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Research Article

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## SURVIVING THE NARCISSIST'S PSYCHOLOGICAL GAME: DISARMING THE TOXIC WORKPLACE COWORKERS

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### ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of human race, narcissistic individuals are known to be dysfunctional, troubling, and morale-crushing. This objective of this study is to analyze the organizational behavior of narcissistic individuals and how workers in business organizations can use strategies to disarm their destructive behaviors/schemes to ensure wellbeing and productivity. The study is important because narcissistic coworkers are filled with envy and grandiosity or self-admiration; they can cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts in coworkers. These psychologically unstable individuals can hold different positions in business organizations and play their emotionally manipulative games to destroy talented coworkers. Their negative and controlling tactics go beyond socially accepted behaviors which demoralize employees and wreak havoc on their job satisfaction. The study uses qualitative data from secondary sources of literature to derive useful themes. The findings suggest that narcissists end up being ineffective managers, controlling leaders, and toxic coworkers. The study concludes that narcissism is difficult to treat; however, using the smart strategies and recommendations such as ignoring them, referring to a good psychologist, showing empathy, and blowing the whistle with good communication can help employees improve their confidence and emotional wellbeing to disarm the toxic attacks of narcissistic bosses and coworkers.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Narcissistic behavior has been considered toxic and anti-growth by several researchers in the recent decades (Johnson, 2017). Toxic behaviors at workplaces are often associated with troubling results and relationship problems between coworkers. Narcissistic bosses and co-workers can significantly damage the productivity and performance of other employees due to a negative psychological mindset. A study published by the SHRM states that "narcissistic individuals prevent good things from happening" (O'Connell & O'Connell, 2022). Julie Hall, the

narcissistic trauma recovery expert and the author of “The Narcissist in your life: Recognizing the patterns and learning to break free” claims that narcissists are pathological liars; they distort and deny reality and try to mould it for their benefit. The author states that narcissistic individuals use pathological distortion from early childhood including dismissal, negation, reversal, or false justification (Godkin, L., &Allcorn, (2009). Many studies were done on the psychological traits of narcissists and abusive individuals prove that these people have twisted thoughts and crave attention at any cost; not being able to seek relentless praise raises their incivility and engages them in abusive, violent, criminal, and toxic behaviors (Meier &Semmer, 2013).

Since not hiring a narcissist at all would certainly not guarantee sunshine and roses, this study provides actionable strategies to help save employees from “alien-like” self-obsessed narcissistic individuals fostering a toxic workplace culture. Sadly, insignificant research has been conducted in the past few decades to deeply analyze the harmful personality characteristics of narcissists; some studies reveal that these empathy-impaired people do change over time and with age, however, dealing with potentially dangerous narcissistic managers and coworkers is often a confusing, mind-boggling, and uphill battle one needs to win in order to thrive in their careers. Narcissism is positively associated with the study recommends strategies using secondary sources’ analysis to set boundaries with the narcissist and get psychological help to regain sanity after workplace abuse.

Many psychologists and mental health professionals believe that narcissistic traits often dwell and develop from childhood trauma or corrupted relationships with family members. These traits may also be a result of neurobiology and genetics. A narcissistic brain is wired for vengeance, revolt, and aggression, therefore, this obnoxious behavior impacts everybody in their family, workplace, and business settings. Regardless of their origin, narcissistic individuals are manipulative, abusive, attacking, violent, and mentally unstable and possess an inflated sense of self (Kernberg, 1989).

### ***Research Objectives***

The following research objectives help to understand the goals of this study.

- To understand the poisonous nature of narcissistic coworkers and how their toxic personality traits negatively impact the wellbeing of employees/organizations.
- To analyze how narcissistic abuse emotionally impact coworkers and reduce loyalty, happiness, teamwork, and productivity?
- To learn and implement strategies to help coworkers to reduce the influence of narcissistic abuse to improve retention rates.

## **2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The current research aims to answer the following research questions:

- Why narcissists are poisonous individuals and how their personality traits adversely impact the wellbeing of employees/business organizations?
- How narcissistic abuse emotionally impact coworkers and reduce loyalty, happiness, teamwork, and productivity?
- What strategies/tactics managers, leaders, and coworkers can learn and implement to help coworkers reduce the influence of narcissistic abuse to improve retention rates.

