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### Narcissistic leaders: the appearance of success

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## CHAPTER 3

### CRISIS ENHANCES THE EMERGENCE OF NARCISSISTIC LEADERS

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Despite their negative characteristics, such as egocentrism and lack of empathy, many of the world's leaders appear to be narcissistic. Using two studies, we propose that a specific contextual factor, i.e. crisis, increases the emergence of narcissists as leaders. We hypothesized that high narcissists will emerge as leaders more often than low narcissists, especially in times of crisis when the characteristics of high narcissists (e.g., confidence, dominance, and toughness) match those of prototypical leaders. As expected, Study 3.1 showed that high narcissists were perceived to reduce uncertainty and were therefore more often chosen as leaders than low narcissists, especially in a crisis context. Also, Study 3.2 showed that when people directly experienced crisis and pessimism about future outcomes, high narcissists were more often chosen as leaders than low narcissists. Taken together, these results reveal the importance of contextual crisis in understanding the allure of narcissistic leaders.

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Nothing captures certainty and strength more than the supreme confidence, dominance and charm of a narcissist. These characteristics have become increasingly valued by individualistic Western modern societies (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008), which tend to raise narcissistic individuals to prominent positions. It is therefore not surprising that many of the world leaders and CEOs are attributed with narcissistic characteristics (Deluga, 1997; Maccoby, 2000). Examples include business leaders such as Steve Jobs (Robins & Paulhus, 2001) and presidents such as Nicolas Sarkozy (De Sutter & Immelman, 2008).

At first glance, the seeming prevalence of narcissistic leaders is not unexpected. Narcissists possess many prototypical leadership traits, such as confidence, high self-esteem, extraversion and dominance (Judge, Illies, Bono, & Gerhardt, 2002; Paunonen, Lönnqvist, Verkasalo, Leikas, & Nissinen, 2006; Smith & Foti, 1998), which makes them more likely to be viewed as leaders by others (Lord, Foti, & DeVader, 1984; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994). Indeed, narcissists have been found to emerge as leaders in team settings (e.g., Brunell et al., 2008; Nevicka, De Hoogh, Van Vianen, Beersma, & McIlwain, 2011) and are perceived as effective regardless of their actual negative effect on group performance (Nevicka, Ten Velden, De Hoogh, & Van Vianen, 2011).

However, narcissists also possess a host of negative qualities, such as arrogance, lack of empathy, egocentrism and exploitativeness (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006; Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984), which makes their appeal as leaders paradoxical. Empathy, for instance, has been identified as an important and valued aspect of leadership (George, 2000; Kellett, Humphrey, & Sleeth, 2006). Thus, this two-sided face of narcissists begs a question as to *when* narcissistic individuals might emerge as leaders. Previous research suggests that leadership prototypes are not static but adjust to various situational constraints, such as environmental features (Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001). In other words, individuals' perceptions regarding a prototypical leader are subject to change depending on the demands of a specific context. Thus, it is possible that narcissistic leaders may only be appropriate in contexts where lack of empathy, egocentrism, and arrogance are not perceived to hinder the leader's perceived potential effectiveness. Support for this premise can be inferred from research showing inconsistent ratings of

narcissists as leaders (Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006). When narcissistic leaders were judged by co-workers of a beach patrol, where empathy, warmth and caring would be important, their performance was evaluated negatively. In contrast, students enrolled in a business management course, a context in which dominance and confidence would be valued, rated high narcissists positively.

In their review of relevant literature, Campbell and Campbell (2009) suggested that narcissistic leaders would be particularly suitable in contexts that are characterized by instability and change. In the current research we build on this idea and propose that a crisis, defined as "*a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly*" (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 59), constitutes a context in which high narcissists are especially likely to be chosen as leaders because they match the crisis-specific leader prototype. Crises trigger feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, anxiety and stress (e.g., Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2004; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981) and this brings about an instinctive desire in people to eliminate such uncertainty or find ways to make it tolerable (e.g., Van den Bos, Poortvliet, Maas, Miedema, & Van den Ham, 2005; Weary, Jacobson, Edwards, & Tobin, 2001). As a result, crises trigger a need for leaders who can swiftly resolve the situation, restore order and reduce uncertainty (Madera & Smith, 2009; Shamir & Howell, 1999). Indeed, when people feel threatened or insecure they are more willing to accept assertive leadership (Madsen & Snow, 1991; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007), prefer leaders who are high on agentic (e.g., confidence and decisiveness) rather than communal (e.g., warmth and empathy; Hoyt, Simon, & Reid, 2009) attributes and show a lower preference for relationship oriented leaders (Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2004).

