

Name of Publisher: BRIGHT EDUCATION RESEARCH SOLUTIONS

Area of Publication: Business, Management and Accounting
(miscellaneous)



Journal of Management & Social Science

ISSN Online: 3006-4848
ISSN Print: 3006-483X

RECOGNIZED IN "Y"
CATEGORY BY



[Narcissism in the Boardroom: The Gendered Dynamics of Organizational Politics]

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Review Type: Double Blind Peer Review

ABSTRACT

This study examines the intricate dynamics between narcissistic personality traits and organizational politics, focusing on the moderating role of gender on teachers working in public sector universities of South region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. A cross-sectional design was employed, gathering data from 364 professionals across universities of South region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan through validated scales. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between narcissism and organizational politics. Regression analysis demonstrated that narcissistic personality traits significantly impact organizational politics, emphasizing the role of such traits in shaping political behavior within the workplace. Moderation analysis showed that gender plays a significant role in moderating the relationship between narcissism and organizational politics, with males demonstrating stronger associations. Additionally, demographic variations were found to influence responses, confirming significant mean differences. The study highlights the practical implications of these findings for organizations, including the need to recognize and manage the impact of narcissistic traits on workplace dynamics. It emphasizes the importance of fostering inclusive environments, providing leadership training, and implementing strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of organizational politics. While contributing to the literature on narcissism and workplace behavior, the study acknowledges limitations, such as its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data, and offers directions for future research. These include longitudinal studies, exploration of cultural and structural factors, and intervention-based approaches to enhance organizational outcomes.

Keywords: Narcissistic Personality, Organizational Politics, Gender, Workplace Behavior

1. Introduction

Organizational politics is an inherent element of most work environments and plays a pivotal role in shaping employee behavior, decision-making, and institutional culture. While some scholars recognize its potential benefits such as facilitating informal

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communication and aiding in career progression (Bearce & Park, 2019) the overwhelming consensus suggests that politics often functions as a disruptive force. It can foster competition over collaboration, lead to the misuse of authority, and negatively affect organizational goals and interpersonal trust (Landells et al., 2017). Ferris et al. (2000) argue that organizational politics may even lead to bullying behaviors, where both managers and coworkers pursue their personal interests at the expense of the organization's well-being. In such highly politicized environments, senior management often turns a blind eye to unethical practices, further reinforcing these behaviors (Asad et al., 2020).

One of the significant psychological traits linked to organizational politics is narcissism. Narcissistic individuals exhibit self-centeredness, a sense of superiority, and a strong need for admiration. These individuals tend to use manipulative strategies to gain influence and are often skilled at creating favorable impressions. According to O'Reilly and Chatman (2020), narcissists may project the image of ideal managers confident, assertive, and bold enough to challenge organizational norms. They are competitive self-arguers, often well-groomed in interpersonal interactions, and make positive initial impressions (Den Hartog et al., 2020; Ronay et al., 2019). However, such behaviors, while seemingly beneficial, may lead to toxic dynamics. Ferris et al. (2019) emphasize that narcissism can increase political behavior in the workplace, thereby harming organizational productivity, goodwill, and relationships. O'Reilly and Pfeffer (2021) further suggest that as political actors increase their use of negative tactics, the intensity of narcissistic behaviors also escalates.

Traditionally, organizational politics involves leveraging one's status and power to achieve personal objectives, often at the cost of organizational values and collective progress (Braca & Dondio, 2023). When formal procedures break down or are insufficient to guide decision-making, individuals resort to political conduct as a means of self-preservation (Andrews et al., 2023). In the public sector context of Pakistan particularly within universities such behaviors are exacerbated by ethnic diversity, institutional competition, and weak accountability mechanisms. Political maneuvering becomes

normalized, leading to strained employee-manager relations and a decline in productivity (Asad et al., 2020).

Although the relationship between narcissistic personality traits and organizational politics has been previously discussed, an important question remains underexplored: how does gender moderate this relationship? While gender is a well-recognized variable influencing workplace behavior, very few studies have examined its moderating role in the narcissism-politics link. Notably, Zhou et al. (2012) explored this relationship in a limited context among adolescents in China but no substantial academic work has investigated this dynamic within organizational settings. Addressing this gap, the current study explores the impact of narcissistic personality on organizational politics, moderated by gender, within public sector universities of the southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. This context provides a unique environment where political behaviors are pervasive, and understanding the interplay between personality traits and gender can offer valuable insights into improving institutional governance and employee relations.