## **3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this second study is to empower and strengthen business owners, managers, supervisors, leaders, and professionals (in both private and public organizations & NGOs) with the vital knowledge of “narcissistic personality disorder” and how narcissists in any organization can willfully prevent growth and teamwork from happening by using their psychological mind games. The ill-tempered and unstable, yet highly intelligent and social narcissists are difficult to identify and comprehend. Human Resource Leaders need workable strategies and strong policies and knowledge to curb the toxicity spread by narcissists and enrich the workplace culture by using these strategies. This study is of interest to everyone from corporate heads to researchers to academicians; the study also suggests further expiration of countering narcissistic abuse and mind game at

workplaces to reduce turnover intentions and mental illnesses in victims.

## 4. METHODS USED

Technology has made possible to access vast data regarding subjects such as organizational behavior, organizational psychology, narcissism, workplace culture, and employees' wellbeing (Vartanian, 2010). Utilizing the currently available secondary data online is a more prevalent and effective approach used in this research to rely on secondary data analysis which is analyzed flexible and hassle-free. The secondary data collection helps to find immensely useful knowledge and information regarding the issue of narcissism at workplaces and helps to conduct viable discussions by following a credible and proven method. Researchers define secondary data analysis as a systematic method that that helps researchers to conveniently gather robust data and helps them develop research questions to help managers enact leadership roles to mitigate narcissism (Johnson, 2017).

## 5. THEMES

### *Narcissism in Psychological Perspective*

In the United States, narcissistic personality disorder exists in less than 6% of the population (less than in many developing countries). Narcissistic behaviors are often controlling and manipulating driven by an inflated sense of envy, harm, and misuse. The self-centered behavior of narcissists becomes dangerous in workplaces because such individuals lack empathy or any positive concern for other employees or subordinates. Narcissists only aim to worship and go after their own desires and typically target individuals or subordinates most vulnerable to feed their narcissistic appetite. Overblown by their self-importance and egoistic mindset, narcissist bosses often take extreme measures to boost their recognition, fame, and legacy (Weiss & Miller, 2018). Emotional abuse of a narcissistic partner or a boss can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological and mental well-being issues. Since narcissistic partners and bosses seek targets they can easily control and use, they often live in their own utopia by seeing people as tools of their pleasure and superiority.

Moreover, using a Narcissistic Grandiosity Scale, psychologist's measure narcissistic personality traits and characteristics that help to identify their extreme personality traits. For example, there are nine extreme characteristics/traits of narcissistic individuals that highlight their underplaying mental condition and explain their bizarre behavior. For example, Psychology Today author Nuala Walsh characterizes the following extreme traits of narcissistic individuals ("How to Spot and Survive a Narcissistic Boss", 2022):

- Oxygen Sucker: Barely considers anyone else's opinions or needs as important.
- Grandiosity obsessed: Display extravagant boasting to show self-love.
- Glory Hunters: Reject others' suggestions and advice; focus on a higher locus of control instead of teamwork.
- Self-charmer: Mostly prone to arrogance but appear to be charming, intellectual, and social.
- Limelight Hogger: Craves employees' obedience and needs constant buttering or admiration.
- Blame Game Master: Never accepts responsibility for failure and loves to blame others for mistakes.
- Empathy-impaired: No regard for others' feelings, hardships, and problems.
- Dominant, stringent, and emotionally abusive: Always put the truth down and re-enforces self-superiority.
- Drama Lover: Loves to create drama and argue. Refuses to accept criticism.

However, narcissistic personalities cannot be confused with psychopathic behaviors. Psychopaths are mostly antisocial and show a complete lack of empathy. Most serial killers and insane criminals in this history such as John Wayne Gacy and Ted Bundy are categorized as "psychopaths". The narcissist tends not to be completely empathy-impaired; however, they are always self-adoring and selfish in their social, professional, and personal behavior.

### *Explaining Narcissism in Organizational Psychology Perspective*

Since the above-mentioned traits and behaviors span a spectrum, it is highly likely that managers, business

owners, or employees may practice these traits in a professional or multidisciplinary environment. Narcissistic behavior is significantly prevalent in business organizations (including private, public, SMEs, and large corporations). Three decades of research have shown that narcissistic personality disorder is found more in men than women ("How to Spot and Survive a Narcissistic Boss", 2022).

