AUTHOR:
Dr Meg Milligan[1]
Dr John Mankelwicz[1]
Dr Hoon Peow See[2]

AFFILIATION:
[1]Troy University, USA
[2]Berjaya University College, Malaysia

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Narcissism as a global barrier to education for sustainable development

Abstract

Narcissism, extreme self-interest, refers to a set of personality characteristics including arrogance, self-centeredness, need for admiration, sense of entitlement, grandiosity, lack of empathy, and interpersonal exploitation, which can range from normal to a diagnosable mental disorder, narcissistic personality disorder. Narcissism, deriving from the Greek myth of Narcissus who fell in love with his reflection in a pool of water which led to his demise, is part of our human nature and is associated with aggressive behaviour, conflict and war, counterproductive work behaviour, "bad" leadership, and weaker environmental ethics. Evidence suggests that individual and collective narcissism is increasing worldwide. Correspondingly, individualism is increasing while collectivism is declining. Furthermore, leadership attracts narcissists with its allure of power and prestige, who then affect their organisations' performance, and those higher in narcissism tend to attain higher leadership levels. These trends are increasingly problematic as our world shifts toward greater interdependence. Add the challenges of narcissism with its corresponding threats to sustainable institutions to the challenges of sustainable development, "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 43), and this identifies an overlooked barrier to education for sustainable development. We developed a testable model to address this barrier. Since the determining factors for institutional sustainability are generated largely by activities of specific teams, departments, and task forces, our framework stresses interactions at the group level in education systems. This model presents seven sets of impacts of a narcissistic leader's actions upon the outcomes for her or his group, generates fourteen propositions, and outlines research strategies.

Keywords: *narcissism, leadership, sustainable development, institutional sustainability*

1. Introduction

The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (1987: 43) defines sustainability as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development" (UNDP,

n.d.). Furthermore, education is one of the key institutions to produce human capital for future needs and sustainability by integrating the principles, values and practices of sustainable development in all aspects of education through teaching and research centres, outreach activities, institutional culture, forming the next-generation professionals, and by implementing sustainable campus practices (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021).

The United Nations General Assembly designated 2005–2014 as the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as the lead agency. The goals were to change education and improve quality of life globally through sustainable development (Tilbury, 2011). Nearly a decade later, there remains a need to identify drivers and barriers to reaching those goals, especially in higher education. This paper addresses narcissism – extreme self-interest – as a barrier to education for sustainable development, describes a testable model, and outlines research strategies.

2. Sustainability and resilience

Sustainability is typically measured by continued high performance in social, economic and environmental dimensions – the "Triple Bottom Line" (TBL) (Savitz, 2006; Žalėnienė, & Pereira, 2021). Performance on the social dimension may be in terms of such factors as public service, student conduct, faculty cohesiveness, and mutual benefit (Lee, 2016). Colleges and universities, whether for profit or not, measure the economic dimension in terms of tuition revenue, grant revenue, cost reduction, new programmes, and so forth. Evaluation of environmental performance is similar to other large service organisations.

Resilience, originally an ecological concept (Holling, 1973), is a fundamental aspect of sustainability. Resilience is not just stability or propensity of the focal system to return to its original state. Rather, resilience is persistence over time in the critical relations among major system components and variables. Resilience enables continued performance of educational departments and teams, in turn contributing to an institution's own performance along the three Triple Bottom Line dimensions. Resilience enables development of professional and subunit level skills needed to provide Higher Education for Sustainable Development (HESD or HEfSD, Franco, *et al*., 2019), which refers to higher education's pivotal role in achieving sustainable development goals. These subunits generate the determinants of performance.

Historical performance and its present snapshot are not the concerns, but rather the organisation's "fitness for the future" (Thompson, 1967). Sustainable development builds this fitness. Stakeholders have different views regarding the adequacy of performance on each dimension and its contribution to that fitness. Also, there is incomplete knowledge of the causal pathways to performance. In Thompson's terms, stakeholders rely largely on social and instrumental measures rather than efficiency metrics. For example, since most universities compete with one another within the same highly quantitative ranking system; this often leads to 'McDonaldization' of education, such as the emphasis on the monetary amount of grants received and short-term results, instead of long-term fundamental research (See, 2008), unscrupulous practices such as instructing colleagues to cite one another to improve ranking (University of Malaya, 2017), or graduating a questionable number of PhDs (Citizen, 2022; Rafidi, 2019). An institution's quality is typically rated by its material capital and measured ability of human inputs, students, faculty, staff, and administrators and, in turn, perceived quality attracts students and job candidates as well as external financial support.