We propose that in crisis contexts, which are characterized by uncertainty of the future (e.g., Cohen et al., 2004; Gillath & Hart, 2010), a narcissist will be perceived as someone who will reduce uncertainty. Thus, during crises the prototypical leadership traits of narcissists will supersede their negative relational traits, such as lack of warmth and empathy, which will enhance the appeal of choosing narcissists as leaders. We test this idea in two studies, using a scenario as well as a task in which individuals directly experience crisis, and expect that high

narcissists will be chosen more often as leaders than low narcissists, especially in crisis contexts.

### Study 3.1

In Study 3.1 we employ a scenario to test our main prediction. Participants read a description of a company that was facing a crisis or non-crisis, and were asked to choose between a high and low narcissist as leader. We hypothesized that high narcissists will more often emerge as leaders than low narcissists, especially in a crisis context, and this effect will be mediated by perceived reduction of uncertainty (Hypothesis 1).

### Method

#### *Participants and design*

Forty-one students ( $M = 22.83$  years; 17 men)<sup>5</sup> participating for course credit, or 2 Euros, were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: Crisis versus non-crisis context.

#### *Procedure and manipulations*

Participants received written instructions stating that, as an employee of the organization, they needed to choose a leader out of two potential candidates for the CEO position of a company either facing a crisis or non-crisis. We modeled our *manipulation of crisis versus non-crisis* after prior research (Halverson, Murphy, & Riggio, 2004). In the crisis [non-crisis] condition, participants received a company description stating that “The company is currently finding itself in difficulty [a period of relative stability]”, “Its share price has plummeted [been stable]”, “The company has lost market share [has a constant market share]”, “The company has an unpredictable [predictable] work environment” and “Many employees feel a sense of stress spreading through the organization

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<sup>5</sup> Controlling for gender and age in all analyses of both studies revealed the same patterns of results and identical conclusions. Thus, these variables are not discussed further.

[experience little stress]”.

After reading the description, participants were asked to consider two candidates selected by head hunters (see ‘Leader profiles’) fill out a questionnaire assessing the candidates, and choose one as a CEO for the organization. Finally, participants filled out manipulation checks.

*Leader profiles.* We created two distinct leader profiles, one of a high and one of a low narcissistic candidate. Participants read that out of several applicants, two candidates with highly similar CV’s and letters of reference were recommended for the job of a CEO, and that as the last part of the application process, the two candidates had filled out a questionnaire to assess certain characteristics. They were then provided with the two candidates’ alleged answers. The questionnaire contained 18 items, fourteen of which were based on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory used to measure narcissism in general populations (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979; e.g., "I am a very unique person and better than other people"). Four items captured general leadership characteristics (Smith & Foti, 1998; e.g., "I am perceived as intelligent"; all 1 = "Completely disagree", 7 = "Completely agree").

The answers from the two candidates were presented such that a high narcissistic or a low narcissistic profile appeared for each candidate. For example, participants saw that the high narcissistic group member had answered "6" on the item "I am a very unique person and better than other people" whereas the low narcissistic group member had answered "2" on this item. On general leadership quality items both group members answered either a "6" or a "7", to ensure that overall, both group members would be seen as having similar general leadership qualities.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Dependent measures***

*Manipulation checks.* To check the *manipulation of crisis versus non-crisis*, participants were asked to fill out a five-item questionnaire (e.g., "The company is finding itself in a crisis";  $\alpha = .98$ ). In order to check the adequacy of the leader

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<sup>6</sup> We balanced the scores on the general leadership questions, such that both candidates showed the same average score.

profiles we measured leader perceptions central to narcissism, participants indicated the extent to which they perceived the candidates to be "selfish", "arrogant", "manipulative", and "empathic". We also measured perceived general intelligence in order to check that the profiles displayed similar general leadership capability (all 1 = "Completely disagree" to 7 = "Completely agree").