Narcissistic people are not generally considered "good people" because they hold extremely negative beliefs, values, and attitudes which result in "adverse notoriety". For employees, daily wage workers, and even managers and executive leaders, it is indispensable to understand and realize why their coworkers or bosses act weird or can be toxic without a warning or a logical reason. Some narcissistic employees are spoiled children of their parents who are overvalued and fail to develop healthy relationships with others. Even though narcissistic coworkers or supervisors appear to be self-confident, extremely assertive, and enjoying, they are downright arrogant, manipulative, suspicious, sensitive, and outlandish in their behavior. This implies that narcissists often behave in an unusual manner and act like "aliens" invading the world of their subordinates or coworkers. Therefore, their rigid structure creates an even massive and pitiful emotional black hole that sucks the viability of other coworkers or even friends. A typical narcissistic reaction is to behave immorally in almost all life's areas including intimate partner relationships and dealing with coworkers.

Many Western scholars particularly have tried to answer the question in the past few decades: "Are narcissistic bosses and coworkers self-destructive, damaging, and morale-crushing zombies?" narcissist coworkers are deeply convinced of their culpability; they are often found involved in deeper conspiracies, scams, contradictions, and hate speeches while deceiving their nearest and dearest people. This action and its impact fester as narcissists at workplaces yield high self-loathing and fear from the bottom-up (Ronningstam & Baskin-Sommers, 2022). And that is not all.

The Table 1 (see appendix) shows a difference between a positive or effective leader and boss Vs the narcissistic or a toxic manager. These facts infer that narcissists are like leeches, insects which bite, crawl, and murmur. Their negative characteristics are almost never-ending. For example, the Carlson Vazire, & Oltmanns (2011) study argues that narcissists are heedless, careless, and hasty daredevils who often play thoughtless emotional games and remain ill-advised regarding their workplace decisions/actions. Their coworkers and subordinates often tear their hair apart to know a way to deal with them (Miller, 2017). Even though Miler argues that some narcissistic qualities are beneficial for everyone including confidence, self-importance, and intelligence, narcissists do the opposite by forcing coworkers down instead of pushing them up towards successful careers. They trigger a loss of confidence in their team members or groups they lead; their fractured ego tells them to take credit for all the team's work. This is why narcissists are more insidious and blame-game starters when it comes to giving honest feedback to employees.

For example, Shana Palmieri from the Federal Employment Law Training Group reveals that narcissistic coworkers and supervisors create challenges for leadership and hinder teams to achieve their missions. Unfortunately, in recent years, narcissistic personality disorder has remained the least studied psychiatric disorder in organizational psychology. The worst trait of such patients/individuals is that they never choose to accept their psychological abnormality and are often forced by family members or friends to consult psychologists as a last resort. Moreover, they often also poorly show up and respond to therapeutic treatments. Therefore, despite having countless failures and resentments, narcissists continue to think they are proud of their negative choices, decisions, achievements, abilities, and egos (Bredlich, Kruse & Brettel, 2021).

Another study by Li, Xu, & Kwan (2021) explains that narcissistic individuals are both envious in workplaces and also fear that their subordinates or managers are envious of them. Since these individuals (more men than women) believe that they always deserve the best of everything that exists in the world, leaders have a difficult time with them having to accept positive criticism or feedback. Moreover, narcissistic bosses and managers frequently get angry and struggle to control their emotions or stabilize them. They are awful at tackling stressful situations and direct their anger towards blaming subordinates to maintain their fallacious ego.

### ***Insights on Narcissist Manager's Psychology: Do they Emotionally Derail Co-workers?***

Narcissists bug with their stings at the workplace. Identifying and dealing with narcissistic psychological abuse is mind-boggling for most employees in business organizations worldwide. This is because these unhealthy individuals love making others negative and feel empowered by achieving destructive goals (Ronningstam & Baskin-Sommers, 2022). This means that narcissists are also abusers with hatred directed towards their victims/defendants/subordinates. Narcissists can become hate tornadoes at the workplace by losing control over their emotions and sending hate avalanches toward team members they dislike; without feeling guilty about their

lousy actions, they welcome a toxic environment that sees the death of empathy, employee emotional support, and team cohesion. Therefore, it becomes extremely difficult to comprehend the strategy to even speak to a narcissistic coworker or a CEO who significantly lacks the ability to understand and share others' feelings.

