Political Skill of Narcissistic Leaders

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A vast number of 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 organization members or leaders have recently become a research topic in the organizational sciences. In this scope, the recent research on narcissism indicates that narcissistic leaders can either cause organizational tragedies or contribute to organizational success by their great vision. In addition to narcissism, another popular leadership feature is political skill which has attracted considerable attentions in recent years, and become one of the important topics of management studies. Moreover, political skill has been asserted to be a positive characteristic which is related to develop vision and team insight as well as to increase in members' trust and support; whereas narcissism has both harmful and beneficial effects on organizations. In this study, the relationships between the dimensions of narcissism and political skill are examined via the 16-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) and the 18-item Political Skill Inventory. Analysis has shown that the authority, which is the adaptive dimension of narcissism, correlates positively with social astuteness and networking ability dimensions of political skill. Accordingly, entitlement, which is one of the maladaptive dimensions of narcissism, correlates significantly and negatively with the networking ability, interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity dimensions of political skill. When political skill is considered as a composite score, the findings indicate that the authority dimension of narcissism has a positive effect whereas, the entitlement dimension has a negative effect on political skill. Besides, implications for future studies are discussed.

Keywords: political skill, narcissism, leadership, adaptive and maladaptive dimensions

Literature Review

Narcissism

The narcissism notion, which has numerous definitions, has been argued for more than hundred years in psychology literature. Simply, Kernberg described narcissism as defensive grandiosity and Kohut demonstrated the concept 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 *On narcissism: An introduction,* which was Freuds' (1914) most important work regarding narcissistic phenomenon (Rozenbaltt, 2002, pp. 47-48). In spite of the variety of definitions, there is a great consensus on the behavioral description of narcissism. Narcissism involves a turning inward for

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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):

(1) Superiority: Capacity for status, social presence, self-confidence, and narcissistic ego inflation;

(2) Exploitativeness: Rebelliousness, nonconformity, hostility, and a lack of consideration and tolerance for others;

(3) Authority: Dominance, assertiveness, leadership, criticality, and self-confidence;

(4) Entitlement: Ambitiousness, need for power, dominance, hostility, toughness, and a lack of self-control and tolerance for others;

(5) Self-sufficiency: Assertiveness, independence, self-confidence, and need for achievement;

(6) Exhibitionism: Sensation seeking, extraversion, and a lack of impulse control;

(7) Vanity: Both regarding oneself as physically attractive and being actually judged to be physically attractive.

Narcissism is an older concept in psychology literature; however, the discussions about narcissistic individuals as organization members or leaders have recently been subject to the researches of the management and organizational sciences. The argument, focused on narcissistic leadership, has shown that narcissistic leaders can be classified into two groups as productive and destructive narcissistic leaders (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 is 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 organization objectives" (Ferris et al., 2005, p. 127). Findings of the recent researches have emphasized that political skill is distinctive on issues which are closely related to organization success such as team performance (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004), stress factors (Meurs, 2008), employee reactions (Treadway et al., 2004), leader effectiveness (Douglas & Ammeter, 2004) and work outcomes (Brouer, 2007). Ferris and colleagues specified four dimensions of political skill which are social astuteness, interpersonal influence, network ability and apparent sincerity (Ferris et al., 2005, p. 129).

(1) 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;

(2) 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;

(3) 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;

(4) 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 are accepted as one of the key elements of organization success for the leaders. Nonetheless the importance of having political skill is increasing because it is proved to be a predictor of successful leaders. Considering the knowledge about narcissism, it is seen that narcissists 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 hard to establish sincere relationships, and further, to have political skill for narcissists.

Although narcissism is generally considered as a negative personality characteristic, authority dimension of narcissism is one of the positive characteristics, which is seen related to the success feelings and influence on others. Besides, some of the researchers asserted that authority dimension contributes to be a leader among others. On the maladaptive aspects of narcissism, exploitativeness is the manipulative and engaged in seeking for special treatment dimension of narcissism which reflects on interpersonal relations as an undesirable behaviour (Bogart, Benotsch, & Pavlovic, 2004, p. 36). Entitlement, which is the second maladaptive dimension, 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 but alsoto acquire more than what is deserved, even if doing so causes harm to others (Hochwarter et al., 2007, pp. 507-508). In conclusion, it is supposed that authority is positively related to political skill and its dimensions, whereas entitlement and exploitativeness are negatively related.

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 whether the dimensions of political skill are affected by the dimensions of narcissism or not. Besides, as the literature findings indicate that political skill is a whole characteristic beyond its dimensions, the effects of the dimensions of narcissism on political skill are surveyed.

H1: Authority dimension of narcissism has a positive and significant relationship with political skill and its dimensions.

H2: Entitlement dimension of narcissism has a negative and significant relationship with political skill and its dimensions.

