among personality traits (Howard & Cogswell, 2018; Zajenkowski et al., 2019). The finding is interesting given that narcissism is essentially unrelated to objective IQ (Zajenkowski et al., 2019). Because intelligence is a key asset for the attainment of agentic attributes like admiration, status, dominance and sense of control, narcissistic individuals are highly concerned with their intelligence (Zajenkowski et al., 2019). It has been shown that positive self-views in the domain of intelligence help them to maintain positive feelings (Zajenkowski et al., 2019). Additionally, narcissistic individuals view intelligence as a crucial factor that influences mainly interpersonal success, i.e. popularity among peers, social status, and relationship satisfaction (Zajenkowski et al., 2019).

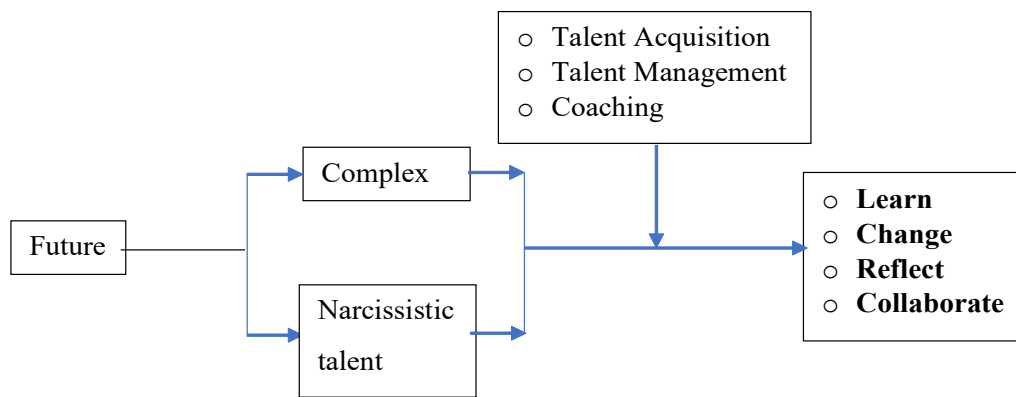
Intelligence appears to be an important resource in gaining other people's admiration. The concept of intelligence is an important building block of the nar-

cissistic self-concept in young people. Even though the concept of intelligence is not fully formed in adolescence, it is already linked with a narcissistic attitude. This finding suggests that in people's minds the two phenomena, viz. thinking positively about one's intelligence and narcissistic grandiosity go

together and that their coexistence occurs at a relatively early developmental stage.

Based on the corroboration obtained from literature and from the leaders' interviews, we depict the future in organizations using model in fig. 1

Fig. 1 Proposed Model of the 'Narcissistic Future' Paradox



The above figure shows the possible situation that will evolve and emerge as time goes by. The future is going to be complex. The volatile uncertain complex ambiguous (VUCA) situation is going to be amplified more and more with changes in geopolitical, socio-economic and digital changes. A leader will have to be able to grapple with and leverage to the organization's advantage. In parallel, the talent pool is going supply candidates with increasing narcissism. As literature and research has shown, narcissistic employees have challenges in handling complex tasks, working in teams, sharing credit and lag in learning. This poses twin challenges for business organizations who have to manage the complex external dynamics as well as internal mix of diverse workforce.

Interventions starting with talent acquisition followed by talent management and coaching are to be designed in a manner that alleviates the twin challenges mentioned above. Current procedures in the areas of talent acquisition and management are ideal platforms for narcissists to shine, thereby not surfacing the right talent for the organization's needs. Such interventions on the part of the organization and the individual should result in learning, change, reflection and collaboration. These behaviors have been shown to be important for leaders, by many researchers and studies.

Implications for Organizations

- Leaders should listen more than they speak. Organizational culture has

many facets, a simpler way is to actively encourage humility. Move from a 'know it all' to a 'learn it all' mindset. The leaders who are humble and who admit to not knowing everything, set the agenda for building a culture of humility and learning.

