



Radical Times Call for Visionary Leadership

The great accomplishment of [Steve] Jobs's life is how effectively he put his idiosyncrasies — his petulance, his narcissism, and his rudeness — in the service of perfection. ~ Malcolm Gladwell

Like it or not, we are in the midst of great social, economic and political upheaval. The way we live and work has changed tremendously in the last 10 years, and it's likely to be radically different in another decade.

Perhaps we need to take another look at what's needed in leadership style during this period of uncertainty and transition. Is it time to call on intensely visionary leaders?

There's a case to be made for narcissistic CEOs who can lead companies to greatness, inspire followers and achieve game-changing solutions in our rapidly changing world. In the words of Michael Maccoby, author of *Narcissistic Leaders: Who Succeeds and Who Fails*: "It is narcissistic leaders who take us to places we've never been before, who innovate, who build empires out of nothing."

Unfortunately, with the banking meltdown and recession that followed in 2008, capital has been shifted away from risky investments, spurring more conservative, by-the-numbers leadership personalities to take charge.

This doesn't change the fact that we're still living in an era of continuous invention and experimentation. It takes strong, visionary leaders to unleash the power of emerging technologies, turn ideas into practical tools everyone can use, and change the way we live and do business.

Conservative leadership, focusing on what works now, can negatively impact the technological and social advances required over the next 20 years — particularly in emerging fields like nanotechnology, genomics and gene therapy, robotics, artificial intelligence, biomedicine, bioengineered food,

A Message from Nancy...

I have a couple of questions to ask you:

1. Is your business as successful as you think it should be?
2. Are you and your team able to pinpoint the solutions necessary to create positive changes to get where you need to go?

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Given the huge social and economic stakes, there's an urgent need to understand leaders' personality types – particularly, the promise and peril of radical, visionary leadership. When does visionary leadership veer off into unproductive narcissism?

Narcissists can be honest or crooked, brilliant or ordinary, wise or foolish. The label is often misused and misunderstood, and it's usually applied in a negative context. Consider this: Narcissists can be passionately bold visionaries, highly capable of persuading others to embrace the value of their ideas.

In the last 20 years, we've enjoyed radical advances from companies led by productive narcissists like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Andy Grove, Howard Schultz, Richard Branson and Oprah Winfrey.

While some thought leaders claim that sustained business success depends on bold innovators and productive narcissists, many caution against celebrity CEOs who lead Enron and Tyco type scams.

Obsessive business leaders excel at cutting costs, culling nonperformers from the pack, and implementing the right processes and systems. On the other hand, productive narcissists want to create new games, changing the way we live and work. Which approach is better for leading your company?

The answer depends on the context.

At this time in history, we need creative energy and passion more than ever before. What differentiates the more successful visionary leaders from the failures is strategic intelligence.

Strategic Intelligence

Think of Jack Welch, Bill Gates and Herb Kelleher, the flamboyant self-promoter who built Southwest Airlines. These leaders developed disciplined management styles by partnering with operational managers who implemented their strategies.

These visionary leaders (and others who succeed as productive narcissists) are strategically intelligent. It's not enough to be a creative genius with media-worthy new ideas.

Building an innovative organization requires leaders who know how to motivate talented and

ethical people within a socioeconomic system that creates value for customers, employees and owners.

Many companies, even those known for innovation, don't want to hire narcissists. No matter how much their leaders boast of encouraging independent thinking and creativity, many businesses have little tolerance for true originals or mavericks. They prefer the obsessive type who is driven to please and enforces company rules.

Too often, promotions are in short supply for high-performing, creative visionaries who aren't "team players." Indeed, most narcissists don't "play well with others" – unless, that is, they have strategic intelligence and pay close attention to the crucial requirements for leading a company to sustainable success.

5 Elements of Strategic Intelligence

According to Maccoby, visionary leaders succeed because they have mastered five elements of strategic intelligence:

1. Foresight
2. Systems thinking
3. Visioning
4. Motivating
5. Partnering

Foresight

Any coherent view of strategy involves thinking about the future. Leaders anticipate how current movements, ideas and forces will play out in the short and long terms. They can identify evolving products, services, technology systems, global gaps, competitors, and customer needs and values.

