Narcissistic leaders: the appearance of success

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Publication date
2011

CHAPTER 6

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In the introduction of this dissertation I presented a paradox to the seeming prevalence of narcissistic individuals in leadership positions. Narcissistic leaders have been dubbed to have a 'bright' as well as a 'dark' side to them. For example, on the one hand they are charming, confident, extraverted, risk-taking, yet on the other hand they are also arrogant, self-absorbed, exploitative, and lack empathy. In this dissertation I have attempted to unearth the circumstances in which, and the reasons why, narcissistic individuals appear to epitomize the image of an effective leader in the eyes of others. Furthermore, I investigated whether the perceptions of narcissists as effective leaders are actually aligned with reality, in terms of their effect on those they lead. Below I will discuss the core findings of this dissertation and explicate its theoretical and practical relevance.

Contextual influences

Levels of social interaction: visibility motivates performance

The connectionist-based model of leadership prototype generation (Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001) states that the extent to which a person is perceived as an effective leader varies with context. In other words, people adjust their notion of what a prototypical leader should be like in response to the given situation. Thus, throughout this dissertation I have suggested that there are specific contexts which may especially accentuate the appeal of narcissists as leaders. Chapter 2 of this dissertation took into account the basic premise that narcissistic individuals search for social evaluation in order to bolster their ego and assert their superiority (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). As such, they would thrive in the spotlight and thus, an interactive group setting may constitute one context which particularly elevates the allure of narcissists as leaders. A highly interactive context would provide narcissistic individuals with an ideal stage from which they can exhibit their superior leadership skills, and this would be readily apparent to others. Another question that was posited in Chapter 2 revolved around the individual performance of narcissists, whilst also taking into account the interdependence of the context. It was predicted that in addition to emerging as leaders in a highly interdependent and interactive setting, narcissists would perform better at an individual level as they would attempt to show off their skills and abilities.

These predictions were tested using an experiment with four-person teams that completed an interactive group task. Reward interdependence was manipulated as a proxy for the level of interaction, and indeed teams in the high reward interdependent condition (i.e. team members worked for a group reward) reported higher interaction than those in the low reward interdependence condition (i.e. team members worked for an individual reward). The results showed that narcissistic individuals emerged as leaders irrespective of the context, which did not support the initial hypothesis. This could be due to the large overlap between narcissistic characteristics and those of a prototypical leader, and it is plausible that this image of a quintessential leader comes through even at low levels of interaction. Furthermore, the group task invoked pressure in the participants, across conditions, and prior research has suggested that narcissistic leaders may be preferred in a crisis or a high pressure context (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Interestingly, additional analyses of team level processes revealed that teams in which narcissists emerged as leaders reported being less verbal and having less individual decision-making opportunities. This inhibition of communication and decision making in other team members points towards the narcissist's dominance and a desire to divert attention to themselves. With respect to individual performance, the results were in line with the prediction and showed that narcissistic individuals performed better in a context of high rather than low reward interdependence. All in all, these results reveal that narcissistic individuals are considered, and emerge as, leaders even at low levels of interaction, yet their individual performance is enhanced in a highly interactive context in which they can exhibit their skills and capabilities.

Crises amplify narcissists' appeal as leaders

As the level of interaction in a specific context did not appear to differentially influence the appeal of narcissists as leaders, Chapter 3 focused on the context of crisis as a likely condition which enhances the emergence of narcissists as leaders. A potential reason for why narcissistic individuals emerged as leaders in Chapter 2 is that the context itself was one of high stress, uncertainty and pressure, factors that are often invoked by a crisis. Prior research suggests that narcissists may be seen as particularly suitable in such a context because they exude confidence, decisiveness, dominance and toughness, which

are the characteristics that people seek in a leader in times of crisis (Cronin, 2008; Galvin, Waldman, & Balthazard, 2010; Madera & Smith, 2009; Pillai & Meindl, 1998). When people experience uncertainty, stress and anxiety as a result of a crisis they turn towards a strong leader to guide them through. Thus, Chapter 3 aimed to test this proposition and examined whether narcissistic individuals indeed emerge more often as leaders in a crisis, rather than non-crisis context. As stated earlier, in spite of the fact that narcissists possess many prototypical leader characteristics, they also have a host of negative characteristics such as arrogance, egocentrism, exploitativeness and they lack empathy, an attribute which has been identified as important for leadership (Kellett, Humphrey, & Sleeth, 2006). I proposed that especially in times of crisis, highly narcissistic individuals would emerge more often as leaders than low narcissistic individuals.