Narcissists as explained by AydınKüçük (2019) company culture crushers who fail to adapt to changes and must be controlled by setting clear boundaries and rules. Managers/leaders across Malaysia, Europe, the United States, and Africa are still struggling to foster efficiently productive workforces due to narcissistic individuals promoting drama and emotional blame games in their respective departments. They seriously lack skill and understanding of sympathizing with their coworkers; they are quite arrogant and hamper team unity. Instead of being focused and creative, they cannot cooperate with team members and work as a harmonious unit together. Therefore, they always find ways to lower employees' confidence and undermine their competencies. This creates unwanted team conflicts that reduce the team's motivation; as a consequence, creates a talent crisis and brain drain in the organization.

Biçer (2020) writes in "Wolves in Sheep's Clothing: Spotting the Dark Triad of Personality in Organizations and Overcoming the Troubles They Cause" the reasons why narcissists diminish collaboration in the workplace to disarm the coworkers they hate or despise due to unique positive traits/attitudes. Narcissists mostly like working alone and jeopardize the efficiency of their teams by refusing collaboration and creating conflicts.

The selfish motive is often to take all the appreciation to stand out from the crowd and become the center of the boss's attention. They create a void by refusing to cooperate because their absence halts important projects and they know that they are difficult to replace (Freestone, Osman, & Ibrahim, 2022). This allows them to further tarnish the team's unity and make coworkers unhappy & unsatisfied. When employees' levels of satisfaction reduce, a positive work environment turns into a toxic or uncooperative workplace. This instantly decreases the productivity and engagement of the workplace. Therefore, employers need a solid plan or a remedy to engage employees at all levels and boost their morale in such destructive conditions.

A narcissist can grow overconfident and arrogant with time. They are almost never genuinely interested in helping others unless it gives them a favor in some way. This alone can put a negative influence on the mindset and psychology of the whole workforce. Therefore, they cause confusion and hurt the company's culture, turning more and more employees into toxic human parasites (Sarfarazi, n.d).

As Jacobs (2022) explains the lack of empathy and self-centeredness of narcissistic bosses and subordinates constantly burn a fire that increases employees' frustration that leads to anxiety, stress, burnout, and other mental health issues. Narcissists are mind distorters, reality-benders, and pathological liars who fail to set any foundations for positive work culture.

A narcissistic personality disorder is utterly complex because it twists the minds of narcissistic individuals who want people to beg them to be kind; yet, they show no kindness or sympathy for coworkers they despise. Narcissists are evil, they pretend to be know-it-all geniuses, yet, they fail to understand right from wrong.

Their evil plans are well-targeted and they know how to throw a trap for their victims. They are well-awakened of the corruption in their minds and the fraud they do intend to bring positive individuals down (Kernberg, 1989). They are good and are ruining the workplace and social relationships of the enemies they envy. Moreover, some narcissists often get away from an unethical workplace crime or fraud by calculating the risk of their getting caught. They use tactics like a threat, bribes, and violence to dominate honest coworkers with their craziness. This implies that narcissist workers often disregard workplace rules and Human Resource (HR) policies and can steal a company's assets and financial resources with a well-researched hacking strategy.

Summing it all up, the bottom line is that the narcissism psychological game is horrendously terrifying, negative, toxic, and gut-wrenching when it comes to dealing with such obnoxious bosses and coworkers in the long run. The most obvious reason for brain drain in Malaysia, the West, and other Asian countries is narcissistic abuse and toxicity in the workplace (Green, 2002). Hence, in the era of economic crisis and technological revolution, the formation of a 100% positive work culture still remains a mammoth challenge for global organizational managers/leaders who need to be greatly prepared for dealing with toxic and abusive individuals.