Foresight is more complex than extrapolating today's market into the future. The dot-com bust between 1995 and 2000 is a perfect example of the difference between foresight and extrapolation. Aspiring entrepreneurs came up with ways to make it big on the Internet. They asked, "*How do I capitalize on what already exists?*"

Foresight would have required them to ask, "*How do we capitalize on what doesn't exist now but will in the future?*" It's not about linear thinking. Leaders must connect the dots among many interdependent forces and determine how

they will coalesce. Foresight requires systems thinking.

Systems Thinking

Visionary leaders understand how disparate parts influence the whole. They synthesize and integrate various elements to build and maintain healthy systems.

Those who want to lead companies in new directions must have competency in systems thinking, as well as the other interdependent elements of strategic intelligence.

Visioning

Foresight and systems thinking are pure intelligence skills. The other components of strategic intelligence—visioning, motivating and partnering—are real-world skills, sometimes referred to as “street smarts.” Unforeseen events, people’s quirks and qualities, messy interactions with other companies and a volatile economic climate make business success a complex affair.

Visioning combines foresight and systems thinking into a realistic view of business goals. In some companies (IBM, GE), visionary leaders have had the foresight to shift from selling products to selling solutions in a knowledge/service economy.

A focus on learning ensures that visioning evolves with the times. Yet, even the clearest vision can fail if a leader lacks the skills to motivate.

Motivating

Motivating is the most misunderstood and elusive element of strategic intelligence. It’s one thing to talk up a storm about how a corporate initiative designed to improve sales and profits will help you crush the competition. It’s quite another to grasp the importance of “soft” skills like influencing others to act as you see fit.

Motivating is difficult because it involves the messy work of igniting people’s passions so they’ll carry out your vision. A business model that neglects human motivations won’t get the buy-in needed to make your vision a reality.

Consider appealing to the four “Rs”:

- Reasons
- Rewards
- Relationships
- Responsibilities

You must reward positive behaviors to further your vision. By building genuine relationships, you convince people to take ownership of the responsibilities you’ve entrusted to them.

Many leaders motivate only their immediate teams, often ignoring front-line workers and lower-level employees. A CEO with strategic intelligence recognizes the need to motivate the entire hierarchy.

Partnering

Partnering is the ability to forge key strategic alliances. It’s different than making friends; a leader with strategic intelligence makes allies. You need to understand how each alliance fits into your corporate vision.

Partnering is the opposite of acquiring companies to bolster overall financial holdings. Leaders who operate in this fashion are merely “serial acquirers.” You must learn how to partner internally (with advisers who complement your personality) and externally (with companies that add value rather than size). This requires an understanding of how companies work together to motivate a social system that achieves one’s vision.

Self-Assessment for “SI”

There is no established measurement tool for strategic intelligence. In *Narcissistic Leaders*, Maccoby offers several questions that can help you self-assess your abilities.

The real test of a leader’s strategic intelligence is in the workplace:

- **Foresight:** How well do you stay abreast of marketplace trends? Do you excel at imagining new products, services and paradigms for the future?
- **Systems Thinking:** Do you think in terms of systems, synthesizing and integrating feedback and hard-to-imagine possibilities?
- **Visioning:** How well can you take an idea and translate it into a workable vision with measurable goals?
- **Motivating:** Do you inspire others to buy into your vision and execute your ideas?
- **Partnering:** How well do you forge strategic alliances, both internally and externally? Do you recognize that alliances are two-way streets and encourage collaboration?

Radical Times Call for Visionary Leaders

There is a need for bold, visionary, productive narcissists who can lead companies through 21st-century periods of uncertainty and transition. The best way to avoid leadership derailment is to steer narcissistic leaders onto stabilizing paths by developing their strategic intelligence.

Author Maccoby makes a strong case against obsessive, by-the-numbers personality types as leaders because their conservative approach to running companies doesn't allow for sufficient risk-taking or innovation. Much depends, however, on the specific business environment.

If you've ever wondered how someone like Steve Jobs could succeed, in spite of his lack of emotional intelligence, the answer may lie in his strengths as a productive narcissist, coupled with strategic intelligence.

The same can be said for many stellar leaders over the last 20 years: Jack Welch, Bill Gates, Andy Grove, Larry Ellison, Richard Branson and Herb Kelleher. Each is a strong personality with narcissistic tendencies of the productive kind.

Given the huge social and economic stakes, there's a critical need to understand leadership personalities, including the value of the narcissistic leader.

"All people, especially leaders, need a healthy dose of narcissism...it's the engine that drives leadership."~ Manfred Kets de Vries



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