The results of two experimental studies consistently showed support for this proposition. Findings of Study 3.1 revealed that high narcissists were perceived to reduce uncertainty more than low narcissists, especially in a crisis, and were thus chosen more often as leaders than low narcissists. Since Study 3.1 employed a scenario paradigm, participants merely imagined what kind of a leader would be appropriate for an organization in a crisis versus non-crisis context, rather than experiencing the crisis directly. Thus, Study 3.2 built upon these findings and investigated whether high narcissists would also be chosen as leaders when participants actually experienced the threat of a crisis. Study 3.2 employed a simulated group task in which participants were subjected to a state of crisis or non-crisis and were required to choose a member of their group as a leader, with the personality profile being manipulated to either reflect a high narcissist or a low narcissist. The results were in line with those of Study 3.1 and showed that when participants directly experienced crisis they more often chose high narcissists as leaders than low narcissists, whereas in a non-crisis context there was no difference in preferences between a high or a low narcissistic leader. The underlying process of why narcissistic individuals were perceived as more appealing potential leaders in a state of crisis was shown to be their perceived reduction of uncertainty about the future. This is also in accordance with Study 3.2 which showed that when people feel greater pessimism about future outcomes they seek narcissistic leaders. In sum, the results of Chapter 3 expand our

knowledge about an amplifying context, namely a state of crisis, that enhances the appeal of choosing a narcissist as leader. Especially in such a context narcissists' negative relational characteristics, for example their lack of empathy, their exploitativeness, sense of entitlement and egocentrism, do not appear to deter people from choosing narcissistic individuals as leaders.

Environmental dynamism prompts innovative behavior

The findings from Chapters 2 and 3 highlight the importance of contextual factors in determining narcissists' individual performance as well as their appeal as leaders. It was found that narcissists' individual performance was enhanced in a highly interactive context and that they emerged more often as leaders in the context of crisis. Another lens through which this dissertation wanted to look at narcissistic leader's effectiveness was via their innovative behavior. Prior literature has highlighted the importance of innovation to organizational viability and competitiveness, and a leader's innovative efforts are an essential component towards achieving organizational innovativeness (Jung, Wu, & Chow, 2008; Mumford & Licuanan, 2004). Through role modeling, followers can also come to emulate the leader's innovative behavior.

Being innovative represents an avenue through which narcissistic leaders could obtain glory and also portray how different they are from others. Chapter 4 proposed that a context that will motivate narcissistic leaders to display innovative behavior is environmental dynamism. If an organizational environment is highly dynamic this generates a need for innovation in order to respond to environmental changes (for example greater customer demands, or intense competition) and remain competitive in the market (Amabile, 1988; Mumford, 2000; Scott & Bruce, 1994; West, 2002). Thus, displays of innovative behavior in such an environment would be indicative of success.

The results of two field studies, which obtained responses from leaders as well as their followers, confirmed the predictions. In Study 4.1 I collected data from different organizations and found that, in a highly dynamic environment, leader's narcissism was positively associated with greater displays of innovative behavior. The question that remained was which underlying process spurred on narcissistic leaders' innovative behavior? Thus, the aim of Study 4.2 was to (a) replicate the results of Study 4.1, and (b) identify the underlying process that