### ***How Narcissistic Personality Disorder Damages Teams and Work Cultures***

Psychologists believe that narcissists are like negative saints who consider law-abiding and empathy-filled people as sinners. Narcissists won't mind if they are able to completely destroy their subordinates' careers and trap them in an endless circle of frustration and despair. For example, they seek, hunt, and devour team members who they can dominate. They seek fun in mind playing mischievous mind games and tricking subordinates and

even superiors. They steal people's energy by becoming a radiating source of toxic energy in the workplace (Green, 2002). They devalue any relationships or advice that aims to hurt their interests; this leads to an end of a sweet relationship quickly and abruptly with coworkers and colleagues.

Besides, their subtle gas lighting shows their endless hatred towards passionate, motivated, and hard-working individuals. They cannot stand the idea of anyone getting ahead of them and constantly plan and do things criticize good employees to damage their loyalty. They are also found by employers and HR managers in many multinational organizations to be involved in sadistic sexual and physical torture of employees (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020). Therefore, it becomes an ethical and moral duty to expose and stop a narcissist from spreading toxicity through investigation, strategy planning, and implementation of toxicity abatement policies.

The fact remains that narcissists can behave in an extreme manner and cause injuries to coworkers. They can inflict deep emotional wounds and scars difficult to heal and handle by most employees in business organizations. Their anger is pretty scary that comes like a storm unexpectedly and hits a vulnerable employee at the weak spot (Glad, 2002). The mistake most vulnerable females and even male workers make is to keep narcissistic abuse to themselves and hide it due to guilt and shame. The bad news is that this abuse is not likely to end anytime in the future as silent suffering makes narcissists' ambitions stronger with a sinister smile on their faces. Also, O'Connell & O'Connell (2013) reveals that narcissists can throw office supplies and even chairs when they act violently; they can even throw anything sharp at victims they hold as a result of overwhelming rage/anger.

This appetite for destruction and outrageous wrath leads to physical injuries or even the death of employees. When they finally come to their senses, they cry and pretend that the abuse never happened. In this manner, highly poisonous narcissists love to steal and destroy their victims. They steal precious years of people's lives, their wellbeing, physical health, psychological health, financial resources and assets, and relationships. Moreover, putting others down and feeling happy about it is their badge of honor or pride. This is why they steal coworkers' self-respect, self-esteem, confidence, dignity, and even the lives of their team members. In simple words, "a narcissist is someone who demands their victims give up everything to be their nothing" (Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell & Marchisio, 2011).

It can be easily inferred that narcissists can promise a great future or career to employees and deliver a nightmare to employees they control or manage. They can make perfectly healthy individuals go crazy by starting a culture of name-calling, yelling, punching, or silently ignoring them. The worst thing is that they create a goal to extend their "circle of control" in the current radar; if left unpleased like a king, can burst like a volcano (Butler, 2005). Therefore, employees must take precautions and not say or do many things that are likely to upset a narcissist and unleash their beastly rage. What happens as a result of all this madness?

Narcissists work for organizations for several years or decades and destroy many coworkers around them. Sadly, many coworkers quit jobs or switch companies to get rid of narcissistic team members. When there seems to be no way of escaping narcissists' emotional-drain game and no end to their power and hegemony, predominance, and wreckage, vulnerable men and women fail to excel at work and end up with either suicidal thoughts or engage in addictive or self-destructive behaviors. Significant chaos and unrest await coworkers working in the toxically manufactured environment led by narcissistic bosses. First, narcissists kill the enthusiasm and lower motivation of their subordinates they envy or fear. They make work culture and communication difficult for them and ridicule them. That does not mean they do not make mistakes themselves; they just hide them and look smart and holy (Butler, 2005). When an unnoticed, narcissistic leader can severely impact the workplace culture and fantasize about exerting power over everyone. All these personality characteristics show the offbeat, unacceptable, outré, and eerie behaviors of narcissistic managers. These habits become a norm or a rock-solid attitude developed over a number of years; which is why narcissists kill, crush, diminish, and tarnish positive workplace cultures and teams. Therefore, working in an abusively toxic environment controlled by none other than a narcissistic leader can inflict emotional pain on employees/team members and destabilize them mentally to perform optimally (Green, 2002).

