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# Leadership Organizational Psychology from Productive Narcissist to Tyrannical Narcissist

## Introduction

In this construction, I refer primarily to Michael Maccoby's work *Narcissistic Leaders: Who Succeeds and Who Fails*.<sup>1</sup> Coming into the era of the postmodern organization both in academic Organizational Social Psychology and the rapidly growing field of business and nonprofit organizational coaching, an increasing amount of attention has been given to positive psychology, emotional intelligence, worker motivation and self-development.

By the mid-90s, the nature of the American business organizations had begun to change drastically. Organizational Psychologists had shifted perspective from a modernistic, bureaucratic organization of a top-down hierarchy of centralized authority, decision-making, stable and specialized classification of roles, standardized processes, and routines to a more flattened heterarchical organization of decentralized authority and decision-making to fast, smart teamwork, and flexible, orderly, tactics and processes. The change in basic organizational structure identified

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Maccoby, *Narcissistic Leaders: Who Succeeds and Who Fails* (Harvard Business Press, 2007).

business organizations in terms of a major transformation to a “hierarchical-heterarchical reconstruction.”<sup>2</sup> I argue that post-modern, successful organizational leadership is driven at executive levels by a character type described by a continuum of a narcissistic productive virtuous leadership to a narcissistic productive pathological tyrant.

### The productive narcissist

When Freud speaks of libido, he is not talking about sexuality; rather he refers to Plato’s concept of eros which means a creative force of love. It is not love per se. It is the internal power to perceive the potential for love in reality and to bring it to actuality. It is the power to perceive and create the beautiful and the lovable.

Maccoby defines this productive, narcissistic, leadership power concisely:

Narcissists train themselves from an early age to block out other voices, other options, so one of the few voices they trust is their own. They are accustomed to listening to themselves talk, debating different sides of the issue, finally reaching a decision about what to do and the best way to do it.<sup>3</sup>

### Aristotle self-love (narcissism)

Charalambos S. Ierodiakonou M.D. is an Aristotelian-oriented, psychiatrist psychoanalyst who is a distinguished Professor of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki. As an Aristotelian recognized philosopher and psychiatric psychoanalyst, he presents the

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur William McVey, *Soulful Organizational Leadership* (En Route Books and Media, 2020), 215.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Maccoby, *Narcissistic Leaders: Who Succeeds and Who Fails* (Harvard Business Press, 2007), 46.

methods, categories, and the conception of the undivided nature of the human being that represents Aristotle in the psychoanalytic tradition and the perspective of the narcissistic personality trait, i.e. narcissistic self-love.<sup>4</sup> Ierodiakonou believes that an Aristotelian psychoanalytical understanding of narcissism must be taken basically from two chapters in *Book IX* of *Nicomachean Ethics* as well as in the *Eudemian Ethics* that discusses the nature of friendship in depth. He states that Aristotle comes to the major psychological conclusions that

friendships are determined according to one's feelings for oneself (1166 a).<sup>5</sup>

He continues citing Aristotle that a "Mature personality respects life as the extreme good and considers man's existence as positive. The good man is full of pleasant memories and hopes for the future," and "His mind is rich in ideas". Therefore, Aristotle's view is that such a wise man

is his own best friend and therefore should have the greatest love for himself.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, Ierodiakonou states that the wise man can be in a dialogue with himself. Furthermore, during this dialogue, it is very important that

the good and prudent man is in harmony with himself.<sup>7</sup>

We must mention here that the concept of narcissistic self-love is based mainly upon the moral aspect and belief that most

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<sup>4</sup> Charalambos S. Ierodiakonou, *The Psychology of Aristotle. The Philosopher. A Psychoanalytical Perspective* (Karnac Books Ltd 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 145.

people, however ordinary, may possess the good qualities that give the right to self-love. In contrast, Ierodiakonou describes disordered, narcissistic, vicious character as thus:

Bad and wicked men cannot establish steady friendships because of the wicked relation with themselves and others.<sup>8</sup>

Narcissistic leaders:  
who succeeds and who fails.  
The Maccoby method

Productive Narcissistic Knowledge Types Continuum is only one essential part of the equation. It doesn't tell you the level of a person's productiveness and moral reasoning or emotional attitudes such as enthusiasm, envy, anger, fear, sadness, and so on. That requires a combination of intellect and emotional awareness or what I'd rather call a heart that listens, i.e. the ability to experience and recognize emotional attitudes.

