



# **ALL ABOUT ME... HELPING YOU? THE CURIOUS LINK BETWEEN NARCISSISM, RECOGNITION, AND WORKPLACE CITIZENSHIP**

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## **Abstract**

In the bustling world of the modern workplace, where ambition and recognition often collide, a curious dynamic unfolds. Some employees thrive on appreciation, their efforts blooming under the warm glow of acknowledgment. Others, particularly those with narcissistic traits, react in ways that are far more complex—sometimes expected, sometimes surprising. This study dives into the intricate relationship between narcissism, recognition, and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), peeling back the layers of what drives employees to go beyond their formal duties. We look at five dimensions of OCB—altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue. As the findings reveal, recognition is a powerful force, but one that doesn't always land as intended. When narcissistic employees are publicly praised, they respond with sharpened focus and diligence, their conscientiousness surging as if to prove they were always the star of the show. Yet, in moments when status-enhancing rewards are on the line, sportsmanship falters. Patience wears thin, and a competitive edge emerges—after all, why endure inconveniences when the spotlight could be stolen by someone else? Curiously, the more selfless dimensions of OCB, such as altruism, courtesy, and civic virtue, remain largely unmoved by recognition. Perhaps because true generosity requires something beyond external validation. The implications are clear: recognition programs are not a one-size-fits-all solution. To harness motivation, organizations must understand what truly fuels their employees—be it ambition, admiration, or something deeper.

## **Keywords**

Employee Recognition; Narcissistic Personality; Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

## **Introduction**

In the intricate social ecosystem of the workplace, success is rarely determined by individual effort alone. Beyond meeting deadlines and fulfilling job descriptions, employees who go the extra mile, offering help to colleagues, taking initiative, and showing resilience in the face of challenges, are the ones who shape an organization's culture. This phenomenon, known as Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), has long been celebrated as a key ingredient in fostering collaboration, driving productivity, and ensuring long-term organizational success (e.g., Yaakobi & Weisberg, 2020). But while most employees engage in these discretionary acts out of a sense of responsibility or camaraderie, others have different motivations. Some thrive on acknowledgment. Some crave validation. And for a certain type of employee, recognition isn't just a perk—it's fuel.

Organizations eager to cultivate an engaged and high-performing workforce have long relied on recognition programs as a powerful tool for reinforcing positive behaviors. From public praise to performance bonuses, recognition is designed to signal that extra effort does not go unnoticed. But what if the impact of recognition isn't universal? What if, for some individuals, the promise of acknowledgment transforms workplace citizenship from a selfless act into a strategic maneuver?

Enter narcissism—a personality trait defined by an insatiable hunger for admiration, a grandiose sense of self-importance, and an acute sensitivity to status (Pincus & Lukowsky, 2010). In the workplace, narcissistic employees walk a fine line between confidence and entitlement, between ambition and manipulation. They are not necessarily unwilling to engage in acts of organizational citizenship, but their participation is often calculated. They are drawn to behaviors that enhance their image, reinforce their superiority, and secure the recognition they believe

they deserve. If helping a colleague or contributing to the organization's goals earns them praise, they may eagerly step forward. But if the spotlight shifts elsewhere, their willingness to cooperate may dim.

This raises a fascinating question: **Does employee recognition encourage narcissistic employees to engage in workplace citizenship, or does it simply reinforce self-serving behaviors that undermine genuine collaboration?**

Understanding the interplay between narcissism and recognition is crucial for organizations looking to design effective motivation strategies. Recognition is intended to inspire engagement, but it does not exist in a vacuum—it interacts with personality, shaping behavior in ways both intended and unintended. Unlike employees who engage in OCB out of intrinsic motivation, narcissistic employees may treat recognition as a currency, carefully calculating when and where to invest their efforts. If recognition fosters their participation, it could be a valuable tool for harnessing their ambition in productive ways. But if it primarily amplifies their self-enhancing tendencies, recognition programs might inadvertently create a work culture that rewards image over integrity.