H3: Exploitativeness dimension of narcissism has a negative and significant relationship with political skill and its dimensions.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted 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 they had an average of almost 12.26 years of full-time work experience. When the work positions were analyzed, it

was 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. The rate of the managers who indicated that they are entrepreneurs was 7.40 %.

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).

(1) Narcissistic Personality Inventory: To survey narcissism degree and dimensions, 16-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory which was 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 are forced to prefer one choice. The reliability of the scale was found as 0.652 (Atay, 2009a, p. 191);

(2) Political Skill Inventory: The original form of Political Skill Inventory developed by Ferris, Treadway, et al. 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". The reliability of Turkish form of Political Skill Inventory was found as 0.863 (Atay, 2009b, p. 894).

Procedure

In accordance with the aim of this study, the research was designed in a manner which involved 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 composed of education, finance, software, communication, manufacturing, chemical, automotive, retail, health and food industries etc.. Hence, the surveys were applied via internet-based survey software. Initially, 303 surveys were distributed and 276 feedbacks (91.08%) were collected. After elimination of the surveys which have blank statements, 260 surveys were left in final stage to be analyzed.

Results

In the present study, the linear correlation was researched between "narcissism and its dimensions" and "political skill and its dimensions". Regression analysis was achieved over the characteristics that show linear correlations and two models were presented.

The Results of Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis has shown that authority dimension of narcissism correlated positively with political skill and its dimensions. Besides, the results of the research indicated that authority dimension of narcissism correlated positively with social astuteness and network ability dimensions. On the other hand, entitlement dimension of narcissism correlated negatively with both political skill and all of its dimensions. Further, it is determined that entitlement correlated significantly and negatively with interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity dimensions. The third dimension of narcissism, which is self-sufficiency, was found to have significant and negative correlations with political skill. Besides, it was indicated that self-sufficiency correlated negatively but not significantly with political skill. The only dimension which correlated significantly and positively with self-sufficiency was interpersonal influence (see Table 1).

Table 1

The 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	0.760**										
3 Interpersonal influence	6.17	1.10	0.670**	0.739**									
4 Apparent sincerity	5.68	0.97	0.737**	0.751**	0.742**								
5 Political skill	22.99	3.62	0.885**	0.904**	0.887**	0.901**							
6 Superiority	1.36	1.01	0.046	0.036	-0.009	0.088	0.044						
7 Exhibitionism	1.55	1.04	0.048	0.073	-0.043	0.095	0.046	0.167**					
8 Authority	0.96	0.77	0.137*	0.164**	0.015	0.054	0.101	0.123*	0.303**				
9 Exploitativeness	1.25	0.82	0.098	0.097	-0.017	0.142*	0.086	0.177**	0.168**	0.219**			
10 Entitlement	0.32	0.54	-0.063	-0.099	-0.182**	-0.155*	-0.140*	0.058	0.143*	0.163**	-0.006		
11 Self-sufficiency	1.05	0.65	0.045	-0.007	-0.123*	-0.023	-0.033	0.242**	0.119	0.049	0.089	0.081	
12 Narcissism	6.52	2.66	0.105	0.098	-0.088	0.093	0.054	0.609**	0.656**	0.571**	0.527**	0.348**	0.443**

Notes. $N = 260$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

The Results of Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between narcissism and political skill. Accordingly, two different models were introduced and analyses were performed over these models which were verified by the results. According to the first model, authority dimension of narcissism affects social astuteness 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 was researched and it was indicated that authority affects the development of political skill significantly and positively, whereas the entitlement affects significantly and negatively (see Table 2).

Table 2

The Results of Regression Analysis

	Social astuteness		Network ability		Interpersonal influence		Apparent sincerity		Political skill	
Variables	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Model 1										
Superiority	0.015		0.013		0.030		0.072		0.036	
Exhibitionism	0.003		0.033		-0.022		0.087		0.026	
Authority	0.133*		0.162*		0.058		0.025		0.105	
Exploitativeness	0.062		0.054		-0.022		0.113*		0.056	
Entitlement	-0.088		-0.129*		-0.181**		-0.171**		-0.160*	
Self-sufficiency	0.036	0.009	-0.016	0.025	-0.114***	0.026*	-0.049	0.037*	-0.042	0.019
Model 2										
Narcissism	0.105	0.007	0.098	0.006	-0.088	0.004	0.093	0.005	0.054	0.000
Model 3										
Superiority										
Exhibitionism										
Authority	0.137*	0.015*	0.185**						0.127*	
Exploitativeness							0.142*			
Entitlement			-0.129*	0.035**	-0.181	0.033**	-0.154*	0.037**	-0.161*	0.028*
Self-sufficiency										

Notes. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.10$.

