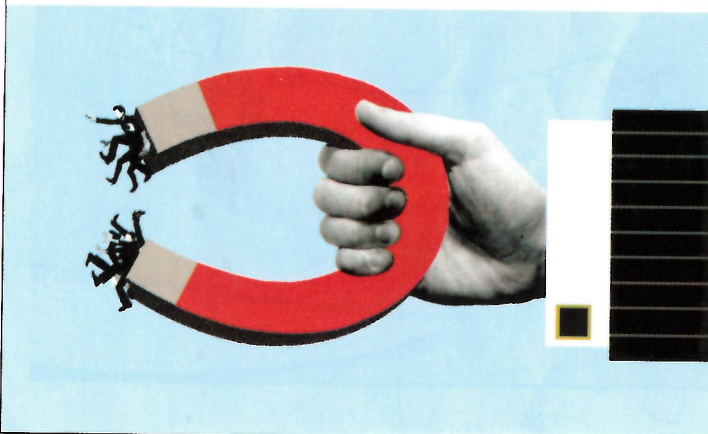


## WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA? CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

Great idea. Pity about its exponents. For every Nelson Mandela there is a legion of Hitlers, Stalins and Mugabes. People are fascinated with the idea of the individual who draws upon some inner force of nature to dominate people and events. Executives often yearn for such leaders to replace the colourless and barely competent folk they see in their boardrooms. At least, until they are reminded of the downsides of charisma: narcissism, control freakery, psychopathy, erratic emotions, etc.... Nineteenth-century political economist Max Weber was one of the first to spot the dangers and recommended the creation of leader-proof organisations via bureaucracy. The contemporary responses have been to portray charisma as a kind of theatre, requiring no more than the mastery of dramatic arts. The other is to dilute it into something more palatable, 'transformational leadership', in order to tame it. The trouble is, we just end up with an idealised stereotype that makes the gallant, grey men and women who actually do lead us feel inferior. Nigel Nicholson is professor of organisational behaviour at the London Business School



Liam Bardsley