*Leader emergence.* We asked participants which of the two candidates they would prefer for the position of CEO in the organization.

*Perceived reduction of uncertainty.* For both candidates, participants completed four items developed for this study (e.g., "This candidate would reduce uncertainty in the company"; 1 = "Completely disagree" to 7 = "Completely agree";  $\alpha > .78$ ).

## Results

### *Manipulation check*

Results revealed that participants in the crisis condition reported more crisis for the company ( $M = 6.11$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) than participants in the non-crisis condition ( $M = 1.48$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ),  $t(39) = 25.13$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 8.05$ . In order to confirm that the leader profiles were representative of a high or a low narcissistic candidate we conducted paired-samples t-tests, which revealed that participants perceived the high narcissistic candidate as more selfish ( $M = 5.88$  vs. 2.12), arrogant ( $M = 6.41$  vs. 1.73) and manipulative ( $M = 6.71$  vs. 2.12), and less empathic ( $M = 3.54$  vs. 5.31) than the low narcissistic candidate, all  $t_s(40) > 5.32$ ,  $p_s < .001$ . Furthermore, there was no significant difference between the two candidates on their perceived level of intelligence ( $M = 6.05$  vs. 6.12),  $t(40) = .43$ , ns.

### *Leader emergence*

A Chi-Square analysis revealed, first of all, that high narcissists were in general more often chosen as leader (68%,  $n = 28$  of 41) than low narcissists (32%,  $n = 13$  of 41),  $\chi^2(1, N = 41) = 5.49$ ,  $p = .019$ ,  $\phi = .37$ . Second, and more

importantly, there was a significant effect of context,  $\chi^2(1, N = 41) = 8.50, p < .01, \phi = .46$ . Participants in the crisis condition more often chose the high narcissistic candidate as a leader (90%,  $n = 18$  of 20) over the low narcissistic candidate (10%,  $n = 2$  of 20),  $\chi^2(1, N = 20) = 12.8, p < .001, \phi = .80$ . For participants in the non-crisis condition there was no difference (48%,  $n = 10$  of 21 chose the high narcissistic candidate as a leader, and 52%,  $n = 11$  of 21 chose the low narcissist),  $\chi^2(1, N = 21) = 0.05, ns$ .

### *Perceived reduction of uncertainty*

A 2 (crisis versus non-crisis) by 2 (perceived reduction of uncertainty) repeated-measures analysis with perceived reduction of uncertainty answered for both candidates as the within-subjects factor revealed that participants more strongly perceived the high narcissistic candidate to reduce uncertainty ( $M = 4.75, SD = 1.21$ ) than the low narcissistic candidate ( $M = 4.09, SD = 1.21$ ),  $F(1, 39) = 5.33, p = .026, \eta^2 = .12$ . This effect was qualified by an interaction between condition and perceived reduction of uncertainty,  $F(1, 39) = 6.67, p = .014, \eta^2 = .15$ . As expected, high narcissistic candidates were more strongly perceived to be able to reduce uncertainty ( $M = 5.31, SD = 0.90$ ) than low narcissistic candidates ( $M = 3.88, SD = 1.26$ ), but only in a crisis context,  $F(1, 39) = 11.68, p < .01, \eta^2 = .23$ . In the non-crisis condition, this difference was not significant,  $F(1, 39) = 0.04, ns$ .