### ***The Million Dollar Question: Do Narcissists Ever Grow Up?***

A puzzling question for employees and psychologists can be: "Can Narcissists Change their Behaviors from Ugly to Beautiful? Having a narcissistic manager in a toxic workplace is often a nightmare that has no end. Narcissists in teams also give goosebumps to project managers. This is because narcissists also love to give others a wild ride and discard anyone including their partners interested in changing them from ugly to beautiful, loving, and gentle creatures. They do a good job of hiding their dark side behind a fake smile; their unsatisfied ego

generates anger and pain that they inflict back on their society, family, or workplace (Yang and Hang, 2004). In fact, they feed on the pain of others they can manipulate and emotionally blackmail and leave them bewildered and abandoned afterward.

Narcissists are loser-mentality individuals and they love producing and engineering losers at workplaces. Since narcissists are clever aliens destined to become sworn enemies of humble or genius employees, it is mandatory to educate people regarding this “psychological disorder” to save them from getting seriously ill, demoralized, and emotionally drained at the workplace.

A Business Insider Psychologist author Perpetua Neo states, “Narcissists, psychopaths, and sociopaths do not have a sense of empathy. They do not and will not develop a sense of empathy, so they can never really love anyone (Neo, 2022)”.

The latest scientific research claims that from young adulthood to midlife and old age, narcissists do change. However, particular personality traits do remain stable over the course of a lifetime, fortunately for workplace managers; the good news is that reliable personality changes do occur with age. For example, Scientific American states that humans tend to become more conscientious, emotionally balanced, and agreeable with maturity (Kaufman, 2022). Narcissistic personality traits are continuous and permanent which portrays a negation of maturity in these “childlike individuals”. Therefore, a few studies like these claim that narcissists have a tendency for increased maturity over their lifetimes, however, the researchers never found a significantly huge decrease in narcissism. The positive news for HR managers is that as young narcissists grow older, their self-focus becomes weaker.

Very few studies published in the United States show that narcissistic individuals change over time. In fact, as the negative and sinister habits grow stronger, their beliefs turn more negative to blackmail more employees. Normally, their “maladaptive personality traits” do not change without intervention or a miracle/stroke of luck. However, as narcissists age, they meet more new people and build relationships with bosses and supervisors. According to Dr. William Chopik, a professor of psychology at MSU, narcissists can get more feedback with experience and this can change their outlook or self-perspective that allowing them to treat others with kindness (Kaufman, 2022).

The evidence proves that young adulthood is the most crucial period for strengthening narcissistic traits. Very little research is available on baby boomers and near-retirement narcissistic individuals to explain their changes in personality over time. However, there may be hope for a few unique narcissists who may open their minds and hearts in later parts of their lives to understand their wrongdoings and devastating behaviors and grow out more positively in old age (Foster, Misra, &Reidy, 2009).

## 6. DISCUSSION

Researchers like Cramer (2011) also studied adult narcissism over a period of 25 years by studying individuals from 34 to age 59. The study’s results showed that hypersensitive narcissism was reduced in participants, while autonomous narcissism increased over time. Moreover, the level of Willfulness Narcissism did not change with age. This study helped to predict the change in the empathy level of narcissists at age 71. The study revealed that hypersensitivity and willfulness of individuals at 34 resulted in emotional imbalance that helped researchers to predict less positive outcomes of their later lives.

Organizational psychology researchers have studied narcissistic personality disorder. Grijalva (2010) suggested that with the increasing age, narcissism should reduce in personality. Since these individuals fail to make commitments all lifelong and meet them, it also impedes their psychological development and personal growth (Raskin, 1991). Similarly, according to Graham, Weston, Gerstorf, Yoneda, Booth, Beam, & Mroczek (2020), during middle age (above 50), the longitudinal research finds an increase in mental health problems in narcissistic individuals. Therefore, there is a deeper need for business professionals to realize the ego-threatening personality traits of narcissistic coworkers during their youth and Middle Ages to predict the level of hypersensitivity and willfulness narcissism.

Improving an individual’s personality with age is a daunting task for psychologists. There must be a desire for seriousness towards one’s self-enlightenment. We believe that a vital strategy for narcissists is to first gain very theoretical knowledge of empathy to have any chances of transforming their emotionally disturbed personality in the middle or older ages. Until they keep getting away with their criminal behaviors, they may continue to hold a lifelong belief that other people may not exist (Kaufman, 2022).