The advent of globalism, the interconnected-world ideology that forms the basis of globalisation, the associated dynamic processes (Steger, 2005), and the 'information society' provoked repeated attempts at wholesale higher education reform, especially towards producing students with strong critical thinking, intercultural competence, emotional intelligence, teamworking, and other soft skills (Aldulaimi, 2018). This shifted the focus from knowledge to competencies, based on active learning, experiential learning, and individualised learning. It also involved decentralisation and less rigid regulation. HESD programmes proliferated. Concurrently, there are interacting global trends towards a consumer, growth-oriented mindset (Sterling, 2008), economic globalisation, diminishing authority of expert opinion, persistent media disinformation, rising consumerism, erosion of collective values, impact of social media, and increased narcissism (exaggerated self-interest). All of these trends impact the provision of HESD. The next section will focus on the last factor, narcissism, with special emphasis on the narcissism of educational leaders.

3. Narcissism and the effectiveness of HESD

'Personality' refers to what someone is like as a person, a general style of thinking, emotions, and behaving, often described with adjectives, such as friendly, intelligent, pessimistic, and irresponsible. 'Narcissism' refers to a set of characteristics describing some individuals' basic personality style as well as to a mental disorder called Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), and includes traits such as arrogance, self-centeredness, need for admiration, a sense of entitlement, interpersonal exploitation, lack of empathy, and grandiosity. People exhibiting grandiosity, a key characteristic, are more likely to be hired and promoted to leadership positions in organisations, including educational institutions (Nevicka & Sedikides, 2021), though research results on their effectiveness is mixed (Dowgwillo *et al.*, 2016; Grijalva *et al.*, 2015).

NPD is a mental disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5-TR* (American Psychiatric Association, 2022), and can manifest with destructive psychopathic features (Milligan, 2019). The term derives from the myth of Narcissus, who fell in love with his reflection in a pool of water, which led to his demise. Narcissism has a genetic basis (Vernon *et al.*, 2008), and is exhibited worldwide (Foster, Campbell & Twenge, 2003), more typically in men (Grijalva *et al.*, 2014). Whether someone is narcissistic or has a narcissistic personality disorder is a matter of degree and severity. NPD is a clinical diagnosis; narcissism is not.

Research suggests increasing narcissism worldwide (Dingfelder, 2011; Santos *et al.*, 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2009), though this is not unequivocal (Chopik & Grimm, 2019), an association with individualism (Durvasula, Lysonski & Watson, 2001), and weakening social networks or "social capital" (Putnam, 2000). As Paris (2020: 53) summarises, "as globalization proceeds, these cross-cultural differences could be attenuated".

4. Concerns about narcissism

There are concerns about narcissism in politics and big business, especially considering the trend towards globalisation, through which decisions by powerful leaders in one location affect economies around the world. If these leaders are narcissistic, the results could be dire, such as the financial crisis and recession in 2008 (Arjoon, 2010; George, 2009). Furthermore, data from many nations indicate increasing individualism, focusing on oneself rather than group

wellbeing, with a corresponding decrease in collectivism (Santos, Varnum & Grossmann, 2017). This is concerning, since narcissism is the primary predictor of counterproductive work behaviour and is moderated by a collectivist culture (Grijalva & Newman, 2014). See Grijalva *et al*. (2015) for a metanalysis of associations between narcissism and leadership, and Van Bevel and Packer (2021) for benefits of the 'collective mind' and a self that is defined in shared terms. Specific to sustainability, Bergman *et al.* (2013) found that narcissism is significantly related to materialism, and materialism is significantly related to lower levels of environmental ethics (concern about effects of our behaviour on the Earth and its health).

Although negative and destructive aspects of narcissism are obvious, such as associations with criminality, including white-collar (Stone, 2009), counterproductive work behaviour (Grijalva & Newman, 2014; Penney & Spector, 2002), aggression and vengeance (Rasmussen, 2016), there appears to be some positive outcomes from narcissism within certain contexts. Narcissists can be productive (Wilhelm *et al.*, 2013), providing successful leadership in settings with effective governance to temper their behaviour (Maccoby, 2007), and there is positive organisational narcissism (Duchon & Drake, 2009; Rousseau & Duchon, 2015). Leadership with its allure of power and prestige attracts narcissists.

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) (Raskin & Hall, 1979; Raskin & Terry, 1988) is the most widely used measure of narcissism, with higher scores reported in the U.S. (more individualistic), compared to Asia and the Middle East (more collectivist) (Foster *et al*., 2003). The NPI provides distinct dimensions for narcissism: exploitative/entitlement, leadership/authority, grandiose/exhibitionism, and self-absorption/self-admiration. "Reactive narcissists" are strongly averse to criticism, are harsh taskmasters who prefer sycophants as subordinates, and tend to launch huge risky projects. This style is associated with especially pathological consequences for organisations, though others can be detrimental as well.