- Skills and capabilities can be learnt, but inherent traits need to be carefully screened before promoting someone to a leadership position. It is very important to have the right filters of behavior and culture, before promoting someone into a leadership role.
- Outcomes should not be the only focus of the leader who is keen on building an organization with a specific culture. Having a "what a dialogue" meeting where the process is discussed and not just the outcome, is therefore essential. This fosters learning through the process of dialogue, discussions and failures.
- The corporate performance management process which calls out only overt performance is to be blamed for encouraging a narcissistic demonstration of accomplishments. People who have their 'numbers' on their finger tips are judged to be better performers than those who don't. Which is not the best indicators of whether the person is a good team manager, a good peer or a good learner.
- Even though the leader may know all the answers or the right decision to take, it is advisable to listen to the team's inputs and consider them be-

fore taking the decision. It is possible that the quality of the decision is improved and the team's capability is also improved.

- Keen observation is an important characteristic to have. Leaders should learn by observation. A learning CEO or a learning human being is unlikely to be a narcissist. The secret of a leader's success is to take the right decisions. Right decisions are taken by gaining experience. Experience and learning are gained by taking the wrong decisions.

Conclusion

As evident from this exploratory study, narcissists are poor learners. Their 'know it all' attitude prevents them from absorbing and observing cues from the environment. This attitude is also reflected in their poor listening skills. Their preference to hear adulatory comments about themselves, filters out feedback and constructive criticism, which if integrated into their learning, would have improved them. However, this does not happen, and even though there may be inputs coming in from external sources, the narcissist is unable to absorb them, as he/she is obsessed with wanting to hear only about himself/herself. In order to improve on learning agility, the narcissist has to first acknowledge lacking in knowledge and thereafter set about to gain the same with adequate patience.

Curiosity belongs to the lot of those who acknowledge their ignorance and are open to learning from others. Narcissists generally do not possess intellectual cu-

riosity, as it could involve approaching complexity. They prefer complexity avoidance, as the threat to their fragile ego and possible embarrassment is low. Hence, narcissists prefer to stride out the beaten path. Extremely grandiose narcissists will choose new courses to chart, more out of capturing attention, than out of curiosity.

Narcissists suffer from low self-awareness, leading to faulty assessments and judgement.

Time being of essence, one of the leader's mentioned about fast-tracking self-awareness amongst leaders. Eventually, when one speaks of experience, maturity and wisdom, it is the learning that the leader has gleaned from such events. This learning when integrated with the self, should eventually lead to greater self-awareness. Narcissists are generally not prone to reflection on their behaviors, as it is likely to reveal unwelcome facets of their own self, which they are unwilling to accept and acknowledge. Hence, narcissists suffer from low self-awareness, leading to faulty assessments and judgement. Such an attitude interferes with their learning abilities, as their self-assessment and image, does not allow them to be lacking in something. This results in not acquiring any knowledge or accepting feedback or criticism. Self-awareness is critical for development.

Handling complexity, critical thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence, serving humanity, being compassionate and listening are key leadership skills (this as-

sumes there is a threshold level of domain related skills). With the dynamic changing world, these skills will help the leader stand the test of a variety of situations and lead the team and the organization through choppy waters.

Given the axiomatic fact that the 'Future is Complex' and 'Workforce is Narcissistic', this provides a lot of opportunities for future research in the areas of leadership, talent development, cultural transformation and talent acquisition. In addition, societal cultural modification and allied aspects may also focus on narcissistic behaviors to make society, the economy, organizations and talent at an individual level, more productive and positive. The willingness to learn, change, adapt, adopt and improve are key to survive and thrive. Individuals and leaders who are adept at these, will succeed and also steer their organizations to leadership positions.

