Preventing and combating administrative narcissism
Implications for professional programmes

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper seeks to examine the problem of destructive narcissism as an aspect of the emotional dimension of educational administration. Positions of power and influence provide motive and opportunity for the damaging character of this personality disorder to negatively affect the work life of colleagues and sabotage organizational effectiveness, ranging in degree from mild annoyance to extreme disabling.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper presents a model of narcissism composed of the typical profile and organisational expression in educational settings, drawing on narcissism theory. This includes the narcissist's illegitimate sense of entitlement, inappropriate need for admiration and attention, lack of empathy, and projection of negative traits onto others that affect the politics and culture of schools and universities, including social interaction and work styles, that produces an objectified use of people.

Findings – Four aspects of graduate professional programs are examined for the effects of destructive narcissistic pattern – student recruitment, curriculum, narcissistic professors, and research activities – and strategies recommended for dealing with this problem.

Originality/value – The problem of narcissism in educational administration and leadership professional programmes is not addressed in the field.

Keywords Emotional dissonance, Educational administration, Leadership

Paper type Conceptual paper

In the emotional life of an educational organisation many things can contribute to a destructive climate such as micro-politics, toxic cultures, abuse of power by administrators, and even the moral problem of administrative evil. One cause that has received considerable attention in management literature since the 1980s is that of destructive narcissist pattern (DNP), which in some cases is the root cause of a hostile organisational environment. This problem is not remote – if one is in a large enough organisation or has worked in a number of organisations, one is likely to have encountered a narcissist. The rate of psychopathy is estimated to be 1 percent of the population (Hare, 1993, p. 74). Figures for narcissism are much more difficult to determine since narcissists are not inclined to seek help or come to the attention of the criminal justice system, however, given the commonality that management writers ascribe to the condition, it would appear to be at least as frequent a personality disorder. As Kets de Vries (2003, p. 23) and others have noted:

> Narcissistic personalities [...] are frequently encountered in top management positions. Indeed, it is only to be expected that many narcissistic people, with their need for power, prestige, and glamour, eventually end up in leadership positions.

And the university is not immune: Hill and Yousey (1998, p. 164) found in their comparative study of four professions – university faculty, clergy, politicians, and librarians – that faculty scored relatively low in comparison with politicians, however, their conclusions were also suggestive that university administrative positions may disproportionately attract narcissistic faculty members, where "social attention, prestige, and status" accompany leadership and authority positions. Positions of power and influence provide motive and opportunity for the damaging character of this personality disorder to negatively affect the work life of colleagues and sabotage organisational effectiveness, at times creating an extremely disabling environment.

Analysed early as a social problem by Christopher Lasch in The Culture of Narcissism, a widespread need to depend "on others to validate [. . .] self-esteem" (1979, p. 10), the effects of a narcissistic culture in reducing the measurement of self-esteem to accomplishments verified by others (Misch, 2002, p. 464) has been investigated by clinical psychologists such as Chessick (1985), Kohut (1971), and Wolf (1988), as well as serving as a major organisational problem for theorists like Downs (1997) and Kets de Vries (2006). A narcissistic culture creates fertile ground for rewarding and legitimising narcissists despite their destructive capacities. The evidence suggests that educational administrators are at least as likely as any other professional group to both attract and harbour narcissists: Lasch (1979) and Sennett (1974) regarded narcissism to be a problem characteristic of middle-class professionals in relational occupations, and Downs (1997) and Kets de Vries (2006) argue that the current corporate culture encourages narcissism, increasingly the character of universities since the advent of the new public management and market models. Blase and Blase (2003, 2004) have appealed to the field to make workplace abuse in the forms of bullying or mobbing, particularly principal mistreatment of teachers, a legitimate topic of research and professional development.

In educational administration and leadership studies, narcissistic behaviour (or any other organisationally damaging personality disorders such as the histrionic personality, borderline personality disorder, obsessive/compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, and psychopathy[1]) is often not distinguished from general cultural or political dynamics in the organisation. For example, the field of counterproductive work behaviours (CWB) has most often been approached through equity theory or theories of aggression that focus on environmental or situational characteristics in which narcissists are lumped in together with other causes of negative behaviour (Penney and Spector, 2002, p. 126). Some research has attempted to identify personality characteristics that increase CWB, however, most have examined links to Machiavellianism, *locus* of control problems, negative affectivity, and agreeableness, with narcissism appearing only more recently (Penney and Spector, 2002, pp. 126-7). Very little exists in the educational administration and leadership literature discussing types of people who are wholly unsuitable for authority roles.