would explain the link between leader's narcissism and innovative behavior in a dynamic environment. At the core of narcissism lies their pervasive sense of uniqueness (Emmons, 1984), and therefore one mechanism that may drive narcissistic leaders' innovativeness is behavior directed at differentiating oneself from others, a concept known as individuation (Whitney, Sagrestano, & Maslach, 1994). Indeed, the results from Study 4.2 concurred with this idea and showed that, in addition to replicating the finding that in a highly dynamic environment leaders' narcissism is positively related to their displays of innovative behavior, this was mediated by the leader's individuation. It should be noted that narcissistic leaders exhibited more differentiation behavior in general, which fits with their high need for uniqueness and being special (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). However, this behavior was accentuated in a dynamic environment. Taken together, the results of these two studies provide first time evidence of the relationship between narcissistic leadership and displays of innovative behavior, within the boundary condition of high environmental dynamism. All in all, the results of both studies in Chapter 4 provide evidence for another contextual factor that influences the perceived effectiveness of narcissistic leaders, namely environmental dynamism, specifically with respect to innovative behavior.

Disparity between perceptions and reality: The two sides of narcissistic leaders

Although the results from Chapters 2 to 4 show that narcissistic leaders tend to be perceived in a positive light, for example in terms of being perceived as leaders during an interactive team setting, chosen as leaders in times of crisis and perceived as innovative in a highly dynamic environment, the question is whether these positive perceptions of narcissists as leaders also translate into better performance of those they lead, i.e. groups or organizations. Chapter 5 of this dissertation argued that the positive image of narcissists as leaders is at discord with reality in terms of group performance. Results of an experiment using three-person groups which engaged in a hidden profile task (e.g., Stasser & Titus, 1985) supported this proposition. It was revealed that despite being perceived as effective leaders by other members of the group, narcissistic leaders in fact inhibited the exchange of essential unshared information among group members. As a result groups with high narcissistic leaders made decisions of lower quality than groups with low narcissistic leaders. Thus, although narcissists are very

skilled at projecting a positive image of leadership effectiveness, there is an evident disparity between others' perceptions and the reality in terms of group performance, as they hinder the very processes that are essential for reaching high quality decisions.

Overall Conclusion

As stated in the introduction of this dissertation, narcissists represent a paradox in exemplifying the prototypically effective leader. This stems from the fact that in addition to their positive qualities, such as confidence, extraversion, high self-esteem and dominance, they also possess a host of negative relational characteristics, such as egocentrism, arrogance, lack of empathy, sense of entitlement and exploitativeness. The view of narcissistic leaders as a paradox has also been voiced in prior literature, which suggested that they have both a 'dark' and a 'bright' side to them (Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011; Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009). More specifically, narcissistic leaders have been heralded as charismatic visionaries who can introduce bold and innovative changes (Maccoby, 2000). On the other hand however, the inherent self-absorption, sense of superiority, overconfidence and impulsivity of narcissists means that narcissistic leaders have a proclivity to undertake risky ventures, without heeding others' sound advice, serve their own self-interests at long-term costs to others, and bully their subordinates (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). In this dissertation I have attempted to disentangle this paradox by addressing the following questions: *Why* and w*hen* do narcissistic individuals emerge as leaders and are perceived as effective leaders? I hypothesized that context needs to be taken into consideration to understand the paradox, such that in specific conditions, narcissistic individuals especially emerge as leaders and are perceived to be effective. The results of this dissertation clearly support this idea.

In this dissertation, I also aimed to answer a third question: If narcissists are perceived as (potentially) effective leaders, are they actually able to *meet* these expectations? I predicted that despite being perceived by others in a positive light, insofar as their leadership competencies are concerned, narcissistic leaders will in fact hinder the performance of those whom they lead. The results presented in

this dissertation provide convincing evidence for this proposition. Thus, an interesting conundrum rises to the surface, namely that narcissistic individuals are so skilled at portraying an image of a prototypically effective leader that others inaccurately judge their competencies. The reality, in terms of group performance, shows an entirely different picture and because narcissists are characteristically self-absorbed and egocentric, they inhibit essential information exchange and thereby diminish the quality of group decisions. I propose that the 'bright' side of narcissistic individuals stems primarily from the positive impressions of their leadership competencies as attributed to them by others. This is potentially dangerous for organizations as it suggests that narcissistic leaders' competencies may be erroneous and greatly overstated.

