Deferring to expertise versus the prima donna syndrome: a manager's dilemma

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Abstract Deference to operational or engineering expertise is considered critical for maintaining safety in many industries. At the same time, legitimating specialized knowledge can help create "prima donnas," expert operators who attain considerable organizational status and informal power. Safety can be used as a lever to gain industrial advantage or maintain inequitable perquisites. This paper first considers the common consensus about the need to defer to expertise in safety–critical organizations and industries and assesses available research on the relationship between deference to expertise and safety. Then, it reviews two psychological literatures that illuminate some of the cognitions, behaviors and organizational dynamics behind a prima donna syndrome: one on entitlement and another on organizational narcissism. Conclusions and recommendations center on how to defer to expertise (not necessarily experts) while dealing with "prima donnas."

Keywords Expertise · Prima donna · Organizational narcissism · Psychological entitlement · Safety management · High-reliability organizations

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1 Deference to expertise

1.1 Overview

Dealing with prima donna employees presents a real dilemma for managers in safety–critical organizations. Prima donnas often enjoy their status because of privileged insight into core safety–critical technologies or processes, and much of the safety literature urges managers to defer to such expertise in order to maintain safety and prevent drifting into failure. This, however, can have consequences for industrial issues, workplace relations, organizational change and ultimately safety itself. This paper first considers the common consensus about the need to defer to expertise in safety–critical organizations and industries and assesses available research on the relationship between deference to expertise and safety. Then, it reviews two psychological literatures that illuminate some of the cognitions, behaviors and organizational dynamics behind a prima donna syndrome: one on entitlement and another on organizational narcissism. Finally, recommendations for how to accommodate the need to rely on prima donnas are offered. This includes documentation, accountability, physical space arrangements, dealing with issues of self-esteem, and appropriate legitimizing of "expertise" rather than "experts."

1.2 Deference to expertise and maintaining safety

Deference to operational or engineering expertise is generally deemed critical for maintaining safety in a variety of industries (Bellamy 1994; Baker 2007; Huber et al. 2009; Woodcock and Au 2013). Signals of potential danger, after all, and of a gradual drift into failure, can be missed by those who are not familiar with the messy details of
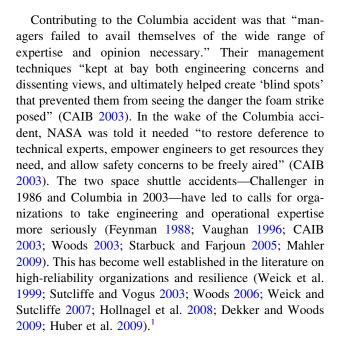
practice (Woods 2003; Weick and Sutcliffe 2007; Dekker 2011). As Barton and Sutcliffe found in an analysis of wildland firefighting (p. 1339), "a key difference between incidents that ended badly and those that did not was the extent to which individuals voiced their concerns about the early warning signs" (2009).

For a manager, deference to expertise means engaging those who are practiced at recognizing risks and anomalies in operational processes. So-called high-reliability organizations, for example, have been acclaimed for their sensitivity to operations and deference to expertise. They are attentive to their operational front end, the sharp end where the "real" work gets done (Weick and Sutcliffe 2007), where workers are in direct contact with the organization's safety–critical processes (Cook and Woods 1994; Dekker and Woods 2009). High-reliability organizations push decision making down and around, creating a recognizable "pattern of decisions 'migrating' to expertise" (Weick and Sutcliffe 2007). Such engagement must happen even for decisions that have, at the surface, little connection to operations or design. "Budgets," for example, "are often insensitive to operations" (Weick and Sutcliffe 2007) but can in the long run very well have operational or safety consequences (Baker 2007). Paying attention to the sharp end is generally thought to payoff: Recent research links leadership involvement in daily work operations with worker competence, role clarity and safety involvement (Dahl and Olsen 2013). It is echoed in organizational-psychological research into the effects of leadership presence on employee performance, loyalty and attachment (Schein 1992; Dekker and Schaufeli 1995).

1.3 Accidents and lack of expert input

In hindsight, *not* deferring to expertise is often constructed as a major safety shortcoming. Prior to the Texas City refinery explosion in 2005, for example, BP had eliminated several thousand US jobs and outsourced refining technology work. Many experienced engineers left (Baker 2007). With the appointment of Sean O'Keefe (Deputy Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget) to lead NASA, the new Bush administration signaled that the focus should be on management and finances (CAIB 2003), continuing a trend that had been set years before. NASA had vastly reduced its in-house safety-related technical expertise in the 1990s. NASA's Apollo-era research and development culture once prized deference to the technical expertise of its working engineers (Murray and Cox 1989; Mindell 2008). This had become overridden by bureaucratic accountability—managing upwards with an allegiance to hierarchy, procedure, and following the chain of command (Feynman 1988; Vaughan 1996).