This paper is a theoretical exploration of narcissists in schools and universities, drawing on well-documented experiences in other sectors and in other caring professions, suggesting that education may have as much a problem with narcissistic destructiveness as others. The educational setting, such as the university, has sufficient common characteristics as an organisation to allow for the application of a model from the private management world, particularly since it has successfully been applied to other public sectors like social work and the mental health field.

The paper will first present a profile of the narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), followed by a discussion of its organisational expression in educational settings, focusing on the behaviour of narcissistic students, professors, and administrators and strategies for dealing with them recommended in the narcissism literature. While there are other models for narcissism (e.g. analytic psychology, behaviourism), this paper draws primarily on the psychoanalytic literature, since it is the most prevalent in organisation and management theory on this problem, and because it is the most rigorously developed.

The profile of destructive narcissism

Narcissism is a personality disorder comprising "a number of overlapping behavioural tendencies rather than a single unitary construct" (Munro *et al.*, 2005, p. 51). The underlying cause of narcissism, according to Kohut (1971, 1977), is a lack of cohesive self able to mirror to oneself a validation of success causing this personality type to seek external validation, or mirroring, to produce a healthy self-image. Since validation cannot be internalised, the narcissist perpetually seeks the praise of others to counter constant self-doubt, feelings of incompetence, and self-denigration. In turn, others are held responsible for feelings of failure and envy.

There is a strong parallel relationship between the list of traits in Robert Hare's Psychopathology Checklist (1980/2003) and those for NPD as listed in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders IV-TR* (APA, 2000). One of the few differences is that the narcissist is prone to using manipulation, coercion or demands rather than violence to gain what he or she needs from others. Among the similarities are a grandiose sense of self-worth, conning and manipulative behaviour, lack of remorse or guilt over actions, callousness towards others and a lack of empathy, a parasitic lifestyle, lack of realistic, long-term goals, impulsivity, irresponsibility, and a failure to accept responsibility for their own actions (Hare, 1980/2003; APA, 2000). The narcissist believes that he or she is superior to most people, harbouring fantasies of power, success, and fame which the average world and the people in it cannot live up to.

Their behaviour towards others ranges from superficially charming, if they want something from you, to arrogant and haughty, if you apparently do not matter to them, to derisive and contemptuous, if you are in their road. People are objects and resources to be exploited and relationships cannot be reciprocal. Nevertheless, this is a relational disorder in that people are experienced by the narcissist as an extension of his or her needs, indeed his or her self. Underlying and driving narcissism is a deep lack of self-worth that needs to be bolstered continually by the narcissist's relation to others. According to Rosenfeld (1987), who first coined the term "Destructive narcissism", the destructive aspects of the omnipotent self are idealised and the aim is to obliterate the separation between the other and the self. The narcissist hides internal feelings of envy, shame, or incompetence by devaluing or eliminating the perceived sources of those feelings – others' due value and importance.

The narcissist's illegitimate sense of entitlement, inappropriate need for admiration and attention, lack of empathy, and projection of negative traits onto others affect the politics and culture of schools and universities, including social interaction and work styles that produces this objectified use of people (Ronningstam, 2005).

Implications for professional programmes

Professional graduate programmes in educational administration and leadership have two responsibilities that could be impaired by narcissists: the teaching and administrating responsibilities of its faculty and senior administration; and that of ensuring that its graduates are adequately trained and have the attitudes, values, and behaviour that support desirable styles of authority. Recent literature in the field has stressed a number of cooperative and collaborative features of professionalism that the narcissist is unable to demonstrate. Ruohotie (1996, p. 425) includes a number of these in research on professional growth and development: active peer-colleague interactions, a critical approach to problem solving (including self-reflection), and is able to use performance feedback and evaluation effectively (and one could add fairly and relatively objectively). Complementing these personal attitudes is the ability to create a supportive culture, full supportive and participatory management, intensive communication, and a personally secure atmosphere (1996, p. 429), all of which are required by students, professors, and administrators in graduate programmes in order to instill the appropriate values and attitudes and to role model them for prospective educational administrators. Blase and Blase (1996) are more direct: attention to mistreatment of staff is a critical issue in administrator preparation programmes.