I suggest that narcissistic leaders are exceedingly skilled at persuasion and self-presentation and it is in this manner that they manage to elicit positive affirmations from others. For example, as I have shown in Chapter 4, narcissistic leaders were perceived by their followers to be innovative in the context of high environmental dynamism. Recent research shows that narcissistic individuals were very persuasive at making others believe their ideas were creative, yet this was objectively not the case (Goncalo, Flynn, & Kim, 2010). It was suggested that underlying this projection of a creative individual is the fact that narcissists are very persuasive and deliver their message in a confident and enthusiastic manner. Thus, narcissists possess the gift of persuasion and positive self-presentation. If narcissists are perceived as effective leaders, then this is how people will consider them, irrespective of whether this is an accurate view of the reality. Thus, the only potential positive flow-on effects from favorable perceptions of narcissistic individuals as leaders stem from the psychological reactions of their followers based on these perceptions. For example, the presence of a narcissistic leader in a crisis context may be sufficient to alleviate some of the fears, anxiety and uncertainty of the followers as they perceive such a leader as strong, tough and confident. Another example is that if narcissistic leaders are perceived to exhibit innovative behavior, the perceptions themselves may be sufficient to motivate the followers to emulate this behavior and through role modeling it can enhance the innovation efforts in the organization. Implications of these conclusions, as well as some limitations to the empirical evidence provided in the preceding chapters, will be discussed in the following section.

Implications for Leadership

The research presented in this dissertation makes several noteworthy contributions to the domain of leadership. First of all, the results from Chapters 2 and 3 are consistent with earlier findings that narcissists tend to emerge as leaders in leaderless group discussions (Brunell et al., 2008). As has been suggested throughout this dissertation, narcissistic characteristics, such as confidence, high self-esteem, extraversion and dominance, greatly overlap with those of a prototypical leader. Thus, people make attributions of leadership capabilities by matching their implicit leadership prototype with the visible cues that a particular person exhibits (e.g. Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; Keller, 1999; Lord, Foti, & DeVader, 1984; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994). As narcissists think very highly of themselves across many domains, including leadership, they would naturally gravitate towards the leadership role in any context that demands it, and thereby pronounce their leadership characteristics. This is also in line with Trait Activation Theory (cf. Tett & Burnett, 2003) which states that personality traits are expressed as responses to trait-relevant situational cues. Thus, a situation which demands leadership would trigger a greater activation of narcissistic traits that accentuate the outward display of leadership, such as confidence, dominance and extraversion, which is consistent with the leadership prototype. It is thus perhaps not surprising that many prominent world leaders have been ascribed with narcissistic characteristics.

A second contribution to leadership research stems from Chapter 3. The research presented in this chapter is relevant to work on contingency theory of leadership (e.g., House, 1996; Meindl, 1995) and supports the more recent connectionist model of leadership prototype generation (Lord et al., 2001) by introducing the crisis context as an amplifying condition for the emergence of narcissistic leaders. Thus it becomes evident that different leadership prototypes are activated depending on a specific context. The research presented in Chapter 3 is the first to address the emergence of narcissists in times of crisis, and as such extends work on leadership in times of threat or crisis (e.g., Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2004; Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszcynski, & Greenberg, 2004; Hoyt, Simon, & Reid, 2009; Hunt, Boal, & Dodge, 1999; Madera & Smith, 2009, Pillai & Meindl, 1998, Williams, Raijnandi, Lowe, Jung, & Herst, 2009). The

results indicate that in times of crisis followers seek different qualities in their leaders and thereby a different leadership prototype than in times of stability, which leads them to more often choose high narcissists as leaders during crises. Narcissists' negative relational characteristics, such as lack of empathy, do not appear to curb their emergence as leaders, especially not in a crisis context. Furthermore, the reason why narcissistic individuals are particularly preferred as leaders over low narcissistic individuals in the context of crises is that they are perceived to reduce uncertainty in their followers. Thus, a potential 'bright' side to narcissistic leaders may be gleaned from the diminished stress and anxiety of followers during crises.