1.1 Problem Statement

The present study seeks to investigate the influence of narcissistic personality traits on organizational politics, with a particular focus on the moderating role of gender among university teachers in the public sector of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. While prior research has examined gender differences in narcissism (Foster et al., 2003; Rayon et al., 2008), much of this work has been limited in scope, often targeting specific age groups such as adolescents (Zhou et al., 2012). As a result, there remains a significant gap in understanding how gender may shape the relationship between narcissistic traits and political behavior within professional and academic environments.

A critical and yet unresolved question is whether the impact of narcissistic personality on engagement in organizational politics differs between males and females—particularly within educational institutions where power structures, leadership dynamics, and political interactions are uniquely complex. Public universities in Pakistan serve as ideal contexts for such exploration, as faculty members often operate within intricate webs of

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formal authority and informal influence. Teachers, by virtue of their roles in policy development, academic governance, and interpersonal networks, can both influence and be influenced by political dynamics. Understanding how narcissistic traits affect their behavior in these settings is therefore essential.

This study responds to the lack of empirical evidence by exploring whether gender differences in narcissism are associated with varying levels of political behavior among university teachers. Drawing on Self-Regulation Theory (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), which emphasizes how individuals regulate their self-image and social behavior to maintain self-esteem, this research seeks to explain how narcissistic individuals motivated by self-enhancement navigate political environments differently based on gender.

By addressing this gap, the study not only advances theoretical understanding of the intersection between personality, gender, and organizational politics but also offers practical implications for institutional leadership. Insights from this research can support university administrators and HR professionals in identifying, managing, and potentially mitigating the impact of narcissistic behaviors in politically sensitive academic settings.

1.2 Significance of the study

This study contributes to the growing body of empirical literature by examining how narcissistic personality traits influence political behavior within organizations, particularly in the context of public sector universities. By linking narcissism to organizational politics and career outcomes, the research highlights how certain personality characteristics often considered part of the "dark triad" can shape professional conduct and institutional dynamics.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study advances knowledge in the fields of organizational psychology and management by deepening our understanding of how narcissistic tendencies manifest in politically sensitive environments. It provides a nuanced perspective on how individual traits interact with organizational contexts, especially when moderated by gender, an area that remains underexplored in existing literature.

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Practically, the findings of this research offer valuable insights for human resource professionals and university administrators. Understanding how narcissistic traits contribute to political behavior can help institutions refine their strategies related to recruitment, selection, promotion, and employee development. Moreover, by identifying personality features associated with negative workplace outcomes such as manipulation, favoritism, or interpersonal conflict organizations can implement more effective mechanisms to maintain organizational goodwill, promote transparency, and reduce counterproductive political behaviors.

In summary, this study bridges theoretical inquiry with applied relevance, offering both academic value and actionable insights for improving governance, employee relations, and leadership practices within higher education institutions.

1.3 Research Questions

- Q1. Is there any relationship exist between narcissism and organizational politics?
- Q2. Does narcissism have an impact on organizational politics?
- Q3. Does gender moderate the relationship between narcissism and organizational politics?
- Q4. What is the mean difference in responses because of the demographic variations among respondents?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

- I. To investigate the relationship between narcissism and organizational politics.
- II. To find out the impact of narcissism on organizational politics.
- III. To examine the role of gender as a moderator between narcissism and organizational politics.
- IV. To determine the mean difference in responses because of demographic variations.

2. Literature Review

Organizational politics are unofficial, informal, and sometimes covert attempts by individuals to 'advertise' concepts, to gain employees, to acquire authority, to get certain agendas accomplished etc. (Shahani et al., 2019). According to Asad, et al (2020),

organizational politics is the study of an entity of interaction, influence and competing demands and behaviors among members of an organization.

2.1 Narcissism

The term "narcissism" was first introduced by Havelock Ellis in 1898, drawing inspiration from the Greek myth of Narcissus an individual consumed by admiration for his own reflection (Hollingsworth, 2024). While some scholars, such as Waghorn (2024), argue that narcissism follows a developmental trajectory and is not inherently pathological, its implications in organizational contexts have drawn increasing attention.