1. Student narcissists

To date, there have been no studies conducted on narcissism in masters or doctoral students in the field, however, there is evidence from other groups of students. Munro *et al.* (2005, p. 49) recently conducted a study of the relationship between narcissism and professional ethics in those medical school students who have difficulties in "demonstrating appropriate levels of care for patients or in making appropriate ethical decisions in real-life situations involving patients and colleagues" that suggests some of the characteristics of narcissistic students in other caring professions. Their primary concern was in examining how a lack of empathy would be reflected in professional "ethically desirable behaviours" (2005, p. 49). The profile constructed can clearly be characteristic of narcissists in other professional programmes. First, their view of self includes "an intense need to belong to a high prestige/power group, an 'extreme focus on [their] own activities', regarding their 'own needs overrid[ing] others', an 'inflated view of self and abilities', and 'no insight into self or others'". Their communication style consists of:

- not listening;
- talking over others;
- trying to dominate;
- making "inappropriate/offensive comments";
- demanding rather than requesting;
- being dismissive of others;
- treating others with distain;
- showing no respect for confidentiality; and
- reacting "defensively when challenged: huffy, angry, abusive".

And finally, of most interest for teaching is their behaviour with instructors and other students:

- Poor group participation.
- Does not complete group work on time or to an appropriate standard.
- Poor time keeping with peers, instead tries to set own timetable.
- Operates alone rather than collaboratively.
- Will not personally involve themselves with others.
- Own position is so fixed there is no room for debate.
- Considers staff as lesser people.
- Shows no concern for others (uncaring).
- Steals shared resources (e.g. library books).
- Does not take responsibility for own actions.
- Will not take shared responsibility.
- Lies and dissimulates (2005, p. 50).

Vigilante (1983) in examining students in another caring profession, social work, constructed a profile not dissimilar to Munro *et al.*'s. They were found to:

- Interpret learning challenges as rejections or persecutions (little self-doubt, inappropriately self-assured even when the problem is difficult).
- Rigidly apply theory to all clients and situations.
- Be preoccupied with what they will do rather than with the client's need or participation.
- Seek attention and admiration in professional activities.
- View the professional role as that of a saviour curing others.
- Be unable to differentiate personal, religious, moral, or political goals from professional ones when they conflict.
- Be intolerant of the need to learn specific knowledge, values, and skills for professional practice.
- Believe their substandard performance to be the fault of others.
- See deadlines and limitations as punitive.
- Believe that they already knew a lot and just needed a degree to be credentialed.
- Resist learning that may change one's philosophy (1983 in Munro *et al.*, 2005, p. 51).

Additionally, Farwell and Wohlwend-Lloyd (1998, p. 66) found in three studies of university students that grandiosity of narcissistic students causes them to overestimate their future and course grades, through a number of self-enhancing attitudes: seeing themselves as better than average and judging themselves more favourably than others do, believing in a personal control of events that is excessive, attributing positive outcomes to their own ability and effort but negative outcomes to bad luck or uncontrollable circumstances, and overestimating their causal role in producing a collective product. They can also exhibit a number of other behaviours,

extrapolated from the general narcissism literature, that can be directed at faculty members and fellow students further disrupting teaching and classroom activities including:

- Deriding others' ideas to protect fragile egos.
- Expecting non-reciprocated favours from others.
- Not following rules because they are special and rules to not apply to them.
- Being lazy – downloading work onto others, then criticising accomplishments.
- Manipulating others through a range of tactics from bullying to undue praise.
- Perceiving normal pedagogical criticism as an attack.
- Not using rational arguments.

a. Graduate programme recruiting. Pounder and Young (1996) emphasise the additional demands since the 1970s on educational administrators, particularly in schools where there are increased numbers of at-risk students and diversity, yet little research has been done on those attracted to administrative positions. The management literature suggests strongly that increasing numbers of narcissists can be found in senior administrative positions (as discussed above), yet the conditions of education in an increasingly complex, diverse, and economically stressed environment would demand more caring and supportive superordinates.