The third contribution can be gleaned from findings presented in Chapter 4, which extend the leadership literature by identifying dynamism of the context as a theoretically relevant boundary condition for innovative behavior of narcissistic leaders and the increase or decrease of individuation behavior as an underlying process. Innovation has been established as a necessary ingredient for organizations to maintain their competitiveness in a world of globalization and rapid technological change. The role of leaders in this process has been identified as particularly important (Jung et al., 2008; Mumford & Licuanan, 2004), especially with respect to role modeling and the potential emulation of leaders' creative or innovative efforts by their followers (Jaussi & Dionne, 2003). Thus, the results reported in this dissertation add to extant literature and show that narcissistic leaders are perceived to exhibit innovative behavior, but only in a context that is subject to change. In a dynamic context the potential 'bright' side of narcissistic leaders stems, once again, only from the perceptions of the followers, because their leader's overt innovative efforts may motivate followers to also engage in innovative behavior.

Finally, Chapter 5 highlights the potential downside of highly dominant, overconfident and egocentric leaders, namely that they can have a negative effect on group performance by curtailing the exchange of relevant information. This is consistent with prior research which suggested that narcissistic leaders are at risk of pursuing their own agendas, and ignore advice of others. This can lead them to undertake unnecessarily risky ventures, or undertake impulsive decisions (Padilla et al., 2007). What is more alarming, however, is that these leaders are still

considered to be effective by their followers, and such erroneous assessments of a leader's capabilities can be disastrous for organizations.

The research presented in this dissertation specifically contributes to our knowledge on narcissistic leadership (e.g., Brunell et al., 2008; Campbell et al., 2011; Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006) by (a) demonstrating the important role of context in influencing the emergence and perceived effectiveness of narcissistic leaders and (b) showing that despite the positive image of leadership effectiveness that they instill in others, narcissistic leaders actually diminish group performance. This dissertation, therefore, illuminates both the potential 'bright' side of narcissistic leaders, which I argue would be driven by the positive perceptions of followers and their responses to these perceptions, as well as their 'dark' side which is shown in terms of actual leadership performance. Specifically, the potential positive flow-on effects of followers' perceptions regarding narcissistic leaders can be seen by the fact that narcissistic leaders are perceived to reduce uncertainty in times of crisis. Therefore, their presence may suppress followers' negative emotions during crises, such as anxiety or uncertainty (Chapter 3). Furthermore, perceptions of narcissistic leaders as being innovative may stimulate greater innovative efforts on the part of the followers as they attempt to emulate the leader's behavior through role modeling (Chapter 4). However, perceptions aside, if we take a closer look at the effects of narcissistic leaders on objective group performance (Chapter 5), then their self-serving and domineering 'dark' side rises to the surface as they impede group information exchange, decision making opportunities and communication (Chapters 2 and 5).

The central reason for the positive attributions of leader effectiveness to narcissistic individuals that has permeated throughout this dissertation is the extensive overlap between narcissistic characteristics and those of a prototypical leader. The reason why people utilize these implicit leadership schemas in order to assess the leadership potential of an individual based on his/her behavior or visible characteristics, is that people possess a limited cognitive capacity. Thus, making inferences about someone's leadership aptitudes through this matching process allows them to simplify information processing (Lord & Shondrick, 2011; Lord & Maher, 1991). However, the findings in Chapter 5 clearly show that such

categorizations can lead us down the path of making inaccurate inferences regarding an individual's capabilities, which can be detrimental for organizations.

Implications for Narcissism

This dissertation extends the extant knowledge concerning narcissistic individuals in two important ways. First, Chapter 2 identifies a context which provides narcissists with greater opportunities for self-enhancement, and thereby improves their individual performance (cf. Wallace & Baumeister, 2002). The experiment presented in Chapter 2 is the first to show this phenomenon in an interactive team setting. Narcissists were found to perform better with high levels of interaction. This could be due to several reasons. For instance, greater levels of interaction in a group setting enhance the potential visibility of any one group member, and in narcissists this would likely trigger a desire to exhibit their superior talents and capabilities relevant to the specific group task. Narcissists are constantly scanning for opportunities to show themselves as superior performers relative to others and they are also highly exhibitionistic (Buss & Chiodo, 1991). Thus, a highly interactive context fits this specification and will allow narcissists to bask in the limelight of others' attention. Moreover, as narcissists have a strong need for power and dominance, a highly interactive group context would provide them with greater latitude to try and influence others. This in turn may energize them to perform better.