Despite the wealth of research on employee recognition and workplace engagement, surprisingly little attention has been given to how personality traits, particularly narcissism, moderate these effects. This study aims to investigate the complex relationship between narcissism, recognition, and OCB. Specifically, we examine whether recognition enhances narcissistic employees' engagement in discretionary workplace behaviors—or whether it merely fuels their need for validation without fostering genuine commitment to the organization.

To unravel this dynamic, we explore five distinct dimensions of OCB: **altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue**. By dissecting these behaviors, we seek to uncover whether recognition inspires narcissistic employees to contribute meaningfully to the workplace or if their engagement is conditional.

Beyond its theoretical contributions to leadership and organizational behavior, this study carries profound **practical implications** for human resource management, leadership strategies, and performance management. Understanding how narcissistic employees respond to recognition can help organizations design **more targeted, effective** recognition programs—ones that maximize engagement without inadvertently encouraging performative prosocial behavior. Rather than assuming that recognition universally fosters cooperation, leaders can take a more nuanced approach, ensuring that their efforts to motivate employees do not come at the expense of workplace harmony.

By exploring this question, we move one step closer to understanding the hidden forces that shape workplace behavior—forces that, when harnessed wisely, have the power to transform organizations for the better.

## Theory & Hypotheses

Recognition can ignite motivation, shape behavior, and reinforce workplace norms. For many employees, it serves as an affirmation of value, fueling commitment, effort, and discretionary actions that benefit the organization (Stajkovic & Luthans, 2003; Grant & Gino, 2010). However, recognition is not universally experienced in the same way—it is filtered through individual differences, shaping both motivation and response. One of the most intriguing personalities in this equation is the narcissist—an employee who thrives on status, validation, and the careful management of self-image.

Narcissism is a paradoxical trait—narcissists exhibit high self-esteem but fragile self-worth, requiring continuous reinforcement to sustain their inflated self-view (Emmons, 1987; Rhodewalt, Madrian, & Cheney, 1998). Their motivation is highly contingent on external feedback, making them especially reactive to recognition and social comparison (Zeigler-Hill, Myers, & Clark, 2010; Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004). While they may engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), their participation is often strategic, driven by a calculation of whether recognition enhances their status or threatens their superiority (Park & Colvin, 2015).

Theories of social exchange and reciprocity help explain why recognition can be particularly influential for narcissists. Blau (1964), Akerlof (1982), and Fehr et al. (1993) argue that employees engage in discretionary effort when they perceive recognition as a valuable resource. For narcissists, recognition is not just feedback, it is a mirror reflecting their perceived superiority, reinforcing their sense of worth and influence. Similarly, conditional altruism theory (Levine, 1998) suggests that employees are more motivated to reciprocate effort when they believe recognition is genuine. This distinction is critical—when recognition is sincere and well-distributed, narcissists may embrace prosocial engagement, but when it is perceived as scarce, misdirected, or inaccessible, their motivation may erode (Dur, 2009; Non, 2012).

Furthermore, conformity theory (Bernheim, 1994; Sliwka, 2007; Fischer & Huddart, 2008) suggests that employees adjust their behavior to align with socially rewarded norms. If recognition publicly signals that certain OCBs are highly valued and prestigious, narcissists may embrace these behaviors—altruism, conscientiousness, courtesy, and civic virtue—as a means of personal branding. However, when recognition is tied to competitive rewards, narcissists may view the workplace as a zero-sum game, disengaging from behaviors that do not offer immediate status gains, such as sportsmanship.

The following hypotheses examine how narcissism and recognition interact to shape engagement in five key dimensions of OCB: altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue.

### ***Narcissism, Recognition, and OCB-Altruism***

Altruism, a fundamental component of OCB, refers to discretionary acts of helping colleagues, offering support, and assisting with work-related tasks without direct personal benefit (Organ et al., 2005). While traditionally associated with selfless intent, research suggests that not all altruistic behaviors are purely prosocial—for some individuals, helping is a calculated move tied to social perception and personal advantage.

