

# Political Skill of Narcissistic Leaders

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## Abstract

Numerous researches and studies have been conducted on narcissism since the term was used to explain a psychological phenomenon in 1898. However, the discussions about narcissists as an organization member or a leader have recently become a subject of organization science. In this scope, the studies examining narcissistic characteristics of leaders show that narcissistic leaders can cause organizational tragedies or contribute to organizational success by their great vision. Furthermore, political skill, which attract attention in recent years and become one of the popular topic of management studies has been seemed related to contributes to generate vision and team insight as well as increase in members trust and support, perceptions about leaders' competence and integrity. In this research, the relationship between the dimensions of narcissism and political skill has been conducted. Narcissistic Personality Inventory including 16 items which consists of entitlement, exploitativeness, authority, exhibitionism, superiority and self-sufficiency dimensions and 18 item Political Skill Inventory consisting of social astuteness, network ability, interpersonal influence, apparent sincerity dimensions are used. Analysis has shown that authority dimension of narcissism is correlate positively with social astuteness and network ability dimensions of political skill and exploitativeness dimension is correlate positively with the apparent sincerity dimension. Moreover, entitlement is correlate significantly and negatively with the network ability, interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity dimensions of political skill. The findings indicated that authority dimension of narcissism is correlate significantly and positively and entitlement correlate significantly and negatively with political skill as a whole trait. Implications for future studies are drawn.

## Introduction

### Narcissism

Narcissism notion which has numerous definition is being argued over than hundred years in psychology literature. Simply, Kernberg described narcissism as defensive grandiosity and Kohut demonstrated the notion as the prevention of a child's grandiosity from turning into healthy self-esteem (Kernberg, 1999; Kohut, 1998). Narcissism was defined as the withdrawal of libidinal investment from the external world and back toward the self in the essay named "On Narcissism: An Introduction" which was Freud's (1914) most important work regarding narcissistic phenomenon (Rozenblatt, 2002, p. 47-48). In spite of the variety of definitions, there is greater agreement on the behavioral description of narcissism. Narcissism involves a

turning inward for gratification, a reliance on self rather than others for safety and self-esteem. Narcissists tend to be preoccupied with power and prestige, enhancing themselves with beliefs that they are stronger and more important than others, greater in their abilities, or more beautiful to behold (Duss, Chiodo, 1991, p. 183). Moreover, prior researches indicated that there are seven dimensions for the narcissistic individuals. The dimensions of narcissism were found to be associated with some characteristics which are summarized below (Raskin&Terry, 1988, p. 891):

*Superiority:* Capacity for status, social presence, self-confidence, and narcissistic ego inflation.

*Exploitativeness:* Rebelliousness, nonconformity, hostility, and a lack of consideration and tolerance for others.

*Authority:* Dominance, assertiveness, leadership, criticality, and self-confidence.

*Entitlement:* Ambitiousness, need for power, dominance, hostility, toughness, and a lack of self-control and tolerance for others.

*Self-Sufficiency:* Assertiveness, independence, self-confidence, and need for achievement.

*Exhibitionism:* Sensation seeking, extraversion, and a lack of impulse control.

*Vanity:* Both regarding oneself as physically attractive and being actually judged to be physically attractive.

Narcissim is an older subject in psychology literature; however, the discussions about narcissistic individuals as an organization members or leaders have recently been subject to the researches of the management and organization sciencep. The argument focused on narcissistic leadership has shown that narcissistic leaders can be classified into two groups as productive and destructive narcissistic leadership (Maccoby, 2000; Lubit, 2002). Moreover the researches indicated that productive leaders can have crucial roles which contributes to organizational success and create difference; whereas, destructive narcissistic leaders can cause organizational tragedies.

## **Political Skill**

Political Skill ise defined as “the ability to effectively understand others at work, and use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives” (Ferris, Tredway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas & Frink 2005, p. 127). Findings of the recent researches has indicated that political skill is distinctive on issues which are closely related to organization success such as team performance (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas & Ammetar, 2004,), stres factors (Meurs, 2008), employee reactions (Treadway, Hochwarter, Ferris, Kacmar, Douglas, Ammetar&Bucley, 2004), leader effectiveness (Doglas & Ammetar, 2004) and work outcomes (Brouer, 2007). Ferris and colleagues specified four dimensions of political skill which are interpersonal influence, network ability, apparent sincerity and social astuteness (Ferris, Tredway vd. 2005, p. 129).

