



## Personnel Trend Letter

### Success for one's mirror image?

Our society has taken on a bizarre marketing-oriented approach to life – both in general as well as in terms of mindset. **Individuals view their existence as a quasi-product, the value of which is a reflection of the feedback it generates from society: “The individual's body, mind and soul are their capital, and the object of the individual's life is to invest these advantageously, to derive a profit from themselves.”** This desire for reflective attention has found its greatest expression in mass media. Be it talk and reality show participants or the preponderance of personal homepages, proof of the urge to acquire a secondary feeling of self worth by kindling the interest of others can be found everywhere. But how valuable and sustainable can this “success for one's mirror image” actually be? This issue is dedicated to a trend which will probably be missed by those who cling to these mirror images for various reasons, thus potentially letting an extremely exciting development pass them by.

*Sincerely yours,  
Barbara Hunz*



### Society

Narcissus 2.0 – a diagnostic update

Many of us have faced this situation: Looking for a competent consultant, we land on the website of a company with international operations and core competencies for about forty markets around the globe. The website is designed much like those of multinationals. The company appears to be knowledgeable and capable of everything. At some point, it becomes clear that the owner is a single entrepreneur who – noblesse oblige – has a

network. This does not mean that he does not provide a good service. But is he convinced of the grand impression he conveys himself? That is the crucial question! It's nothing new for people to make out to be more than they actually are. However, what separates the strategic con man from the narcissist is a fine and often unclear line, and the strategist probably has the more stable self of the two. But what is based on a sham existence quickly becomes the indispensable foundation of one's career and self-image. Doctoral theses are a good example of this. Biographies of this kind are similar to a spiral that describes ever-wider rings compensating for a lack of self-confidence through an external sense of accomplishment, with this experience often constituting the entire success (as is the case in business and art gallery receptions). Human beings are guided by external forces. They perceive the world around them as if they were looking at a picture on a screen and seek to put in the most advantageous appearance in this picture.

This approach definitely has a history. From the exhibitionist loneliness of the voyeurs in the alleys of Paris to the purportedly sociable atmosphere of Vienna's Café Central, the world view ce-



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celebrated around 1900 was considered by A. Polgar to have an innermost core consisting in refraining from looking at the world. He believed that narcissistic personalities were magically attracted to such "cultures." This is because their psychological makeup lends itself to them. In terms of developmental psychology, the narcissistic stage immediately precedes the establishment of relationships to objects. If this transition is incomplete, then the formation of the self and of the concepts of objects apart from the self (the environment, the different and the others) before it was incomplete as well. This is a model explanation of why narcissists are not really accepted by their fellow men. Instead of seeking happiness in community, they look for it in substrates of an oceanic feeling of which they have never been able to rid themselves from a developmental psychological perspective. Experts have brought narcissistic character in relation with a gradual shift in the relation between the public and the private. The US sociologist Richard Sennett spoke of a "tyranny of intimacy" – notably more than two decades before Web 2.0 and social media. However, the new debate on the narcissistic symptoms of Generation Y from 1980 to 1990 is rooted in the present developments of telecommunications, as this generation is the first in history to work with the same services enabling personalized self-portrayal and the maintenance of networks, which also provides new gadgets for the mirror stage.

### Human Resources

Hamsters and princes: the natural selection of Generation Y

When speaking of a natural selection in a global context, an irrefutable fact is that education and training will decide whether young human beings will be able to compete with skilled workers and executives or