Narcissists, in particular, engage in altruism selectively, depending on whether helping behaviors serve self-enhancement motives (Krizan & Bushman, 2011). Unlike employees driven by intrinsic concern for others, narcissists are more likely to display "strategic altruism"—acts of generosity that bolster their self-image and reinforce social dominance. However, these behaviors do not occur spontaneously. Recognition plays a crucial role in activating narcissistic altruism by framing helping behavior as a source of prestige and admiration.

One explanation for this dynamic lies in the status-signaling function of prosocial behavior. Baumeister and Vohs (2001) argue that narcissists excel at reinterpreting helping behaviors as signals of competence, leadership, and moral superiority. When acts of altruism are recognized publicly, they become socially visible performances rather than purely prosocial gestures. Public recognition signals that helping behavior is not only valued but also admired, making it an attractive means of enhancing one's workplace reputation.

Additionally, social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) provides insight into why narcissists are more likely to engage in altruism when recognition is involved. Narcissists are highly attuned to how they compare to others (Krizan & Bushman, 2011), meaning that when helping behavior is publicly rewarded, they may feel compelled to engage in similar or greater acts of altruism to maintain social status. Recognition, in this case, does not just encourage altruism—it creates a competitive incentive for narcissists to outperform others in demonstrations of generosity.

Further supporting this idea, Nelson (2018) found that recognition can be a more effective workplace motivator than financial rewards, reinforcing the notion that symbolic acknowledgment influences discretionary behaviors. In the case of narcissists, the motivation to engage in helping behavior is not rooted in selflessness but in the reputational gains recognition affords. When recognition elevates altruism as a socially prestigious trait, narcissistic employees are likely to embrace it, as long as their contributions are acknowledged and rewarded.

However, this recognition-altruism effect is conditional. If helping behaviors are not recognized or publicly reinforced, narcissists may disengage from altruistic acts, as these efforts would no longer serve their self-enhancement goals. Rather than maintaining consistent helping behavior, they may redirect their efforts to more visible forms of status-seeking engagement, such as civic virtue or conscientiousness.

Thus,

*Hypothesis 1: The interaction between narcissism and employee recognition positively predicts altruism, such that narcissistic employees engage in more altruistic behaviors when they receive recognition.*

### ***Narcissism, Recognition, and OCB-Conscientiousness***

Conscientiousness—characterized by diligence, reliability, and task commitment—is a key dimension of OCB that reflects an employee's investment in workplace responsibilities beyond formal obligations (Organ et al., 2005). While conscientious behavior is often associated with intrinsic motivation and a strong work ethic, narcissists approach it differently. Rather than being driven by a genuine desire for thoroughness or diligence, narcissistic employees may engage in selective displays of conscientiousness, using it as a means to signal competence and superiority (Campbell et al., 2004).

For narcissists, conscientiousness is not merely about responsibility—it is a vehicle for status enhancement. One of the key factors influencing their conscientious behavior is public recognition, which creates an opportunity to be perceived as exceptional. Bradler et al. (2016) found that public recognition significantly boosts performance, particularly when employees compare themselves to high-achieving peers. Given that narcissists are highly sensitive to social comparison (Krizan & Bushman, 2011), recognition serves as a competitive incentive, prompting them to intensify their demonstrations of effort, diligence, and reliability.

The underlying mechanism driving this relationship can be explained through impression management theory (Leary & Kowalski, 1990), which posits that individuals strategically regulate their behaviors to control how others perceive them. Narcissists, who are especially attuned to social feedback, may engage in heightened conscientiousness when recognition makes diligence a visible and rewarded trait.

