

# Narcissistic Leaders

## Who succeeds and who fails

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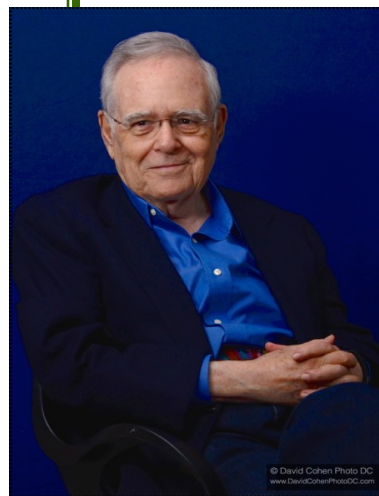
Executive Book Summary

Yunjian Tang

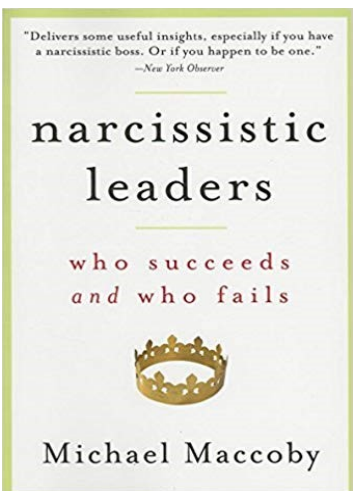
University of Saskatchewan

### Introduction: The “Change the World” Personality

**Narcissists** believe they can change the world; “they never listen” (p. 7) or they reject to listen to others, for example, Abraham Lincoln; more specifically, narcissist “doesn’t listen to anyone else when he believes in doing something (p. 9); and they have “a precise vision of how things should be” (p. 9). However, the factor that determine whether a narcissist can achieve their goal successfully is he or she is either productive or unproductive, because as the author pointed out that productive narcissists are able to deal with risk and create new things to change the society (p. 10). There was also a leadership style called “emotional intelligence” by Daniel Goleman, which means leaders create an understanding and equal atmosphere for employees, but nowadays, this may not happen in innovative companies and “was nowhere to be found in upper management” (p.13).



- Michael Maccoby was born in March 5, 1933
- Michael Maccoby is an American Psychoanalyst and anthropologist



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## Chapter One: Recognizing Personality Types

Maccoby (2007) stated that “we intuitively recognize that there are different personality types, but there is a much better way of looking at people, a deeper and more precise understanding of personality type that can make you more effective in handling all of your relationships, especially in your career” (p. 21).

- 850 people in Mexican village were interviewed  
- The questionnaire asked “what they most liked and disliked about their work, their concept of love” (p. 23), etc.

Circle the number that represents your answer to each question:

HOW WELL DOES THIS DESCRIBE YOU?					
NEVER	ALMOST NEVER	SELDOM	SOMETIMES	FREQUENTLY	ALMOST ALWAYS
1. I want my work to further my own development.					
0	1	2	3	4	5
2. I try to develop a vision for the ideal future of the business or organization.					
0	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am an idealistic person.					
0	1	2	3	4	5
4. I am satisfied at work if my job allows a great deal of autonomy.					
0	1	2	3	4	5
5. I follow the rule that practice makes excellence.					
0	1	2	3	4	5
6. I adapt easily to people I like.					
0	1	2	3	4	5

Questionnaire ( Maccoby, 2007, p. 26)

## Chapter Two: Patterns of Personality

### 1. What Is Narcissism?

Narcissism has become a common word which usually means “a broad assortment of entirely negative characteristics, a synonym for every sort of self-absorbed, self-centered behavior” (p. 36).

Maccoby (2007) described the narcissist who is “arrogant, haughty, grandiose, thinks he or she is superior and deserving of special treatment, requires excessive admiration, is oblivious to the feelings of others, lack empathy, has a sense of entitlement, takes advantage of others, overestimates his or her abilities, and acts snobby, disdainful, or patronizing” (p. 38).