Narcissistic individuals are characterized by an inflated sense of self-worth, a deep need for admiration, and a lack of empathy (Kenworthy, 2023). They are often obsessed with their perceived superiority in physical, intellectual, or social domains (Little, 2023). Such individuals are known to seek validation from others while simultaneously resisting criticism or conflicting viewpoints, often overestimating the accuracy of their beliefs (Cosgrove & Murphy, 2023).

In organizational settings, narcissism has been linked to both beneficial and detrimental outcomes. Research suggests that narcissistic traits may correlate with entrepreneurial ambition, confidence, and charismatic leadership (Davis, 2023). However, these same traits can manifest as arrogance, antagonism, and counterproductive behaviors, especially in collaborative environments (Hayat Mughal et al., 2024;). Narcissistic leaders may inspire through vision and charisma, yet simultaneously disrupt team cohesion due to their self-centeredness and poor interpersonal sensitivity (Charles et al., 2021).

Moreover, narcissists often engage in behaviors that preserve and reinforce their idealized self-image (Kirk et al., 2024). Their preoccupation with status and admiration can lead to political maneuvering, manipulation, and inefficient work practices (Tiwari & Jha, 2022;). These tendencies make narcissism a significant concern for organizational health and functioning, particularly in environments where power dynamics and self-promotion are prevalent.

2.2. Organizational Politics

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Organizational politics (OP) is generally characterized by self-serving behaviors that fall outside of formal role expectations. Shafer (2020) defined OP as individual or group activity that is often covert, divisive, unofficial, and contrary to the accepted organizational norms and values. More recent perspectives have expanded this view by emphasizing the influence of personal and social dimensions in managerial contexts (Abdullah et al., 2021). In developing countries, political dynamics within the broader social environment often influence organizational operations, hindering service delivery and institutional effectiveness (Dappa et al., 2019).

While some level of politics is inevitable in social interactions, its intensity can determine whether it harms or merely coexists with cognitive and professional functions. When moderate, politics may not significantly impair performance; however, excessive politicization can disrupt trust, morale, and productivity (AL-Abrow et al., 2021). Organizational politics has also been shown to impact employee silence and loyalty, as political behaviors often discourage open communication (Alnoor, 2020).

According to Utomo et al. (2023), organizational members may prioritize personal agendas over collective interests, leading to tensions and ethical concerns. Ferris et al. (2019) argue that when individual political behavior threatens group harmony or organizational goals, it becomes detrimental. Politics in the workplace is perceived as pervasive by many employees (Khairy, 2023), often manifesting when personal interests supersede organizational welfare (Hyusein & Eyupoglu, 2023).

The emotional and behavioral effects of OP are significant. Malik and Malhi (2020) found that workplace politics contributes to dissatisfaction and increased turnover, though they acknowledge that, under certain conditions, it may serve useful functions such as safeguarding employee benefits or facilitating project approval. However, the negative consequences tend to outweigh the positives when political activities dominate workplace culture.

Gallagher and Laird (2008) emphasized that organizational politics arises when individuals use informal or unauthorized tactics to fulfill personal goals. Bryson et al. (2024) further noted that ambiguous incentive structures and unclear performance goals

can fuel political behavior, making its management more complex. Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2019) highlighted that employees in politicized environments often experience heightened job stress and reduced performance, particularly in academic institutions where political influence is perceived as persistent and difficult to counter. Organizational politics also correlates with various psychological and behavioral outcomes such as anxiety, withdrawal, and reduced job satisfaction and involvement (Haider et al., 2020). Research by Maslyn and Fedor (1998) suggested that a favorable perception of workplace politics may reduce turnover intent, yet recent findings indicate that OP is generally associated with diminished happiness and commitment, and a greater likelihood of quitting (Wijerathna & Rebecca, 2024).