Narcissistic behaviour, especially by leaders, inhibits the development processes of HESD, and hinders the implementation of new programmes. This resistance is at least in part due to distortions related to goal setting, accelerating classic goal-displacement processes (Merton, 1949; Michels, 1911), and moving institutional goals towards unit level goals that are short-term, simply measured, and yield visible outcomes derived from visible behaviours. The results emerge differently in the economic, social and environment facets of HESD. Nevertheless, some dynamics are common, such as over-obsession with ranking, student population size, financial gains; sacrificing longer wellbeing, and subject areas that are important but less popular or employable, such as pure sciences, humanities and philosophy.

The narcissistic leader thinks of performance as a device for self-enhancement and chooses and interprets goals accordingly. This applies to the TBL social, economic, and environmental performance factors. Leaders at all levels tend toward goals that will reflect well on themselves, performance goals relating to their personal benefit. These propensities of narcissists are stronger than those of other managers. They seem to (often unwittingly) shift efforts and resources toward maximisation of goals they feel will yield personal benefit. This pattern of decisions should be evident in the allocation of resources. Oliver Williamson (1964) provides a useful descriptive framework for this in his classic Managerial Utility Function (MUF). The section on economic performance below employs his model. In all of this, it is actual leader narcissism, not narcissism as perceived by followers, that is most concerning here.

5. Process of narcissist conduct

Narcissistic leaders seek *visible* accomplishments as intermediate and symbolic goals along the path. Overall, the goals favoured will be short-term and clearly measurable, such as key performance indicators (KPIs). This in itself is not undesirable; it could even lead to improved short-term performance. Problems arise as attention and efforts are drawn away from important long-term objectives. Sustainability and HESD are by definition long term affairs.

Motivated by power and status, narcissists pass through a continuous process of status seeking (Grapsas *et.al*., 2020), described in their four-stage SPIN model of narcissistic conduct. First, in 'situation seeking', narcissists gravitate towards situations that provide opportunities for status growth. Usually these are hierarchical and publicly competitive, allowing them to both display real ability and practice impression management. In the second 'surveillance' stage, they attend to cues that indicate actual status increase from their behaviours. Since status-seeking behaviours by others may impede their own efforts, they also carefully observe others' behaviours. Together these cues can trigger the third 'appraisal' stage in which the narcissist determines whether self-promotion will truly increase status. Those authors believe that most narcissists' sense of grandiose self-importance is so high that the default judgement will be affirmative. In the last 'response execution' stage, narcissists will ordinarily act in very self-promoting ways. However, if they judge that self-promotion will not work, they begin 'other-derogating' comments and behaviours in attempt to at least improve relative status. Completion of the cycle, of course, results in a new situation, and the process may begin anew.

These issues are characteristic at all levels of management. Narcissistic leaders of teams or work units wish to survive and to advance. Although they may demand esteem from their own subordinates, narcissistic unit leaders seek first to ingratiate themselves to their superiors and to the top management. They verbally invoke top management goals and seek to be visibly supporting them, yet implementing those goals in ways that foster self-image. In Williamson's (1964) classic terms, this means increasing economic slack, maximising opportunities for new investment projects, and jockeying for salary. The result is distortion and goal displacement, regardless of the realism of their own goals. The next sections review how this occurs in each area of performance related to sustainability.

6. Impacts of narcissistic leadership in higher education

For higher education institutions to fulfil their role to promote sustainability, a strong organisational culture emphasising sustainability values and behaviour is critical (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021). The presence of narcissistic leadership in higher education may be a strong barrier to developing sustainability values and behaviours and lead to some of the following social, economic, and environmental impacts:

6.1 Social impacts

Social processes are the core of education. While economic performance provides resources needed to facilitate overall social performance, personal interactions generate the processes of HESD, and goal displacement through narcissism begins and is evident. Narcissistic leadership injures the morale and cohesion of work units, then their group performance, and ultimately institutional performance. It is associated with counterproductive work behaviour (Meurs *et a*l., 2013), generally 'bad' leadership (Higgs, 2009), and risker decisions (Maccoby, 2007).

Narcissistic team leaders do not provide the best feedback to their superiors. Thus, they are not truly 'good followers' (Kelley, 1988), since they are reluctant to directly submit contrary ideas. When their own followers sense their efforts at impression management, they become less responsive (Liao *et. al*., 2019) and the quality of leader-member exchange (LMX) in the unit declines. Individual followers may also be narcissistic. Employee narcissism is associated with lower organisational citizenship behaviour (Yildiz & Oncer, 2012).