There are a number of recruitment methods, that still support the principle of merit, that could help identify applicants who for narcissistic, or any other significantly damaging behaviours or disorders, could be excluded from graduate professional programmes. The application process could include the use of written statements, interviews, and written entrance exams designed to elicit attitudes and behaviours not appropriate in the collaborative, cooperative, and other-oriented world of administration and leadership authority positions. Faculty members are generally not qualified to clinically diagnose disorders like narcissism, however, they are able to recognise the unsuitability of its distinctive character in a variety of ways and should have a clear grasp of the personal qualities one looks for in prospective administrators and leaders. In other words, on a non-clinical organisational behaviour level, applicants with problematic conditions can be identified in a more indirect way.

Interview and exam activities could include two forms that are more likely to elicit both the attitudes and the behaviour one is looking for in applicants, as well as those for screening: storytelling and problem scenarios (like those used in foreign service exams). Tredway *et al.* (2007, p. 213) in their study of the administrative disciplinary role promote the use of storytelling and narrative analysis as a way of better expressing and reflecting on experience, on one's "feelings, dispositions, attitudes, and moods", and values. All of these provide key indicators for narcissism, providing storytelling does not degenerate into a superficial telling of war stories in an uncritical or unreflective fashion. Danzig (1996), also, regards storytelling and its analysis as important activities in administrator training, however, attaching a moral dimension that should be evident such as expressions of fairness and "putting kids first" as the welfare of colleagues and subordinates, among other attitudinal traits. Effective storytelling also reveals subtleties and nuances that more quantitative or superficial application practices do not catch.

b. The classroom. Once students have been admitted into a programme, it is through various classroom assignments and activities that narcissists can be identified. There are a number of teaching approaches that have been promoted in the field for general pedagogical purposes, but which also would reveal extreme narcissistic tendencies. Diamantes and Ovington (2003, pp. 466-7), for example, provide a compelling rationale for the use of case method in professional administration programmes in their review of perspectives on its use in the field. Among the benefits identified are that cases better approximate reality, cover topics in more depth, require involvement and interaction of the student, apply knowledge and skills, encourage reflection, provide experiential learning, reveal students' perceptions, and create a community of learners.

Problem-based learning (PBL) has recently received interest in many professional programmes, including educational administration, as an approach that is particularly well suited to developing relational skills, teamwork, and commitment to lifelong learning (Fenwick, 2002, p. 5). Fenwick examined PBL for its efficacy for mid-career professionals, the profile of most students in graduate educational administration programmes. This method also allows for faculty to determine how well students express the values, attitudes, and behaviour necessary for participatory, cooperative, reflective, and critical engagement in PBL.

Mitchell and Poutiatine (2001, p. 181) argue for an experiential approach to graduate leadership training, drawing upon a variety of models, such as Kolb's (1984) Lewinian four-stage cycle and Joplin's (1995) experiential learning sequence. What these models have in common relevant to narcissists is the requirement to critically reflect on one's actions and receive critical feedback from instructors and fellow students. They cite Gardner's (1990) recommendations for such experiential models, a few of which a narcissist would have great difficulty in meeting such as sharing responsibilities of group action and using opportunities for testing judgment.

Cobia *et al.* (2005, pp. 243-4) argue for the use of portfolios in doctoral comprehensive evaluation (rather than traditional exams) due to their ability to provide better information and judge students' competence, knowledge and skills in assuming their professional roles for teaching, supervising, conducting research and participating in service activities, and in tracking formative processes. Portfolios also provide better information to faculty in assessing "the relationship between a student's interests, personality, skills, and social/cultural context" and their knowledge, as well as informing faculty discussions about programme goals and decisions. The most important aspect of portfolios for concerns about narcissism is that they provide much more detailed information on students' "perceptions, experiences, goals, and ambitions" (2005, p. 251). Those who exhibit persistent narcissism will not be able to reflect on their practice and experience in a critical manner, nor will they exhibit a concern for colleagues and prospective students, providing the portfolios require critical and interpretive perspectives.