### Freud:

- ◇ 1908: called that “anal character”
- ◇ 1910: “treated narcissism as a personality type”, and connected homosexuality with narcissism
- ◇ 1914: called that “On Narcissism”, and moved to a form called primary narcissism, which was a healthy self-preservation, but secondary narcissism was unhealthy which put their preference and thoughts in the first place
- ◇ 1931: “described narcissism as one of the normal personality types”

Freud’s normal personality types:  
erotic, obsessive, narcissistic  
Erich Fromm added:  
marketing personality

## 2. The Erotic Personality

Maccoby (2007) introduced what areas were suitable for people who were erotic personality work in, and what careers were not suitable for them, and the answers were “caring fields” and jobs which “emphasized the technical or ‘cold’ aspects of work” (p. 45), and how this personality works and affects organizations and other people. Moreover, they were “our biggest schmoozers” (p. 46) which was a positive side of this personality because they could give people a sense of family at any time. Then, the author listed erotics who were hosts, musicians, dancers, writers and performers.

However, at the same time, depending on others and vulnerable are negative sides of erotic. The author listed some examples if erotic who were leaders, the personality made them always try to please others, but led to situation that they were “loved but no respected” (p. 48). In conclusion, erotic is more likely to be lower and middle level leaders in big companies, so they will be firstly fired when there is a surplus, but they connect each other and make a better atmosphere in workplace.

## 3. The Obsessive Personality

Firstly, obsessives are people who are most productive, and “want their work to be of the highest quality, always meeting their exacting standards and values” (p. 50), so as the author listed, they could be doctors, engineers, scientist, etc. Between 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington and Warren E. Buffett were all obsessives.

Obsessives are able to run companies step by step and orderly, which could lead companies effectively, but they are not the best personality to run “innovative companies in fast-moving” because they are “needed to create a new vision to change the world” (p. 53). In addition, sports stars are mostly obsessives who could practise constantly and focus on every detail.

However, there are some unpro-



ductive characteristics of obsessives as well, such as “become mired in details and rules...they are rigid, judgmental, stubborn, cheap” (p. 55), and Swiss-German’s character is a typical example, which was called “anal” by Freud. They focus more on the right way to finish works and “always want to be right” (p. 56), which will leave others much more pressure. Furthermore, they always try their best to improve themselves by making rules and schedules to follow, so the author mentioned that obsessives should be “less hardheaded...more open and receptive” (p. 56).

#### 4. The Marketing Personality

Marketing personality tends to adapt frequently and follow the latest things in order to fit the market and meet requirements of the market, so the author described them as adaptable and appropriate.

Moreover, marketing personalities develop themselves by keeping learning from new experiences, clients and customers, and taking classes in order to improve themselves from skills to appearance. In that case, careers such as school and college leaders and CEOs are suitable for them.

Typical examples of marketing personalities are listed in this part. Sean Combs as an artist followed everything Russell Simmons

did because Simmons was his successful model; Carly Fiorina treated John Chambers as model who were both marketing personalities, which made the former become No.1 “on *Fortune* magazine’s Most Powerful Women in Business” (p. 62). Madonna as a marketing personality followed the trends and showed them in her concerts. At last, the example of George W. Bush who was a president comes to the conclusion that marketing personalities do not have their own and stable style and belief because they are busy adapting to the market and other people by changing themselves.

#### 5. The Narcissistic Personality

The author tried to distinguish differences between obsessives, erotics, marketing personalities and narcissists. Firstly, about doing right things, narcissists do not need to do right things, they only care what themselves really value; secondly, about security, narcissists can gain a sense of security when they make people “join them in their worldview” (p. 67).

The example of Steve Jobs illustrates that the reason why Apple succeeded was that employees joined and believed Jobs, and were also motivated by his thoughts that they could change the world.

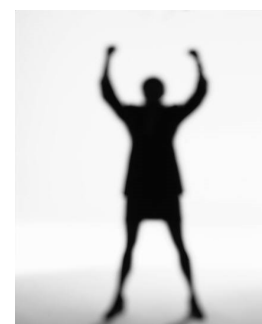
When people are at adolescent period, they cannot be controlled, and refuse to be like others because they only want to do things they really like in order to distinguish themselves with other peers, and this period is called “narcissistic moment” by the author (p. 70).

