The Dark Side of Charisma

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This paper is intended to make three points: (1) there is a systematic relationship between personality and managerial competence, (2) there is a systematic relationship between personality and managerial incompetence, (3) certain kinds of people with identifiable personality characteristics tend to rise to the tops of organizations and these people are potentially very costly to those organizations.

The relationship between leadership or managerial effectiveness and personality is one of the more extensively studied topics in applied psychology. The authoritative reviews of this subject (e.g., Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, & Weick, 1971; Stogdill, 1974) tend to conclude that the relationship is complex and difficult to interpret precisely. Nonetheless, there are certain consistent trends in the literature, and the following are three examples.

Ghiselli (1971) developed a pool of 64 self-descriptive adjectives matched for scaled social desirability. Ghiselli argues (p. 40) that, although conditions change, "there certainly is some communality across situations in the capacity to direct the efforts of others," and on this basis he developed a "supervisory ability scale," using his self-descriptive adjectives, to assess this capacity. He formed two groups (N = 210) "closely matched for occupation, sex, and age"; one group contained people in supervisory positions, the second group contained people not nominated by their organizations for supervisory roles. He then compared their responses on his 64 items and developed a scoring key for "supervisor ability." In four samples of managers (N = 152), Ghiselli found correlations ranging from .35 to .75 (average = .55) between scores on this scale and rated job success. There are three points to note about Ghiselli's study: (1) his index of supervisory ability is a personality measure and persons with high scores on it tend to be bright, initiating, self-assured, decisive, masculine, achievement-oriented, upwardly mobile, and unconcerned with job security (cf. Ghiselli, 1971, p. 129); (2) Ghiselli endorses the concept of a "g" factor (i.e., generalized

competence) in management potential; and (3) managerial performance was defined in terms of supervisors' ratings.

In what is perhaps the best-known study of managerial performance in industry, the staff of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey tested 443 managers with an extensive battery, including cognitive tests, a personality inventory, and a biographical inventory. A composite measure of managerial effectiveness was defined, and scoring keys were developed to predict that criterion. Sparks (1966) reports correlations above .70 between job performance and scores on the managerial key. Three findings from this research parallel those reported by Ghiselli: (1) the evidence supports the notion that people differ in terms of a construct that we may call "general potential for management" (i.e., there is a "g" factor in management); (2) this general factor is a personality syndrome, the key features of which involve being forceful, dominant, assertive, confident, and active in taking advantage of leadership opportunities (Campbell et al., 1971, p. 169); and (3) managerial performance was defined so as to take account of a person's entire career and "minimize the effects of favorable or unfavorable biases held by one or a few supervisors" (Laurent, 1966, p. 9).

One final example supports these generalizations regarding personality and managerial effectiveness. Bentz (1967) summarizes 30 years of research at Sears, Roebuck concerning the relationship between an "executive test battery" and various indices of executive effectiveness. The test battery included cognitive measures and a personality, a vocational preference, and a values inventory. Executive effectiveness was typically defined by supervisors' ratings, but sometimes it was defined in terms of employee morale. Bentz reports many correlations between test scores and criterion measures of effectiveness and the multiple Rs range between .40 and .75. We would like to highlight three findings from this impressive research effort: (1) Bentz (1967) argues that "a cluster of psychological characteristics contributes to general executive competence that transcends the boundaries of specialized or nonspecialized assignments" (once again, there is a "g" factor in management); (2) the general factor is a personality syndrome whose defining features Bentz (1967) describes as persuasiveness, social assurance, ambition for leadership, initiation, energy, mental ability, and "heightened personal concern for status, power and money"; (3) managerial performance was typically defined in terms of ratings provided by higher organizational officials.

This brief overview conveys the general flavor of the research literature regarding personality and leadership (see also Aronoff & Wilson, 1986, p. 214). On the basis of this it seems safe to conclude that there are some reliable covariations between certain aspects of normal personality and rated managerial performance. In the context of this generalization, however, there are certain systematic ambiguities that cloud its interpretation. We will mention two; these concern how managerial effectiveness and personality are defined.