### *Mediation analysis*

Hypothesis 1 stated that high narcissistic individuals would emerge more often as leaders than low narcissists, especially in a crisis context and that this would be mediated by perceived reduction of uncertainty. First, results showed that context (crisis versus non-crisis) had a significant effect on leader choice,  $B = 2.29, SE = 0.86, Wald = 7.04, p < .01$ . Second, context had a significant effect on perceived reduction of uncertainty,  $B = 1.50, SE = 0.58, t(39) = 2.58, p = .014$ . Third, the mediator had a significant effect on leader choice,  $B = 0.91, SE = 0.29, Wald = 9.76, p < .01$ . Finally, the effect of context was reduced to non-significance when the mediator was entered,  $B = 1.89, SE = 1.01, Wald = 3.49, p$



$> .06$ ,  $Z = 1.87$ ,  $p = .03$  (directional). Thus, mediation was established and Hypothesis 1 was confirmed.

### Discussion and Introduction to Study 3.2

Results of the first study showed that crisis is an important contextual factor that influences the emergence of narcissists as leaders. In line with our expectations high narcissists, in contrast to low narcissists, were perceived to reduce uncertainty more in a crisis than a non-crisis context, and this led others to choose them as leaders more often. These findings suggest that during crises, the positive leadership characteristics of narcissists, such as confidence and extraversion, surpass their negative characteristics, such as arrogance, exploitativeness and egocentrism.

In Study 3.2 we built on these findings and investigated whether high narcissists are also chosen as leaders when people directly experience a crisis that threatens their personal interests. Furthermore, as results of Study 3.1 indicated that high narcissists were expected to reduce uncertainty more in times of crisis, we hypothesized that greater pessimism with regards to future outcomes would prompt people to choose the high narcissist, rather than the low narcissist, as leader. We thus expected to replicate the results of Study 3.1, and predicted that in times of directly experienced crisis rather than non-crisis, high narcissists will emerge as leaders more often than low narcissists, and that this will be mediated by greater pessimism regarding expected future outcomes (Hypothesis 2).

### Method

#### *Participants and design*

Ninety-five students ( $M = 21.41$  years; 27 men) participated for course credit or 10 Euros. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (crisis versus non-crisis).

#### *Procedure*

Participants were informed that they were about to engage in a computer-mediated three-person group task, in which their group had to perform several

tasks, one of which involved another three-person group. In reality, there were no other group members and the participants interacted individually with the computer in a simulated group task.

To facilitate the creation of leader profiles later in the experiment participants completed a "personality questionnaire" (see 'Leader Profiles'). After completing this questionnaire, the simulated group task commenced. At the end of the task participants chose a leader, and answered several questions.

### *Task and manipulation of crisis*

*Task.* We adapted a computerized interactive task used in negotiation studies (e.g., De Dreu, Koole, & Oldersma, 1999; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004), in order to create a context that required participants to choose a leader and within which we could manipulate crisis with strong psychological realism. Participants negotiated the sale of hybrid cars, and were instructed that they would be randomly allocated to one of three roles in either the sellers' or the buyers' group. In reality, all participants took on the role of representative of the sellers' group, and had to negotiate with a (simulated) representative from the buyers' group.

There was one issue to be negotiated—the price of cars. Participants could sell the cars for any price, ranging between €20 000 and €35 000 per car, but they received a financial incentive to try and obtain a price of at least €28 000 (see 'Manipulation of crisis'). Participants were informed that the buyer would make the first offer, that they could respond with a counteroffer, and that the negotiation would end when both parties agreed.

After participants read information about the cars, negotiation commenced. Over the first four negotiation rounds (phase 1) the buyer's proposed price increased at escalating increments. After round four, negotiation was momentarily interrupted and participants answered questions about the negotiation thus far. Furthermore, participants were told that they could send messages about their perception of the negotiation to the buyer. Next, we

manipulated the context as either crisis or non-crisis (see ‘Manipulation of crisis’), and negotiation resumed for another three rounds (phase 2).<sup>7</sup>

After round seven, negotiation was interrupted and participants answered the same questions as after the first negotiation phase. Next, participants were informed that their group would have to perform additional tasks, and that they should choose one of their fellow group members as leader to complete the current task and to lead the group during the subsequent tasks.