Common to most of these is a range of collaborative activities that Slater (2005, p. 322) regards as difficult even for those already in principalships since they have to learn to share leadership in a role that traditionally has positional authority and power in a hierarchical organisation. A narcissist would simply not be able to be effective in collaboration, and over time, would become abusive, dismissive, or undermining of others. A collaborative role is most associated with relational roles that narcissists are not capable of building or sustaining such as mentor, facilitator, enabler, and supporter

characterised by trust and caring (p. 323), and helping shape a humane and mutually respectful culture, instead of oriented towards controlling the micro-politics to their own advantage at the expense of others.

Of course, these strategies only work if high standards are maintained and faculty are willing to fail those students not consistently meeting critically and interpretively demanding standards.

2. Narcissistic professors

Narcissistic professors' sense of entitlement and grandiose self-evaluation leads to a general work modus operanda: the rules apply to everyone but the narcissist. This can lead to a number of problems, such as believing that certain courses "belong" to them, that they deserve larger and better equipped offices that their colleagues, that they do not have to assume routine workloads, such as evaluating student applications or marking exams. More serious infringements can include misuse of budgets, removing confidential files from the workplace, using students to manage course grading, negotiating special treatment behind closed doors, etc. Typical general behaviours include:

- Preferential treatment for allies (including high profile or "plum" assignments for those not qualified).
- Damaging treatment for opponents (victimisation or demonisation).
- Delegating work to avoid responsibility.
- Manipulating people into compliance through fear or "deals" (possibly resulting in such phenomena as Groupthink and rationalisation).
- Initially trying to "charm"; abandons when challenged or serves no purpose.
- Interpreting texts and policies in idiosyncratic (unfounded) ways.
- Expecting special provision or exemption from policies and rules.
- Not remembering past events.

Their general behaviour would be that of other professionals who have been examined for narcissism. The Narcissism-Empathy (NAREMP) instrument uses a set of four scales for behavioural factors - narcissism, aloofness, confidence, and empathy – with the first describing behaviours that can easily be applied to narcissistic professionals such as professors and educational administrators: "likes to impress or outsmart others, contemptuous of others" stupidity or weakness, believes people do not really care about others, employs sarcasm and practical jokes, admires clever criminals, impatient with juniors, untrusting, conscious of own abilities and importance, uses power and privilege to get things, wants and expects to be top, manipulative, enjoys risk, vengeful, likes "tall poppies" being cut down (Munro *et al.*, 2005, p. 53). Such behaviour is evident in academic bullying and mobbing of high-performing scholars (Westhues, 2004, 2005).

Wallace and Baumeister (2002) concluded from their study on workplace performance that narcissists' inflated self-view, desire for self-enhancement, and pursuit of personal glory leads them to invest little in unchallenging or collective tasks (resulting in "social loafing"), but a great deal on high pressure or challenging tasks that will bring notice, that is, satisfy a motivation for self-presentation exhibitionism.

The consequences are that much of the routine work required in professorial and administrative positions will be done poorly or left undone. However, even tasks that promise glory are undermined by other narcissistic traits: their arrogance and vulnerability make them dispositionally impulsive, leading to behaviours that compromise workplace activity such as:

> [...] bragging, derogating others, reacting to ego threats with hostility and aggression, making internal attributions for success and external attributions for failure, and overestimating future outcomes and performance even in the face of disconfirming feedback (Vazire and Funder, 2006, pp. 154-5).

These characteristics translate into classroom behaviour that would compromise both a supportive learning environment and the quality of readings and assignments used such as:

- Self-embellishment (at the expense of other faculty).
- Excessive classroom control.
- Meeting student questions as a personal attack.
- Present only their own work or that of colleagues or students reflecting their own work.
- Entitlement to student work (e.g. inappropriate retention of papers).
- Treating students differentially depending upon their professional (not student) status with which the narcissist identifies (e.g. those who hold senior positions such as dean, vice-president, or president in their organisations). The result of this is less support for "lesser" students and privileges provided to "special" students.