"The unexamined life is not worth living", a quote attributed to Socrates, has many implications for education. Our discussion posits that the core driver of effective HESD consists of resilient, thoughtful and reasonably virtuous people. Aristotle asserted that only a virtuous individual could have stable relationships or lead consistently beneficial teams. To him, relations among the non-virtuous were inevitably shifting, faithless alliances. Virtues develop through practice, and some virtues are fairly ubiquitous. The most sweeping intercultural study of virtue is the Values in Action (VIA) project, reviewed in Peterson and Seligman (2004). Based both on a philosophical study of many traditions and statistical analysis, the study derived 24 separate 'character strengths', clustered under six universal virtues recognised by all major cultures: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence of self. The expectation is that all are instrumental for sustaining functional education teams. In terms of VIA virtues, narcissism is a lack of both the universal virtue humanity and the character strength humility, a component of temperance.

Narcissistic leaders are unlikely to implement curriculums or practices that address future needs, such as ongoing humanitarian concerns or unexpected ecological crises, for example, Covid-19 (Kim *et al.*, 2021), which may cause an immediate set back in achieving their KPIs (Ryan *et al.,* 2010: 112). The Chinese often say that the earlier generation plants trees, so that the later generations can enjoy the shade. It will be hard for self-seeking narcissistic leaders to be the planter, as they often seek immediate glory rather than praises they may not live to enjoy.

The quality of an institution is typically assessed *a priori* by the quality of inputs, based on admission test scores, faculty credentials, or facilities. However, "it is also their social responsibility to help students and broader community acquire competences for sustainable development" (Franco, 2019: 1622). Those social responsibilities are often neglected by narcissistic leaders, as fulfilling them, such as admitting students from disadvantaged backgrounds often means 'lowering standards'.

6.2 Economic impacts

The economic or market aspects of education are tricky. HESD is almost by definition long-term oriented. However, the fundamental definitions of learning and education are not universally agreed; hence, the production function of education is uncertain. Also, most educational institutions remain not for profit. There can be disagreement even on the proper units of productive output – credit hours, course matriculation, degrees granted, and there are many short-run performance measures including tuition revenue, total enrolment or enrolment in particular programmes, grants, new programmes, capital acquisitions, and alumni salary or achievement. With no universal clarity on such matters, the quality of a university is typically assessed *a priori* by the quality of inputs, based on admission test scores, faculty credentials, and facilities. Thus, the institution's long-term expected performance, or "fitness for the future" (Thompson, 1969), would be judged on inputs.

In economic terms, educational institutions deliver their products in imperfectly competitive markets. Also, for-profit institutions have a minimum profit constraint from the owners, while other public and private institutions must seek acceptable rates of return on projects. Nevertheless, ownership of the institutions, public or private, is separated from its management. In these terms, educational institutions closely approximate the assumptions of Williamson's (1964) MUF, which derives from the idea that as ownership and management are separate, an agency problem arises. Managers do not maximise profit but rather their own utility, which may be based on such factors as revenue, market share, salary, perquisites, status and prestige, social service, and certainty of outcomes.

After extensive regression analyses, Williamson (1964) simplified the function. Its implicit form is U = f (S, M, D), where U represents the utility function, S is staff expenditure, M is management slack (largely nonmonetary, hence untaxable), and D is discretionary investment. An increase in any of the three components will increase the manager's personal utility, or benefit. As conceived, this function can be applied in analysis at the organisational or work unit level.

Relating the above to the known propensities of narcissistic managers, it is intuitive that the role of HESD in fostering economic performance may be vulnerable to goal displacement effects from narcissistic educational leaders. Due to extreme self-focus, these leaders would be prone to drift from the official performance goals toward goals related to maximising their own utility. This drift would increase each component of Williamson's U.

Consider staff expenditure. The unit staff budget, number of staff, and highly paid professional staff are determinants of performance and symbols of accomplishment, status, and power for the leader. Wisely directed, staff expenditures may indeed increase all of these for a leader, while still nursing a narcissist's grandiosity and need for attention. Narcissists' sense of entitlement suggests that they would favour higher staff costs, and especially higher salaries for themselves, and would seek to increase economic slack, from which perquisites (largely non-taxable) can be absorbed as cost. Again, narcissistic managers make riskier decisions (Maccoby, 2007; Foster *et. al*., 2011) and often unrealistic ones, that may entail the aggressive addition of new programmes initially started from increased discretionary investment funds. Thus, narcissistic leadership can be costly in many ways, including bureaucratic accretion (Coccia, 2009).