Aristotle's psychodynamic psychology  
of self-intersubjective love

Aristotle teaches: all the feelings towards others are an extension of the loving feelings a person has for himself (NE 1168 b).<sup>9</sup> The creator [Healthy Productive Narcissist] loves more whatever he himself creates. He brings the case of craftsmen [HPNs] who love more the work of their hands, and of poets even to a greater degree who are fond of their own poems, as an extension of themselves. The interpretation Aristotle gives for such an attitude is psychologically very interesting. Everybody loves his own exist-

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

tence, but we exist by living in activity “...while acting a creator [HPN] is in a sense, his own work” ( NE 1168 a).<sup>10</sup>

And to this identification of the creator [Healthy Productive Narcissist, HPN] with his work, Aristotle adds a significant remark: The creator [HPN] therefore loves his work since he loves his own self (NE 1168 a).<sup>11</sup> So the creator [HPN] loves the object as part of himself as a consequence the love directed to the object is essentially belonging and coming back to the subject.

### Freud and the healthy productive narcissistic type

It is most insightful in developing a theory of a continuum of productive, narcissistic leadership to examine Freud’s basic description of the narcissistic personality type in a conversation he had with Sandor Ferenczi:

There is no tension between ego and super-ego (indeed, on the strength of this type one would scarcely have arrived at the hypothesis of a super-ego), and there is no preponderance of erotic needs. The subject’s main interest is directed to self-preservation: He is independent and not open to intimidation. His ego has a large amount of aggressiveness at its disposal which also manifests itself in a readiness for activity. In his erotic life, loving is preferred above being loved. People belonging to this type impress others as being personalities; they are especially suited to act as support for others, to take on the role of leaders and to give a fresh stimulus to cultural development or to damage the established state of affairs.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>12</sup> Maccoby Trump, *Psychoanalytic and Historical Perspectives, Narcissism and Marketing in an Age of Anxiety and Distrust* (Routledge Taylor & Franis Group, London, and New York, 2020).

## Productive narcissists have the drive to change the world

Maccoby found that “Change the World” type of leaders had appeared in the eighties. Even though business literature from Stephen Covey to Jim Collins stressed emotional intelligence, listening to others, sensitivity to feelings, anger and impulse control and working consensus. Maccoby found these things are necessary to make business a better place to work, but they do not make business successful. Emotional intelligence does not make business successful; it is a matter of strategic intelligence. The answer is a narcissist may be either productive or unproductive. It was the call for executive leaders who would appear on the front page of “Time Magazine” as the new productive leaders, e.g. Steve Jobs, Herb Kelleher, Bill Gates, Sam Walton, Andy Grove [*Only the Paranoid Survive*], Larry Ellison of whom it was once said:

The difference between God and Larry is that God does believe he is Larry.<sup>13</sup>

## The productive narcissistic organizational successful types

Maccoby clarifies in an article he wrote for the “Harvard Business Review” in 2000 that successful narcissistic leaders are not tough guys without emotional intelligence. The following is a brief summary of that important article on the issue of emotional intelligence and narcissistic leadership. While it’s true that many successful narcissistic leaders lack emotional intelligence, the issue is complex. Keep in mind that elements of emotional-like empathy are talents, not values. Being sensitive to others’

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Maccoby, *Narcissistic Leaders The Incredible Pros, the Inevitable Cons* (Best of the Harvard Best Reviews, 2000).

feelings doesn't mean you care about them. Bill Clinton used empathy to charm and seduce, while Abraham Lincoln used empathy to manage a cabinet of big egos. Does a narcissistic leader's lack of emotional sensitivity indicate an inability, or does it result from a decision to tune out diverting emotions? Some narcissists tell me they are protecting themselves from doubts and feelings by ignoring emotions. However, in doing so, they are losing the ability to better understand themselves and others. Emotional Intelligence doesn't necessarily keep a leader from making tough decisions that hurt some people. Decisive leaders can be hard-headed, have a well-protected heart, or, like Lincoln, have a brave heart, but they don't have flabby or bleeding hearts.