Discussion

Authority-Political Skill Relationship

Authority dimension is positively correlated both with political skill and its social astuteness and network ability dimensions. Since authority is accepted as a positive aspect of narcissism, the positive relationships are not surprising. Leadership characteristics are in the foreground of individuals who 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 supports these aspects.

Exploitativeness-Political Skill Relationship

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

Rebelliousness, nonconformity, hostility, and lack of consideration and tolerance for others are the main characteristics of narcissism which are especially seen in highly exploitative individuals. This type of people is focused on how they can derive more benefit from others. Therefore, the needs, feelings and expectations of other people are not important for them, and they are not aware of these characteristics of their own. 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 as the individuals high in exploitativeness are not skilled enough at interpersonal influence. The positive and significant effect of exploitativeness on apparent sincerity might be meaningful when it is considered that they need to be perceived sincere by others to get approval and admiration.

Entitlement-Political Skill Relationship

The negative correlation between political skill and the entitlement was an expected result. The aim of entitled people is not to protect what they deserve but to get more than they deserve (Hochwarter et al., 2007). Accordingly, these people do not 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 have no interest in understanding others and making them feel comfort. Entitled individuals believe they are superior in any condition and are worthy of any attention and admiration; that is why they are 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 to be unwilling in improving social astuteness skills that express understanding social situations and adapting to them. The negative correlation between network ability and entitlement attracts attention on unwillingness of entitled individuals about improving relationship with other people. Regression analysis demonstrated that improvement of entitlement, which is maladaptive and unhealthy dimension of narcissism, is going to cause lower scores both on the political skill dimensions and political skill as a whole trait (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).
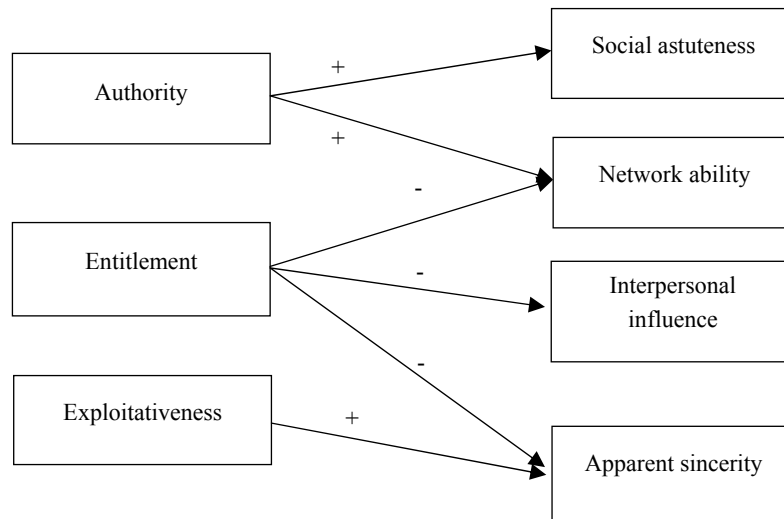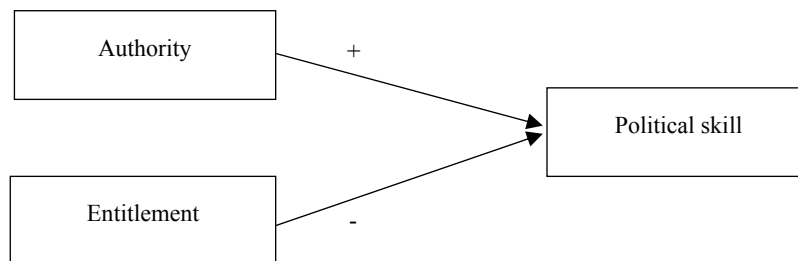
Figure 1. Model I.

Figure 2. Model II.

Conclusions and Implications

Based on the statistical analysis, the dimensions of narcissism and the dimensions of political skill showed significant relationships. Further, the entitlement and authority dimensions were found to be predictors of political skill. Since the entitlement dimension is seen as a maladaptive aspect of narcissism, the relationship corresponds to literature reviews. Moreover, authority, the adaptive dimension of narcissism, was found as a positive predictor of political skill. This is assumed as an expected and meaningful finding for the further studies and implications.

In conclusion, all these results might be evaluated for leadership development and increasing leader effectiveness. As narcissism is 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. Since political skill is asserted as a crucial ability for leader effectiveness and organizational success, the organizations might consider the narcissistic inclinations and political skill level of leaders.

Prior researches in the literature denote that political skill can be developed by trainings (Ferris, Davidson & Perrewe, 2005), and this research indicates that narcissism affects political skill and its dimensions. Therefore, it is proposed that consideration of narcissism dimensions is going to contribute the quality of the trainings intended to develop political skill. Furthermore, findings would probably be useful for hiring and promotion procedures and, meaningful for executive and human resources managers for recruitment processes.

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