Contributing to the Columbia accident was that "managers failed to avail themselves of the wide range of expertise and opinion necessary." Their management techniques "kept at bay both engineering concerns and dissenting views, and ultimately helped create 'blind spots' that prevented them from seeing the danger the foam strike posed" (CAIB 2003). In the wake of the Columbia accident, NASA was told it needed "to restore deference to technical experts, empower engineers to get resources they need, and allow safety concerns to be freely aired" (CAIB 2003). The two space shuttle accidents—Challenger in 1986 and Columbia in 2003—have led to calls for organizations to take engineering and operational expertise more seriously (Feynman 1988; Vaughan 1996; CAIB 2003; Woods 2003; Starbuck and Farjoun 2005; Mahler 2009). This has become well established in the literature on high-reliability organizations and resilience (Weick et al. 1999; Sutcliffe and Vogus 2003; Woods 2006; Weick and Sutcliffe 2007; Hollnagel et al. 2008; Dekker and Woods 2009; Huber et al. 2009).[1]

2 The "prima donna syndrome"

For a manager, however, this can create a dilemma. When an operation relies on specialized knowledge, "notably because certain decisions are highly technical ones, certain experts attain considerable informal power" (Mintzberg 1979). Tobacco factories in the 1960s, for example, were ruled by maintenance men because only they could handle the major source of uncertainty: machine stoppage. Everybody relied on them to keep things running, but nobody understood what they did, nor could they check on them. Supervisors lost in the perpetual fight for control. The arrangement in fact challenged the collaboration between experts and any other organization members (Crozier 1964). The popular-organizational literature has referred to the "prima donna syndrome" (Girard 2005). Prima donnas typically have privileged contact with (and influence over) the organization's primary or safety–critical process. They often enjoy more authority than the formal organizational structure allows and can receive preferential treatment

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[1] Interestingly, the emergence of this appeal has coincided with unprecedented growth in generic management (MBA) programs and a simultaneous rise in corporations retaining external subject matter expert consultants. If there is a role for expertise, it is not in-house and not in management. See Mintzberg (2004), Managers not MBAs: A hard look at the soft practice of managing and management development, San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler and also Khurana (2007), From higher aims to hired hands: The social transformation of American Business Schools and the unfulfilled promise of management as a profession, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.

and outsized compensation. They are recognized for their high-technical competence, assertiveness and self-confidence, yet can have an insensitivity to larger organizational goals and difficulty working under direction or as part of a mixed-composition team (Girard 2005). The "prima donna" syndrome has been described in fields as varied as construction (Schultz 1998), nursing (Girard 2005), technology (Dickerson 2001), business (Wright 2009), sports (Dubois 2010), manufacturing (Pollock 1998) and aviation (Bertin 1997).

Not all these fields have safety–critical processes. But when they do, and "when people are entrusted with dangerous technologies, it is easy for them to feel self-important and central since they live on a steady diet of people telling them that they are important" (Weick and Sutcliffe 2007). Feeling "self-important and central" can turn into a sense of psychological entitlement (Harvey and Martinko 2008). Specialized, detailed insight into safety–critical technology can amplify the organizational leverage of groups tasked with operating it (Lovell and Kluger 1994; Edwards and Jabs 2009). Popular-technical literature sometimes expresses intolerance with prima donnas, driven in part by emerging economic realities. High-quality operators in IT, for instance, may be easier to find than a few years ago (Dickerson 2001), though not necessarily in the health care or energy sectors (Aiken et al. 2002). Some of the observations made about "prima donnas" in this literature are as follows:

- They feel they do not have to play by the rules. They might resent being held accountable for their performance like other employees, because they believe their performance is as good as it will ever get.
- They have unrealistic expectations about what the organization will do for them and are resistant to negative feedback.
- Superior knowledge of frontline activities or technologies is allowed to trump other organizational concerns.
- Their qualities as operators of frontline or safety–critical technologies (persuasive, self-confident, productive when they want to be) are the same that make them hard to manage and hard to get along with.
- They have an inflated sense of self-importance, a belief that gets justified by praise, attention and "coddling" from others (Dubois 2010). At the same time, they can show deliberate rudeness and have corrosive effects on team- and organizational cohesion.
- They thrive in workplaces with high levels of ambiguity. Where credit and blame are easily diffused (because of a lack of documentation and accountability), self-serving attributional biases can solidify.

