

execution. That's not the auto industry of Carlos Ghosn." Ghosn rescued a nearly bankrupt Nissan by building a consensus within the Japanese company that it needed radical surgery.

"Nardelli's the poster child of poor workforce relations," Sonnenfeld says.

Ken Siegel, an organizational psychologist who tracked Nardelli's path at Home Depot, called the choice "unfathomable," "stupefying" and "a supreme statement of arrogance" by Cerberus. Siegel, president of the Impact Group, said Nardelli is "an imperial CEO" who will make life difficult.

At the very least, Nardelli's tough-minded leadership "is going to speed up the level of change that is going to be required to get the costs out of the business," says Jeremy Garlington of management consultant Point of View, which, like Home Depot, is based in Atlanta.

And grit could be good.

"This guy is unafraid to make the really difficult, tough choices, and is as tough a CEO as you're going to find, which is (critical) in an industry that's falling apart," says Sydney Finkelstein, management professor at Dartmouth College. Nardelli can provide "disciplined, tough management. The 'car guys,' at least in the U.S., have not been able to figure this out for decades."

In choosing Nardelli, Cerberus gets someone who is likely to create value fast, "someone who specializes in changing things quick," says Peter Cappelli, a management professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School. Cerberus apparently believes that there's little to be gained using someone within a struggling industry: "My guess is they looked and said, 'What do we get from having an auto insider?' They said, 'Not much.' "

An automaker depends on its dealers, who demand empathy and careful treatment. "My gut is, a good chance he will do a good job," says Adam Lee, president of Lee Auto Malls in Maine and a Chrysler dealer for 60 years. "I don't think (Cerberus boss John) Snow is going to sit around and watch the guy screw things up and stand for it very long. They have to do drastic things to help Chrysler survive."

The harsh appraisals contrast with the image of Mulally. He was a successful executive at Boeing when Ford Chairman Bill Ford hired him last year.

He's overseen a borrowing package that should give Ford enough cash to get through current hard times, says David Healy, auto analyst at Burnham Securities, and appears to be a leader willing to listen and learn, who motivates and boosts morale.

Mulally even sold cars in two dealerships to make sure he knew the retail end of the business.

Nardelli visited Home Depot stores unannounced to get an unvarnished look. But, he has said in interviews, those visits sometimes were seen negatively, as the boss trying to catch people doing something wrong.

In the six full years he was CEO, Home Depot revenue jumped 70%, to \$90.9 billion in 2006. Profits zipped 93% to \$5.8