6.3 Environmental impacts

Narcissism is associated with weaker environmental ethics through its association with materialism (Bergman *et al*., 2013). Narcissistic self-focus can mean too little empathy for others, minimising or ignoring the costs to others in the process of benefiting oneself, and risk-taking, grandiose and exhibitionist status seeking. Even without conviction, they may gravitate towards positions and projects that are socially acceptable in order to enhance their images. Environmental innovations are very socially desirable in many quarters and may even attract narcissists. The factors counterbalance, so that it is not certain what the short-run impact of narcissistic leader behaviours will be for environmental performance. Over time, however, there is declining enthusiasm as followers realise the leader's motives (Liao *et al*., 2019). The expectation is that narcissistic leadership diminishes the long-run effectiveness of HESD to promote environmental performance.

While it is encouraging to see many universities, especially in Asia-Pacific, are embarking on the 'green campus', often these are achieved through extensive and expensive renovations; while lacking in actual curriculum and pedagogic reforms (Ryan*, et al*., 2010; Franco *et al*., 2019). One may wonder if such efforts are truly for the environment or narcissistic self-seeking efforts, such as to win awards. Žalėnienė and Pereira (2021) point out that high effectiveness in teaching sustainability issues depends on making sustainability principles core to the course.

The increase in risky projects has been greater at for-profit schools and colleges; their status allows, even encourages, that they utilise loans and the capital markets more frequently. Results have often been unfortunate (Lynch, Engle & Cruz, 2010); risky projects frequently involved advertising-driven open enrolment policies to gain revenue, which also result in massive accumulation of student debt. In addition, administrators do not always provide concomitant oversight or integration. Overreliance on part-time faculty partly facilitates cost containment, but aggravated underlying problems. While the immediate economic penalties fall to the defaulting students, the colleges' reputations suffer, with attendant enrolment declines. Some of the institutions also face serious U.S. federal legal actions for fraud. Some colleges closed or underwent corporate reorganisation and ownership change. Educational administrators at the University of Phoenix, for example, once the largest for-profit educational institution in the world, has faced all of these issues as a result of its rapid expansion and decline (Lynch *et al.*, 2010; Newton, 2019).

7. Model and propositions

Specific teams, departments and task forces generate the determining factors for the success of HESD programmes. The leaders' skills and behaviours impact the motivation and performance of each member, and ultimately of the entire work group. It is the actual behaviour of the leaders, not their narcissism *per se*, that is the influencer. Narcissistic leader behaviours may have mixed effects in the short run, but in the long run they are counterproductive. Several factors drive this result. Perhaps the most significant development is that group members start recognising the leader's narcissism. There is diminished voice (Liao *et al.*, 2019) on the part of the members, and hence less feedback to encourage the narcissist to change behaviour.

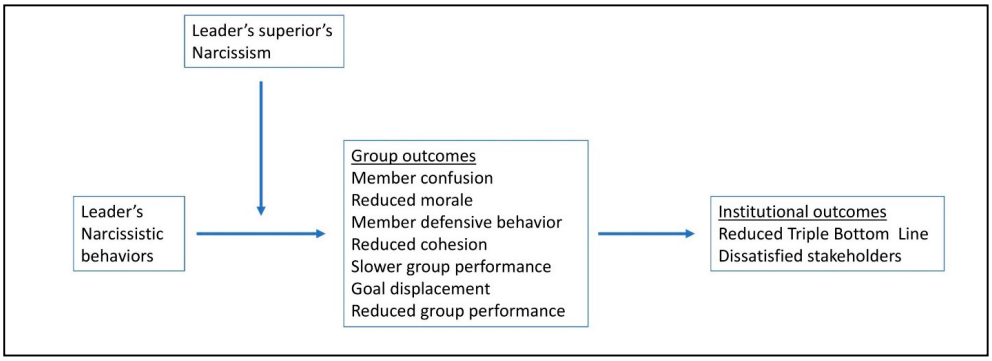

Figure 1: Narcissism of superior magnifies the negative effects of a leader's narcissistic behaviours

Successful HESD programmes are long-term efforts, resilient and sustainable. The grandiosity and need for reinforcement to their self-image makes narcissists impatient for results. This can lead both the group leaders and their superiors to make premature adjustments. At the same time, their willingness to take risky decisions sometimes ironically results in needless costs and delays as a consequence of those adjustments.

In modern economies of highly interdependent producers, sustainable development usually involves consistently satisfying key stakeholders. HESD programmes are strategic, meaning success depends on adequate implementation, as well as on what stakeholders do. Educational institutions have diverse stakeholder sets and typically find cooperative endeavours the most effective for HESD. However, narcissistic grandiosity and a sense of entitlement may work against cooperation and the sharing of resources, even if this provides the greatest long-term rewards. It may be especially true if the cooperative arrangement involves significant commitment from the stock of discretionary investment (with some loss of leader control) to gain results over time. Hence, narcissistic leaders may bypass many opportunities, instead leading go-it-alone efforts of their institutions. Drawing from the literature of HESD, narcissism, and applicable leadership theory, this section will present a model and propositions relating to these long-run impacts of narcissism.

