

WHAT DID THE MEGAPHONE TOLD YOU ABOUT ME 2 !

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the proposition that narcissism can be strategically deployed as a "tactic of stability" or a temporary role-playing mechanism to generate short-term Return on Investment (ROI) in organizational settings (Chekki, 2023). We explicitly redefine narcissism as an inherent psychological trait that is fundamentally mutated—not merely amplified—by positional power, giving rise to "official political narcissism." To capture the insidious phenomenon of "mild-to-moderate abusive narcissism," we propose a multi-instrument methodological operationalization designed to bypass the narcissist's inherent blind spots. By distinguishing between productive, disruptive, and malignant narcissism, we confront the empirical realities of workplace trauma, demonstrating that the abuse of power degrades the leader's humanity and precipitates organizational collapse. Finally, addressing the core question of whether narcissistic leaders can engage in self-criticism, we argue that innate self-reflection is structurally impossible for the malignant narcissist; thus, self-criticism must be externalized and enforced through rigorous institutional frameworks.

KEYWORDS: Narcissism, official political narcissism, abusive supervision, self-criticism, organizational tyranny, ROI of narcissism, methodological operationalization.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE MYTH OF THE "PLAYING NARCISSISTIC LEADER"

The contemporary discourse on leadership occasionally romanticizes the narcissistic leader as a visionary capable of driving innovation and high-risk projects (Choi & Phan, 2022; Lassoued & Khanchel, 2022). Some theoretical perspectives even suggest that narcissism can be adopted as a strategic "role-playing" mechanism—a "tactic of stability" or a temporary game played to handle subordinates and maximize short-term ROI (Chekki, 2023). This paper fundamentally challenges this instrumental view. We argue that treating narcissism as a mere tactical mask obscures the profound psychological and structural damage it inflicts. By integrating critical analysis with current methodological debates, we demonstrate that the acquisition of power does not allow a leader to simply "play" narcissism; rather, it structurally traps them in a grandiose belief system (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006) that inevitably degrades both their own humanity and the organizational fabric.

2. THEORETICAL REDEFINITION: FROM INHERENT TRAIT TO OFFICIAL POLITICAL NARCISSISM

To establish a rigorous theoretical foundation, we must first define narcissism as an inherent, continuous psychological trait present in the general population (subclinical narcissism), characterized by grandiosity, a need for admiration, and a deficit in empathy (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

However, when an individual possessing this trait acquires positional power, a critical metamorphosis occurs. We define this transformation as the emergence of "official political narcissism." Power does not merely amplify the trait; it reshapes the leader's behavioral repertoire into an institutionalized ideology. In this state, the organizational structure itself becomes a mirror validating the leader's grandiosity. The leader ceases to be a mere individual with a personality trait and becomes the embodiment of an unchecked authority. As Glad (2002) notes in the context of tyrants, the pursuit of absolute power leads to the crossing of ethical boundaries and the adoption of Machiavellian tactics—manipulativeness and a lack of morality (Kishimoto & Kohsaka, 2023). Therefore, the idea that a leader can consciously "play" narcissism and then retreat from it is a fallacy; the structural incentives of power permanently alter their cognitive and behavioral pathways.

3. METHODOLOGICAL OPERATIONALIZATION: BYPASSING THE NARCISSIST'S BLIND SPOT

A major methodological debate in organizational psychology centers on the measurement of narcissism. Relying on self-reported metrics is epistemologically flawed when studying leaders, due to social desirability bias and the narcissist's inherent lack of self-awareness. According to the "tolerance narcissistic theory" (Hart & Adams, 2014), narcissists are virtually invisible to their own flaws and tend to surround themselves with similar traits, creating an echo chamber.

To accurately capture "mild-to-moderate abusive narcissism" before it escalates into absolute tyranny, researchers must operationalize the construct using a triangulated, multi-source battery of validated instruments:

Abusive Supervision Scale (Tepper, 2000): The gold standard for measuring subordinates' perceptions of sustained hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors. This shifts the measurement from the leader's intent to the subordinate's lived reality.

Unified Narcissism Scale (UNS) (Clifton et al., 2021) or NPI-16 (Ames et al., 2006): Used in peer- or subordinate-reported formats, these isolate the subclinical, grandiose traits (e.g., entitlement, exploitativeness) operating within the non-clinical workplace.

Petty Tyranny Questionnaire (Ashforth, 1994): Captures the "everyday" abusive behaviors—arbitrariness, self-aggrandizement, and lack of consideration. This is crucial for identifying the "disruptive" phase where the leader prioritizes ego over organizational goals.

Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS) (Andersson & Pearson, 1999): Measures low-intensity, ambiguous deviant behaviors (rudeness, condescension). These "mild/mezzo" abuses are often rationalized by the narcissistic leader as "high standards" or "demanding management," making them highly insidious.

By combining these tools, we move beyond the leader's subjective "grandiose belief system" to measure the objective, relational damage inflicted on the organizational unit.

4. TYPOLOGY AND THE MIRAGE OF THE "ROI OF NARCISSISM"

Proponents of the "tactic of stability" often point to the ROI of narcissism, citing examples of leaders who drive sales growth (Bachrach et al., 2022) or innovate (Choi & Phan, 2022). To contextualize this, we must distinguish between three typologies:

Healthy/Productive Narcissism (The "Communal" or "Admirative" Mask): Leaders who channel grandiosity into visionary risk-taking. While Balcerowska and Sawicki (2022) note that "admirative" narcissism can be used to project a heroic image, this phase is highly fragile and dependent on continuous external validation.