References

- Amabile, T. M. (1982), "Social Psychology of Creativity: A Consensual Assessment Technique", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 43(5): 997.
- Bergman, J. Z., Westerman, J. W. & Daly, J. P. (2010), "Narcissism in Management Education", *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 9(1): 119-31.
- Bogart, L. M., Benotsch, E. G. & Pavlovic, J. D. P. (2004), "Feeling Superior But Threatened: The Relation of Narcissism to Social Comparison", *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 26(1): 35-44.
- Brunell, A. B., Gentry, W. A., Campbell, W. K., Hoffman, B. J., Kuhnert, K. W. & DeMarree, K. G. (2008), "Leader Emer-

- gence: The Case of the Narcissistic Leader”, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(12): 1663-76
- Bushman, B. J. & Baumeister, R. F. (1998), “Threatened Egotism, Narcissism, Self-esteem, and Direct and Displaced Aggression: Does Self-love or Self-hate Lead to Violence? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75 (1), 219
- Campbell, W. K. & Miller, J. D. (2011), *The Handbook of Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality Disorder: Theoretical Approaches, Empirical Findings, and Treatments*, John Wiley & Sons
- Campbell, W. K., Goodie, A. S. & Foster, J. D. (2004), “Narcissism, Confidence, and Risk Attitude”, *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 17(4): 297-311.
- Campbell, W. K., Reeder, G. D., Sedikides, C. & Elliot, A. J. (2000), “Narcissism and Comparative Self-enhancement Strategies”, *Journal of Research in Personality*, 34(3): 329-47.
- Cannon, H. M., Friesen, D. P., Lawrence, S. J. & Feinstein, A. H. (2009), “The Simplicity Paradox: Another Look at Complexity in Design of Simulations and Experiential Exercises”, in *Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning: Proceedings of the Annual ABSEL Conference*. Vol (36)
- Carlson, E. N., Vazire, S. & Oltmanns, T. F. (2011), “You Probably Think This Paper’s about You: Narcissists’ Perceptions of Their Personality and Reputation”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(1): 185
- Chatterjee, A. & Hambrick, D. C. (2007), “It’s All About Me: Narcissistic Chief Executive Officers and Their Effects on Company Strategy and Performance”, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 52(3): 351-86.
- Chatterjee, A. & Hambrick, D. C. (2011), “Executive Personality, Capability Cues, and Risk Taking: How Narcissistic CEOs React to Their Successes and Stumbles”, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 56(2): 202-37.
- Ciarrochi, J. V., Chan, A. Y. & Caputi, P. (2000), “A Critical Evaluation of the Emotional Intelligence Construct”, *Personality and Individual Differences*, 28(3): 539-61.
- Cope, J. (2011), “Entrepreneurial Learning from Failure: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis”, *Journal of Business Venturing*, 26(6): 604-23.
- Cranton, P. (1994), “Self-directed and Transformative Instructional Development”, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 65(6): 726-44.
- Czarna, A. Z., Wróbel, M., Dufner, M. & Zeigler-Hill, V. (2015), “Narcissism and Emotional Contagion: Do Narcissists ‘catch’ the Emotions of Others?” *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 6(3): 318-24.
- Dalton, J. & Crosby, P. (2008), “Challenging College Students to Learn in Campus Cultures of Comfort, Convenience and Complacency”, *Journal of College and Character*, 9(3)
- De Dreu, C. K., Nijstad, B. A. & van Knippenberg, D. (2008), “Motivated Information Processing in Group Judgment and Decision Making”, *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 12(1): 22-49.
- Deliè, L., Novak, P., Kovaèiè, J. & Avsec, A. (2011), “Self-reported Emotional and Social Intelligence and Empathy as Distinctive Predictors of Narcissism”, *Psihologijske teme*, 20(3): 477-88.
- Deutschman, A. (2004), “The Fabric of Creativity”, *Fast Company*, 89 (December): 54-60.
- DeYoung, C. G., Quilty, L. C., Peterson, J. B. & Gray, J. R. (2014), “Openness to Experience, Intellect, and Cognitive Ability”, *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 96(1): 46-52.