In relationships with colleagues, narcissistic professors would exhibit the following typical behaviours in meetings, based upon the general narcissistic profile including:

- "Laying down the law" (controls or hijacks agenda).
- Things are only how they see them.
- Not listening to others or talking over them.
- Possibly using confidential knowledge that cannot be questioned to elevate their status.
- Possibly fawning over selected individuals as an extension of self.
- Embellishing and magnifying their own problems while diminishing or ignoring others'.
- Becoming belligerent or bullying when challenged.
- Using extreme consequences or threats (e.g. removal from committees, not renewing contracts, denying access, attacking opponents' students).
- Using positional authority to get away with irregular or offensive behaviour.
- Neglecting or avoiding work that does not fit their inflated self-images.

This pattern will also be evident in other activities such as emails, letters, and reports. Personal encounters may consist disproportionately of striking deals, passing "secret" or confidential information, conveying slanderous gossip, or threatening those who

do not conform to their way of thinking. They tend to take over control of supervision distribution, course assignments, and discussions on programme design or expect special provision or exemption. Quite often their curricula vitae will be highly embellished, taking personal credit for work done by others. And they claim expertise in areas in which they are not qualified. Grandiosity can lead them to regard themselves as a "hero of the department" through achievements in procuring resources or collaborative arrangements with other organisations (sometimes without the knowledge or approval of the rest of the unit). At the same time, they relegate others to mediocrity or even ineptness. All of this translates into a very high potential for adversely, and illegitimately, affecting decisions on committees granting approvals for tenure, promotion, salary review, and research projects, essentially subverting the collegial governance process.

There are few strategies colleagues and administrators can use. Destructive narcissists cannot be encouraged to appropriately engage in the life of the organisation. Instead, the only general strategy is that of containment. This can be achieved through a number of practices: disengage on a personal level and engage them only through formal policies and rules; avoid direct challenges through indirect means of assigning duties; create distance from students by keeping them off student committees; and isolate them culturally and politically by reducing their participation on committees where they can affect decisions about colleagues and students.

Students have relatively less opportunity to protect themselves. Hotchkiss (2003, pp. 66-7) recommends a number of strategies that would apply to colleagues and superiors, but are probably most important for students. The first is, know oneself: protect oneself by becoming more aware of one's own emotional reactions in order to deflect the potential shame, discomfort, and anger produced by engaging with a narcissist, and detach emotionally. Second, embrace reality by avoiding accepting the narcissist's "manufactured images, illusions, distortions of fact, catastrophising or other kinds of exaggerations, denial, or outright lying" (2003, p. 69) and attempting to change their behaviour (2003, p. 73). Third, set boundaries to prevent the narcissist from using and exploiting others to their own ends – a strategy that may be initially difficult to adopt, since they may be well-developed in other respects, "smart, funny, accomplished, even lovable" (2003, p. 76), however, they inevitably violate others' personal space and rights. Finally, cultivate compensatory reciprocal relationships with others (2003, pp. 81-2). In addition, within the classroom setting students should maintain a low profile, keep as much distance as possible, and avoid one-on-one meetings.

3. Narcissistic administrators

Narcissists' organisational impact has been examined by a number of authors in management literature such as Downs (1997) and Kets de Vries (2006) who profile typical narcissistic behaviour, the negative impact on others, and examine strategies that may provide some relief. Leadership literature has a sparser contribution to make, due in part to a much lesser treatment of the "dark side" of leadership or charisma. Rosenthal and Pittinsky (2006, p. 621) are notable in the leadership literature for their recent contribution to the problem of narcissism, recently synthesising and summarising the discussion, and extending the psychiatric description of the disorder into more organisational terms. For example, due to their need for recognition,

narcissists are prone to self-promotion and self-nomination and use their skills in "deception, manipulation, and intimidation" in order to gain leadership positions for which they are underqualified. In addition to the nine diagnostic criteria for NPD by the American Psychiatric Association, Rosenthal and Pittinsky (2006, p. 621) add two behaviours that are particularly germane to the leadership field: hostility and fragility of self-esteem. As managers they are "notoriously poor, overinvolved, and abusive", resist others' suggestions, take credit for successes of others, and blame others for their failures and shortcomings. Grandiosity leads them to make poor judgments and decisions, but with a greater certainty and confidence and therefore greater influence (2006, p. 622)[2], in other words mimicking the self-assuredness and confidence of authentic leadership. Popper (2002) is one among a few who have examined the link between narcissism and one form of charisma, the personalised, which is driven exclusively by self-interest (in contrast to socialised charisma motivated by the concerns and needs of others).