#### “How the narcissistic personality is formed in early childhood?”

**Stephen King:** “a strong, supportive mother and an absent or failed father who ‘piled up all sorts of bills and then did a runout’” (p. 72)

**Heinz Kohut:** “the mother’s own ambitions and dreams are frustrated and transferred to her son, whom she pushed to excel and succeed in ways that she couldn’t” (p. 74)

**Michael Maccoby:** “when narcissistic personality go so far beyond his father in terms of his knowledge and skills in a highly technological society that he looks for outside mentoring and affirmation” (p. 75)



## Chapter Three: The Productive Narcissist

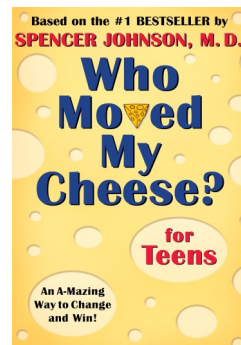
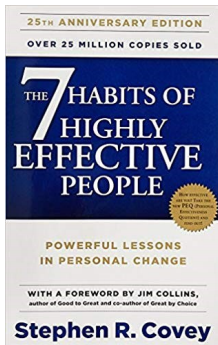
### Elements of productiveness:

freedom, reason, activeness, understanding, purpose, passion/enthusiasm, perseverance

### In terms of productiveness,

*Who Moved My Cheese?*: about “adapting to change” (p. 92)

*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*: about “pushing your skills in the workplace and keeping up your knowledge, while also teaching obsessives to be more cooperative and less self-centered” (p. 92)



Productive and unproductive could change at any time, as examples that the author gives, inflexible rules can make productive employees feel boring and become unproductive; however, at the same time, gaining respect from colleagues can make people more productive and successful, and do what people really enjoy can make people creative and productive, which could positively influenced peers.

Although unproductive does not equal to failure, but “to run a company, or even to run it into the ground, a narcissist must be, to some degree, productive” (p. 93), and productive narcissists who are failed may because they let “their weaknesses undermine them” (p. 94).

### STRENGTHS OF THE PRODUCTIVE NARCISSIST

- Visioning to change the world and create meaning
- Independent thinking/Risk taking
- Passion
- Charisma
- Voracious learning
- Perseverance
- Alertness to threats
- Sense of humor

(Maccoby, 2007, p. 95)

## STRENGTHS

### 1. Visioning to Change the World and Create Meaning

A productive narcissist finds his purpose and vision, which specialize his



Passion flames up which will bring talents and skills



Passion makes vision reality

There are two statement about narcissists based on author’s observation. It is common in our lives that narcissists may find their purpose in their middle ages, so they would start their business later, for example, Henry Ford had his car business when he was forty. In addition, narcissists prefer creating their own rules and style instead of following old rules, for instance, Phil Jackson and his Chicago Bulls basketball team.

## 2. Independent Thinking/ Risk Taking

Firstly, narcissists are independent internally which means that they do everything on their style and follow themselves, and their thoughts and behavior will never be limited by others.

Secondly, narcissists are independent externally. In workplace, people usually are not independent and free because “you are not independent if you have flexible hours but are caught up in trying to impress the boss, you aren’t free if you are a freelancer who obsessively worries about making money, living from paycheck to paycheck” (p. 111). Most people prefer staying in comfort zone or having a reliable job, but narcissists will not let others or companies constraint them because they would rather have a risky but free life, and they are not afraid to fail.

## 3. Passion

After productive narcissists having their purpose, they would put all their passion to work constantly without break. The author listed examples such as Steve Jobs, Alan Deutschman and Bill Gates who came up with new ideas and questions at any time, and their passion could support them work without sleeping.

## 4. Charisma

When productive narcissists need something from others, they will change to charmers.

## 6. Perseverance

Productive narcissists have ability to ignore everything that hinder them, and constantly following goals they really want to achieve.