2.3 Gender as Moderator

Gender plays a critical moderating role in the relationship between narcissism and organizational behavior. Prior research consistently suggests that males generally exhibit higher levels of narcissism compared to females. For instance, Foster et al. (2003) and Morf and Rhodewalt (2001) reported that among middle-aged individuals, men demonstrated significantly more narcissistic traits than women. Similar results have been observed in younger populations as well; recent studies on Chinese adolescents confirmed that males score higher on narcissism scales, supporting the gendered nature of this personality trait. Narcissistic expression also varies qualitatively between genders and it was found that while both sexes may pursue narcissistic goals, the strategies differ. Women often employ more subtle, indirect approaches, whereas men tend to exhibit more overt and grandiose narcissism. Men, in particular, are more likely to display characteristics such as exaggerated self-importance, lack of empathy, and a strong sense of entitlement (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). The impact of gender on the expression of narcissism also aligns with the backlash effect literature. Grijalva et al. (2015) observed that women often experience social penalties for exhibiting agentic or dominant behaviors that are typically associated with narcissism. This backlash is reflected in various organizational outcomes. For example, Phelan and Rudman (2010) found a positive relationship between agentic behavior in women and hiring discrimination.

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Similarly, Okimoto and Brescoll (2010) reported that assertive behavior in women negatively influenced voting preferences, an effect not observed in their male counterparts.

These findings suggest that gender does not only influence the degree and style of narcissistic behavior but also moderates its organizational consequences. Understanding this moderating effect is essential for interpreting the broader implications of narcissistic personality traits in workplace politics, especially in contexts where leadership, influence, and interpersonal dynamics are shaped by gender norms.

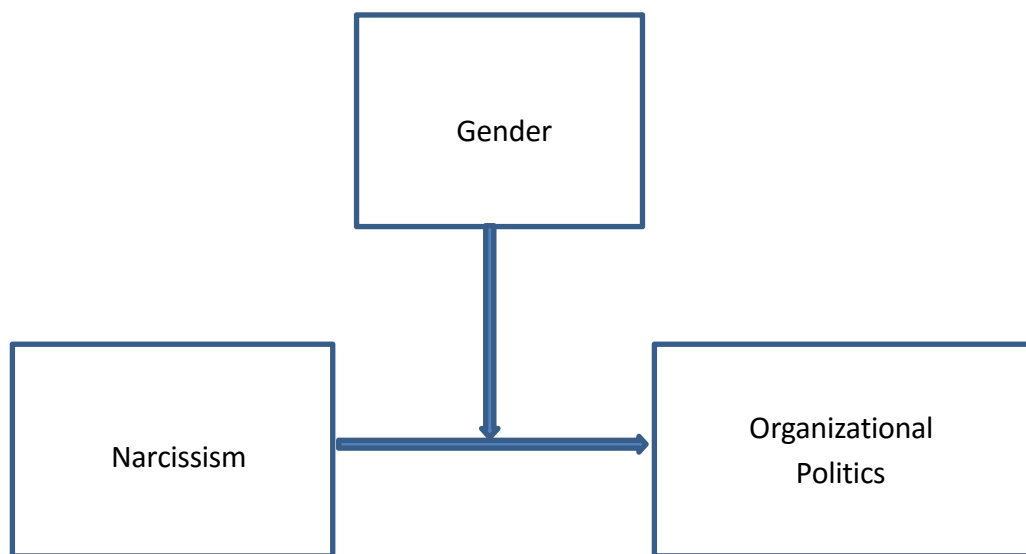
2.4.Theoretical Perspective

Self-regulation Theory

Morf and colleagues in their research used the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), which resulted in a significant notion of narcissism called self-regulation theory. It contends that goals related to affirming a person's lofty sense of self are largely what motivate people with high NPI scores to worry about self-regulation (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). According to this research, people with high NPI scores put a lot of effort into promoting their perceptions of their superiority and are incredibly alert about spotting and attempting to neutralize any risks to these inflated ideas of who they are. In another research work, Morf and Rhodewalt (1993) found that when these people feel threatened such as competed against or compared to a better performer or when they get bad feedback, they retaliate rudely by insulting or undervaluing other (Kernis & Sun, 1994). The grandiose and flimsy aspects of narcissism were identified by Morf (2006), who proposed that if on one hand narcissists have an extremely positive feeling of self, then on other hand they also have a clandestinely flimsy and fragile feeling of self which always make them dependent on getting validation and affirmation from their social environment and interpersonal relationships.

2.5 Conceptual Framework of the Study

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2.6 Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between narcissism and organizational politics.

H2: There is a significant impact of narcissism on organizational politics.

H3: The relationship between narcissism and organizational politics is significantly moderated by the Gender.