8. Applicable leadership theory

In addition to the corpus of work on narcissism and managerial utility, recent contingency-based theories of leadership allow considerable insight by focusing on the interactions of leaders and followers within situational contexts. Our discussion draws from three well-established areas: *Path-Goal Theory* (PGT) (Evans, 1970; House, 1971; House, Sahane & Herold, 1996), *Followership* (Follett, 1949; Kelley, 1988; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2015), and *Leader-Member Exchange* (LMX) (Dansereau, 1995). Each of these models implies a two-way influence between leader and follower.

Path-Goal Theory derives from Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory, asserting that people act consistently with their expectations of outcomes (rewards) and the perceived attractiveness of those rewards. Followers are motivated if they strongly hold three beliefs: they are capable of doing the work (*Expectancy*); their efforts will actually result in reward (*Instrumentality*); and the rewards are valuable (*Valence).* Leaders seek to strengthen these beliefs, and by this motivate followers to accomplish designated goals. They clarify both the goal and the paths to it, and remove obstacles or roadblocks by providing information and needed resources. Leaders may also strive to make the work itself more intrinsically satisfying (intrinsic rewards), possibly tapping into organisational slack or the excitement of discretionary projects. They can also strive to increase the number, kinds and amounts of payoffs (extrinsic rewards) to the followers.

Although it has roots in Follett's (1949) work, *Followership* gained impetus through the work of Kelley (1988), but has matured only recently as a field of study (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2015). This theory stresses two-way influence: effective leaders must have effective followers, and highly effective followers often emerge as excellent leaders. Ideally, good followers become the "mature partners" of LMX theory (Dansereau, 2014). Determinants of follower influence include education, experience, locus of control and power. With its potential for role conflict and ambiguity, the role of "good follower" can become very difficult. They must offer continuing support and show appreciation for the leader, seeking honest feedback and

clarifying their roles and expectations, while taking initiative, keeping the leader informed and playing counselling and coaching roles to the leader when appropriate. A good follower is not a 'yes man', but must raise concerns when necessary and resist inappropriate influence of the leader.

Leader-Member Exchange views leadership as a process and emphasises the interactions and relationships between leaders and followers. The dyadic relation of the leader with each follower is the basic unit. Dyadic leader-follower relationships proceed through 'leadership-making' stages of stranger, acquaintance and mature partner, or true in-group (Uhl-Bien *et. al*., 2014). Hierarchy, rules, and organisational culture largely govern relationships at the stranger phase; influence is one way from the leader. Beyond the stranger stage, there is two-way selection: leaders seek followers with enthusiasm, participation, gregariousness, and extraversion, while followers seek leaders who are pleasant, trusting, agreeable, and cooperative. A milieu of culture, formal hierarchy, and existing relationships among the members themselves forms context for processes of LMX, which is applicable to all levels of analysis: group, organisation, larger networks, or nations.

A leader's referent power – reputation, charisma, and general attractiveness – draws followers to seek entrance to the in-group. Reward power may have a similar effect. By getting along well with the leader and negotiating expanded responsibilities, followers gain entrance to the leader's 'in-group', admission to which is the leader's choice. Over the course of contact episodes (Grapsus *et. al*., 2020), narcissistic leaders would choose an in-group that is both personally supportive and likely to enhance the leader's status. At educational institutions, this would often involve a group member's specific abilities related to funding or regarding implementing new discretionary projects. Working longer and harder, in-group members become involved beyond the job description, but also receive more attention, information, raises, promotions, opportunities, trust and influence, thereby, having some access to the benefit components (salary, perquisites and discretionary investment) of the MUF. Within the in-group, charismatic leadership might even be termed transformational for a time. By contrast, out-group members are less involved overall, receiving only standard benefits and opportunities of the employment contract and their hierarchical position; leadership here is thus transactional.

9. Influence of the leader's superior

Not only the leader, but also the leader's superior would influence the group's outcomes. However, in most cases the dean or other responsible education executive would not interact directly with group members in the course of normal work. Most of the superior's behaviours would likely be diffuse and long-term, invisible to most individual group members. In many cases the most significant behaviours would be recommendations or authorisations regarding new projects, and sometimes for salary or perquisites. For these reasons, a senior academic's influence on the group leader would come in their propensities regarding decisions. Intuitively, a narcissistic superior would aggravate ego-defensive or overcompensating propensities of the group leader. Thus, the narcissistic influence of the senior leaders is best understood as a moderator, strengthening the effects of the group leader's narcissistic behaviours. Both leaders would provide undesirable role models. Also, the superior might be above several other leaders, thus influencing the overall culture of the institution.