*Manipulation of crisis.* According to its definition (Pearson & Clair, 1998), crisis constitutes an unexpected change in the situation that creates uncertainty, and affects the interests of the individual as well as the group. Following this definition, our manipulation of crisis was twofold. First, after the first negotiation phase, participants in the *crisis* condition received sudden negative feedback from the buyer stating that they felt uncomfortable with the way that the negotiation was unfolding, and that the negotiation was difficult. The first element of crisis, in that it is an unexpected event which causes uncertainty, is captured by the suddenness of the negative feedback from the buyer. Thus, the purpose of this negative statement was to unexpectedly interrupt the stable negotiation that participants had experienced in phase one. This served as a catalyst for the second part of the crisis manipulation, which entailed a substantial decrease in the buyer’s proposed offers during negotiation phase two. This is also likely to instigate uncertainty as it is not consistent with the previous rounds of negotiation and departs from it drastically.

Participants in the *non-crisis* condition received feedback from the buyer stating that they felt comfortable, and that the negotiation was proceeding as it should. In the second negotiation phase the buyer’s proposed offers remained consistent with the trend of the first phase.

Because participants needed to negotiate at least 4 rounds to receive the crisis versus non-crisis manipulation, all participants received a financial incentive to prevent them from settling too early. They were informed that all members in the seller group would receive 2 extra euros if they negotiated a price

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<sup>7</sup> Four participants were removed from the analysis because they settled on a price before the end of round 6 (cf. Tripp & Sondak, 1992). However, including these participants in our analyses yielded identical results.

of at least €28 000. This incentive also served to ensure that participants were adequately committed to the negotiation, and that failure to successfully finish negotiating would be perceived as threatening to their personal and group's interests (the second part of the definition of crisis; Pearson & Clair, 1998).

### *Leader profiles*

The leader profiles (high versus low narcissistic group member) were similar to the ones used in Study 3.1. The only difference was that at the beginning of the experiment, participants were asked to complete a fake personality questionnaire containing all of the items (see also Steinel & De Dreu, 2004; Ten Velden, Beersma, & De Dreu, 2009). Thus, participants believed that all group members had completed this test. Prior to choosing a leader they received the questionnaires allegedly completed by the other two group members, with their answers manipulated in such a way that a high narcissistic or a low narcissistic profile appeared for each group member (see Study 3.1).

### *Dependent measures*

*Manipulation checks.* The *manipulation of crisis* was checked with five items (e.g., "The negotiation can be described as a crisis"). In addition, two items measured experienced comfort after the first negotiation phase and after the second negotiation phase (e.g., "I felt comfortable during the negotiation"; all 1 = "Completely disagree" to 7 = "Completely agree"; both  $\alpha$ s > .82).

As was done in Study 3.1, we checked the adequacy of our leader profiles by measuring the same leader perceptions central to narcissism (1 = "Completely disagree" to 5 = "Completely agree").

*Expected future outcomes.* Participants assessed, as a percentage, the probability of a successful negotiation outcome, with lower percentage indicating greater pessimism in future outcomes. This was measured at two periods, once after the first and once after the second negotiation phase.

*Leader emergence.* We asked participants to choose one of their group members as leader for the remainder of the experiment.

## Results

### *Manipulation checks*

Results revealed that participants experienced more crisis in the crisis condition ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) than in the non-crisis condition ( $M = 2.68$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ ),  $t(89) = 4.45$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = .94$ . Furthermore, a 2 (crisis versus non-crisis) by 2 (comfort after phase 1 versus phase 2) repeated-measures analysis with comfort as the within-subjects variable revealed that participants experienced less comfort in the second phase ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ) than in the first phase ( $M = 4.64$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ),  $F(1, 89) = 24.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .22$ . This effect was qualified by an interaction between condition and comfort,  $F(1, 89) = 51.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .37$ , see Figure 3.1. In the crisis condition, participants reported less comfort in the second negotiation phase,  $F(1, 89) = 76.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .46$ . For participants in the non-crisis condition this difference was not significant,  $F(1, 89) = 2.46$ , *ns*. Taken together, these results indicate that our manipulation of crisis was successful.