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H4: There is a significant mean difference in responses due to the demographic variations.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to investigate the impact of narcissistic personality on organizational politics with gender as a moderating variable. A descriptive, cross-sectional research design was employed, as suggested by Malhotra (2004), Creswell (2007), and Mertens (2005), to align the research methods with the study objectives. The target population included university teachers working in public sector universities in the southern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Due to time and financial constraints, convenience sampling a non-probability sampling technique was used to select respondents (Hanlon & Larger, 2011; Gupta, 2022). The total population comprised 715 faculty members from six universities, with details acquired from respective registrar offices. The selection of quantitative methodology is supported by Mohajan (2020), Bell et al. (2022), and Bryman and Bell (2007), who emphasize the relevance of numerical data and positivist philosophy in explaining cause-and-effect relationships within social phenomena.

Data were collected through structured, validated questionnaires. Narcissism was measured using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-13) by Gentile et al. (2013), comprising 13 items. Perceptions of organizational politics were assessed using the Organizational Politics Scale by Kacmar and Carlson (1997), consisting of 5 items. SPSS version 25 was used to conduct both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics included measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and dispersion (standard deviation, variance). Inferential techniques such as t-tests, F-tests, Z-tests, and ANOVA were employed to test hypotheses and examine group differences. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability, while correlation and regression analyses evaluated relationships and effects among variables. The moderating role of gender was tested following the procedures recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Preacher and Hayes (2008).

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3. Data Analysis

1.1 Reliability Analysis

Sub Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items	N
Narcissistic Personality	.893	13	364
Organizational Politics	.611	5	364

The reliability of the measurement instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The subscale for Narcissistic Personality demonstrated a high level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .893 across 13 items. The subscale for Organizational Politics yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .611 across 5 items. Data were collected from a total of 364 respondents for both constructs.

1.1.1 4.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation between Narcissistic Personality and Organizational Politics

	NP	OP
NP	1	
OP	.830**	1

The results of the analysis shows that the correlation between narcissistic personality (NP) and organizational politics is 0.830 while the significance is (sig. 2-tailed). This positive correlation indicates a moderate relationship between Narcissistic Personality and Organizational Politics. Individuals with higher levels of narcissism tend to perceive or engage more in organizational politics to advance their personal goals.

1.2 Moderation Analysis

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4.3.1 Multiple Hierarchical Regression (Moderation Interpretations)

In the presence of Gender as a moderator Association between Narcissistic Personality and Organizational Politics

Table a) Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.8328	.6936	.0367	271.6553	3.0000	360.0000	.0000

OUTCOME VARIABLE: OP

An R-value of 0.8328 in this model means that the variables being modeled (predictors or independent variables or Xs) and the variable being forecasted, which is called the dependent variable (Y), are strongly, positively correlated. There seems to be a strong relationship between these two variables. With an R-squared of 0.6936, approximately 69.36% of the variance in the dependent variable (e.g., organizational politics) is explained by the independent variables (narcissistic personality, gender, and interaction term). The value of MSE value is 0.0367, which measures the average of square difference between predicted value and actual value. With F-statistic value = 271.6553, we test the overall significance of the model.

Table b) Coefficients

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	.5914	.1992	2.9695	.0032	.1997	.9830
OP	.6994	.0968	7.2287	.0000	.5091	.8896

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Gender	-.3343	.1416	-2.3603	.0188	-.6128	-
						.0558
Int_1	.1638	.0686	2.3870	.0175	.0288	.2987

The predicted value of the dependent variable (e.g., organizational politics) into which all other predictors are zero is 0.5914. Since its p-value is less than 0.05 (or 5%), its significant. Since the confidence interval (0.1997, 0.9830) excludes zero, there is a significant effect. 0.6994 is the constant coefficient, which changes the dependent variable for every 0.6994 units change in the value of OP. This is a strong positive OP outcome relationship ($p = 0.0000$), with a strong t-value (7.2287). This variable is found to be significant, as the narrow confidence interval (0.5091 to 0.8896) does not include zero. The coefficient is -0.3343, meaning that gender has a negative moderating affect.

The coefficient (0.1638) is the positive coefficient of the dependent variable on the interaction between OP and Gender. In other words, gender moderates the relationship between OP and the outcome. That's why, OP has the strongest direct positive impact on the dependent variable. Both the direct effect of gender is negative and the moderating role of gender in the interaction with OP is positive.