- Diehl, M. & Stroebe, W. (1987), "Productivity Loss in Brainstorming Groups: Toward the Solution of a Riddle", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(3): 497.
- Dugosh, K. L. & Paulus, P. B. (2005), Cognitive and Social Comparison Processes in Brainstorming. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 41(3): 313-20.
- Elsbach, K. D. & Kramer, R. M. (2003), "Assessing Creativity in Hollywood Pitch Meetings: Evidence for a Dual-process Model of Creativity Judgments", *Academy of Management Journal*, 46(3): 283-301.
- Farwell, L., & Wohlwend Lloyd, R. (1998), "Narcissistic processes: Optimistic expectations, Favorable Self evaluations, and Self enhancing Attributions", *Journal of Personality*, 66(1): 65-83.
- First, M. B. & Tasman, A. (2004), DSM-IV-TR: Diagnosis, Etiology and Treatment, West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Forsyth, D. R., Banks, G. C. & McDaniel, M. A. (2012), "A Meta-analysis of the Dark Triad and Work Behavior: a Social Exchange Perspective", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97(3): 557.
- Gerstner, W. C., König, A., Enders, A. & Hambrick, D. C. (2013), "CEO Narcissism, Audience Engagement, and Organizational Adoption of Technological Discontinuities", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 58(2): 257
- Godkin, L. & Allcorn, S. (2009), "Dependent Narcissism, Organizational Learning, and Human Resource Development", *Human Resource Development Review*, 8(4): 484-505.
- Hage, J. (1980), *Theories of Organizations: Form, Process, and Transformation*, John Wiley & Sons
- Hassett, K. (2009), "Harvard Narcissists with MBAs Killed Wall Street", *Bloomberg.com*, February 17th.
- Hoover, J. D. (2011), "Complexity Avoidance, Narcissism and Experiential Learning", in *Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning: Proceedings of the Annual ABSEL Conference (Vol. 38)*.
- Howard, M. C. & Cogswell, J. E. (2018), "The "Other" Relationships of Self-assessed Intelligence: A Meta-analysis", *Journal of Research in Personality*, 77: 31-46.
- Jehn, K. A. & Mannix, E. A. (2001), "The Dynamic Nature of Conflict: A Longitudinal Study of Intragroup Conflict and Group Performance", *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(2): 238-51.
- John, O. P. & Robins, R. W. (1994), "Accuracy and Bias in Self-perception: Individual Differences in Self-enhancement and the Role of Narcissism", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66(1), 206.
- Judge, T. A., LePine, J. A. & Rich, B. L. (2006), "Loving Yourself Abundantly: Relationship of the Narcissistic Personality to Self- and Other Perceptions of Workplace Deviance, Leadership, and Task and Contextual Performance," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(4): 762 "
- Kasof, J. (1995), "Explaining Creativity: The Attributional Perspective", *Creativity Research Journal*, 8(4): 311-66.
- Kim, D. H. (1993), *A Framework and Methodology for Linking Individual and Organizational Learning: Applications in TQM and Product Development*, Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- March, J. G. & Olsen, J. P. (1975), "The Uncertainty of the Past: Organizational Learning Under Ambiguity", *European Journal of Political Research*, 3(2): 147-71.
- McGlone, T., Spain, J. W. & McGlone, V. (2011), "Corporate Social Responsibility and the Millennials", *Journal of Education for Business*, 86(4): 195-200.