3 Reviewing the link between deference to expertise and safety

More importantly, research has problematized the relationship between deference to expertise and safety. Normal accident theory, for example, linked the potential to system accidents to structural factors of that supersede expert input into organizational and even operational decision making (Perrow 1984). Exceptional cases of tight coupling and interactive complexity have a way of overwhelming operational expertise. In a more recent analysis of military operations in Iraq, Snook shows the ambiguity of expertise in this regard: Expertise was about adaptation, about allowing "procedural drift," which accommodated the realities and constraints of local operating units. It sensitized them to a particular reading of risk and a consensus about where its sources were located and how they should be managed. When occasionally and unpredictably contracted into tighter coupling with other units, however, the rifts between their respective procedural drifts (their developed expertise) caused misalignments, coordination breakdowns and sometimes spectacular failures.

Coming to it from the other side, a recent analysis of the Montara oil well blowout shows that a lack of technical competence underdetermined the negative outcome (Hayes 2012). This, of course, is consistent with the orthodox consensus in safety research. Safety is not made and broken by operational experts alone. Problems are brewed in, and handed down from, administrative and bureaucratic levels in the web of organizations that govern safety–critical activities (Turner 1978). Minimizing accident potential is not based on relying on expert opinion or heroic recoveries, but on identifying and correcting delayed organizational action failures before they combine with local triggers to breach or circumvent the system's defenses (Reason 1997). Operational experts may not always have privileged insight into the ways their technologies are requisitioned, maintained, organized, regulated or managed. The complexity and intransparency of large-scale organizational production and management can render risk invisible to experts too. Reflecting on the challenger launch decision, Jensen (1996) describes it as such:

> We should not expect the experts to intervene, nor should we believe that they always know what they are doing. Often they have no idea, having been blinded to the situation in which they are involved. These days, it is not unusual for engineers and scientists working within systems to be so specialized that they have long given up trying to understand the system as a whole, with all its technical, political, financial and social aspects (p. 368).

Expertise, too, gets absorbed by cultures of production. Subtle normalization of signs of deviance in technical and operational details affects experts as well as managers (Vaughan 1996). Indeed, earlier work shows how technical neutrality in the face of larger organizational goals and pressures can largely be an illusion (Wynne 1988; Weingart 1991). As Leveson (2012) put it, experts do their best to meet local conditions, and in the busy daily flow and complexity of activities, they may be unaware of any potentially dangerous side effects of those decisions. Expertise based on the accumulation of experience, even or especially when operating close to the margins, may miscalibrate experts not only about the probability of failure but the possibility for recovery as well (Amalberti 2013).

Finally, research has shown that organization members tend to remain silent if "they are overly deferent to expertise or they assume that high-status experts have full situational knowledge… They assume that the 'experts' know what they need to know and are acting on that knowledge" (Barton and Sutcliffe 2009) (p. 1349). This research offered cases where a strong expression of expertise in an organization created silence for other voices, limiting rather than enhancing diversity. It seemed, further, to suggest that *skepticism* of others' expertise, rather than deference to it, was a factor that enabled a robust conversation with multiple voices influencing organizational decision making.

In order to manage the dilemma of appropriately deferring to expertise while handling prima donna groups, the remainder of this paper reviews the psychological literature that allows for a relational or transactional construction of the "prima donna syndrome." These ideas can help a manager assess the cognitions, behaviors and organizational dynamics which can lead to potential managerial pathways out of the dilemma, balancing the experts' voice against other legitimate organizational concerns and voices.

4 The psychology of prima donnas

Two psychological literatures guide the remainder of this paper. The first literature is that of psychological entitlement, broadly organized around cognitive and attributional frameworks. The second is that of organizational narcissism, an originally psychodynamic concept adapted to social-organizational contexts. Results are presented as an assemblage of observations, concepts and theory. The aim was to explore the form and origin of a "prima donna syndrome" in safety–critical organizations and arrive at possible recommendations for how to reconcile it with the need for deference to expertise to stave off a drift into disaster. The search was not for personality types or

clinical predispositions of "prima donnas." Rather, both literatures allowed a prima donna syndrome to be constructed as systematically produced by the interplay between environment, organization, cognition, professional expectations and social and industrial relations.