whether the progressive automation of processes will replace them in their active working lives. Global developments accelerate this natural selection as the proportion of positions that can be filled by individuals with low qualifications in the EU will have decreased from 21% at present to 15% by 2020. In contrast, the share of highly skilled workers will rise from 29% to 35%. Moreover, competition for these positions has already begun. Institutions the world over are positioning themselves to train the new elite when vying for technological-scientific innovations. Two trends that are rarely brought into relation with each other are becoming more pronounced in the process: the global mobility of high potentials representing the group of young adults in elite training programs and the speed at which scientific-technological innovations are launched on the mass market. The consequence is that operative flexibility is becoming increasingly important and established knowledge banks are changing progressively, becoming "fluid." The challenges faced by the labor force will rise considerably in the next few years. Employees will have to implement new framework conditions and coordinate them with the environments in which they work. This requires one to have conceptual skills and the capacity to think in contexts conventionally expected of companies. Conversely, Generation Y representatives are often characterized as being self-absorbed, willing to perform only under certain conditions. They may put in quasi-entrepreneurial appearances, but fail to keep this promise. A lack of endurance is being generally observed and deplored. Expectations clearly outweigh the prevailing willingness to perform. Various labels have been invented to describe this trend, which is spreading in highly-developed industrial societies: Paul Harvey spoke of the greedy generation and Jean Twenge coined Generation Me, while Byung-Chul HAN referred to a sleepy society that had lost its external enemies. Entrepreneurs are worried about a potential Narcissism 2.0 which will



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exhaust itself in the entertainment circuits of social networks and increasingly be lost to the real economy as a productive force.

The growth of the service sector and of cross-border trade tends to favor the narcissistic strategies of communication as strong persuasive factors in relatively short encounters are the determining elements. (It is rarer to find narcissistic characters in agriculture.) International sales and network-based marketing are attractive to narcissistically imbued personalities – as long as the ploy is successful, one must add.

In contrast, one speaks less frequently of the benefits to corporate images through which employees with the appropriate disposition strengthen their narcissistic self. Those who attack the company attack the apple of their eye. They are the hamsters of the real economy and can be likened to the dark side of the spoiled prince because they do not have what it takes to become a prince or a princess. Their ocean is the company, the political party or the social network. However, hamsters and princes share a disadvantage, which makes them dangerous if they staff responsible positions in the real economy: Their personal involvement renders them inflexible. They react to change defensively and repressively. The innovative potential, which they definitely possess, cannot blossom because the negotiation of plans, budgets and schedules with coworkers and competitors is not their cup of tea. The fast lane of the future may thus be occupied by curious young adults uniting a high level of education with social skills and the flexibility to react to current challenges with a wealth of ideas and operative dexterity. They will leave the hamsters and princes far behind them.



### Leadership

**Empowerment:** sense of accomplishment or success?

Leadership must be sustainable in order to be successful. Bosses who keep their employees happy by offering them nice incentives, thus putting the company into a precarious situation as a result of this expenditure over time, may rightly be accused of having a quasi-narcissistic bias as they have obviously made their popularity a priority over everything else. As regards corporate culture, it thus makes sense to check the extent to which employee communication is in touch with reality. This begins with the wording used in job ads. It makes a difference whether a job candidate is addressed as a superhuman from the beginning as opposed to being hired based on an accurate job profile. Stress research and current case studies on burn-out prove that the series of symptoms indicative of narcissism describe a behavioral pattern used by employees with such a disposition as a refuge when they are unable to cope. The overextension need not be caused by an excessive workload or working hours. Difficulty shouldering responsibility is also a possible cause. Being subject to public scrutiny after having scored poorly on performance tests also tempts employees who are not very stable to flee from reality. Structural change in middle



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management and public administration creates positions bearing quasi-entrepreneurial responsibility (and vulnerability) for which individuals holding such offices are neither prepared nor trained. There is not a single entrepreneur who has not experienced situations of this kind first hand. How one deals with them, however, is what makes the difference. And one can definitely serve as a role model in this regard, because the employee's realistic self-assessment is the prerequisite for working productively and having a productive, trusting relationship to his or her superior (leader-membership exchange – LMX). After all, there is no greater sense of accomplishment than achieving actual, common success.