*Social Astuteness:* Politically skilled individuals are astute observers of others and are keenly attuned to diverse social situations. They comprehend social interactions and accurately interpret their behavior, as well as that of others, in social settings. They have strong powers of discernment and high self-awareness.

*Interpersonal Influence:* Politically skilled individuals have a subtle and convincing personal style that exerts a powerful influence on those around them. Individuals high on interpersonal influence nonetheless are capable of appropriately adapting and calibrating their behavior to each situation in order to elicit particular responses from others.

*Network Ability:* Individuals high on network ability are adept at developing and using diverse networks of people. They can easily develop friendships and build strong, beneficial alliances and coalitions. They are often highly skilled negotiators and deal makers, and adept at conflict management.

*Apparent Sincerity:* Politically skilled individuals appear to others as possessing high levels of integrity, authenticity, sincerity, and genuineness. They are, or appear to be, honest, open, and forthright.

### **The Relationship Between Political Skill and Narcissism**

Having good human relations and managing them effectively in the organizations which were defined as political arenas is accepted one of the key elements of organizational success for the leaders. Nonetheless the importance of having political skill is increasing because it is proved to be a predictor of successful and unsuccessful leaders. Considering the knowledge about narcissism, it is seen that; narcissistics are perceived as persons who are immodest, egocentric, not giving, not empathic, arrogant and impatient to criticism by others around them (Köroğlu & Bayraktar, 2007 p. 93). Consequently it is getting harder for narcissistics to establish sincere relationships, further to have political skill.

Authority dimension is one of the positive characteristics of narcissism that is seen related to the success feelings and influence on others. Exploitativeness is the manipulative and engaged in seeking for special treatment dimension of narcissism which reflects on interpersonal relations as a maladaptive behaviour (Bogart, Benotsch. & Pavlovic, 2004, p. 36). Entitlement has been related to negative personality characteristics, such as neuroticism, suspicion, tenseness, and anxiety. Emmons' (1987) observation was that the entitlement subscale of the NPI measures the maladaptive and pathological aspects of narcissism (Bogart et. al, 2004, p. 42). For entitled individuals, the objective is not only to protect what is deserved, it is to acquire more than what is deserved, even if doing so causes harm to others (Hochwarter et al, 2007, p. 507-508). In conclusion, it is considered that authority is positively and significantly related whereas entitlement and exploitativeness are negatively and significantly related to political skill and its dimensions.

### **Hypotheses**

This research based on the assumption of “leaders who are high in narcissism are going to be less politically skilled.” Hereby, it is surveyed if the dimensions of political skill are affected by the dimensions of narcissism. Besides; as the literature findings indicate that political skill is a characteristic which is beyond its dimensions, it is surveyed if political skill as a whole is affected by the dimensions of narcissism.

H: 1 Authority dimension of narcissism has a positive and significant relationship between political skill and its dimensions..

H:2 Entitlement dimension of narcissism has a negative and significant relationship between political skill and its dimensions..

H:3 Exploitativeness dimension of narcissism has a negative and significant relationship between political skill and its dimensions..

## **Method**

### **Sample**

The sample consist of 90 female (34,6%) and 170 male (65,4%) and totally 260 managers. According to education level, 58,7 % of the respondents has bachelor, 25,10 % has master and PhD degree and the left (16,2%) graduated from associate or high school. The average age of respondents was approximately 31,96 years and had an average of almost 12,26 years of fulltime work experience. When the work positions are analysed, it is seen that 53,9 % of the respondents were middle echelon staff member, %21,30 of the participants were top managers and 17,40 of the sample were low echelon managers. 7,40 % of the managers indicated that they are entrepreneur.

### **Measures**

The Turkish forms of Narcissistic Personality Inventory and Political Skill Inventory were used in the conducted research Atay (2009a, p. 181; 2009b, p. 892).