Additionally, achievement motivation theory (McClelland, 1961) provides insight into why narcissists increase conscientious behavior in response to recognition. Individuals with high achievement motivation seek opportunities to demonstrate competence and success, particularly in competitive settings. Narcissists, who are inherently driven by dominance and prestige, may perceive conscientiousness as a controllable domain where they can excel and receive validation. When recognition reinforces the idea that diligence and reliability distinguish high-status employees, narcissists may engage in exceptional displays of conscientiousness.

Further supporting this, research on symbolic rewards (Kosfeld & Neckermann, 2011) suggests that non-monetary recognition can be as effective as financial incentives in shaping workplace behavior. For narcissists, who crave visibility over material rewards, conscientiousness becomes a strategic investment in their professional image.

When public acknowledgment positions conscientiousness as an admired trait, narcissists are more likely to embrace it—not out of a deep-seated sense of responsibility but as a means to secure praise, influence, and perceived leadership potential.

However, just as recognition can amplify conscientiousness, its absence may lead to disengagement. Thus, recognition is not merely a reinforcer but a determinant of whether narcissists exhibit heightened effort or withdraw from discretionary commitment.

Thus,

*Hypothesis 2: The interaction between narcissism and employee recognition positively predicts conscientiousness, with narcissistic employees demonstrating higher conscientiousness when their efforts are publicly acknowledged.*

### **Narcissism, Recognition, and OCB-Sportsmanship**

Sportsmanship—the ability to tolerate workplace inconveniences, setbacks, and frustrations without complaint—is an OCB that often goes unnoticed and unrewarded. It requires employees to exercise patience, suppress negative reactions, and accept minor unfairness for the sake of workplace harmony (Organ et al., 2005).

For many, sportsmanship reflects professionalism and emotional resilience. For narcissists, however, it presents a unique challenge.

Narcissists are notoriously low in frustration tolerance (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001), particularly when obstacles or setbacks threaten their self-image. Their sense of entitlement and superiority means they expect special treatment, recognition, and success without undue struggle (Campbell et al., 2004). When they encounter barriers to advancement, unfair feedback, or delayed rewards, they are more likely to react with indignation rather than patience. Instead of viewing setbacks as temporary inconveniences, they may interpret them as personal slights, system failures, or evidence of others' incompetence.

Recognition, particularly when tied to exclusivity and competition, further exacerbates this effect. Kube et al. (2012) suggest that for recognition to be motivating rather than discouraging, it must be selective yet attainable. When recognition is highly exclusive and granted only to top performers, narcissists may view any failure to receive it as an unacceptable loss. Their need to maintain status and dominance makes them less willing to endure the kinds of small frustrations that come with the workplace experience—such as deferring to others' ideas, waiting for opportunities, or gracefully handling setbacks. Instead, they may engage in complaining, undermining colleagues, or disengaging altogether.

This response aligns with reactance theory (Brehm, 1966), which suggests that individuals react negatively when they feel their autonomy, status, or expectations are constrained. When recognition is perceived as a scarce and highly competitive resource, narcissists may internalize workplace challenges as evidence that they are being unfairly deprived of admiration, triggering defiance rather than resilience. Instead of tolerating inconveniences with grace, they may display hostility, disengagement, or counterproductive behaviors as a way to reassert control and importance.

Further supporting this idea, Krizan & Bushman (2011) argue that narcissists are hypersensitive to social comparison, making them particularly reactive to environments where status is unevenly distributed. If recognition amplifies perceived inequality, rather than motivating narcissists to improve their standing, it may cause them to reject norms of patience and sportsmanship entirely.

Thus,

*Hypothesis 3: The interaction between narcissism and employee recognition negatively predicts sportsmanship, such that narcissistic employees are less likely to tolerate workplace inconveniences when status-enhancing rewards are on the line.*

### **Narcissism, Recognition, and OCB-Courtesy**

Courtesy, defined as thoughtfulness, respect, and proactive conflict avoidance, is a subtle yet influential form of workplace citizenship. Employees who exhibit courtesy engage in small but meaningful behaviors—such as keeping colleagues informed, acknowledging others' contributions, and diffusing potential conflicts before they escalate (Organ et al., 2005). While often overlooked in favor of more overt workplace achievements, courtesy plays a critical role in shaping social cohesion and professional reputations.