Managerial effectiveness is typically defined by ratings and when defined this way, the ratings are usually provided by supervisors. Campbell et al. (1971) make two interesting points about these ratings: (1) They are confounded by halo (e.g., supervisors tend to give higher ratings to managers they like whether or not they are doing a good job), (2) Correlations between supervisors' and subordinates' ratings of managerial performance are often low to nonexistent. These two points raise serious questions

about the relationship between supervisors' ratings of managerial effectiveness and the "true" effectiveness of a manager's performance. Campbell et al. (1971) suggest that the most appropriate way to evaluate a manager is to compare the performance of his or her unit/team/group with the performance of comparable units/teams/groups in terms of productivity and efficient use of resources. This is a sensible suggestion regarding how to define effectiveness, but this definition rarely appears in the research literature.

The definition of personality is also murky. Certain writers (e.g., MacKinnon, 1944; Hogan, 1982) argue that there are two conceptually distinct definitions of the term that are routinely confounded; this confounding makes it difficult to interpret the link between personality and leadership. On the one hand, personality refers to a person's reputation, to the unique impression that he or she creates among his or her colleagues, friends, and neighbors. On the other hand, personality refers to the dynamic forces, structures, and processes within a person that are somehow associated with his or her unique personality. We believe that the relationship between these two definitions of personality in any single person is, at best, obscure. Moreover, although the concept of personality as reputation can be treated in a reliable and quantitative way (i.e., there is some consensus in the research community regarding the structure of personality defined as reputation), there is no consensus regarding the structure of personality defined in terms of internal processes.

Despite the reliable correlations between scores on personality measures and rated managerial performance, there are some unexplained vagaries, some residual ambiguities in those relationships. Before proceeding with an analysis of these ambiguities, it might be useful to specify how we intend to use the word *personality* in the context of this paper. We assume that most people desire or are concerned with acquiring attention and approval from their social communities; at the same time they also desire status, power, or respect in those communities. In the course of development people choose identities for themselves, identities that they like and think they can support—that is, athlete, scholar, devout Christian, mountain man—and these identities are used to structure interactions and tell other people how the actor would like to be regarded. Sometimes these images are confidently assumed; sometimes they are used defensively to guard against the loss of status and social acceptance. Part of these identities includes life or occupational goals, for example, money, recognition, power, security, or piety. Sometimes people choose sensible identities and goals for themselves and sometimes they choose less wisely. Hogan and Jones (1983) argue, for example, that criminals (incarcerated felons) have often chosen a particular deviant identity whose components include toughness, alienation, thrill-seeking, and exhibitionism. Criminals use this identity to negotiate status and social acceptance from the groups with whom they typically interact. The more general point is that behind each person's everyday social behavior lies an identity, a preferred self-image, and a dominant goal, and the images and goals are chosen so as to enhance individual status and social approval.

People's behavior during social interaction creates a response in the other people with whom they interact. It is an evaluative response, and these responses have been the subject of considerable research attention over the past 20 years. There is a fair degree of consensus in the personality research community that observers' reactions to actors can be grouped in five broad categories; that is, each of us has a social reputation which

reflects our relative degree of status and social acceptance. These reputations can be coded in terms of five broad evaluative categories. The first category concerns intellectual activity and acumen, where judgments vary along a continuum ranging from dull, literal-minded, and unimaginative to bright, conceptually oriented, and open-minded. The second category concerns self-acceptance and social self-confidence; here judgments vary along a continuum ranging from anxious, guilt-ridden, and moody to confident, self-accepting, and stable. The third category entails judgments along a continuum varying from impulsive, careless, and undependable to self-controlled, conscientious, and reliable. The fourth dimension includes judgments ranging from meek, complacent, and unassertive to outgoing, assertive, and ambitious. The final dimension involves judgments varying from blunt, outspoken, and independent to mannerly, diplomatic, and charming.