5.1. Discussion

This study explored the influence of narcissistic personality traits on organizational politics, with a focus on gender as a moderating factor. The results confirmed a positive relationship between narcissism and engagement in organizational politics, aligning with prior research that links narcissistic traits to manipulative, self-serving behaviors in the workplace (Srivastava et al., 2024). However, the strength of this relationship was moderate, suggesting that contextual factors like leadership styles or organizational culture may shape how narcissism translates into political behavior (Tschanz et al., 1998). Gender moderation was partially supported. Male participants exhibited slightly higher

narcissism levels than females, in line with meta-analyses by Grijalva et al. (2015) and Twenge et al. (2008). Interestingly, narcissism's influence on organizational politics appeared stronger among men, supporting Grijalva and Newman's (2015) argument that narcissistic traits in men are often socially reinforced, particularly in leadership roles. The Biosocial Construction Model (Chukwuorji et al., 2020) further suggests that sociocultural expectations shape gendered expressions and perceptions of narcissism in organizational contexts.

These results contrast with studies like De Hoogh et al. (2013), which found that narcissistic leaders of both genders were perceived similarly. Here, male employees were more accepting of narcissistic behavior in male leaders, likely due to traditional gender-role norms that associate dominance and assertiveness with masculinity (Croft et al., 2021). Thus, narcissistic behavior may be viewed as more acceptable or even advantageous for men in leadership, while the same traits in women are often criticized or discouraged.

In summary, this study enhances understanding of how narcissism influences organizational politics and how gender norms shape its expression and acceptance in workplace settings.

5.2. Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide valuable guidance for organizational practices, particularly in managing narcissistic personalities and mitigating organizational politics. Integrating personality assessments in recruitment and promotion processes can help identify individuals with high narcissistic traits, allowing organizations to allocate roles strategically. Leadership training programs should focus on emotional intelligence and ethical behavior to ensure that individuals with narcissistic tendencies positively contribute to organizational goals. Promoting transparency in decision-making and performance evaluation can reduce political behavior by fostering a culture of fairness and accountability. Moreover, since gender moderates the relationship between narcissism and organizational politics, diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as gender-sensitization and mentorship programs, are essential. Finally, providing employee

support systems like counseling and conflict resolution platforms can help address the interpersonal tensions arising from organizational politics, contributing to a more supportive and inclusive workplace.

5.3. Conclusion

This study explored the intricate relationship between narcissistic personality traits and organizational politics, emphasizing the moderating effect of gender and the relevance of demographic characteristics. The results confirm that individuals with higher narcissistic tendencies are more likely to engage in or perceive political behavior within organizations. Furthermore, gender emerged as a significant moderator, with men showing a stronger link between narcissism and political behavior than women, suggesting that social and cultural constructs may influence these dynamics. The demographic profile of the sample—largely composed of experienced, educated professionals adds depth to the findings by reflecting mature workplace environments. Overall, the study enhances our understanding of how personality and gender shape political behavior at work, providing meaningful implications for organizational policy, leadership development, and future research.

1.1.2 5.4 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, organizations are advised to implement transparent policies that reduce political behavior and promote fairness. Leadership development programs should emphasize emotional intelligence and ethical conduct, particularly for individuals with narcissistic traits. Given the moderating role of gender, organizations should adopt gender-inclusive strategies to ensure balanced power dynamics. Recruitment and promotion processes should incorporate personality assessments to identify and manage high-risk traits early. Lastly, establishing strong employee support systems, including counseling and mentoring, can help mitigate the negative impact of organizational politics and enhance overall workplace well-being.

5.5 Limitations and Future Directions

This study is limited by its regional sample and cross-sectional design, which constrain the generalizability and causal interpretation of findings. Reliance on self-reported data may

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have introduced social desirability bias. Additionally, the study focused on a narrow set of variables primarily narcissism and gender while overlooking factors like organizational culture, leadership style, and broader personality traits. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to assess changes over time and explore cross-cultural settings to understand contextual influences. Incorporating other moderators and mediators, such as emotional intelligence or organizational climate, would enrich the analysis. Objective data sources, including peer or supervisor evaluations, could help validate results. Expanding to broader personality models, like the Big Five or Dark Triad, and investigating how narcissism operates in virtual work settings or different organizational structures could yield more comprehensive insights. Research into practical interventions and sector-specific dynamics would further contribute to managing workplace politics effectively.

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