#### Four main social organizational personality types

Freud recognized that there are an infinite variety of personalities, but he identified three main types: erotic, obsessive, and narcissistic. I present these types plus one other based on Maccoby's Neo-Freudian reconstruction.

1. The erotic personality type: Freud did not generally mean sexual personality, but rather one for whom loving and above all being loved is most important. This type of individual is dependent on those people they fear might stop loving them. Many erotic types are teachers, nurses, and social workers. At their most productive, they are developers for the young as well as enablers and helpers at work. As managers, they are caring and supportive, but they avoid conflict and make people dependent on them; they are, according to Freud, out-directed people. In my consulting work, I refer to them as productive affectionate carrying working types.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Maccoby, *Narcissistic Leaders: Who Succeeds and Who Fails* (Harvard Business Press, 2007), 45–49.

2. Obsessives, in contrast, are inner directive. They are self-reliant and conscientious. They create and maintain order and make the most effective operational and detail managers. They look constantly for ways to help people listen better, resolve conflict, and find win-win opportunities. They buy self-improvement books such as *The Seven Habits of Effective People*. Obsessives are also ruled by a strict conscience; they like to focus on continuous improvement at work because it fits in with their sense of moral improvement. As entrepreneurs, obsessives start businesses that express their values but they lack the vision, daring and charisma it takes to turn a good idea into a great one. The best obsessives set high standards and communicate very effectively. They make sure that instructions are followed and goals are kept within budget. The most productive are great mentors and team players. The unproductive and uncooperative become narrow experts and rule-bound bureaucrats.<sup>15</sup>
3. Narcissists are the third type. They are the innovators, driven in business to gain power and glory. Productive narcissists are experts in their industries, but they go beyond it. They also ask the critical questions. They want to learn everything about everything that affects the company and its products. Unlike the erotic, they want to be admired, not loved. And unlike obsessives, they are not troubled by a punishing super-ego, so they are able to aggressively pursue their goals. Of all the personality types, narcissists run the greatest risk of isolating themselves at the moment of success. And because of their independence and aggressiveness, they are constantly looking out for enemies, sometimes degenerating into paranoia when they are under extreme stress.<sup>16</sup>
4. The marketing type: Michael Maccoby as a Neo-Freudian includes a fourth type of personality based on the psychoana-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 49–65.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 65– 80.

lyst Eric Fromm. This fourth type of personality is extremely prevalent in today's consumer economy. It is the marketing personality type. The personality is best exemplified in Woody Allen's movie *Zelig*, a man so governed by his need to be valued that he becomes exactly like the people he happened to be around. Marketing personalities are more detached than the erotic, and so are less likely to cement close ties. They are also less driven by conscience than obsessives. Instead, they are motivated by a radar-like anxiety that permeates everything they do. Because they are so eager to please and to alleviate this anxiety, marketing personalities excel at selling themselves to others. Unproductive marketing types lack direction and the ability to commit themselves to people or projects. But productive, marketing types are good at facilitating teams and keeping the focus on adding value as defined by customers and colleagues. Like obsessives, marketing personalities are avid consumers of self-help books. Like narcissists, they are not wedded to the past. But marketing types generally make poor leaders in times of crisis. They lack the daring required to innovate and are too responsive to current common rather than future customer demands.<sup>17</sup>

Eric Fromm and Michael Maccoby  
productive narcissist leaders  
and social upheaval theory

During times of disruption and upheaval, especially periods of crisis, which clear the way for the productive narcissist to assume positions of power, leading the populace to a new way of life. These are times that call for productive, narcissistic leaders, for better or worse, to create a new visionary order that damages the established state of affairs. Franklin Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 57–64.