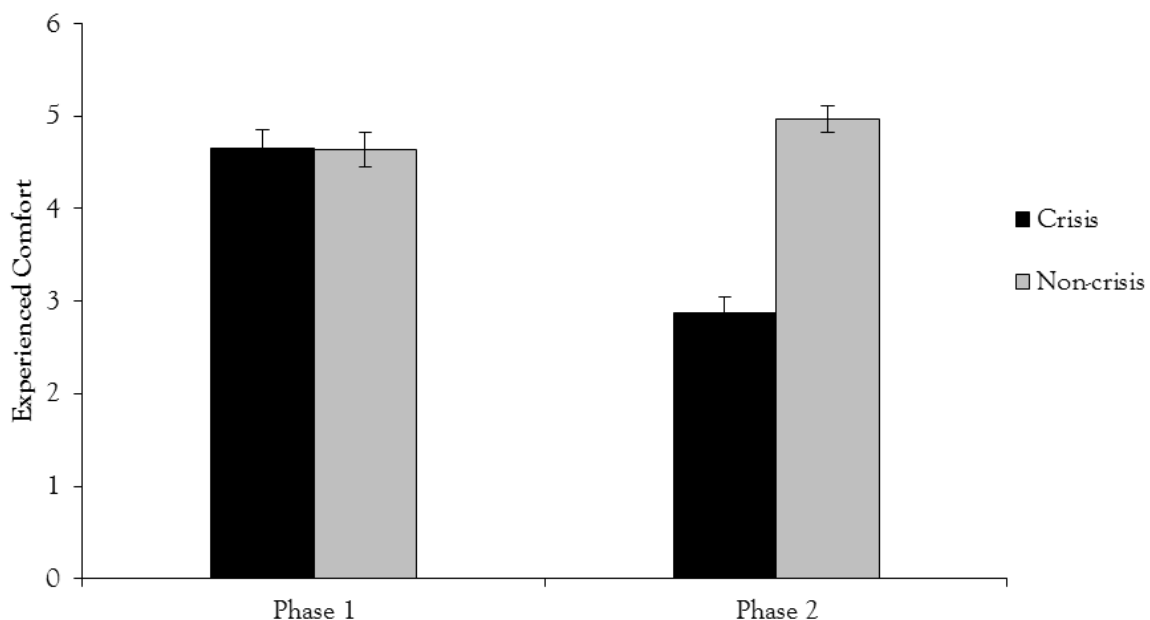


Figure 3.1.

Experienced Comfort During Negotiation Phase One and Two as a Function of Crisis Versus Non-crisis.

Paired-samples t-tests revealed that participants perceived the high narcissistic group member as more tough ( $M = 4.71$  vs.  $1.91$ ), arrogant ( $M = 4.68$  vs.  $1.48$ ), manipulative ( $M = 4.56$  vs.  $1.82$ ) and less empathic ( $M = 1.95$  vs.  $4.25$ ) than the low narcissistic group member, all  $t_s(90) \geq 13.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . This provides support for our presentation of the prospective leader profiles as either high versus low narcissistic.

### *Leader emergence*

A Chi-Square analysis revealed that high narcissists were in general chosen more often as leaders (63%,  $n = 57$  of 91) than low narcissists (37%,  $n = 34$  of 91),  $\chi^2(1, N = 91) = 5.81$ ,  $p = .016$ ,  $\phi = .25$ . Second, and more importantly, the analysis revealed a significant effect of condition on leader choice,  $\chi^2(1, N = 91) = 3.94$ ,  $p = .047$ ,  $\phi = .21$ . Participants in the crisis condition more often chose the high narcissistic group member as a leader (72%,  $n = 34$  of 47) than the low narcissistic group member (28%,  $n = 13$  of 47),  $\chi^2(1, N = 47) = 9.38$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\phi = .45$ . For participants in the non-crisis condition there was no difference (52%,  $n = 23$  of 44 chose the high narcissist as a leader, and 48%,  $n = 21$  of 44 chose the low narcissist),  $\chi^2(1, N = 44) = 0.09$ , *ns*.