Their organisational profile is a consistent pattern of entitlement (often run amok), devaluing "those they feel beneath them, but such self-involved individuals also readily disregard rules they are contemptuous of" (Berglas, 2002, p. 88). In a university setting this is displayed through disregarding policies and procedural requirements in dealing with subordinates and devaluing the teaching and scholarship accomplishments of others. According to Penney and Spector, they have a high self-esteem that is not grounded in reality and likely have an emotional investment in being superior to others, with their grandiosity acting as a defense against underlying feelings of failure and shame (2002, pp. 127-8), which in a university setting is expressed by exaggerating the extent and quality of their scholarship, quality of teaching, or their status on committees and *ad hoc* meetings with external agencies. Their need for self-importance can lead them to exaggerate or even manufacture the degree to which others listen to or respect them, or the influence they wield.

Penney and Spector also reviewed research establishing a link between narcissism and hostility and aggression: derogating evaluators, being more aggressive with those perceived as competitors, or any perceived ego threat requiring an exercise of dominance over others as an "ego boost" to lessen the threat's impact (2002, pp. 128-9). If the narcissist is in a leadership or administrative position, that is, any authority position, then the likelihood of aggressive behaviour is high due to the usual challenges these positions encounter and narcissists' "strong preference to be superior to others" (Penney and Spector, 2002, p. 129) and insatiable need for others to "mirror" them in their own grandiose and exaggerated terms. This could translate into an excessive lack of respect or disregard for others and their offices, particularly university officers like faculty association directors or executive members and an ombudsperson officials whose duty may be to challenge a narcissistic administrator's decisions and actions.

One of the very few articles in educational administration on narcissism is Donald Misch's discussion of Deutsch's "as if" personalities, her expression for NPD. Misch focuses his attention on those mid to senior administrators in universities holding faculty and student support positions, such as associate dean or dean of students, or academic affairs or faculty development – positions in which one would expect cooperative and supportive attitudes and behaviours. However, the "as if" personality in classic narcissist fashion operates as a "personality chameleon" (Deutsch, 1942), creating "an illusion of conviction and involvement although they lack commitment

to the thoughts and emotions they express" (Moore *et al.*, 1990, p. 28) in order to compensate for a severely impaired self-esteem. Misch describes a number of behaviours that indicate the need for self-validation through mirroring:

- Having office walls, or "power walls", "overflowing with plaques, certificates, and other testimonials" and photographs with important people serving as proof of self-worth and maintaining a threatened self-esteem rather than as an expression of pride.
- Changing the focus of discussions towards their "selfless devotion to others" and great accomplishments, including persistent name dropping.
- Inability to listen to others while creating a listening façade.
- Use of rehearsed conversational roles instead of spontaneous and truly felt discussion (2002, pp. 462-3).

The typical narcissistic traits noted by Misch of these administrators include: the need to intensely control others, even when appearing to empower them; being tirelessly attuned to institutional politics, particularly who is up and who is down, "who is 'in' and who is 'out', who is moving forward in career and whose career is slipping in order to ensure his/her own successful rank in the organisation" (2002, p. 466); spending much time covertly ensuring being in the "loop" regarding promotions and career opportunities; and using any opportunity to impress with accomplishments, some of which are vicarious such as a critical training role for someone who has attained success or high status (2002, p. 463). Narcissists will exploit organisational positions in which they are empowered to help others as a way of providing evidence of their worthiness (or creating allies), accompanied by a selective public acknowledgement through promotions and awards. Driven by an insatiable need for affirmation they also exhibit some characteristics of obsessive-compulsive disorder: being "hard-working, driven, and perfectionistic, often sacrificing family and friends to an excessive preoccupation with [. . .] work and career" (Misch, 2002, p. 465). Part of their success is due to their own expressed belief in their motives, intentions, and abilities, however, as Misch notes, over time others may eventually recognise the self-interest driving such individuals. In effect, the initial charm and grandiose ideas that may seem appealing or even radiate an aura of charisma that at first is taken at face value by a unit committed to development or redressing cultural or political problems wears off. However, narcissism can be more insidious than this – anyone who is perceived as a threat will cause a narcissist to engineer damage to their status in the organisation, sometimes through the subtle and surreptitious politics of the organisation, possibly to the point of being expelled.