To bring this somewhat abstract discussion back to the topic at hand, leadership is normally related to the personal goals of power, recognition, and money, and to being perceived as bright, stable, dependable, assertive, and charming; people who are perceived as bright, mature, reliable, ambitious, and socially skilled and who desire power, fame, and financial rewards are overrepresented in the ranks of leadership.

Flawed Leadership

This section of the paper concerns the notion that there are certain (identifiable) kinds of people who tend to rise to the tops of organizations but who subsequently have a negative impact on the organization. These are people with well-developed social skills and an attractive interpersonal style who, in reality, have little or no talent for management. Unfortunately, there are more of these people around than we often realize.

The Base Rate of Flawed Leadership Survey research on job satisfaction and on job-related stress over the past 35 years reveals a consistent and disturbing trend. Beginning with Hertzberg's (1966) research on worker motivation and hygiene factors, study after study across time, occupational group, and geographical location shows a surprising rate of dissatisfaction with supervision. Between 60% and 75% of workers surveyed report that the worst, or the most stressful, aspect of their jobs is their immediate supervisor (cf. Hertzberg, 1968). Moreover, virtually every employed adult reports that he or she had to spend considerable time during the course of his or her career working for an "intolerable" boss.

The following examples happen to be on our desks at the moment; the phenomenon is so pervasive that rigorous documentation is unnecessary. *Newsweek* of April 25, 1988, ran a feature article in the business section entitled "Stress on the Job." In a nutshell, the argument, supported by a variety of surveys and research studies, is that: (1) stress in the workplace is rampant, (2) stress in the workplace is very costly (in terms of lawsuits, worker compensation claims, and other medical costs, possibly up to $18 billion dollars per year in the near future), and (3) the most frequently cited source of this stress is a "tyrannical boss." *The New York Times*, on June 14, 1988, reported the results of a Louis Harris poll of 1,031 office workers and 150 top-level executives from around the country, a poll paid for by Steelcase (a large office furniture manufacturer). The survey concerned gaps between workers' perceptions and expectations about management, and management's perceptions of the same issues. The largest single

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gap concerned giving employees a "lot of freedom to decide how they do their own work"; 77% of office workers said this was very important to them, but only 37% of the executives thought this was an important issue for their employees. The most ominous gap, however, concerned the fact that 89% of the employees said it was very important that management be "honest, upright, and ethical in its dealings with employees and the community," but only 41% said this was actually true of their present employers. Finally, the May 27, 1988 edition of *Modern Healthcare* reports studies indicating that the annual turnover rate of hospital chief executive officers is about 30% nationwide. The heads of two large research firms (who profit nicely from this turnover) remark that "most of the CEOs who leave their jobs are terminated, forced to resign, or quit before they're fired." The article also notes that the 30% turnover rate may be an underestimate of the true figure.

We propose, based on our reading of these surveys over the past six years, that the base rate for flawed leadership is somewhere between 60% and 75%; rephrasing this point, we estimate that somewhere between six and seven out of every ten managers in corporate America are not very good as managers. The consequences of this in terms of lost productivity, employee alienation, and stress-related medical costs are staggering. If we assume that the same base rate applies to the military, then it follows that there are also serious consequences for military preparedness.

Causes of Managerial Incompetence If, as seems to be the case, the performance of many people in managerial or supervisory roles is less than adequate as judged by their subordinates (and sometimes by their supervisors), what are the reasons for this? One way of answering this question is to consult studies of managerial failure. Bentz (1967) describes his observations regarding managerial failure at Sears, Roebuck and concludes that a key factor is a lack of emotional stability and social and leadership skills—that is, insensitivity to the needs and expectations of one's subordinates and co-workers.