In terms of the MUF, the leader seeks from their superior access to greater discretionary investment, which now serves multiple functions. Allocation of sufficient discretionary investment can be a determinant of project success and recognition to the leader. This may also have symbolic value, signalling to group members the rising status of the leader. Actual project success may also be a positive signal to still higher management. The leader's in-group would also have some access to the benefits of discretionary investment.

10. Propositions

The proposed model in Figure 1 stresses interactions at the group level: academic departments, teams of faculty or staff, or possibly even student classes, and includes seven sets of impacts of a narcissistic unit leader's actions upon the group. Here the output of each group affects HESD, while the overall Triple Bottom Line of sustainability for the institution is some composite of the functional group performance. Some of the impacts discussed are not by themselves reductions in HESD effectiveness, but reductions in productive determinants of HESD. Presentation is in the expected order that impacts will occur, but these may develop at differing rates and severity within different institutions or cultures. Each linkage represents a proposition for research on behaviour and group outcomes. Also included is the influence of the leader's own supervisor. The superior's influence is posited to be interactive with that of the group leader, thus magnifying the deleterious long-term effects. Thus, there are fourteen propositions.

Leaders serve as role models, living examples for followers. Erratic behaviour of any kind blurs the example portrayed by the leader. Narcissistic impatience by senior leadership pressures the group leader. That leader's own impatience may manifest in erratic communications that blur the goal or the path(s) toward it, weakening Expectancy beliefs and possibly instrumentality beliefs. Narcissistic leaders focus on their own advancement, which impedes clarification of the path to group goals.

Hence, the hypotheses/propositions:

P1: Narcissistic behaviours by the leader over time confuse followers in the group.

P2: The superior's narcissism strengthens the leader behaviour to confusion linkage.

Confusion in the very short run might provoke new creativity and problem solving, but continued confusion would work against path clarification and weaken all three expectancy beliefs. Thus, there would be a weakening of motivation and morale. New followers would be less likely to seek in-group status, and the very value of this status would decline; hence,

P3: Narcissistic behaviours by the leader negatively impact group morale.

P4: The superior's narcissism strengthens the leader behaviour to morale linkage.

Confusion can lead to declining group morale; trust in the leader and the overall situation declines. Members come to realise the leader's narcissism. Followers' motivation falls, especially because they do not believe proper rewards will actually come. Group members, especially the in-group's, desire for favourability may result in unproductive rivalries. There may be jockeying for position, and competition for the opportunities afforded from the MUF. Group members become defensive towards the leader and possibly one another.

P5: Narcissistic behaviours by the leader provoke defensive behaviours by followers in the group.

P6: The superior's narcissism strengthens the leader behaviour to defensiveness linkage.

As these things progress there will be less cooperation and trust, open sharing of information, and mutual support. Overall, there is less member initiative, innovation, and reduced quality of HESD activities. In particular, Instrumentality beliefs suffer. Members may come to view some others as roadblocks to their own paths to performance. Defensiveness results in a less cohesive team. Much of this may be visible to those outside the group, and that does not enhance the leader's image or self-image. In that circumstance the expectation is for the narcissist leader to turn to other-derogating behaviour, which only strengthens elements of a vicious cycle.

P7: Narcissistic behaviours by the leader result in reduced group cohesion.

P8: The superior's narcissism strengthens the leader behaviour to cohesion linkage.

With declining trust and sharing, there is less spontaneity and innovativeness. The pace of accomplishment slows. Narcissistic leader behaviour will not only delay follower achievement, but further frustrate the followers, hurting motivation and group morale still more over time. Delays also mean the immediate situation and perhaps the paths themselves may change. This, of course, further weakens all three expectancy beliefs, inhibiting both the personal development of the follower and the follower's contribution to the two-way influence (i.e. good followership).

P9: Narcissistic behaviours by the leader result in slower group performance.

P10: The superior's narcissism strengthens the leader behaviour to performance rate linkage.

The leader's increase and appropriation factors in MUF thus has myriad impacts. These factors combine to displace the official goals. Members focus primarily on self-protection and leader approval; not the stated goals of the HESD effort.

P11: Narcissistic behaviours by the leader promote goal displacement by the group.

P12: The superior's narcissism strengthens the leader behaviour to goal displacement linkage.

Many reasons suggest declines in quantitative rates of output, in total throughput, and in the general quality of group performance. Due to narcissistic actions by the leader, some may stop practising good followership. New members may never develop good followership at all. Even the in-group will not develop as an effective core, as able members fail to identify with the leader. Thus, for many reasons,

P13: Narcissistic behaviours by the leader result in reduced group performance.

P14: The superior's narcissism strengthens the leader behaviour to performance linkage.