For narcissists, courtesy is not an instinctive behavior, but it can be a strategic one. Narcissists are highly attuned to social perception and constantly manage how they are viewed by others (Park & Colvin, 2015). Their motivation for engaging in courteous behaviors depends not on an intrinsic concern for harmony, but on whether these actions contribute to their social standing and reinforce their self-image.

Courtesy, when recognized and reinforced, offers narcissists a low-cost, high-reward mechanism to appear agreeable, cooperative, and socially skilled. Unlike more effortful forms of OCB, such as altruism or conscientiousness, courtesy requires minimal investment while yielding maximum social benefit, making it particularly appealing to narcissists when tied to public recognition.

Additionally, Vidal & Nossol (2011) suggest that recognition is most effective when it clearly distinguishes achievement without creating a sense of unattainability. When courtesy is rewarded and framed as a trait that enhances professional reputation, narcissists may view it as a valuable personal branding tool. Furthermore, because recognition signals reciprocity within professional relationships, narcissists may see courtesy as a transactional behavior—a way to gain favor, secure alliances, or position themselves advantageously within workplace networks. Thus,

*Hypothesis 4: The interaction between narcissism and employee recognition positively predicts courtesy, such that narcissistic employees engage in more courteous behaviors when recognition reinforces their self-image.*

### **Narcissism, Recognition, and OCB-Civic Virtue**

Civic virtue—active engagement in organizational affairs, participation in decision-making, and commitment to institutional success—is a distinctive form of OCB that requires long-term effort and investment. Unlike more immediate, socially visible behaviors such as altruism or courtesy, civic virtue is often a slow-burning path to influence, positioning employees as knowledgeable, engaged, and dedicated to the organization's future (Organ et al., 2005). While many employees engage in civic virtue out of intrinsic organizational commitment, narcissists approach it as a calculated means of self-promotion.

Unlike sportsmanship, which asks for humility and patience, or conscientiousness, which requires consistent diligence, civic virtue provides a stage for influence. Participation in high-visibility organizational matters—such as policy discussions, leadership initiatives, and strategic planning—can serve as a platform for showcasing expertise, authority, and leadership potential. Bradler et al. (2016) found that public recognition amplifies engagement, particularly when high-status employees are rewarded for civic participation. Given that narcissists are highly attuned to status dynamics, they are likely to engage in civic virtue when it is publicly acknowledged as a pathway to influence.

This motivation aligns with status motivation theory (Anderson et al., 2015), which suggests that individuals strive to attain positions of social prestige and influence in their workplace communities. When recognition signals that civic involvement is a mark of leadership, narcissists may increase their engagement in organizational affairs to assert their standing. Unlike other forms of OCB, civic virtue provides narcissists with access to decision-making power, an outcome that is particularly appealing to their desire for control and admiration. Thus,

*Hypothesis 5: The interaction between narcissism and employee recognition positively predicts civic virtue, with narcissistic employees showing greater involvement in organizational affairs when recognition enhances their status.*

## **Methods**

In this study, a total of 128 participants were recruited via Pollfish, a survey platform with an extensive global network comprising over 250 million respondents across 160 countries. To be eligible for participation, individuals were required to be at least 18 years old, reside in the United States, and be employed for wages. The survey included key demographic questions and assessed all variables within the theoretical framework. Despite the predefined selection criteria emphasizing employment status, 28 participants were excluded from the final sample for one or more of the following reasons: (a) reporting that they were unemployed or not currently working, (b) failing to actively consider their work experience while completing the survey, or (c) providing responses that did not meet the expected level of attentiveness and effort—resulting in an effective response rate of 78.13%. The participants in this study ranged in age from 18 to 73 years ( $M = 39.54$ ,  $SD = 13.22$ ). The sample comprised 47% male and 53% female respondents. In terms of racial and ethnic composition, approximately 59% of participants identified as Caucasian, 26% as Black, 6% as Asian, and 7% as Hispanic, while 2% either selected "other" or opted not to disclose their ethnicity.