### **7. RECOMMENDATIONS: FROM VICTIMHOOD TO VICTORY: CUTTING OFF THE NARCISSISTIC SUPPLY AND DISARMING TOXIC CO-WORKERS**

#### ***Be Proactive, not Reactive***

Several psychologists suggest remedies and strategies deal with toxic individuals in the workplace. For example, Lindsey Ellison, the author of “Magic Words: How to Get What you Want from a Narcissist” and a relationship coach suggests that dealing with narcissists becomes easy when people make a plan and think ahead of narcissists. This includes avoiding direct confrontation or a reaction to their abuse and remaining proactive. The author suggests that playing the emotional game with a narcissist is not advisable because they are great at draining energy and making victims’ lives miserable and chaotic (Behary, 2021).

#### ***Stop the Arguing Game and Disengage***

Shutting down a narcissist takes wit and smartness; a strategic approach that reduces power struggles and will disarm temper tantrums of narcissistic employees. Since a narcissist co-worker loves an argument, the more co-workers respond to their nonsense and lose emotions, the more they will get insulted. Some employees make the mistake of changing narcissists’ minds; the author suggests stopping trying to change narcissists’ views because they will never really value anything co-workers say or feel. Therefore, the best strategy is to completely disengage with them and avoids further arguments (Behary,2021).

When someone falls for and believes in their fraudulent truth, it gives them the narcissistic supply they crave from their environment and feeds on co-workers’ miseries. Discussing anything rationally and logically is a daydream with narcissists, they don’t believe in mutual problem-solving. Therefore, the best way to disarm a narcissist is to give them “zero” attention and no emotional reaction.

#### ***Use Diplomatic Words in a Toxic Workplace Environment***

Psychiatrists believe that narcissists often act assertively and arrogantly; from the inside, they are often anxious, suspicious, and sensitive. Since such individuals want the world to see them as “big”, they feel really “small” in their minds. Since they crave admiration in the workplace, they get jealous of minor achievements of co-workers (Behary&Dieckmann, 2010). Another study states that they are not likely to admire or promote democracy. Often short-tempered, they lash out at employees who do not treat them as special. This means that narcissists do all sorts of weird things; using backfire is a surefire way to get hurt or resentful. The best strategy is not to take a narcissist personally, or they will manipulate you with ease.

Being diplomatic means not asking them directly “why are you doing this to me” or ”Please believe me, I am innocent”. They will always put the blame on weak co-workers. Therefore, using diplomacy and assertiveness is the only guarding strategy by saying, “I will speak to you again when you learn to be more respectful and humble”.

#### ***Set Fair and Equitable Policies and Rules with Narcissist Coworkers***

Managers and HR supervisors must formulate policies and employee behavioral rules by defining clear limits to avoid the challenging dynamics of toxic workers. This means managers should minimize/eliminate favoritism, nepotism, and cronyism to avoid workplace politics, gossip, and turnover intentions (Simon, 2016). Therefore, not focusing on employees’ personal goals and emphasizing achieving the company’s goals is the right strategy to align everyone with the team’s mission.

#### ***Show Empathy***

Supporting employees with sincere empathy and mission-critical guidance is the core responsibility of business managers to achieve organizational goals. Exceptional and transformational leaders are able to demonstrate behaviors that are empathetic, considerate, and respectful to their employees. They must be able to understand the toxic personality traits of their team members and how they can change them or reduce them with



loving and caring decisions (Lerner, 2008).

### ***Set Healthy Boundaries***

All people have flaws and everyone deserved to be loved. However, narcissists can devastate loving relationships, and employees need to set strong boundaries to keep them within their limits. Since they steal joy and happiness from co-workers, a good idea is to share only work-related issues with them and never trust them to ask about your family matters. Early laid boundaries with narcissists can stop their control tactics from working. This way, they fail to disrespect you after knowing your vulnerability or an adverse life situation. Therefore, choosing to work for or not to work for a narcissistic manager or boss is entirely up to one's own decision-making and knowledge about their negative behaviors (Alderete,2022).

For example, if a manager feels their subordinates have pathological personality issues, they should clearly define their objectives and separate toxic employees from productive team members. Managers can be respectful with toxic co-workers but must focus on organizational goals and the need to either replace or keep toxic employees within their limits. This means that the rules of narcissists must be clear and consistent to save the morale of the rest of the team (Luchner,Mirsalimi, Moser & Jones,2008).