### *Expected future outcomes*

A 2 (crisis versus non-crisis) by 2 (expected future outcomes after phase 1 versus phase 2) repeated-measures analysis with expected future outcomes as the within-subjects factor revealed, first of all, that participants experienced more pessimism about future outcomes (i.e. indicated a lower probability of success) after the second phase ( $M = 55.56$ ,  $SD = 23.10$ ) than after the first phase ( $M = 64.43$ ,  $SD = 19.56$ ),  $F(1, 89) = 18.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .17$ . This effect was qualified by an interaction between condition and expected future outcomes,  $F(1, 89) = 51.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .37$ , see Figure 3.2. In the crisis condition, participants experienced greater pessimism regarding future outcomes after the second negotiation phase than after phase one,  $F(1, 89) = 68.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .43$ . For participants in the non-crisis condition, this difference was reversed,  $F(1, 89) = 4.13$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ .

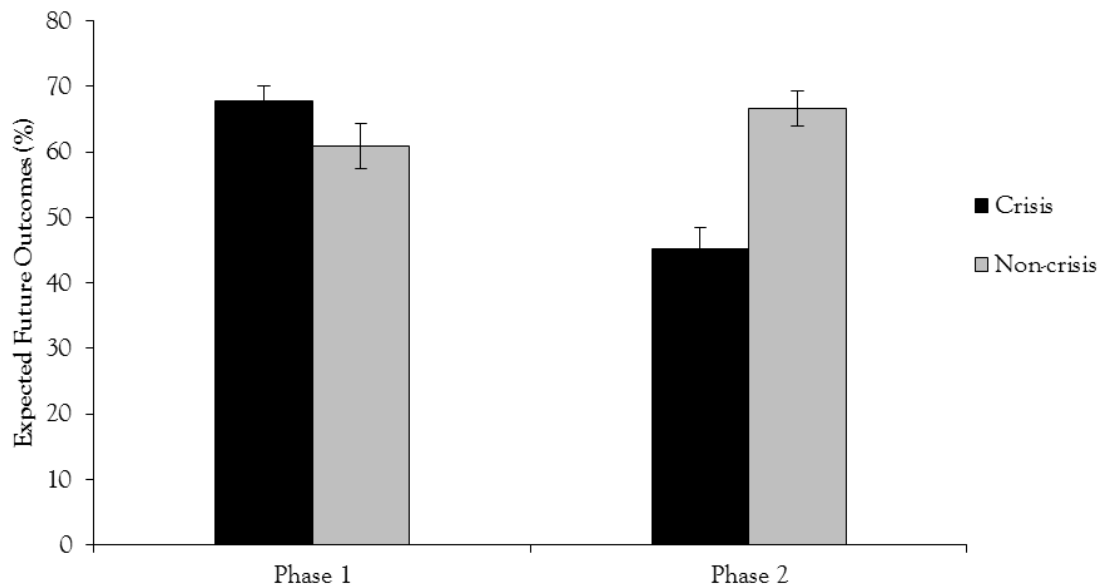


Figure 3.2.

Expected Future Outcomes During Negotiation Phase One and Two as a Function of Crisis Versus Non-crisis.

### *Mediation analysis*

We conducted mediation analysis to investigate whether the effect of crisis versus non-crisis on leader choice was mediated by participants' pessimism regarding future outcomes after the second phase, while controlling for phase one (Hypothesis 2). First, results showed that condition (crisis versus non-crisis) had a significant effect on leader choice,  $B = 0.87$ ,  $SE = 0.44$ ,  $Wald = 3.84$ ,  $p = .05$ . Second, condition had a significant effect on the mediator expected future outcomes,  $B = 25.50$ ,  $SE = 3.64$ ,  $t(88) = 7.00$ ,  $p < .001$ . Third, the mediator had a significant effect on leader choice,  $B = 0.72$ ,  $SE = 0.30$ ,  $Wald = 5.88$ ,  $p = .02$ . Finally, the effect of condition was reduced to non-significance when the mediator was entered,  $B = 0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.58$ ,  $Wald = 0.01$ ,  $p = .93$ ,  $Z = 1.86$ ,  $p = .03$  (directional). Thus, mediation was established and Hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