*Narcissistic Personality Inventory:* To survey narcissism degree and dimensions, Turkish form of 16 item Narcissistic Personality Inventory developed by Ames and his colleagues in 2006 and standardized into Turkish by Atay was used. Besides, original scale consists of six dimensions which are entitlement, exploitativeness, authority, exhibitionism, superiority and self-sufficiency. Each question has two statements and the participants were forced to prefer one choice. The reliability of the scale was found 0.652 (Atay, 2009a, p. 191).

*Political Skill Inventory:* Political Skill Inventory: The original form of Politicall Skill Inventory developed by Ferris, Tredway, Kolodinsky Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas ve Frink in 2005 consists of 18 items. The participants are asked to choose their answers from Likert Scale including 7 statements between “1: Certainly Agree” and “7: Certainly Disagree”. Turkish form of Politikall Skill Inventories’ reliability is found 0.863. (Atay, 2009b, p. 894).

### **Procedure**

Due to the aim; the present research is designed in a manner that involving national and international companies operating in Istanbul, Bursa, Ankara and Izmir. The online link of the survey was sent to the managers of the firms from 29 different and massive sectors including education, finance, software, communication, manufacturing, chemical, automotive, retail, health and food industry. Hence the surveys were applied via internet-based survey software. Initially, 303 surveys were distributed and 276 feed backs (%91,08) were collected. After elimination of the surveys which have blank statements, 260 surveys were left and analysed.

## **Results**

Within present study, the linear correlation is researched between “narcissism and its dimensions” and “political skill and its dimensions”. Regression analysis is achieved over the characteristic that shows linear correlations and two models are exhibited.

### **Results of Correlation Analysis:**

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Insert Table 1  
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Analysis has shown that authority dimension of narcissism is correlate positively with political skill and its dimensions. Moreover, the results of the research indicated that authority dimension of narcissism is correlate significantly and positively with social astuteness and network ability dimensions. Moreover entitlement dimension of narcissism is correlate negatively with both political skill and all of its dimensions. Further, it is found that entitlement correlate significantly and negatively with interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity dimensions. The third dimension which was found to have significant correlations with political skill is self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency is found as the second dimension following exploitativeness by correlating negatively with political skill and its dimensions. Besides it was indicated that self-sufficiency correlates negatively but not significantly with political skill. The only dimension which correlates significantly and positively with self-sufficiency is interpersonal influence dimension of political skill.

### **Results of Regression Analysis**

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Insert Table 2  
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Regression analysis is used to examine the relationship between narcissism and political skill. Accordingly, two different models were introduced and analysis were accrued over these models which are verified by the results. According to the first model, authority dimension of narcissism affects social asstudeness and network ability dimensions of political skill significantly and positively. Surprisingly, the results indicated that the exploitativeness dimension affects the apparent sincerity dimension significantly and positively. Concurrently it is found that entitlement affects network ability, interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity dimensions significantly and negatively. Towards the definitions of relations over dimensions, the effect of narcissism as a whole on political skill is researched and it is indicated that authority affects the development of political skill significantly and positively, whereas the entitlement affects significantly and negatively.

## **Discussion**

### **Authority – Political Skill Relationship**

Authority dimension is positively correlated with both with political skill and its dimension and significant and positive correlation with social astuteness and network ability. Authority is accepted as a positive aspect of narcissism is one of the personality characteristics finding are not surprising. Leadership characteristics are in the foreground of individuals that are high in authority and they exert dominance over others around them. Besides, by means of their self-confidence they can easily adapt and develop diverse social networks. The results of regression analysis about significant and positive affect of authority dimension on social astuteness and network ability dimensions of political skill supports these aspects.

### **Exploitativeness – Political Skill Relationship**

The significant and positive relation between exploitativeness and apparent sincerity is an unexpected and surprising result. However, prior researches indicated that individuals high on exploitativeness dimension are perceived as charming at zero acquaintance (Back&Schmukle ve Egloff, 2010). Moreover, it is thought that, narcissists who are high in exploitativeness could be pretending as they are sincere to get approval and admiration they need, achieving their goals, and deriving maximum benefit from people around them.