Napoleon Bonaparte are narcissistic leaders that take us to places we've never seen before, who innovate and build empires out of nothing. In the 21st century we will continue to see the same kind of technological and social revolution over the coming years in fields of nanotechnology, gene therapy, robotics, artificial intelligence, bioscience, biomedicine, bioengineering, agricultural products, environmental and energy research, healthcare, and medical advances brought about by the explosive combination of narcissistic leadership and tremendous scientific experimentation. Especially, medical advances brought about by the explosive combination of narcissistic-market leadership in aging populations.<sup>18</sup>

Fundamental productive pathological  
narcissist psychological principle  
from Eric Fromm, *Man for Himself*

Selfishness and self-love, far from being identical, are actually opposites. A selfish person does not love himself too much but too little; in fact, unconsciously he or she hates himself. This lack of fondness and care for himself or herself, which is only one expression of his or her lack of productiveness, leaves him or her empty and frustrated. He or she is necessarily unhappy and anxiously concerned to snatch from life the satisfactions which he or she blocks himself from attaining. He or she seems to care too much for himself, but actually he only makes an unsuccessful attempt to cover up and compensate for his or her failure to care for his or her real self. Freud holds that the selfish person is narcissistic, as if he or she had withdrawn his love from others and turned it toward his own purpose. It is true that selfish people are incapable of loving others, but they are not capable of loving themselves either.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 231.

It is easier to understand selfishness by comparing it with greedy concern for others, for instance in an overly solicitous, dominating mother. While she consciously believes that she is particularly fond of her child, she actually has a deep, repressed hostility for the object of her concern. She is overly concerned, not because she loves the child too much, but because she has to compensate for her lack of capacity to love him at all.<sup>10</sup>

The most critical issue regarding pathological, narcissistic leadership is about the vulnerability rage by Heinz Kohut in *Thoughts on Rage and Narcissistic Rage* Michael Maccoby has written:

Be on the lookout for the signs of grandiosity, and be prepared to leave if you see that your narcissistic boss exhibits all the signs of self-intoxication and unchecked pride.

What Maccoby describes in this short passage is an example of an unhealthy, productive narcissist under stress, expressing his or her malignant rage. I have listed characteristics from Kohut's concise manuscript on the unconscious nature of rage. The narcissistic vulnerable rage leader responds to actual or (anticipated) narcissistic injury, either with shamefaced withdrawal (flight) or with narcissistic rage (fight).

1. The need for revenge for fighting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means, and a deeply anchored unrelenting compulsion and the pursuit of all these aims which gives no rest to those who have suffered a narcissistic injury these are the characteristic features of narcissistic rage in all its forms and which set it apart from other kinds of aggression. And what is the specific significance of the psychological injuries such as ridicule, contempt, and conspicuous defeat that tend to pro-

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<sup>10</sup> Erich Fromm, *Man For Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (Owl Books, Henry Holt, and Company, 1947), 130–131.

voke narcissistic rage, and how do these external provocations interact with the sensitive aspect of the rage and revenge-prone personality?

2. The desire to turn a passive experience into an active one, the mechanism of identification with the aggressor, the sadistic tensions retained by those who as children had been treated sadistically by their parents all these factors help explain the readiness of the shame prone individual to respond true or to potentially shame provoking situation by the employment of a simple remedy: the active often anticipatory inflicting on others of those narcissistic injuries which he or she is most afraid of suffering himself.
3. The narcissistically injured, on the other hand, cannot rest until he or she has blotted out a vaguely experienced offender who dared to oppose him or her, to disagree with him or her, or to outshine him or her, "Mirror, mirror on the wall who is the fairest of them all?" the grandiose exhibitionist self is asking. And when he or she is told that there is someone fairer cleverer or stronger than like the evil stepmother in Snow White he or she can never find rest because it can never wipe out the evidence that has controlled that has contradicted its conviction that is the unique and perfect.

Heinz Kohut and others argue that chronic narcissistic rage is one of the most pernicious afflictions of the human psyche. It is absolutely destructive to organizational harmony and optimization. I mention these toxic character traits because in an organizational work setting, as a rule, they are over time recognized by fellow workers and management. They have a negative impact on productivity and team collaboration. There is really no place in business or non-profit organizations for tyrant productivity at any level of the organization.

## Conclusion

We have in this construct established two productive narcissistic extremes of a continuum from a healthy productive narcissist to an unhealthy, productive, pathological narcissist. We have constructed this continuum within the parameters of the discipline of Organizational Social Psychology. Therefore, our purpose has been to examine the topic of the importance of identifying the characteristics of narcissistic leaders who are successful exemplars of leadership as opposed to narcissistic tyrannical leaders.