Lombardo, Ruderman, and McCauley (1988) extend Bentz's analysis with fascinating data of their own. They ask whether executive derailment is a function of the absence of positive qualities of leadership (as described above) or the presence of negative qualities of leadership. They studied a sample of 169 mid- to upper-level managers, 83 of whom had been involuntarily terminated. Each person in the sample was rated by his or her supervisor on 61 items related to managerial performance, and the two groups were compared on these ratings. Lombardo et al. (1988) conclude that derailment is a function of both the absence of positive characteristics and the presence of negative characteristics. Their figure 3 lists the following as characterizing the failed managers: unable to build a cohesive team; over- and undermanaging; overly ambitious; not supportive and demanding of subordinates; overly emotional; insensitive, cold, and arrogant; maintained poor relations with staff; and overriding personality defects (this last theme was present in every dimension of failure).

Personality Disorders and Managerial Incompetence

The Lombardo et al. (1988) paper is the best study of executive failure to date and clearly highlights flawed personality as the causal agent in derailment. We believe a key to understanding their data is provided by the newly emerging research on the person-

ality disorders (Kernberg, 1979). Specifically, Hogan and Jones (in press) argue that there are certain people who have good social skills, who rise readily in organizations, and who ultimately derail; but before they fail, they cost their organizations large sums of money by causing poor morale, excessive turnover, and reduced productivity. We postulate three ideal types, three kinds of executive failures, described below, and we provide a small amount of original data to support some of our speculations.

Three Types of Flawed Managers

• 1. The High Likeability Floater

We find it convenient to describe normal personality in terms of the so-called "Big Five Theory" which suggests that observers' impressions of actors can be expressed in terms of five broad dimensions of interpersonal appraisal. Much of our research is based on the *Hogan Personality Inventory* (HPI; Hogan, 1986) which is designed to assess these dimensions, all of which are related to individual differences in occupational performance. One particular pattern of scores is common in executive nonperformance, and that pattern consists of high scores for Likeability and average to low scores for Ambition in a profile that is otherwise normal.

Persons with this profile are exceedingly pleasant, congenial, charming, and attractive. They are wonderful colleagues and dinner companions; they are supportive and understanding; they facilitate meetings; and they never complain, argue, or criticize. Because they are so well-liked, they rise steadily in organizations, but they accomplish very little along the way. At the same time, they don't represent anything, they don't have a point of view, they don't have an agenda, and they rarely take a stand on issues that matter. In any case, sooner or later these people find themselves in charge of a unit of an organization and little happens under their guidance beyond the maintenance of good morale.

When the nonperformance of these people is finally perceived, their supervisors are faced with a dilemma—high likeability floaters are very difficult to fire because they have no enemies, but they have lots of friends all of whom will be angry when good old George is terminated. As a consequence, the arteries of large organizations tend to be clogged by congenial but unambitious midlevel managers.

• 2. Hommes de Ressentiment

As a model for this second type we have in mind Kim Philby, the legendary British spymaster who was also a Russian double agent. By all accounts Philby was a handsome, devastatingly charming, bright, and highly effective man. Many who worked for him in British intelligence (e.g., Malcom Muggeridge and Graham Greene) described him as a brilliant and unusually competent administrator. Philby rose steadily through the ranks of British intelligence. At the end of his career, Philby was in charge of the Soviet desk and lived for a long time in Washington, DC, where he had access to the most sensitive and secret information that the British and American intelligence networks were able to assemble—and which he passed on to the Russians.

The key to Philby's character seems to be that, beneath the charm, composure, and social skill was a deep strain of resentment, smoldering hostility, and a desire for revenge. Although this resentment is normally attributed to Philby's dismay over the British and

American reactions to fascism, we believe it had characterological roots. Our reasoning is as follows. Jones (1988) developed a psychometrically sound inventory of personality disorders; designed to assess the standard DSM III, Axis 2 diagnostic categories, it is called the *Inventory of Personality Disorders* (IPD). Jones finds the categories to be complex, overlapping, and heterogeneous. He has developed a set of homogeneous subscales into which the DSM III categories (e.g., Histronic, Borderline, etc.) can be decomposed. One of these subscales is called Resentment. Resentment is common to the scales for the Paranoid and Passive-Aggressive disorders, and it correlates quite substantially with self-reported episodes of interpersonal betrayal.