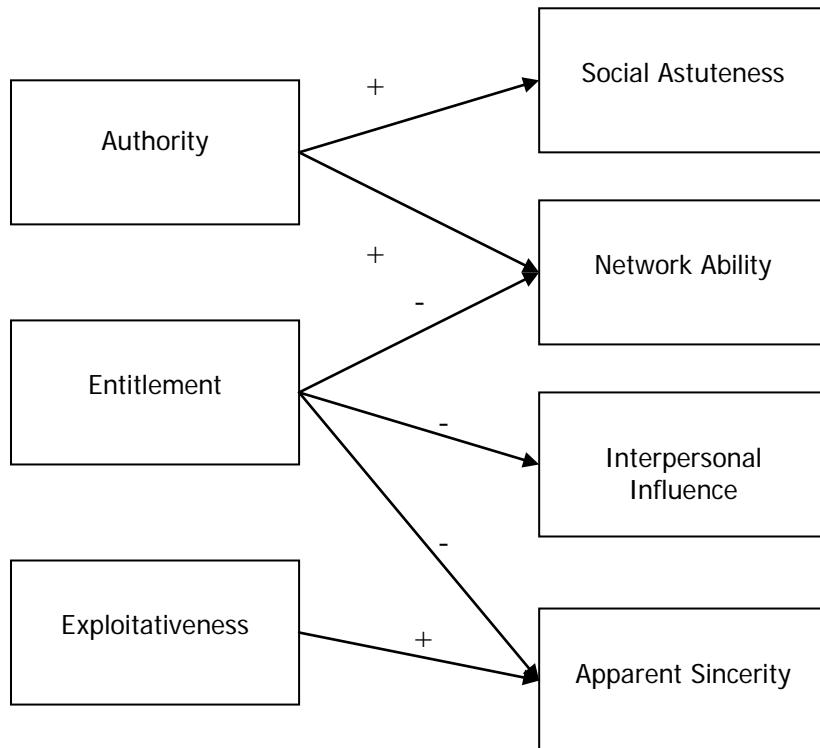
Rebelliousness, nonconformity, hostility, and a lack of consideration and tolerance for others are the main characteristics of narcissism which are especially seen individuals who are highly exploitative. These individuals are focused on how they can derive more benefit from others. Therefore, the needs, feelings and expectation of other people are not important for them and they are not aware of their this characteristic. However, individuals high in interpersonal influence are capable of displaying effective communication style and making others feel confident and successful at developing strong friendships. Consequently, the negative but statistically not significant relation between exploitativeness and interpersonal influence dimensions could be interpreted like the individuals high in exploitativeness are not enough skilled at interpersonal influence. The positive and significant affect of exploitativeness on apparent sincerity is becoming meaningful when it is considered that they need to be perceived sincere by others to get approval and admiration they need, to achieve their goals, and derive maximum benefit from people.

### **Entitlement – Political Skill Relationship**

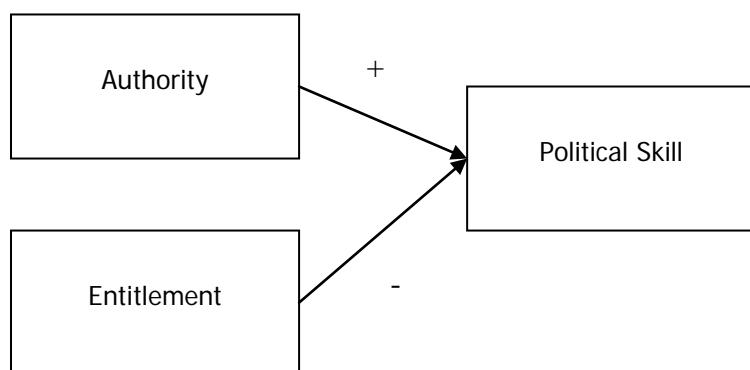
The negative correlation between political skill and the entitlement which is one of the maladaptive characteristic of narcissism is an expected result. The aim of entitled people is not protecting what they deserve but to get more than they deserve (Hochwarter vd., 2007). Accordingly these people don't believe in the importance of being sincere or simply, appearing sincere. On the other hand, because of their lack of concern and tolerance for other people, they do not interest in understanding others and making them feel comfort. Entitled individual believes in that he/she is superior in any condition and is worthy of any attention and admiration, that is why he/she is not concerned with understanding and satisfying other peoples needs. Besides, entitlement is closely related to hostility and maladaptiveness (Raskin&Terry, 1988, p. 899). Therefore it is possible for entitled individuals are not interested in improving social astuteness skills that express understanding social situations and adapting to them. The negative correlation between network ability and entitlement, attract attention on unwillingness of entitled individuals about improving relationship with

other people. Regression analysis indicates that, improvement of entitlement which is maladaptive and unhealthy dimension of narcissism is going to cause lower scores on dimensions of political skill and on political skill as a whole.