### ***Ignore Them***

Narcissists rarely like to be ignored and become crazy when hated or forsaken. . Their high prevalence of grandiosity beliefs enlarges their desire to lead people, achieve control, and meet adventurous goals. Infact, they get energy out of exploiting workers' weaknesses and making them feel sad or agonized. Before they trigger negative emotions in co-workers, the best tactic is to refuse to react to their nonsense and not show any care about their mind games. This is because a quarrel or a fight starts with two individuals and no single player can play a savagely harsh game without getting any response back.

Narcissistic managers are bad leaders; they often demoralize teams and frustrate honest and loyal co-workers to play a win-lose game. Unfortunately, such a character leaves little room for their employees to retain high teamwork spirits. Therefore, when narcissistic employees are ignored in the workplace, they get deflated and disarmed. One caution is not to make fun of these emotionally-explosive bombs; an effective strategy is to cut off their supply by keeping them starved for reactions and emotional outbursts (Kealy&Ogrodniczuk, 2011).

### ***Find a Well-Versed Psychotherapist***

No abusive relationship in a toxic environment can see the light of day unless employees have an access to a healthy support system to avoid rash encounters and heart-breaking emotions. They love drama and energize them by traumatizing others.

The best way to save sanity from a narcissistic emotional blame game is to consult a psychotherapist well-experienced and versed in narcissistic personality disorder treatments. It takes significant skill and perseverance to disarm and comprehend the wicked games of a narcissist (Halewood, A., & Tribe, 2003). The most important skills remain developing emotional intelligence by consulting a well-versed psychiatrist or an anthropologist to help you set boundaries with these people successfully.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

Narcissists are losers, blamers, and parasites who are unable to face life and its true realities. No longitudinal studies have been conducted in the recent past related to tracking personality changes in narcissists from young adulthood to midlife. Narcissists take excessive pride in their appearance and devalue others based on their weaknesses and vulnerabilities Narcissists are often hired as leaders and given powers and resources to make superior resources. Their selection decision can cause significant difficulty for other employees due to their unstable personality traits and emotional behaviors. They harm mental and physical health, emotional intelligence, confidence, self-esteem, loyalty, dignity, diversity, and social justice in organizations (Caper, 2018). Therefore, their twisted beliefs and superman's expectations crumble when they fail to control the world by swiveling reality to their favor and get aggressively angry.

Narcissists think they are irreplaceable and infallible; therefore, having a stable conversation with them is

rare in a love-hate confusing paradox (Durvasula, 2019). Narcissist bosses and coworkers never accept criticism; this significantly hinders their chances of changing their underlying poisonous and malignant beliefs. Hoping and believing that they will someday build any sincere and loving relationships with coworkers is time-wasting. Significant evidence proves that such hypersensitive and emotionally draining individuals become destructive role models, leaders, family heads, managers, and supervisors. However, significant new data and research is required to study older generations of narcissists and how they changed over their life courses to show empathy towards coworkers.

### Appendix

**Table 1:** Narcissistic boss Vs Supportive Boss (Source: (Ellen et al., 2019))

<p><b>Useful (Good Manager)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Openly communicates with employees</li> <li>• Puts trust in team members</li> <li>• Acts like a friend or a family member</li> <li>• Balances workload</li> <li>• Demands attention</li> <li>• Respects and rewards</li> </ul>	<p><b>Useless (Narcissistic Boss)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ignores coworkers/subordinates</li> <li>• Complains a lot</li> <li>• Looks down upon employees</li> <li>• Criticize mistakes heavily</li> <li>• Demands admiration and praise</li> <li>• Makes fun of workers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Harmless (Good Boss)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not criticize small mistakes</li> <li>• Never uses manipulation</li> <li>• Never emotionally threaten or blackmail</li> <li>• Complains only when necessary with respect</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threatening &amp; Career-damaging</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obsessed with employees' destruction</li> <li>• Envious and hateful</li> <li>• Takes credit for others' efforts</li> <li>• Disagrees with 95% of loyal employees</li> <li>• Never puts responsibility on deserving people</li> <li>• Turn other employees against a loyal coworker</li> <li>• Manipulates, lie, cheat, abuse, and weaken chosen coworkers</li> </ul>

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