## 5. Voracious Learning


Productive narcissists are eager to get knowledge, and as the author mentioned that they “use books, computers, machines, movies, rather than just read, operate, see them” (p. 126). However, they are not kids who always get good marks in school because they are not interested in simple and inflexible school curriculum, but they may be successful in their career.

## 7. Alertness to Threats

Narcissists distinguish specifically and clearly whether people around them are friends or enemies.

## 8. Humor

Narcissists are good at using self-effacing humor to show their weakness automatically to make others feel closer.



## WEAKNESSES OF THE PRODUCTIVE NARCISSIST

- Not listening
- Oversensitivity to criticism
- Paranoia
- Anger and put-downs
- Overcompetitiveness and overcontrol
- Isolation
- Exaggeration and lying
- Lack of self-knowledge
- Grandiosity

(Maccoby, 2007, p. 132)

### 9. Not Listening and Oversensitivity to Criticism

For narcissists, in order to protect and insist their purpose, they do not listen to anybody, so staff may complain that “they couldn’t talk to him about the business or make suggestion” (p. 133). Moreover, it is hard for them to accept any criticism, so they will ignore that.

### 10. Paranoia

Narcissists care about their survival because they have paranoia against competitors and the government.

### 11. Anger and Put-Downs

Narcissists pour their aggressive emotion to staff, and it could be both protection and motivation, but sometimes, “it is used to silence dissent” (p. 137).



## Weakness

### 12. Overcompetitiveness and Overcontrol

Productive narcissists will not let anyone including his vice presidents have too much power in order to protect his authority, so they prefer “yes-men who are no threat but also not much good” (p. 139), even though this overcontrol and overcompetitiveness will lead to less creation.

### 13. Isolation

Narcissists treat people surrounding them as obstacle to attract, and they will stop the relationship when they obtain what they want from others. Moreover, they cannot control this behavior, so it is common for them to feel loneliness.

### 14. Exaggeration and Lying

They live up to what they exaggerate and “they treat the vision as though it already has become reality” (p. 141).

### 15. Lack of Self-Knowledge

Generally, they do not introspect and “they justify all of their behavior as necessary to their vision” (p. 142).

### 16. Grandiosity

When narcissists achieve their goal, become successful, obtain fame and reputation, they will enjoy having them and become arrogant, which is dangerous for their success.

## Chapter Four: Strategic Intelligence

Most productive narcissists do not have high emotional intelligence, as the author stated that “the model of an empathetic, understanding, humble leader is not necessarily suited to head up a competitive, change-oriented industry” (p154), because emotional intelligence will lead to ineffective.

### THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE

- Foresight
- Systems thinking
- Visioning
- Motivating
- Partnering

(Maccoby, 2007, p. 157)

### Pure intelligence skills

#### 1. Foresight

Foresight is different from extrapolation, which is a kind of imagination and prediction of the future rather than an inference. Moreover, a narcissist’s ability of foresight comes from gut, which is supported by their reliable and extensive knowledge, and narcissists always correct their foresight in order to achieve their goals.

#### 2. Systems Thinking

The author concluded from an example of systems thinking that “whenever you take apart a system and break it down into its components, the system no longer functions in the same way” (p. 168), so system thinking is a strategic to consider as a whole.

#### 5. Partnering

Making both individual and team fit into narcissists’ purpose and vision about their business, which could change all them into allies.

### “Real world” skills

#### 3. Visioning

The author described visioning as a combination of foresight and systems thinking, and then integrate them into a realistic vision for business, which is the central of leadership in business that should be considered with both motivating and partnering, and the vision need to be adapted constantly.

#### 4. Motivating

Leaders need to motivate everyone in order to make a common goal become their own goal, and they also need to consider different motivated ways to different types of employees. The author pointed out four aspects about motivation which are reasons, reward, relationships and responsibilities.

Reasons are related to rewards, different types have different demands of rewards to motivate them, and frontline workers and lower-level employees should not be ignored as well. In terms of relationships, leaders need to figure out “what relationships motivate their staff” (p. 179).