The greatest damage of a narcissist in an authority position is the disregard for policies, regulations, procedures, and even more fundamental principles of administrative law and natural justice in their treatment of subordinates. They substitute their own idiosyncratic interpretations which furthers their own agenda, finally at the expense of others.

Conclusion
What is important administratively is that narcissists cannot assume the accountability and responsibility necessary in mid-to-senior positions to effectively

wield authority, or to humanely deal with subordinates. When protection of and aggrandising the ego is an imperative, narcissists will forgo all other values and principles, in an academic setting, violating academic freedom and standards; if, under constrained financial conditions, generating revenue is the path to regard, particularly under a market-driven model, high-tuition programmes can be cosseted and promoted to the detriment of scholarship and adequate university teaching and curricular standards in order to "sell" to an expanded market. Narcissists lack the ability to critically reflect on themselves or to consider the needs and rights of others. Normal organisational behaviour and personnel management approaches simply would not work, and some management fads can exacerbate problems with narcissists. As Berglas points out from extensive professional practice, the current fashion in executive coaching (and the guru-type consultants in educational leadership) only shields narcissists and enhances their grandiosity, eventually eroding their performance (2002, p. 88) and exacerbates their abuse of subordinates. Consultants not versed in psychotherapy or clinical psychology will simply apply the training they have received, regardless of the actual nature of organisational problems and their causes, "If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail" (2002, p. 91).

The range of strategies one can use is limited: narcissists do not change their behaviour "unless they experience extraordinary psychological pain – typically a blow to their self-esteem" (Berglas, 2002, p. 88). It is not clear that the strategies offered in the literature to date would be effective, for example, those Blase and Blase call "bullybusting" (2003, p. 151). Brown (1996) reviews a range of possible strategies, however, most are inadequate or contribute to problems with narcissists. The first, withdrawal, has the advantages of removing frustration that may lead to more constructive relationships with others, however, one is then out of the communication loops that could cause one to lose out on important information regarding promotions and other important activities. The second, Attacking, does have the advantage of often getting the narcissist to leave one alone, but the disadvantages are significant – authorities may perceive one as aggressive, hostile, and unfair, providing the narcissist organisational ammunition in characterising one as difficult. Third, Confronting, has no advantages, and this will be perceived as an attack. Fourth, Smoothing (or yielding) has the advantage of effectively avoiding conflict, however, it may require one to discard or devalue one's own goals and standards. Finally, Compromising has no advantages, with the disadvantages that the narcissist may become incensed and one can become marginalised from others. Masterson (1993) may provide the only immediately practicable advice: separate the personal from the public, use only formal forms of address such as surnames and titles, do no special or personal favours, and make requests formally and politely. This may save one from a narcissist, but it does require accepting a highly limited sphere of action.

All important aspects of administrative practice are impaired when a narcissist is in a senior position in the organisation: governance, policy, the effective development and running of programmes and courses, and the management of resources. The damage can be extensive, affecting interpersonal relations by creating a toxic culture or debilitating micropolitics, compromising pedagogy and research activities, disrupting careers and the overall welfare of the educational unit, particularly if the narcissist is in an authority position to wield approval power. The inclination of many is to avoid conflict, others' aggressive behaviour, and eventually normalising narcissism as people retreat into passivity or rationalisation.

In the longer term, educational administrators need to be better equipped in this area of organisational behaviour. A proactive and stronger foundational curriculum would provide the psychological and social psychological understanding that would better prepare administrators to distinguish minor problems, for which their training and responsibilities prepare them to legitimately cope, from the more serious personnel problems like narcissism which cannot be dealt with without clinical training and certification. However, they can be qualified to make an organisational diagnosis and learn to use the policies and procedures available to them to follow the advice from the field, such as Masterson's suggestions.

Notes

1. Referred to as "anti-social personality disorder" in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV-TR* (*DSM-IV-TR*).

2. Our personal favourite: a senior educational administrator claiming to be sufficiently familiar with standards in all disciplines world wide in order to independently assess faculty members' applications for tenure and promotion.

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