- Mezirow, J. (1991), *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA 94104-1310.
- Mezirow, J. (2000), *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*. The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome Way, San Francisco, CA 94104.
- Morf, C. C. & Rhodewalt, F. (2001), "Unraveling the Paradoxes of Narcissism: A Dynamic Self-regulatory Processing Model", *Psychological Inquiry*, 12(4): 177-96.
- Munkes, J. & Diehl, M. (2003), "Matching or Competition? Performance Comparison Processes in an Idea Generation Task", *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 6(3): 305-20.
- Navis, C. & Ozbek, O. V. (2016), "The Right People in the Wrong Places: The Paradox of Entrepreneurial Entry and Successful Opportunity Realization", *Academy of Management Review*, 41(1): 109-29.
- Nijstad, B. A., Stroebe, W. & Lodewijckx, H. F. (2002), "Cognitive Stimulation and Interference in Groups: Exposure Effects in an Idea Generation Task", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38(6): 535-44.
- Paulhus, D. L. (1998), "Interpersonal and Intrapyschic Adaptiveness of Trait Self-Enhancement: A Mixed Blessing?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(5): 1197.
- Petrides, K. V., Vernon, P. A., Schermer, J. A. & Veselka, L. (2011), "Trait Emotional Intelligence and the Dark Triad Traits of Personality", *Twin Research and Human Genetics*, 14(1): 35-41.
- Rhodewalt, F. & Morf, C. C. (1998), "On Self-aggrandizement and Anger: A Temporal Analysis of Narcissism and Affective Reactions to Success and Failure", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(3): 672
- Rietzschel, E. F., Nijstad, B. A. & Stroebe, W. (2006), "Productivity Is Not Enough: A Comparison of Interactive and Nominal Brainstorming Groups on Idea Generation and Selection", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 42(2), 244-251
- Ritter, K., Dziobek, I., Preißler, S., Rüter, A., Vater, A., Fydrich, T. & Roepke, S. (2011), "Lack of Empathy in Patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder", *Psychiatry Research*, 187(1-2): 241-47.
- Schwartzman, H. B. (1987), "The Significance of Meetings in an American Mental Health Center", *American Ethnologist*, 14(2): 271-94.
- Stucke, T. S., & Sporer, S. L. (2002), "When a Grandiose Self image Is Threatened: Narcissism and Self concept Clarity as Predictors of Negative Emotions and Aggression Following Ego threat", *Journal of Personality*, 70.4, (2002): 509-32
- Szymaniak, K. & Zajenkowski, M. (2021), "How Do High Trait Anger People Feel About Rewards High and Low in Arousal? Disentangling the Association Between Trait Anger and Subjective Pleasantness of Rewards", *Personality and Individual Differences*, 168: 11027
- Twenge, J. M. & Campbell, W. K. (2008), "Increases in Positive Self-views Among High School Students: Birth-cohort Changes in Anticipated Performance, Self-satisfaction, Self-liking, and Self-competence", *Psychological Science*, 19(11): 1082-86
- Unger, L. S. & Thumulari, L. K. (1997), "Trait Empathy and Continuous Helping: The Case of Voluntarism", *Journal of Social behavior and Personality*, 12(3): 787.
- Vazire, S. & Funder, D. C. (2006), "Impulsivity and the Self-defeating Behavior of Narcissists", *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(2):154-65.
- Wallace, H. M. & Baumeister, R. F. (2002), "The Performance of Narcissists Rises and Falls with Perceived Opportunity for

- Glory”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(5): 819.
- Watson, P. J., Grisham, S. O., Trotter, M. V. & Biderman, M. D. (1984), “Narcissism and Empathy: Validity Evidence for the Narcissistic Personality Inventory”, *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 48(3): 301-05.
- Weick, K. E. (1995), *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Vol. 3), Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, ca
- Winograd, M. & Hais, M. (2014), “How Millennials Could Upend Wall Street and Corporate America”, *Governance Studies at Brookings*, 5: 19-27.
- Zajenkowski, M. & Matthews, G. (2019), “Intellect and Openness Differentially Predict Affect: Perceived and Objective Cognitive Ability Contexts”, *Personality and Individual Differences*, 137: 1-8.
- Zhu, D. H. & Chen, G. (2015), “CEO Narcissism and the Impact of Prior Board Experience on Corporate Strategy”, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 60(1): 31-65.