Secondly, Chapter 5 suggested that narcissistic individuals are very skillful at projecting an image of competence. Thus, this dissertation also extends prior research on competency attributions based on explicit cues, such as eye contact and mannerisms (Mehrabian & Williams, 1969; Reynolds & Gifford, 2001) and personality traits such as dominance (e.g., Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). I propose that narcissistic individuals are particularly apt at eliciting signals of competence because they are self-promotional, overconfident and domineering in their interpersonal communication (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Moreover, narcissists have been found to have very self-assured body language (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010), which may explain why others so easily adopt the image that the narcissist wishes to project, for example one of a competent leader or a creative individual. These behaviors should be even more accentuated when narcissists are

assigned to a leadership role because it will activate their desire to show off and exhibit superior leadership skills in front of an audience of followers.

Implications for Group Decision Making

The results provided in this dissertation also have important implications for work on group decision making. As stated earlier, leaders constitute an important component in the process of group decision making because their position provides them with greater latitude to facilitate discussion and extract problem relevant information from other group members (De Dreu, Nijstad, & Van Knippenberg, 2008; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004), thereby enhancing the quality of group decisions. However, some leaders can have a detrimental effect on group performance. For instance, highly directive leadership approaches can undermine the degree to which followers think independently and deliberately about their task and inhibit the flow of information (De Dreu et al., 2008; Yukl, 2002; Cruz, Dryden-Henningsen, & Smith, 1999). The group process results from Chapter 2 provide preliminary evidence to suggest that narcissistic leaders tend to dominate and centralize group discussion, and constrain prospects of others to contribute to group decision making. The results showed that groups in which narcissists emerged as leaders reported being less verbal and having less opportunity to make decisions. This is consistent with research on production blocking showing that when one person dominates group discussion, others are inhibited from sharing information and ideas (Nijstad, Stroebe, & Lodewijkx, 2003).

The results found in Chapter 5 build upon these findings and show that leaders who are high on narcissism stifle the exchange of relevant information, and thereby have a negative effect on group performance, despite being viewed positively by the other group members. One suggested reason is that narcissists are self-absorbed and egocentric, and thus they would be biased to focus on their own information rather than be motivated to solicit information from others. Prior research shows that people are already generally predisposed to favor their initial preferences when entering a group decision making context (e.g. Gigone & Hastie, 1993; Winquist & Larson, 1998), i.e. preferences about the decision alternatives that they make prior to entering group discussion, and in the case of

narcissistic leaders, with their overconfidence and egocentrism, this tendency to favor one's own information and disregarding the views of others would be greatly accentuated.

Implications for Practice

The research presented in this dissertation has several implications for organizations, particularly as narcissistic individuals appear to be fairly rife in leadership positions, which can be gleaned from the many 'supposed' narcissistic leaders being identified by clinical psychologists and the media (cf. Campbell et al., 2011; Deluga 1997; Maccoby 2000; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006).

The common thread that is evident throughout this dissertation is that narcissistic individuals are especially sensitive to the context in which they operate, and different contexts also enhance the appeal of narcissists as leaders. In general, narcissists seem to perform particularly well if the context provides them with opportunities to self-enhance, and show off their superior capabilities to others. In order to maximize the performance of narcissists in general, they ought to be placed in organizational situations where there is a high level of interaction between employees as they are more likely to perform at their maximum in a highly social context, where their efforts are clearly visible. Narcissists working alone are less likely to perform at their optimal unless their performance is assessed relative to others or is made public, because at the core of narcissism lies a need for continuous affirmation and visible favorable evaluation from others. However, as was shown in this dissertation, organizations should be careful in giving narcissists a powerful role within the context of group decision making.

Furthermore, it should be noted that narcissists are very egocentric and will tend to look after their own interests at the cost of others, and thus it would be recommended that the organizational incentive compensation system is utilized effectively to align the individual goals with those of the group or organization. For example, organizations can use group rewards for good performance, i.e. employ high reward interdependence, or allow their employees a share of organizational profit, or issue organizational stocks to their employees. In essence what organizations can achieve through these incentive alignments is that the

narcissistic employees will perceive that their success is reflected in the success of the group or the organization, and the two become suffused.