As we draw this continuum to a conclusion, we must bring attention to the fact that this social psychological theory has been from a social psychoanalytic psychology school, primarily Neo-Freudian. We conclude this study of the productive, narcissistic, healthy leader and an unhealthy tyrant by including a final concept worthy of serious attention on defining the differences between the healthy productive narcissist and the unhealthy productive tyrant narcissist, especially in a setting of organizational social leadership and follower emulation. Michael Maccoby states: "We need leaders who will address the causes of our anxiety and work to resolve them. Unlike populist demagogues who promise magical solutions, or leaders who promote special interest, the leaders we need will develop policies and organizations that realistically move all of our society to a better future. Rather than just handouts, the leaders we need will inspire social responsibility. We need this kind of leadership on five interrelated levels: global, national, community, organizational, and individual. These leaders may have different types of personality. What is essential is that they are productive and ethical, that they understand the issues and are able to communicate their policies, and that they share a leadership philosophy that makes the well-being of the people and the environment their highest priorities". They understand the message of the Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset who wrote,

I am myself and my circumstances and if I do not save my circumstances, I cannot save myself.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, in this discussion of the Productive of Narcissistic Continuum we focus on the philosophical, psychological principles of this continuum: 1) We have grounded the construct of agreement of Aristotle and Neo-Freudians on an unconscious understanding of a faculty of a healthy love of self, others, friends, and community. 2) We observe this love in the productive good deeds of the community. 3) There is the critical problem of the malignant, narcissistic rage type character. 4) Every leader in organizational, executive level positions should be somewhat of a productive healthy narcissist. 5) It is a narcissistic tyrannical, malignant, rage, productive narcissist who is the primary threat to the successful productivity, quality out-put, efficiency, creativity, and harmony of the organization.

### The productive malignant narcissist effective character

Malignant narcissistic leaders are excessively suspicious, paranoid, and act indirectly in aggressive, contemptuous, controlling ways. This behavior is a source of pleasure and shows a sadistic expression of aggression, severe paranoid tendencies, and antisocial behavior. The combination of these features: narcissistic personality disorder, aggression, anti-social behavior, and paranoid tendencies<sup>21</sup> that characterizes a malignant, tyrannical syndrome. As Aristotle recognized also in his organizational and

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Maccoby, *Narcissistic Leaders: Who Succeeds and Who Fails* (Harvard Business Press, 2007), 19.

<sup>21</sup> Ken Fuchsman and Molly Castelloe, "The anatomy of narcissistic leadership. Interview with Otto Kernberg" *Psychoanalytical and historical perspectives on the leadership of Donald Trump, narcissism and marketing in an age of anxiety and distrust* edited by Michael Maccoby and Ken Fuchsman.

political psychology and identified the destructive threat of the tyrannical character types to organizational equilibrium:

Any sole ruler, who is not required to give an account of himself, and who rules over subjects all equal or superior to himself to suit his own interest and not theirs, can only be exercising a tyranny.<sup>22</sup>

The issue is that in recruiting individuals for executive leadership organizational positions, productive malignant narcissists have impressive credentials that bespeak of a history of success. They also have excellent rhetorical skills of persuasion in front of an audience. Consequently, they will easily appear as the executive who has the competitive drive to move the organization. In American business culture, they are best described by the metaphor as he or she has that animal spirit the productive malignant effective narcissist types describe themselves as “I push people hard because I push myself hard, but I am fair.”

The productive malignant effective narcissist is continuously driven by voices of the unconscious mind to think rationally about his or her feelings and urges to such an extent that he or she represses the ability to process emotional content. As a result, the malignant narcissist refuses to express his or her feelings to others in the workplace because it is perceived as a sign of weakness. Furthermore, there is grave fear of appearing being a weak and vulnerable leader.

Consequently, feelings are continuously repressed, i.e. buried into the basement of the mind. When the productive, malignant, effective narcissist is overwhelmed by internal or external competitive forces, the unconscious turns to irascible emotions of “rage”. It results in a chronic disposition to attack and destroy enemies rather than be destroyed. As a result, a profound social disposition is felt throughout the organization. Thus, the tyrant’s repressed grandiosity and omnipotence results in an organizational reign of terror. ■

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<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 5.

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