4.1 Psychological entitlement

Psychological entitlement refers to the belief that one should receive preferential treatment that is not matched to actual deservingness. Reference to it in the psychological literature has increased over the last decade (Harvey and Martinko 2008). Entitlement means an inflation of expectations about rewards and compensation above what actual performance deserves. Psychological entitlement is not based on an equitable exchange. Prima donnas expect more benefits, attention, power and input without seeing the need to reciprocate with high(er) levels of performance or other sacrifices (Naumann et al. 2002).

Entitlement expectations are not just monetary. The term has been used to describe the extent to which individuals prefer being treated as special or unique in social settings. It can lead to vociferous defense of even petty perquisites (e.g., shoe or clothing allowances) or the blocking of organizational initiatives aimed at increasing productivity. Safety is easily coopted as the lever by the prima donna group to get the attention or issue it seeks. Entitlement promotes an inaccurate view of the world and oneself (Snow et al. 2001). Such psychological entitlement got members of the core groups at both organizations to react negatively to criticism and challenges to their worldview—and be very public with those reactions.

Harvey and Martinko (2008) have shown that psychological entitlement diminishes the cognitive processing that employees apply to workplace situations. They tend to overlook important situational information. Entitlement is associated with a self-serving attributional tendency, which allows them this cognitive shortcut. Negative events or outcomes tend to get attributed to other people or external circumstances, whereas positive ones are attributed to the self. Individuals with strong entitlement perceptions tend to take credit for positive outcomes and are likely to feel estranged and blame others when negative outcomes occur. Injuries caused to contractors, for instance, might get attributed to contractor inexperience or incompetence, even though the contribution of prima donna groups to the bad outcome can be easy to trace. Existing accountability mechanisms may exacerbate this—contractors are sometimes penalized for loss-time injuries (which hurts their chances at additional work), while prima donna groups are left unaddressed.

Entitlement thus functions as a mental patterning device. It inhibits their desire to engage in an elaborate cognitive

evaluation process and will get people to shy away from information that contradicts these attributions:

> An attribution style that biases individuals toward attributing the negative events in their lives, such as receiving a poor performance evaluation at work, to external factors is one way in which this ego-protecting perceptual distortion can manifest itself. When undesirable events are attributed to external factors, such as another persons' incompetence, the individual fails to accept responsibility (Weiner, 1985a) and the positive self-view is protected We propose that this attributional tendency is likely among entitled individuals, whose positive self-images would logically bias them toward assuming that they are not to blame for negative outcomes (Harvey and Martinko 2008).

Attributional processes (i.e., searches for causes of workplace events) tend to become less effortful and less detailed with psychological entitlement. This is likely to reduce the authenticity or richness of people's attributions, reifying their attributional bias. Job dissatisfaction and poor working relationships result from unmet expectations and a warped view of workplace responsibilities (Naumann et al. 2002). Conflict with supervisors is more likely, as are job turnover intentions (Harvey and Martinko 2008).

4.2 Narcissism in groups

Narcissism, originally a psychodynamic concept, refers to a collection of cognitions and behaviors which help in the regulation of self-esteem (Freud 1950). It involves ego-defense mechanisms such as denial, rationalization, attributional egotism, sense of entitlement and ego aggrandizement. Narcissism has been used in the management literature to understand organizational behavior and collective identity. It does not literally see organizations, groups or teams as narcissistic entities, but their behaviors and social cognitions are analogous to those exhibited by narcissistic individuals (Brown 1997). Groups, after all, have needs for self-esteem too, and these can be regulated in narcissistic ways—displayed as follows (Godkin and Allcorn 2009):

- Exceptional pride in own accomplishments and belief in continued success;
- Entitlement that supports exploiting others both inside and outside the organization;
- Envy and rage that arise when pride or pursuit of own goals are threatened;
- History of banning or driving out non-conformers or resistors;
- Management by intimidation;

- Suppression of accurate reality testing and creativity;
- Filtering of information and magical thinking;
- Frequent blaming and scapegoating of others;
- Volatile mood swings, from celebrating success one day to despair over not achieving smallest of goals the next;
- Alienation of management and leadership to their "foxholes" (cubicles, offices);
- Destructive internal competition and open organizational warfare.