Another practical implication stemming from this dissertation concerns the manner in which narcissistic leaders are viewed in times of crisis. Crisis triggers great feelings of anxiety, stress, and uncertainty about the future, which can lead to lower well-being, mental distress, higher turnover intentions and lowered job satisfaction for organizational employees (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). If an organization is facing a crisis, for example due to a hostile takeover, it is best to ameliorate these negative psychological effects. It seems that merely observing that a strong, dominant, tough, and confident leader is placed at the helm of the organization during a crisis, leads people to feel that the leader can take away their uncertainty and anxiety. Thus, if organizations want to minimize distress in their employees brought on by a crisis they should consider placing a narcissistic individual in a visible position in order to emanate an image of confidence that someone is in charge who can proactively deal with the crisis. For example, organizations can give narcissistic leaders the role of a communicator, or a spokesperson, i.e. one who conveys information to employees or organizational shareholders at general meetings, or interacts with the media.

Another way in which organizations can maximally utilize the positive perceptions of narcissistic leaders is by entrusting them to help promote and implement innovations. This dissertation highlighted that narcissistic leaders are perceived to be innovative in a dynamic organizational context and argued that their strength lies in persuading others of the viability of their innovations. Thus, it would be most advantageous for organizations to employ narcissists as idea champions so as to gather support for a particular organizational innovation and ensure that an innovation becomes implemented. For example a new database management system may have far reaching consequences on many employees, and people usually put up resistance unless they can be adequately convinced that the proposed change has benefits well above the status quo. The charm, enthusiasm, overconfidence and self-assured mannerisms of narcissists would make them very persuasive. However, it is important for the motivation of narcissistic individuals that they are made to feel that they are the owner of the idea, even though they did not come up with the original idea themselves.

Finally, organizations should be aware of the fact that whereas some people may radiate an image of competence, perhaps because of their self-assured body language, confidence, charm, high self-esteem and extraversion, this may not be an accurate reflection of their actual competencies and merely shows their aptitude in self-presentation. Thus, caution is warranted when making inferences about someone's competencies or effectiveness based on impressions. For example, narcissistic individuals would be very skilled at signaling competence in an interview context, and an organization may find out only much later that the person who was hired for the job under the presumption of certain skills and competence does not live up to the expectations. Thus, it is advisable for Human Resource Departments to incorporate various assessments into the interview process if organizations want to be assured that they are hiring the correct person for the job. Likewise, when assessing employees in their normal course of work, any ratings based on impressions, for example supervisor ratings, should be corroborated with objective performance measures.

Future Directions

The studies presented in this dissertation utilized different methods, namely field studies and experiments, and also employed different experimental paradigms, which all contribute to the robustness and generalizability of the findings. This dissertation has attempted to elucidate the conditions under which narcissists are perceived as appealing leaders and why this is the case. It has uncovered specific conditions which amplify narcissists' individual performance, as well as their perceived leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, this dissertation has also shown that appearances of confidence, utilized as signals of competence, can be highly deceiving. While this dissertation has helped in answering the questions that have been posited by scholars, several questions remain, in particular with reference to narcissists' dark side and their instrumental or persuasion tactics. Narcissists are known for being apt at impression management, as can also be gleaned from the results reported in Chapter 5, and prior research has suggested that they possess a superficial charm that can cast its spell on those who surround the narcissist. Thus, future research could further uncover the influence tactics that narcissists use to persuade others. I suggested

earlier that narcissistic individuals would be very skilled at promoting an innovation because of their power of persuasion and their enthusiasm (Goncalo et al., 2010), and this should be investigated further.

Furthermore, as narcissists have been touted as very instrumental, it would also be interesting to see the differences in how narcissists are perceived depending on who in the organizational hierarchy is assessing them. It has been suggested that narcissists would be ingratiating towards high status others and derogate low status others (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001). I would also expect that narcissists are akin to social chameleons and thus, if they really need someone to serve their interests they can adjust their behavior accordingly to pacify and charm the other person. As they are very concerned with how they appear to others, narcissists would be high on self-monitoring. I anticipate that this is the key to their instrumentality.