## General Discussion

Despite several negative interpersonal characteristics such as egocentrism, exploitativeness and lack of empathy, many of the world's leaders appear to be narcissistic. Building on work suggesting that narcissistic leaders may be better

suiting for unstable rather than stable contexts (Campbell & Campbell, 2009), we argued that a crisis (versus non-crisis) context would enhance the appeal of choosing narcissists as leaders. Indeed, results revealed that especially in a crisis context, high narcissists were perceived to reduce uncertainty more than low narcissists, and therefore were chosen more often as leaders (Study 3.1). Furthermore, high narcissists were chosen as leaders over low narcissists when people directly experienced the threat of a crisis (Study 3.2). The current research thus showed that people perceive a positive side to choosing a high narcissist as leader, particularly in the context of crisis as narcissists are perceived to reduce uncertainty and pessimism about future outcomes. Across both studies high narcissists were found to be generally more often chosen as leaders than low narcissists. This is in line with prior research which found that narcissists tend to emerge as leaders in group contexts (Brunell et al., 2008; Nevicka et al., 2011).

Taken together, the results of the two studies presented in this chapter provide first time evidence that a crisis context significantly enhances the appeal of a narcissist as leader, which has been suggested in prior literature but not empirically tested (e.g., Campbell & Campbell, 2009; Galvin, Waldman, & Balthazard, 2010; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). It seems that in personally threatening contexts, such as crises, people prefer a leader who is high on agentic characteristics (cf. Hoyt et al., 2009) and the fact that narcissists are characteristically low on communal traits such as warmth and empathy does not curtail their emergence as leaders in such contexts. It should be noted that our results show that even though people were aware of the negative narcissistic traits, they still preferred high narcissists over low narcissists in a crisis context.

The research reported in this chapter makes several noteworthy contributions. First of all, the current research extends our knowledge on the rise of narcissists as leaders (e.g., Brunell et al., 2008; Judge et al., 2006; Nevicka et al., 2011) by demonstrating the importance of context for their leadership emergence. Furthermore, our research contributes to work on the role of personality in leadership (e.g., Judge et al., 2002; Lord et al., 1984) and extends the broader work on leadership in times of threat or crisis (e.g., Bligh et al., 2004; Cohen et al., 2004; Hoyt et al., 2009; Madera & Smith, 2009; Pillai & Meindl, 1998).



Finally, our research extends literature regarding individuals' responses to threatening and uncertain situations. For example, terror-management theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986) postulates that when people are reminded of their death they cope with this threat by associating with individuals, groups and actions that bolster their self-esteem and serve as an anxiety buffer (e.g., Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2004). We show that when individuals feel threatened they wish to associate with a narcissistic leader who is perceived to reduce their uncertainty and pessimism regarding future outcomes and helps them deal with the crisis.

An interesting avenue for future research would be to examine how narcissistic leadership affects actual group performance during crises. High pressure contexts, such as crises, would be appealing to narcissistic individuals because the pressure magnifies the glory of success (Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). As narcissists persist in the face of failure (Wallace, Ready, & Weitenhagen, 2009) and show lower levels of stress and anxiety when faced with threat (Kelsey, Ornduff, McCann, 2001), it is possible that they could help reduce the anxiety of other team members in a crisis context.

Our research shows that in times of crisis, people tend to choose high narcissists as leaders. However, an additional possibility for the occurrence of narcissists in leadership positions might be that narcissistic individuals select themselves into crisis situations, such as organizations that are in difficulty. Such contexts would possibly provide them with a greater opportunity to shine. This is an interesting avenue for future research.

In two studies we consistently showed that the context of crisis enhances the emergence of narcissists as leaders, even though their negative characteristics are still acknowledged. When individuals find themselves in a state of crisis, with anxiety and uncertainty looming, they prefer a high narcissistic leader who exudes strength, overconfidence, toughness and arrogance, despite being egocentric, arrogant and exploitative. Thus, the positive side of narcissistic leaders appears to shine through particularly in times of crisis.