There are many likely specific narcissistic behaviours by a leader, and different possible operational variables to represent the group impacts. Hence, empirical testing might involve a

larger set of specific hypotheses. The core relationships would hold in a scalable fashion. In a large educational institution, with several divisions, the superior would be under one or more levels of higher management. Sustainability for such a large organisation would indeed be a complicated function of the division performances.

11. Discussion

Narcissistic leadership is expected to have deleterious impacts on group performance over time, with some of them appearing earlier. Appealing to the literature on narcissism and a stratum of institutional economics, the authors' framework yields descriptive propositions to elucidate the impacts more specifically. Narcissists, driven by status seeking, select environments with apparent potential in this regard. They relentlessly scan for cues on such opportunities and clues on means to realise them. With narcissistic entitlement, they utilise the school's resource base to increase their personal status and benefit materially and symbolically.

This paper extends existing theory on narcissistic leadership by relating it to specific models of decision-making and by including the effect of the narcissistic leader's superiors. Narcissistic behaviours follow an episodic pattern in which the narcissist attends to cues that allow possible increases in their status (Grapsas *et. al*., 2020). In the MUF framework, managers are generally self-serving, maximising personal benefit and utility rather than true organisation goals. Entitlement-prone, narcissistic leaders will continually seek to increase their status and personal benefit, tapping the organisational resources defined in Williamson's MUF. Joint application of these models provides a practical, operational framework in which to view specific narcissistic leaders' behaviour and suggest possible governance practices to ameliorate the worst effects.

Future research on HESD begins with testing the hypotheses individually, and then the full model. Moderate sample sizes and standard statistical methods should be sufficient. Longitudinal research is ideal. Comparing contexts – firms in different industries, government agencies, non-profit organisations, public and private colleges – could establish external validity.

Personality factors are consistently instructive moderating variables (House, Sahane, & Herold, 1996). However, the interactions of a narcissistic leader and superior may be more complex than presented here, and dependent on institutional context. Some questions are clear even at this juncture. First, do the interactions always produce a positive moderating effect, making the narcissistic leader's behaviour more deleterious. Could a highly narcissistic superior so intimidate a narcissist that, at least temporarily, behaviour changes, perhaps reflected in more restrained use of discretionary investment, avoiding the temptation of risky commitments? Could a superior very low in narcissism act in a way that partially ameliorates the worst effects of leader behaviour, perhaps by virtuously exemplifying restraint on perquisites as well as discouraging uncertain ventures? Such possible patterns would change the sign and/or the form of the appropriate expected interaction term (Podsakoff *et. al*.,1995) in testing hypotheses involving the superior. However, some insights to guide later research might come through simple initial case studies.

Ideally, strongly narcissistic managers would never reach positions of high authority and power, in which their risk prone decisions can affect the institution and its members adversely. But they do! Our framework does not deal with the *a priori* issues of leader selection, but does

evoke clues toward ameliorating the worst effects at the group level. The driver is the episodic appearance of status enhancement opportunities, seized largely though appropriation of the institution's resources, then appropriated into the utility function. Governance procedures can then focus on these resource-based factors and on overt behaviours.

The most serious abuses by narcissistic group leaders will not be in overclaiming perquisites through appropriating slack resources. Similarly, salary procedures in universities will impede overreaching at most hierarchical levels. Rather, the main issues will be through risky resource commitments as well as other-derogating behaviours towards followers and peers. In the long run there would be clear displacement of HESD goals. The first emphasis must then be on transparency, particularly on use of resources that are considered discretionary.

Since the group leader's preferences will always remain at least partly unobservable at each episode, it will never be perfectly clear just what narcissists perceive as cues as they scan situations. Accordingly, the status-seeking process will continue through the early stages. To stop it might even impact the group leader's motivation counterproductively. The task of governance is to specify early what activities are permissible and desirable, and to monitor the situation carefully. Since oversight will come first through the superior, the superior also must face the same scrutiny. Thus, much of the correction must start and continue with exemplary leadership from the top.

12. Conclusion

"Every sustainability problem is first a social problem and therefore a psychological problem" (Chandler, 2020: 309). We linked a social motive, status seeking, with associated behaviour of narcissistic educational group leaders. Relating these behaviours in turn to institutional resource bases and the proclivities of leaders for self-interest deepens understanding of the impacts and paths by which impacts occur. This framework also considers the moderating effects of a superior's narcissism on the narcissistic group leader, and outlines propositions on specific impacts. Sometimes the process may be unstoppable, but there are areas for corrective intervention by the institution's governance. "Integrating strategies and improving leadership is critical to the longevity of sustainability initiatives" (Ryan *et al*., 2010: 115); thus, identifying the narcissistic leadership which may inhibit such HESD is of paramount importance.

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