### Model I



### Model II



## **Conclusions and Implications**

The dimensions of narcissism and the dimensions of political skill showed significant relationship. Moreover, the entitlement and authority dimensions are found to be predictors of political skill. Since entitlement dimension is seen maladaptive aspect of narcissism, the relationship corresponds to literature reviews. Moreover, the adaptive dimension of narcissism, that is, authority is a positive predictor of political skill which finding was expected and meaningful for the further studies and implications.

These results might be evaluated for leadership development and increase leader effectiveness. Since narcissism a personality characteristic with its both positive and negative aspects, leaders who have narcissistic tendencies can be orientated and directed to develop their adaptive traits. Furthermore, in today's challenging world, leaders' need for political skill is increasing day by day. As political skill is shown as a crucial ability for leader effectiveness and organizational success, the organizations consider the narcissistic inclinations and political skill level of leaders. Moreover, prior researches in the literature denote that political skill can be developed by trainings (Ferris, Davidson, Perrewé, 2005) and present research indicates that narcissism affects political skill and its dimensions. Therefore it is thought that considering narcissism dimensions is going to contribute the quality of the trainings intended to develop political skill. Furthermore, findings seems useful for hiring and promotion procedures and meaningful for executive manager and human resources managers for recruiting employees intended to position that is required.

**Table 1: Results of Correlation Analysis***Descriptive statistics and correlations*

	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Social astuteness	5,49	1,03											
2	Network ability	5,64	0,94	,760**										
3	Interpersonal influence	6,17	1,10	,670**	,739**									
4	Apparent sincerity	5,68	0,97	,737**	,751**	,742**								
5	Political Skill	22,99	3,62	,885**	,904**	,887**	,901**							
6	Superiority	1,36	1,01	,046	,036	-,009	,088	,044						
7	Exhibitionism	1,55	1,04	,048	,073	-,043	,095	,046	,167**					
8	Authority	0,96	0,77	,137*	,164**	,015	,054	,101	,123*	,303**				
9	Exploitativeness	1,25	0,82	,098	,097	-,017	,142*	,086	,177**	,168**	,219**			
10	Entitlement	0,32	0,54	-,063	-,099	-,182**	-,155*	-,140*	,058	,143*	,163**	-,006		
11	Self_sufficiency	1,05	0,65	,045	-,007	-,123*	-,023	-,033	,242**	,119	,049	,089	,081	
12	Narcissism	6,52	2,66	,105	,098	-,088	,093	,054	,609**	,656**	,571**	,527**	,348**	,443**

N=260

\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 2: Results of Regression Analysis**

Variables	Social Astuteness		Network Ability		Interpersonal Influence		Apparent Sincerity		Political Skill	
	B	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	B	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	β	ΔR <sup>2</sup>
<b>Model 1</b>										
Superiority	.015		.013		.030		.072		.036	
Exhibitionism	.003		.033		-.022		.087		.026	
Authority	.133*		.162*		.058		.025		.105	
Exploitativeness	.062		.054		-.022		.113†		.056	
Entitlement	-.088		-.129*		-.181**		-.171**		-.160*	
Self_sufficiency	.036	.009	-.016	.025	-.114†	.026*	-.049	.037*	-.042	.019
<b>Model 2</b>										
Narcissism	.105	.007	.098	.006	-.088	.004	.093	.005	.054	.000
<b>Model 3</b>										
Superiority										
Exhibitionism										
Authority	.137*	.015*	.185**						.127*	
Exploitativeness								.142*		
Entitlement			-.129*	.035**	-.181	.033**	-.154*	.037**	-.161*	.028*
Self_sufficiency										

\* p &lt; .05

\*\* p &lt; .01

† p &lt; .10

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