What characterizes narcissistic groups is a sense of anxiety, which stems from a dependence on others to validate self-esteem (Brown 1997). Narcissistic groups or "prima donnas" are in a constant dilemma. For their self-esteem, positive regard and affirmation, they depend on the very people whom they hold in contempt or even feel threatened by. These may be supervisors, managers or plant leadership, or colleagues who do not interact daily with the organization's safety–critical processes. Organizational change, threats of job insecurity or industrial uncertainty can exacerbate this anxiety. Such threats to continued organizational existence can come from different economic drivers, but it makes prima donna groups more likely to settle on disordered ways to shore up self-esteem and get organizational affirmation of their role and relevance (Dekker and Schaufeli 1995). This exacerbates the managerial dilemma too: While less able to afford perceived indulgences of their prima donnas (yet getting more demands from them), managers are told by the literature to tap into expertise more than ever before: times of cost-cutting, downsizing and possible closure can make safety–critical organizations extra vulnerable (Reason 1997; CAIB 2003).

The behaviors and cognitions of narcissistic groups can be captured by mythmaking. Schwartz (1989) argued how mythmaking, or the dramatization of its own ideal character, played a role NASA's first space shuttle accident. The institutionalized fiction was of NASA as an organization destined for success and incapable of failure—negating the expertise and budgetary gap that had opened wide since Apollo times. Organizational narcissism and concomitant mythmaking can thus interfere with accurate calibration of expert knowledge, creating holes and bugs in expertise and even safety awareness that may go unrecognized (Schwartz 1989; Hall 2003). Prima donna groups typically tell stories of their own mythical past—often preceding the current management. It is possible that prima donna group members mistake the amount, extent and status of their expert knowledge for its currency and accuracy. Largely unbeknown to the operators, that ideal of expertise and competence can become spotty with obsolescence. When pressed, others are often able to point out

places where developments in the industry or technology have overtaken this image. They might not, however, always be to express it forcefully enough to get alternative voices heard (Barton and Sutcliffe 2009).

Myths are patterning devices that cohere and order group members' understandings. As with psychological entitlement, they lead to lower levels of cognitive processing because they offer attributional shortcuts (Harvey and Martinko 2008). They thrive on attributional or causal ambiguity (Wright 2009): When things go wrong, it is easy—natural even—to blame others (Brown 2000). Myths are a vehicle for denying errors and responsibilities when self-esteem is threatened. They immunize groups against contradicting evidence. Injuries and incidents almost always get attributed to other groups (e.g., students, administrators, contractors).

Denial plays a general role in the preservation of self-esteem. It is first among the characteristics of narcissism as applicable to groups:

- Through *denial*, groups may seek to disavow or disclaim awareness, knowledge or responsibility for faults that might otherwise attach to them. Denial at group level is helped by mythmaking: myths not only overtly deny that something is the case, they often conceal conflicting or contradictory information and exclude other equally valid interpretations (Brown 1997).
- *Rationalization* is the attempt to justify unacceptable behavior and present it in a form that is tolerable or acceptable. Groups will offer explanations for their activities that secure legitimacy for what they did and preserve their self-esteem (Weick 1995).
- *Self-aggrandizement* refers to the tendency to overestimate abilities and accomplishments. It is accompanied by self-absorption, the seeking of gratification, exhibitionism, claims to uniqueness and a sense of invulnerability. Groups use myth and humor to exaggerate their sense of self-worth and fantasize about their unlimited abilities during times of stress (Janis 1982). They also engage in social cohesion ceremonies that are overly exhibitionistic—sometimes highly visible, noisy rituals that make others feel acutely excluded. This can include intentional manipulation of physical space that is designed to separate, intimidate or excite admiration, the use of special language and symbols, and the use of power to make others wait or feel worth less by other means (Schwartz 1989; Brown 1997).
- *Attributional egotism* means finding explanations for events that are self-serving. Favorable outcomes are attributed to the group, unfavorable ones to anybody else. As shown above, process or maintenance failures were attributed to inexperienced contractors rather than

inaccurate permitting, for example. Or (by extension) they are blamed on managers who outsourced maintenance in the first place or regulators who allowed it (Campbell et al. 2011).

- *Sense of entitlement*, as explained in an earlier section, is driven by a belief in the right to exploit others and a simultaneous inability to empathize with them (Harvey and Martinko 2008).

