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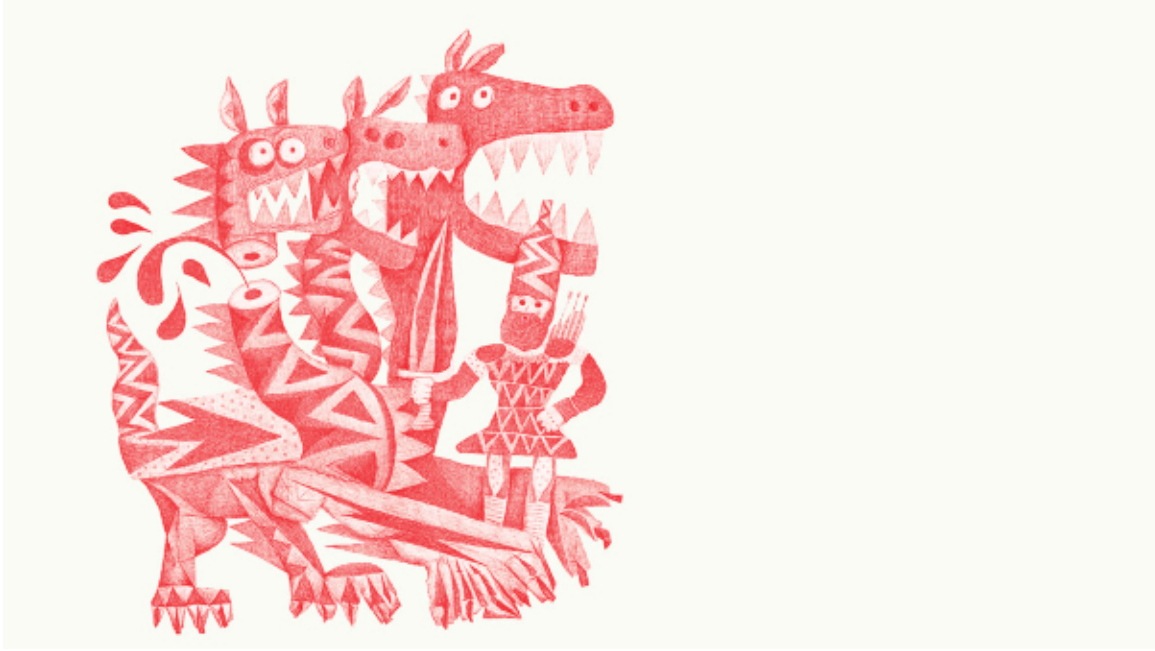

Narcissist leaders represent a conundrum for organizations. On the one hand, they can be huge assets, maintaining impressive drive and vision and enacting sweeping change through the power of their charisma. Research and experience typically show that narcissists are highly likely to ascend to power.

On the other, they can be volatile leaders, exploding at any suggestion that their rosy view of their own competence is inaccurate. Narcissistic leaders tend to become engulfed in a quagmire of difficulties, including intractable conflict, high staff turnover due to an inability to empathize and a failure to share credit, as well as controversy and confusion coming from their unwillingness to explain themselves. In short, narcissists can be valuable when change is necessary and systemic, but more trouble than they're worth at almost any other time.

And yet we suggest it may be possible to contain and control the downsides of narcissism. For example, what if those grandiose self-views could be redirected to become focused on others, such as being the best helper, advice giver, or team member? The narcissists who do this naturally are called *communal* narcissists. They are self-appointed saints who have unrealistic views of their contributions to others. While, like all narcissists, they are driven to maintain unrealistic, inflated self-views and crave positive feedback, their narcissism can be channeled toward productive ends because their self-image is tied to helping others. Whereas traditional research has examined *agentic* narcissists, those who think their abilities are far grander than others' and are focused on achieving things in the world for themselves, communal narcissists are more likely to share credit and resources in group settings in order to support their self-perceptions as heroic helpers — and they could just be the narcissists your organization needs.

What does this mean in practice? To test the behavioral differences between communal and agentic narcissists, we conducted a few experiments. We began by measuring agentic narcissism by asking study participants to indicate their agreement with statements such as "I always know what I am doing" and "Superiority is something you are born with." To measure communal narcissism, participants indicated their agreement with items such as "I am the most helpful person I know" and "I will be famous for increasing people's well-being."

We then conducted an experiment using a dictator game, in which a player is given resources (money, candy, etc.) and asked to divide it between themselves and a partner. Players can behave in a variety of ways, from being completely selfish (keeping all of the resources for themselves) to being completely prosocial (giving all of the resources to their partner).

The dictator games we used came in two flavors. In the first, we sought to emulate communal relationships, such as those with parents or friends. In the second, we tried to emulate exchange relationships, such as those between business partners or consumers buying a product. The main difference between communal and exchange relationships is that, when providing a service in an exchange relationship (though not a communal relationship), individuals expect there to be reciprocity. For instance, if you ask someone in a communal relationship (e.g., a friend) to help you to move, they won't stop talking to you if you fail to pay them (communal relationship). In fact, paying your friend could potentially damage the relationship. However, if you ask a company to help you move, it is unlikely that they will be satisfied with only a thank you.

To simulate communal relationships, we asked our participants to allocate chocolates between themselves and their partners; to simulate exchange relationships, we asked study participants to allocate money between themselves and their partners. We know from existing research that the presence of money frames decision-making processes as exchange-based. In one version of the study we provided study participants with only one unit of the resource, in order to highlight the gain or loss. This forced participants into a decision, where they received all the resources available, leaving their partner with nothing, or their partner received everything, leaving them with nothing.

An interesting pattern emerged in this game. In communal relationships, both agentic and communal narcissists were surprisingly prosocial and sharing. Nine out of 10 participants gave the chocolate to their partner. It seemed that when chocolate, an item often relied on as a polite way to thank (or appease) others, was used, narcissists of both types were extremely likely to give it to others. When we gave participants money, communal and agentic narcissists behaved very differently. Specifically, agentic (traditional) narcissists became extremely selfish, with nine out of 10 participants choosing to take the dollar. However, communal narcissists reacted very differently, behaving in an egalitarian fashion, giving away the dollar about half of the time. As work organizations are based on exchange relationships, and most of us are paid, it is likely that such behaviors are often seen in a positive light.

To test the consequences of communal narcissists in work situations, we conducted a longitudinal study of MBA teams. Here, we found that agentic, though not communal, narcissism had strongly negative consequences in teams. More specifically, we found that teams having higher levels of agentic narcissism was more likely to lead to individual members claiming more status than others believed they were due, inciting conflicts and reducing performance. However, teams that had higher levels of communal narcissism escaped such fates and outperformed groups high in agentic narcissism.

Narcissists can be disastrous for groups and organizations alike, because they typically want complete transformation even when the system is not broken. But when those narcissists are communal, it can temper much of the downside of narcissism. Instead of avoiding narcissists, organizations may be better served in selecting the right *type* of narcissist. Our research suggests that finding communal narcissists could bring the best of both worlds, delivering not only drive, charisma, and vision but also contributions to the greater good.

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