Disruptive Organizational Narcissism: The leader begins to exploit subordinates to maintain their self-image. The ROI may remain temporarily high due to aggressive tactics, but the underlying organizational trust is eroding via petty tyranny and incivility.

Destructive/Malignant Tyranny: The final stage, where the leader exhibits malignant narcissism (Glad, 2002). The pursuit of absolute power leads to the crossing of all moral boundaries. The leader uses informers, spreads discord, and impoverishes the "parish" (the organization) to secure their position. At this stage, any short-term ROI is entirely obliterated by catastrophic strategic errors and organizational collapse.

5. THE DARK SIDE: DECONSTRUCTING THE "TACTIC OF STABILITY"

The argument that "playing narcissism" is a viable short-term strategy to settle stability must be confronted with the empirical realities of workplace trauma. The abuse of power carries an exorbitant, hidden cost that invalidates the "stability" argument.

First, the degradation of the leader's humanity. Chronic power and malignant narcissism diminish the neural and cognitive capacity for empathy. The leader becomes trapped in a Machiavellian paradigm, viewing all interactions through the lens of manipulation and exploitation (Kishimoto & Kohsaka, 2023). As Plato and Aristotle warned, and as Glad (2002) empirically validates, the tyrant who rules without law and seeks only their own interest ultimately becomes a victim of their own paranoia and vulnerability. The leader loses the capacity for self-criticism, rendering them incapable of course correction.

Second, the infliction of severe psychological and operational destruction on subordinates. The "tactic of stability" is, in reality, a tactic of organizational entropy. Abusive supervision and workplace incivility (Tepper, 2000; Andersson & Pearson, 1999) induce severe psychological distress, burnout, and cognitive depletion among subordinates. The resulting turnover and loss of intellectual capital far outweigh any temporary gains in sales or brand loyalty. The "stability" achieved is merely the silence of a traumatized workforce, which inevitably precipitates long-term organizational failure.

6. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF INNATE SELF-CRITICISM AND THE NEED FOR INSTITUTIONALIZED FRAMEWORKS

Chekki (2023) poses a critical question: Is there a possibility that narcissistic leaders could somehow go through self-criticism? Drawing on the literature regarding Personal Negative Signs (PNS) and autonomy support (Powers et al., 2023), we must answer this with a nuanced but firm conclusion: Intrinsically, no; therefore, self-criticism must be extrinsically and institutionally enforced.

Because the narcissistic trait is defined by an intolerance to criticism and a defense mechanism that protects the ego at all costs (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1995), expecting a narcissistic leader to voluntarily engage in deep self-criticism is a strategic error. If a leader realizes they are "crossing boundaries," their grandiose belief system will likely rationalize the transgression rather than correct it.

Consequently, organizations cannot rely on the leader's innate self-reflection. Instead, they must implement a concrete, structural framework to mitigate the abusive end of the spectrum:

Institutionalized Self-Criticism (Forced Reflection): Since innate self-criticism is blocked, organizations must mandate externalized self-criticism. This involves mandatory, anonymous 360-degree feedback loops where subordinates evaluate the leader's behavior using the aforementioned scales (Tepper, Ashforth, WIS). The data must be reviewed by an independent board, removing the leader's ability to filter or ignore the feedback.

Structural Contrepouvoirs (Checks and Balances): To prevent the transition from disruptive narcissism to malignant tyranny, power must be decentralized. Boards must enforce term limits, separate the CEO and Chair roles, and establish robust, protected whistleblowing channels to break the narcissist's echo chamber.

Redefining Organizational ROI: The metrics for leadership success must be fundamentally altered. Financial performance (sales growth) must be weighted against organizational health metrics (employee well-being, psychological safety, ethical climate). Leaders who achieve financial targets through abusive supervision must be penalized, neutralizing the "ROI of narcissism" incentive.

Targeted Humility Coaching: For leaders exhibiting subclinical traits, executive coaching must pivot away from "leadership presence" and focus strictly on cognitive empathy, emotional regulation, and the mitigation of exploitative behaviors. Such target seems hard to pursue, but if the way to is find, this will have a massive balanced ROI.

7. CONCLUSION

The proposition that narcissism can be strategically "played" as a tactic of stability is a dangerous organizational myth. While the inherent psychological trait of narcissism may occasionally align with short-term visionary risk-taking, the acquisition of positional power fundamentally mutates this trait into "official political narcissism." Through a rigorous methodological operationalization combining abusive supervision, petty tyranny, and incivility scales, we can empirically capture the destructive continuum of this phenomenon. The pursuit of absolute power inevitably leads to Machiavellian tyranny, degrading the humanity of the leader and inflicting severe psychological trauma on subordinates. Because the narcissistic structure inherently rejects self-criticism, organizations cannot rely on the leader's internal moral compass. True organizational sustainability requires the externalization of self-criticism through rigorous governance, structural checks and balances, and a fundamental redefinition of leadership success that prioritizes human capital over the illusory ROI of the narcissistic ego.

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