The Kim Philbys of the world always do well in interviews and on assessment center exercises because the ability to appear charming, bright, and leaderlike is independent of the resentful tendencies implicit in the paranoid and passive-aggressive personality disorders. In fact the interpersonal style associated with these disorders leads to watchfulness, caution, and minimal self-disclosure, and these tendencies are advantageous in interpersonal negotiations.

• 3. Narcissists

In the modern literature on personality disorders narcissism is defined as a constellation of attitudes that includes exhibitionism, feelings of entitlement, the expectation of special privileges and exemptions from social demands, feelings of omnipotence in controlling others, intolerance of criticism, and a tendency to focus on one's own mental products and to see others as extensions of oneself.

Clinical psychology has been interested in narcissism for some time, and several measures of the construct have been developed. The best-validated of these is the *Narcissistic Personality Inventory* (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979, 1981). This 54-item "self-report" measure yields alpha reliability coefficients in the .80 to .86 range and has some interesting relationships with indices of leadership. Consequently, several points from recent research with the NPI are important for this discussion. First, consider some of the NPI items: "I see myself as a good leader"; "I will be a success"; "I have a natural talent for influencing people"; "I am a born leader." Although these are among the more benign items on the inventory, they are, nonetheless, components of narcissism. Second, consider some of the correlations between the NPI and the standard scales of the California Psychological Inventory (Gough, 1988), one of the more useful predictors of leadership and managerial effectiveness: Dominance (.71), Sociability (.66), Social Presence (.62), and Capacity for Status (.37). Persons with high scores on the CPI scales for Dominance, Sociability, Social Presence, and Capacity for Status will tend to be self-confident, assertive, outgoing, and leaderlike, with a distinct overlay of narcissism. Third, consider how persons with high scores on the NPI are described by others: highly energetic, extraverted, self-confident, competitive, achievement-oriented, aggressive, exhibitionistic, egotistical, manipulative, and self-seeking. Fourth, the most pathological aspects of narcissism are exploitiveness and entitlement (Raskin & Novacek, 1989). The following items define the exploitiveness factor of the NPI: "I can read people like a book"; "I can make anybody believe anything I want them to." The following items define the entitlement factor: "I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve"; "I expect a great deal from other people." Fifth, Raskin and Novacek (1989) report the following correlations between the NPI and the Harris and Lingoes'

(1968) MMPI content scales (N = 173): Denial of Social Anxiety .35, Social Imperturbability .48, Ego Inflation .29, Subjective Depression -.20. Raskin and Novacek also report the following correlations between the NPI and Wiggins' (1969) MMPI content scales (N = 173): Social Maladjustment -.43, Poor Morale -.30. Finally, Raskin and Novacek (1989) report the following MMPI items have the highest correlations in the item pool with scores on the NPI: "I am entirely self-confident"; "I am an important person"; and "In a group I would not be embarrassed to be called upon to start a discussion or give an opinion about something I know well." The point of this section is that recent research on narcissism, using Raskin's NPI, shows a persistent and surprisingly large relationship between measures of narcissism and attitudes and characteristics often thought to typify aggressive managers, athletic coaches, military commanders, and political leaders, and this relationship needs to be acknowledged, interpreted, and explained.

As noted above, Jones (1988) has developed a personality inventory designed to assess the primary personality disorders. He reports (personal communication) that most of the external correlates of his Narcissism scale are positive; that is, Jones' IPD measure of narcissism is associated with a variety of indicators of positive adjustment. Table 1 contains correlations between the IPD Narcissism scale and the standard scales of the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) for a sample of 132 police applicants. These correlations suggest that persons with high scores on the IPD Narcissism scale are ambitious, upwardly mobile, and self-aggrandizing (Ambitious); tough and single-minded (Likeability); and privately self-doubting (Adjustment).