### Executive Search

High potentials from Asia: trends, bright and dim prospects

Skilled workers and executives from Asia still arouse fears here in Germany. The fact of the matter is, however, that we need them – as does Asia. After all, the dearth of skilled labor is more severe in those emerging economies than here in Germany. This means that competition for this personnel is impending. And as long as our educational and training

facilities remain attractive, high potentials from China and elsewhere will continue studying at German universities. However, retaining them is anything but easy. They may already be courted by German businesses as well as in-company advancement programs in their home countries. Companies invested in China such as Volkswagen and Lufthansa have proprietary educational and training facilities on site. However, cooperative research endeavors benefit the Germans, as does an alumnus who entertains ties in Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok or Hanoi as liaison officer and then spins out a company which receives a government contract. Asian universities have greatly differing levels. By and large, their degree of internationalization, which reflects the share of foreign students, is very low. Singapore and Hong Kong are the exceptions to this rule. Conversely, MBA schools in France and Spain boast internationalization rates in excess of 80%. Therefore, venturing westward into foreign territory is an extremely appealing proposition to the first movers among Generation Y high potentials, as this is the only area in which they can build international networks. This is a selling point for anyone seeking for a position in international management at a global MNC. However, there is a lot of movement. Asia's tigers are also developing master plans to position themselves as knowledge economies and investing heavily in both training and cutting-edge research. South Korea has led the way and Malaysia is in the process of going down the same road. Both countries have an ongoing tradition of attracting universities from the west in order to spin out spin-offs. Their levels of training and diplomas are thus recognized internationally, with both sides benefiting from the transfer of know-how. Here in Germany, one should always keep in mind that high potentials from Asia are the cream of the crop of a selection process. They are the best in terms of qualifications or ties of tens or hundreds of thousands in their countries. they are the hope of their multi-



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generational families, and they are under significant pressure to perform. Their studies abroad are perhaps the only times in their lives that alleviate some of this pressure. At the same time, however, they are their chance in a lifetime. Yes indeed, there are hamsters and princes among Asia's high potentials as well. A current study describes the personality traits of Chinese born before and after 1970. It comes as no surprise that prior to 1970, they were more akin to hamsters, but the generation setting off for new departures is still difficult to categorize. In South Korea, one speaks of the 386 Generation, named after the Intel processor on the market during the Olympic Games in Seoul. In China, it would seem that there is ample opportunity to confuse appearances with reality. However, it may be for this very reason that the Chinese have a keen sense of this difference.

### Senior Experts

60plus or the reinvention of a professional period

One of the pleasing developments in demographic forecasts is that experienced employees and freelancers are back in high demand. The trend is buoyed by a raft of factors: the gradual red-

uction in the number of gainfully employed owing to the demographic trend and the resulting imbalance in defined-contribution pension plans. As life expectancy rises, so does retirement age – a trend that can generally be observed worldwide. Personal finances and in-company factors also play a role: the lack of skilled workers alluded to repeatedly and the associated difficulty in transferring know-how between generations within one and the same company – a problem which, by the way, first occurred in Japan and was the main influence behind the implementation of various old age part-time work models. A particular challenge is posed by what is referred to as the company's "implicit knowledge," the expression used to describe knowledge of materials, methods and procedures that suddenly become relevant again that is not documented or very difficult to put in writing. Senior experts are popular players in negotiations and structuring processes as they bring to the table sound judgment and tactical skills acquired of extended periods of time. One such example is the departmental head of a conglomerate on the Rhine, who on leaving the company, worked as an industrial advisor to land contracts for his consultancy in a variety of ways. Unsuccessful

at first, he eventually won some consulting contracts from Senior Experts Service (SES) in Bonn. Today, he works out of a Düsseldorf office on restructuring companies which he has already successfully paired with seed investors. A willingness to train and acquire are the key prerequisites for 60plus groupers participating in the market. As an aside, China has also initiated advanced training and continued education programs for its senior labor force. Demographic developments make these workers indispensable to the country.

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