With reference to innovation, future studies should investigate whether narcissists are really innovative and employ objective measures of innovativeness, for example number of successful innovations that were implemented, the time that it takes for a new product to be introduced into the marker, Research & Development spending, etcetera. Furthermore, future research could employ an experimental paradigm and investigate how effective a narcissist is in getting someone else to adopt their idea as viable. On the one hand narcissistic individuals would be very skilled at promoting an innovation; however, on the other hand they may also suppress innovative ideas of others because they are likely to give preference to their own ideas. Narcissistic leaders may even be threatened by more creative ideas of their subordinates.

This dissertation highlights the potential 'dark' side of narcissistic leaders in the domain of group decision making, and shows how narcissistic leaders inhibit information sharing and communication and thereby the quality of groups' decisions. Other potential negative consequences of narcissistic leaders have been suggested by prior literature, for example bullying of subordinates, white collar crime, and loss of reality which can lead to disastrous investments and decisions (e.g. Padilla et al., 2007). Yet, thus far research concerning the dark side of narcissistic leaders has remained scant. It would be interesting to investigate narcissistic leadership in terms of their ethical stance. It has been suggested that narcissistic egocentrism, sense of entitlement and self-

aggrandizement predisposes people to follow the slippery slope towards unethical and even illegal acts. For example, organizational narcissism has been argued to be the main reason for Enron's demise (Duchon & Drake, 2009). The company became so admired and identified as a hallmark of success that it wanted to perpetuate that illusion at any cost. I would argue that narcissistic sense of superiority and uniqueness means that narcissists would feel they can rise above the moral or even legal standards. This can be exemplified by a quote of a wealthy American who was subsequently convicted of tax evasion: *"only the little people pay taxes"* (Duffield & Grabosky, 2001, p. 4). In line with these thoughts, future research should investigate how organizations can best utilize the 'bright' side of narcissistic leaders and suppress the 'dark' side. For instance, which organizational roles are they most adequate for?

Concluding Remarks

This dissertation set out to unravel the paradox of narcissists as leaders by positing the question of *why* and *when* narcissistic individuals emerge as leaders and are perceived as effective leaders. And if they are perceived as effective leaders, are they able to *meet* others' expectations of their leadership capabilities? The series of field and experimental studies presented in this dissertation show that narcissists indeed emerge as leaders in group settings, and that there are certain conditions under which they individually perform well, are preferred as leaders and are perceived to exhibit innovative behavior. In other words, this dissertation shows that narcissists are sensitive to contextual influences, and these need to be taken into account when assessing the suitability of narcissists as leaders and in motivating them to perform well at an individual level. Thus, the 'bright' side of narcissistic leaders appears to shine its light mainly in terms of how they are perceived by others, and in turn how these perceptions can have positive flow-on effects on followers. For instance, in the context of crisis narcissistic leaders may help regulate their followers' emotions and help diminish the uncertainty, stress and anxiety that accompany crises. In highly dynamic contexts, the perceptions of narcissistic leaders as innovative may prompt their followers to emulate their innovative behavior and thereby help enhance organizational innovativeness.

This dissertation also uncovers the potential 'dark' side of narcissists in leadership positions and shows that people tend to make erroneous judgments when it comes to narcissistic leaders' capabilities. Narcissistic leaders actually inhibit essential decision making processes, namely the exchange of relevant information, and thereby diminish group performance. There is a cautionary message in these findings, because all is not as it seems, and despite their agility and skill at radiating an image of an effective leader, the capabilities of narcissistic leaders should also be taken with a grain of salt. Earlier in this dissertation I presented the following quote by Lasch (1991, p. 59) *"Nothing succeeds like the appearance of success"*, and therein lies the secret of the narcissist and why modern Western societies tend to elevate them to positions of power and prestige. Narcissists project an image of competence so convincingly that others find it hard to resist. And after all, there is no better stage for a narcissist to brandish their skills than one of leadership.