## **Measures**

All survey items were rated on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) unless otherwise indicated. All items were self-reported.

*Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)* was assessed using the scale developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990). This measure captures discretionary employee behaviors that contribute positively to the work environment but are not explicitly required by formal job descriptions. The scale consists of five dimensions:

*Altruism* ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ): Assesses the extent to which employees willingly help colleagues facing work-related difficulties (e.g., "In general, I help others who have heavy workloads").

*Conscientiousness* ( $\alpha = 0.65$ ): Evaluates adherence to workplace norms, effort beyond formal responsibilities, and compliance with company rules (e.g., “In general, I obey company rules and regulations even when no one is watching”).

*Sportsmanship* ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ): Measures tolerance for workplace difficulties and the tendency to minimize complaints about minor issues (e.g., “In general, I consume a lot of time complaining about trivial matters”).

*Courtesy* ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ): Examines proactive efforts to maintain positive workplace relationships and avoid conflicts (e.g., “In general, I try to avoid creating problems for co-workers”).

*Civic Virtue* ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ): Captures engagement in organizational activities and awareness of company developments (e.g., “In general, I attend meetings that are not mandatory, but are considered important”).

*Employee Recognition* ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ) was measured using an adapted scale based on prior studies on rewards and recognition in workplace settings (Sidhu & Nizam, 2020; Khan & Jabbar, 2013; Ali & Ahmed, 2009; Ndungu, 2017; Pousa & Mathieu, 2014). The scale assessed the extent to which employees perceived recognition and rewards for their performance. It included five items covering both monetary and non-monetary recognition. (e.g., “In my organization, employees are recognized for excellent performance.”)

*Narcissistic Personality* ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) was assessed using the 16-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16) developed by Ames, Rose, and Anderson (2006). This short-form version of the original NPI captures key traits associated with narcissism, such as grandiosity, dominance, and entitlement. Items included statements such as “I like to be the center of attention,” and “I insist on getting the respect that is due to me.”

*Attention Checks* were included in the study to account for the limited cognitive resources of participants and their potential to engage in satisficing instead of providing optimal responses to survey questions. These items were used to assess the extent to which participants were actively engaged in the survey, as opposed to satisficing. Examples of these items include “Please select somewhat disagree” and “Please choose somewhat agree for your response to this item.”

*Demographics* participants' age and gender were considered control variables, which were demographics Pollfish had already collected for each respondent before the survey began.

## Results

Table 1 provides an overview of the means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, and intercorrelations among the study variables. All measures demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of .70 or higher (DeVellis, 2016), except for conscientiousness ( $\alpha = 0.65$ ), which fell slightly below the conventional threshold. In accordance with Cohen (1988), correlation coefficients of .30 are interpreted as moderate, while values of .50 or higher indicate strong correlations.

Following the recommendations of Aiken et al. (1991), all variables were standardized, and a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed to assess the proposed model. Additionally, to improve the precision of standard error estimates and confidence intervals, bootstrapping was employed, as suggested by Alfons et al. (2018). Each hypothesis was tested using a series of three models. The first model included age and gender, which were the control variables. The second model included employee recognition, and narcissistic personality. The third model includes our interaction term. A summary of the regression analysis can be found in Table 2-6.

**Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Age	39.54	13.22	(1.0)								
2 Gender	0.47	.50	.11	(1.0)							
3 Narcissistic Personality	4.38	1.02	-.30**	.21*	(.89)						
4 Employee Recognition	4.90	1.34	-.31**	.14	.51**	(.86)					
5 Altruism	5.57	.89	-.16	-.01	.21*	.42**	(.80)				
6 Conscientiousness	5.67	.84	.00	.02	.07	.36**	.55**	(.65)			
7 Sportsmanship	4.57	1.80	.39**	-.07	-.55**	-.42**	-.26**	-.10	(.90)		
8 Courtesy	5.74	.99	.11	.01	-.02	.23*	.43**	.44**	.00	(.78)	
9 Civic Virtue	5.24	1.13	-.04	.01	.31**	.52**	.63**	.46**	-.20*	.51**	(.75)

Note. N = 100. Means and standard deviations are reported in the raw metric of the variables. Cronbach's alpha is reported in parentheses in the diagonal. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

The results provided mixed support for our hypotheses. Hypothesis 1, which proposed that the interaction between narcissism and employee recognition would positively predict altruism ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), was not supported. This indicates that narcissistic employees were not more likely to engage in altruistic behaviors even when their contributions were recognized.

Conversely, Hypothesis 2 was supported, as the interaction term significantly predicted conscientiousness ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that narcissistic employees exhibited higher conscientiousness when they perceived high levels of employee recognition.

Hypothesis 3 was also supported, with results indicating that the interaction between narcissism and employee recognition significantly predicted sportsmanship ( $\beta = -0.24$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This finding suggests that narcissistic employees' tolerance for workplace inconveniences decreases when their performance is recognized or when status-enhancing rewards are at stake.

In contrast, Hypothesis 4 was not supported, as results failed to show a significant interaction effect on courtesy ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). This finding implies that narcissistic employees do not necessarily engage in more courteous behaviors, even when they might benefit from doing so through employee recognition.

**Table 2 Effects of Narcissism and Employee Recognition on Altruism**

Variables	Altruism		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	0.00 (0.10)	0.00 (0.09)	-0.08 (0.13)
Age	-0.17 (0.11)	-0.03 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.13)
Gender	0.01 (0.10)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.10 (0.09)
Narcissistic Personality		0.01 (0.16)	0.01 (0.17)
Employee Recognition		0.41 (0.17)*	0.46 (0.20)*
Narcissism x Recognition			0.15 (0.15)
$R^2$	0.03	0.18	0.21
$\Delta R^2$		0.15	0.03

Note. N = 100. Table presents standardized  $\beta$  coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Finally, Hypothesis 5 was not supported ( $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), indicating that narcissistic employees are unlikely to engage in civic virtue behaviors regardless of organizational efforts to recognize and reward employee performance.

Overall, these findings underscore the nuanced role of employee recognition in influencing the prosocial behaviors of narcissistic employees. While recognition can motivate certain positive behaviors, such as conscientiousness, it appears to have little to no effect on altruism, courtesy, or civic virtue. Moreover, the negative association with sportsmanship suggests that recognition may, in some cases, exacerbate self-serving tendencies in narcissistic individuals rather than fostering a cooperative work environment.

**Table 3 Effects of Narcissism and Employee Recognition on Conscientiousness**

Variables	Conscientiousness		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	0.00 (0.10)	0.00 (0.10)	-0.10 (0.10)
Age	0.00 (0.10)	0.11 (0.10)	0.09 (0.10)
Gender	0.02 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.10)	-0.07 (0.10)
Narcissistic Personality		-0.12 (0.11)	-0.12 (0.12)
Employee Recognition		0.45 (0.13)***	0.51 (0.15)**
Narcissism x Recognition			0.19 (0.09)*
$R^2$	0.00	0.15	0.20
$\Delta R^2$		0.15	0.05

Note. N = 100. Table presents standardized  $\beta$  coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table 4 Effects of Narcissism and Employee Recognition on Sportsmanship**

Sportsmanship			
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	0.00 (0.10)	0.00 (0.08)	0.12 (0.08)
Age	0.41 (0.09)***	0.23 (0.08)**	0.26 (0.08)**
Gender	-0.12 (0.09)	0.01 (0.08)	0.06 (0.08)
Narcissistic Personality		-0.41 (0.11)**	-0.42 (0.09)***
Employee Recognition		-0.14 (0.11)	-0.21 (0.10)*
Narcissism x Recognition			-0.24 (0.09)**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.17	0.37	0.45
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		0.20	0.08