## Chapter Five: Working with A Productive Narcissist

### 1. Know Yourself and Your Type

In order to stay longer in their positions, people should know what types they are, what motivates them, what behaviors do they usually have, because people are only preferred by narcissists when they have needs.

Having solid knowledge that narcissists do not have is beneficial for both leaders and staffs. Narcissists use people who have deep knowledge in their own weak area; on the other hand, people who are “used” will be “surrounded by creativity and excellence” (p. 208).

### 2. Acquire Deep Knowledge in Your Field

### 3. Learn How to Partner Effectively

This strategy is based on previous two strategies, when people have solid knowledge that their boss does not have, they are trustful and useful for leaders. And then, figuring out what personalities they are and how to partner with leaders is important. **For obsessives**, the most effective way to communicate with narcissists is get straight to the point instead of too much details. **For erotics**, their job and company’s benefits are more important than relationships. **For marketing people**, narcissists care more about what true value these people have. Lastly, **for narcissistic employees**, “you need to let him run the show, step back and learn from him” (p. 212).

Working with narcissists means people cannot be ego at work because their boss will not approve anything and “expect everyone who works for him to do the same” (p. 213).

### 4. Don't Invest Your Own Ego

### 5. Protect the Narcissist's Image

It is beneficial for people who work for narcissist to protect the boss’s image by letting them take your great ideas as their own and blaming you about their own failure or mistakes.



## Narcissistic Leaders

### 6. Deal with the Narcissistic Weakness

#### (1) They don't listen

Narcissists usually do not listen, so the author listed what should people do. Firstly, “recognizing that productive narcissists are strategists” (p. 216), and be usable for them in order to be heard. Secondly, “understand that narcissists do listen, but only to themselves”, so people need to try to entered narcissists’ own dialogue by figuring out “when to present him with an idea, when it seems he can take it on as his own” (p. 217).

#### (2) They are oversensitive

It is better for employees to take what narcissists say, and do not argue with them.

#### (3) They are paranoid

Because of narcissists’ sense of threat and paranoid, humorous people can release their emotion and nervous.

#### (4) They are overcontrolling and overcompetitive

Sometimes overcontrolling and overcompetitive may lead to negative outcome, people can point out how a narcissist’s control hurt himself instead of his employees, which will attract his attention; and “carry out the tasks that you think are important to him, not necessarily to you or even the business” (p. 222).

#### (5) They explode in anger

When narcissists are angry because of nonsupport from others, people should give specific reasons why they cannot support; when they are angry because they do not want to admit their mistakes, telling them truth may lead to dismissal or respect; when they are angry about something that are not others’ business, just ignore and don’t apologize to them.

#### (6) They exaggerate

Managers should “humor him and his claims, then tell the rest of the staff that you know the boss is padding or inflating” (p. 224); and “call the SEC or the U.S. Attorney’s office” (p. 224) when there is something illegal.

#### (7) They have a lack of self-knowledge


Narcissists do not have clear self-knowledge and they do not want anyone to point his personality out, so employees would better not gossip them or remind them about their behavior.

#### (8) They are isolated

People can try to using partnering skills to deal with this weakness.

#### (9) They are grandiose

Narcissists’ grandiose cannot be controlled by themselves, so employees should prepare “to leave if...narcissistic boss exhibits all the signs of self-introxication and unchecked pride” (p. 227).





## **Chapter Six: The Promise and Peril of Visionary Leadership**

### **Conclusion:**

Although companies may not let productive narcissists be leaders because of their personality, and marketing and obsessive personalities become their better choice, it is undoubted that narcissists are irreplaceable and they could contribute more to our society.



“If we are to move forward as a society, we must rely on productive narcissists to take the risks, gather the social and economic resources and support, and push through the reforms that the other personality types could never dream of , much less undertake” (Maccoby, 2007, p. 239).

### Questions:

1. Which kind of personality are you?
2. Did you have narcissistic leaders? Does he or she fit the characteristics the author mentioned?



### References

Maccoby, M, (2007). *Narcissistic leaders: Who succeeds and who fails*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

