

Narcissism at work

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Narcissism at work

➤ Definition and criteria

- Theories and types
- Realms of relevance
 - Benefits
 - Risks and recommendations
- Conclusion

Definition and criteria

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A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

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Definition and criteria

- 1. Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g.: exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements).**
- 2. Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty or ideal love.**
- 3. 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).**
- 4. Requires excessive admiration.**
- 5. Has a sense of entitlement, i.e.: unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations.**

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6. **Is interpersonally exploitative, i.e.: takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends.**
7. **Lacks empathy is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.**
8. **Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her.**
9. **Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.**

(DSM IV)

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Theories and types

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Freud On Narcissism 1914

- Childhood fantasy and adult reality
- Normal versus pathological development

Lasch The Culture of Narcissism 1979

- Culture interacts with personality
- Contemporary culture encourages narcissism

Theories and types

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Overt versus covert

- **Aggressive - contact-shunning**

Healthy versus unhealthy

- **Productive - destructive**

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Realms of relevance

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➤ Leadership and management

- Decision making
- Communication and feedback
- Group and team dynamics
- Organizational culture
- Motivation and incentives
- Fairness and justice
- Retention and succession planning

Leadership and management

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Benefits

- **Narcissists are driven and are willing to make personal sacrifices in order to succeed and lead**
- **Narcissistic illusions can be beneficial in terms of choices, effort, and perseverance**
- **Narcissists are often charismatic, skilled orators and attract followers**
- **The narcissistic leader's bold and transformative vision of the future can inspire loyalty and dedication**

Leadership and management

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Risks

- **Narcissists are emotionally volatile and may be prone to a variety of dysfunctional behaviors**
- **Narcissists can exploit the organization in order to attain their own goals**
- **In their quest to maintain fragile self-esteem, narcissists can ignore or deny reality**
- **Success may lead to failure if narcissists accumulate too much power and prestige and others in the organization cannot moderate their destructive impulses**
- **Narcissists may become distrustful and paranoid when they sense danger or dissent**

Leadership and management

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Recommendations

- **Be mindful about the potential consequences of recruiting, hiring and promoting narcissistic managers**
- **Consider the impact of narcissism on all aspects of the social psychology of the workplace**
- **Create a context in which the benefits of narcissism are maximized and the risks are minimized**

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Decision making

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Benefits

- **Narcissists can make tough decisions without being distracted by empathy, sadness or guilt**
- **Narcissists can see the big picture and anticipate trends**
- **Narcissists' fear of failure can lead to a rigorous assessment of potential risks and rewards**

Decision making

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Risks

- **Narcissists' decisions are often unduly influenced by mood**
- **Narcissists often make decisions for the wrong reasons**
 - **Grandiosity can lead to too much risk**
 - **Fear of failure can lead to too little risk**

Recommendations

- **Surround the narcissistic leader with capable and confident advisors who are willing to disagree with him or her**
- **Monitor the risks that narcissists are taking**
- **Encourage rationality and long term thinking**

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Communication and feedback

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Communication and feedback- benefits

- Narcissistic leaders can be talented communicators and can take advantage of different media to spread their message
- Narcissists can communicate their concerns and expectations very clearly
- Narcissists may seek out and pay careful attention to the feedback of superiors and clients or customers

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Risks

- Narcissistic leaders tend to select loyal and uncritical staff
- Narcissists are generally unwilling to seek out or accept feedback and may throw tantrums if they are questioned or criticized
- Narcissists are less likely to provide performance feedback, mentoring or coaching

Recommendations

- Provide incentives to give and learn from feedback
- Find indirect or non-threatening ways to give feedback to the Narcissist

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Group and team dynamics

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Benefits

- **Narcissistic identification with a group or team can lead to commitment and dedication**
- **Healthy competition both within and between teams can provide benefits to the organization**

Group and team dynamics

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Risks

- **Narcissists' insistence on appearing self-sufficient makes it problematic for them to work interdependently in teams**
- **Narcissists' reluctance to share credit or to take blame can be a source of frustration for teammates**
- **Narcissists are likely to have dysfunctional conflicts with those who deliberately or inadvertently threaten their self or social esteem**
- **Groups working for narcissistic managers can be split along the lines of whom the manager does or does not favor**

Recommendations

- **Consider what role a narcissist can and should play on a team**
- **Evaluate and incentivize group rather than individual performance**

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Organizational culture

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Benefits

- **Healthy narcissism can benefit groups and organizations by inspiring loyalty and pride**
- **Myths can be a productive way in which organizational narcissism is expressed**

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Risks

- **Organizations that are run by narcissists may suffer from a high, possibly dysfunctional level of internal competition**
- **Organizations that are constituted by too many narcissists are not likely to be fortified by strong social bonds**

Recommendations

- **Cultivate a sense of pride in the organization that is rooted in reality**
- **Do not denigrate competitors or demonize critics as a way of building organizational pride**

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Motivation and incentives

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Benefits

- Narcissists can inspire people to make sacrifices in pursuit of their compelling visions
- There are often rational reasons why it makes sense for people to support a narcissistic business leader
- Employees can be motivated and feel rewarded by even a slight amount of attention or regard from a powerful narcissist
- The narcissist's pursuit of perfection can motivate employees to produce high quality work
- Narcissists can be highly motivated both by self-esteem and by social esteem, which can be inexpensive to provide

Motivation and incentives

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Risks

- **Narcissists are unlikely to empathize enough to know what motivates others**
- **Narcissists are less likely to appreciate or encourage subordinates who take the initiative**

Recommendations

- **Ensure that narcissists' esteem rewards are aligned with organizational goals**
- **Monitor the incentives that narcissists provide to lower level staff**

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Fairness and justice

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Benefits

- Narcissists may be motivated to be fair and even generous if they can win praise and gain status
- Narcissists are likely to be concerned about the treatment of people or groups with whom they identify or for whom they feel responsible

Fairness and justice

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Risks

- The narcissistic tendency towards exploitativeness, entitlement and splitting can lead to real or perceived injustices
- Narcissists are less likely to give their staffs “voice” or the opportunity to air grievances
- Narcissists may overwork their staffs without any consideration or acknowledgment of the personal cost

Recommendations

- Establish checks, balances and oversight
- Make fairness judgments part of 360 degree feedback

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Retention and succession planning

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Benefits

- Narcissists who remain challenged and rewarded by their work may stay in their jobs
- Narcissists can successfully use power and resources to provide strong incentives for employees to stay
- Due to their concern for what legacy they will leave, productive narcissists pay careful attention to succession

Retention and succession planning

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Risks

- Turnover is often higher for those reporting to narcissistic managers
- Narcissists may not pick or groom a successor
- Narcissists may pick the wrong successor

Recommendations

- Track turnover statistics for every manager over time
- Ensure that there are incentives for managers to retain staff and to coach, mentor and cultivate successors

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- **Narcissism has a pervasive influence on contemporary organizations**
- **Although narcissists display some behavioral and stylistic flexibility, trying to change their personalities will be an uphill battle**
- **A flexible and self-aware organization can devise successful strategies to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of narcissism in its ranks**
- **Sometimes, humor can be a useful method for illuminating and neutralizing narcissism**



If it's any consolation, that was the best impression of the king I've ever seen

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