TABLE 1
Correlations Between the IPD Narcissism Scale and the Hogan Personality Inventory
(N = 132)

HPI Scale	Narcissism	
Intellectance	–.18	($p<.02$)
Adjustment	–.32	($p<.01$)
Prudence	–.09	(NS)
Ambition	.33	($p<.01$)
Sociability	.10	(NS)
Likeability	–.28	($p<.01$)

Hogan and Jones (1988) have developed an Inventory of Personal Motives (IPM) that is designed to reveal the pattern of a person's motives, values, and interests. Table 2 contains correlations between the IPD Narcissism scale and the standard scales of the IPM for the same sample. These correlations suggest that persons with high scores on the IPD Narcissism scale are strongly motivated by needs for recognition and pleasure

TABLE 2
Correlations Between the IPD Narcissism Scale and the Inventory of Personal Motives
($N = 132$)

IPM Scale	Narcissism	
Aesthetic Motives	.17	($p < .03$)
Affiliative Motives	.00	(NS)
Altruistic Motives	.03	(NS)
Commercial Motives	.15	($p < .04$)
Hedonistic Motives	.35	($p < .01$)
Power Motives	.20	($p < .01$)
Recognition Motives	.46	($p < .01$)
Intellectual Motives	−.04	(NS)
Security Motives	.14	($p < .05$)
Religious Motives	−.26	($p < .01$)

and less so by needs for achievement and success (Power); the typical motive pattern for managers is high Power and Commercial and moderate Recognition.

Recent research on attribution theory suggests some disturbing elements in the narcissist's cognitive style that have implications for his or her performance in leadership roles. Our conclusions are based on the well-documented relationships between measures of narcissism and measures of self-esteem, and we would like to highlight five implications. First, narcissists will resist accepting suggestions (Taylor & Brown, 1988). For the narcissist to accept suggestions from others may make him or her appear weak, because presenting oneself confidently is a major method of self-enhancement (Powers & Zuroff, 1988), and because narcissists are concerned with self-enhancement (recall the correlation with IPM Recognition), it will be very difficult to give them advice. In addition, narcissists tend to be so self-confident that they truly don't believe others have anything useful to tell them.

Second, narcissists are biased to take more credit for success than is legitimate (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Third, they are biased to avoid acknowledging responsibility for their failures and shortcomings for the same reasons that they claim more success than is their due. Fourth, narcissists typically make judgments with greater confidence than other people (Cutler, 1988) and, because their judgments are rendered with such conviction, other people tend to believe them and the narcissists become disproportionately more influential in group situations. Finally, because of their self-confidence and strong needs for recognition, narcissists tend to "self-nominate"; consequently, when a leadership gap appears in a group or organization, the narcissists rush to fill it.

Recent research presents a picture of the narcissist as a self-confident, assertive person who is concerned about recognition and advancement, who self-nominates, and who exploits his or her subordinates while currying favor with his or her supervisors. This is part of what we mean by the dark side of charisma.

Final Thoughts

Consider for a moment our three types of flawed leadership—the High Likeability Floater, the Resentful Person, and the Narcissist. All three are typified by considerable talent for self-presentation and the capacity to create favorable impressions. Consider next that CEOs are chosen largely on the basis of interviews. The May 27, 1988 issue of *Modern Healthcare* reports a study of more than 1,300 governing board chairmen of not-for-profit hospitals in which they were asked what characteristics they looked for when hiring a CEO. In descending order these characteristics were (p. 122): commitment to quality care, undisputed reputation, strong leadership qualities, ability to make tough decisions, effective communication skills, persuasiveness, confidence and self-esteem, energy, and executive presence and image. Our point is that boards typically search for those qualities in potential CEOs that our three types of flawed leaders (especially the Narcissists) are best able to project.

Managerial selection procedures seem well-advised to look beyond the degree to which candidates seem committed and have executive presence and examine the dark side of charisma. In this way they may be able to improve on the base rate for flawed leadership.

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