

# ÉPREUVES D'ADMISSION

**SESSION 2022**

**COMMUNICATION INTERCULTURELLE ET  
TRADUCTION**

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## **The quiet threat of 'covert' narcissists in the workplace**

The braggy colleague, the boss who hogs credit for the team's work, the connection who constantly shows off work achievements on social media – we all know a narcissist when we see one.

Or do we? Not all narcissists are egoists clamouring for the spotlight, it turns out. There's also a stealthier, friendlier version: the covert narcissist.

These individuals have the same basic drive as more overt narcissists, craving attention and recognition. But covert narcissists go about securing this attention in a quieter, more unassuming way: a covert narcissist may appear friendly, even as they ruthlessly sabotage others for their own self-interest. This kind of person can be dangerous in the workplace, as colleagues may have a harder time sniffing out their damaging behaviours.

Luckily, experts say there are hallmark traits to look for, so you can recognise a covert narcissist and understand how best to interact with them – if you must.

When we think of traditional narcissists, we may envisage someone who thinks they're the centre of the universe, to the annoyance and detriment of others around them.

In the workplace, narcissists can be poisonous: they manipulate colleagues to get their way, make reckless choices that don't consider others' viewpoints and can be solely focused on elevating themselves over their teammates. Their disregard for others is one of the reasons they can climb the corporate ladder so quickly.

But narcissists of the covert variety are a little different. They have that same core need to feed their own ego at all costs, but they can be more sensitive in their methods. While overt narcissists may care less about rocking the boat to demand the attention they crave, covert narcissists are not comfortable presenting in that larger-than-life way.

They tend to want to be seen as 'the good guy': basically, easy-going, fun, likable, generous, they may be helpful – that kind of thing. But the downside is that they are calculating; their behaviour is characterised by an ongoing passive-aggressiveness. Think backhanded compliments, insults disguised as humour, subtle digs or gossiping behind people's backs.

They may quietly and strategically fish for acknowledgement or compliments. Perhaps they conspicuously give someone a gift in front of others, checking others are witnessing this act of generosity. At work, they might cosy up to you and a colleague, only to badmouth each of you to the other, pitting you against each other so that the covert narcissist can look like the model employee in comparison.

Driving this behaviour is an internalised sense of shame, says Hall, so they overcompensate by trying to make themselves seem superior. Indeed, covert narcissists, unlike grandiose, overt ones, often have low self-esteem and insecurities, as opposed to having an inflated sense of self.