These behaviors and cognitions can become persistent, pervasive and significant (Godkin and Allcorn 2009). Yet for safety–critical organizations, this is not necessarily all bad. Employing "prima donnas" is a trade-off, a mixed blessing (Campbell et al. 2011) of which confidence, charisma and technical prowess form the bright side. Strong self-esteem can be healthy when faced regularly with uncertain outcomes and the demand to make decisions with incomplete knowledge or information. It also helps in the face of substantial and existential risk to the self or others—whether by conducting surgery, flying jets or operating petrochemical facilities. Ritual task performance and denial of feelings of attachment are ways to deal with the daily stress, anxiety and tension of safety–critical work (Brown 1997; Aiken et al. 2002). This can hold true even if narcissism leads to overconfidence, less-accurate decision making and a willingness to court risk (Campbell et al. 2004).

5 Conclusion

Some groups will obviously be more socially adaptive than others in regulating their self-esteem (just as many individuals are). In safety–critical organizations, the dilemma for colleagues and managers is that they depend, for their own safety and the organization's, on the expertise of their "prima donnas." Yet always deferring to this expertise, being sensitive to their operations and allowing decisions to float down toward them, can feel as unfair and undeserved as the high-reliability organizational literature says it is necessary. In some cases, mythmaking, alienation and self-aggrandizement of expert practitioner groups can strain the relationship with the rest of the organization and its leadership. This becomes visible, for instance, in physical separation of work spaces, higher turnover, industrial strife and ultimately less-safe outcomes for the entire organization (Schwartz 1989; McCartin 2011).

5.1 Deferring to expertise while dealing with "prima donnas"

The managerial dilemma, then, consists in this: a push to legitimize experts' concerns about operations and safety,

versus a pull to limit their power and influence over organizational decision making and other work groups. As with any dilemma, this would not be one if it were easy to solve. But perhaps there are the following managerial possibilities:

- List the potentially corrosive consequences of Prima Donna behavior in the organization, including when and where these consequences are most visible and harmful. Recognize that Prima Donna behavior is often about something else and try to find out what the employees' real interest is and work with that.
- Recognize that low self-esteem and anxiety may drive the behaviors observed. The literature on job insecurity and anxiety recommends keeping periods of industrial uncertainty as short as possible. Certainty of a bad outcome is generally better than uncertainty (Lazarus 1966; Dekker and Schaufeli 1995). It allows people to start coping with a new reality, rather than relying on the myth and fantasy of exaggerated self-worth during a bygone reality.
- Align treatment with performance and build ways to generate accountability equitable with other employees or contractors. Dispensation from rules applicable to other people is corrosive for morale and organizational cohesion. All employees and contractors are part of something bigger than themselves: No player is bigger than the entire team. There needs to be a place in the organization for good performers, but not necessarily in the role or level of influence they would like.
- Legitimize operational expertise. Encourage the sharing of that knowledge and experience, also by showing a willingness to listen to it and time made in managerial agendas to engage with it. Make the conversation about the expertise, not the person (where it is easy to either knock down or overinflate egos). Recognize that autonomy, mastery and purpose are the intrinsic motivators that likely attracted them to the job in the first place. If they want to contribute to decisions, it was originally not about grabbing power but because they really *do* have something to contribute. Differences of opinion or style are not a problem of attitude. In fact, it is that sort of diversity that keeps organizations resilient in the face of challenge and surprise.
- Consider making changes to physical space, layouts and colocation arrangements if necessary to prevent isolation or counterproductive status enhancement of particular groups.

Both literatures consulted in this paper allow, to an extent, for a relational or transactional construction of a "prima donna syndrome." Rather than focusing on essentialist personality characteristics of a bad few, they encourage thinking about *what* is responsible for the creation of the "syndrome." If entitlement and narcissism are the systematic products of cognitions, behaviors and organizational dynamics, then potential managerial pathways out of the dilemma, like the above, can be developed.

The high-reliability organization literature emphasizes deference to *expertise*, not necessarily to experts (Weick and Sutcliffe 2007). Expertise is seen as relational. Expertise, and its effects, emerges from people querying each other, supplying data, opinions and other input to conversations in which it can be rejected, deferred to, modified, delayed and more. Expertise, in other words, is a coproduction: a construct that requires as much social and organizational legitimation from outside as substantive credibility from within. Expertise sometimes emerges spontaneously outside existing organizational structures, when knowledgeable people self-organize into ad hoc networks to solve problems (Rochlin et al. 1987; Murray and Cox 1989). This can only work effectively in organizations that value expertise and experience more than rank and hierarchy, particularly when novel or unexpected situations arise (Schwenk and Cosier 1980; Rochlin 1999).

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