Note. N = 100. Table presents standardized  $\beta$  coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

\*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

**Table 5 Effects of Narcissism and Employee Recognition on Courtesy**

Courtesy			
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	0.00 (0.10)	0.00 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.13)
Age	0.11 (0.09)	0.19 (0.11)	0.17 (0.11)
Gender	0.00 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.10)	-0.06 (0.10)
Narcissistic Personality		-0.15 (0.12)	-0.14 (0.14)
Employee Recognition		0.37 (0.15)*	0.41 (0.19)*
Narcissism x Recognition			0.15 (0.12)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.11	0.14
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		0.10	0.03

Note. N = 100. Table presents standardized  $\beta$  coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

\*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

**Table 6 Effects of Narcissism and Employee Recognition on Civic Virtue**

Civic Virtue			
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	0.00 (0.10)	0.00 (0.09)	-0.01 (0.12)
Age	-0.04 (0.11)	0.18 (0.08)*	0.18 (0.08)*
Gender	0.02 (0.10)	-0.10 (0.08)	-0.11 (0.09)
Narcissistic Personality		0.11 (0.13)	0.11 (0.13)
Employee Recognition		0.54 (0.14)***	0.54 (0.16)***
Narcissism x Recognition			0.01 (0.14)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.00	0.31	0.31
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		0.31	0.00

Note. N = 100. Table presents standardized  $\beta$  coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

\*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

## Discussion

The findings of this study offer a nuanced perspective on the interaction between narcissism, employee recognition, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). The results indicate that while recognition can enhance some dimensions of OCB among narcissistic employees—most notably conscientiousness—it does not have a uniform effect across all dimensions. Specifically, recognition did not significantly impact altruism, courtesy, or civic virtue, suggesting that narcissistic employees may not engage in these behaviors unless they directly serve their self-enhancement motives.

The significant interaction between narcissism and recognition in predicting conscientiousness suggests that narcissistic employees respond well to acknowledgment that validates their competence and diligence. This aligns with prior research indicating that narcissists are driven by external validation and status enhancement.



(Campbell et al., 2004). However, the negative relationship between recognition and sportsmanship raises concerns about unintended consequences. When recognition is tied to competition or status-enhancing rewards, narcissistic employees may exhibit lower tolerance for workplace inconveniences, highlighting a potential downside of recognition programs that inadvertently foster competitive rather than collaborative work environments.

These findings suggest that organizations need to carefully design recognition programs that encourage prosocial engagement without amplifying self-serving tendencies. While narcissistic employees can be motivated to engage in discretionary effort, the type of OCB they exhibit appears to be contingent on how recognition is framed and distributed.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Future research should explore additional contextual factors that may moderate the relationship between narcissism, recognition, and OCB. For example, organizational culture, leadership styles, and peer dynamics could influence whether recognition fosters genuine engagement or reinforces self-enhancing behaviors. Examining whether different forms of recognition—monetary versus symbolic, public versus private—affect narcissistic employees' behavior differently could provide further insight into optimizing recognition strategies.

Longitudinal studies could also help determine whether the effects observed in this study persist over time. It is possible that narcissistic employees initially respond positively to recognition but become disengaged or dissatisfied when recognition is inconsistent or perceived as unfairly distributed. Additionally, incorporating qualitative research methods, such as interviews or case studies, could provide a deeper understanding of the motives underlying narcissistic employees' engagement in OCB.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to response biases, particularly given the nature of narcissism as a socially sensitive trait. Future research could incorporate peer or supervisor assessments to triangulate findings and provide a more comprehensive evaluation of OCB engagement.

Second, while the sample included a diverse range of employees, it was limited to individuals working in the United States. Cultural differences in workplace norms and recognition practices could influence how narcissistic employees respond to acknowledgment. Cross-cultural studies could help determine whether these findings generalize to different work environments.

Lastly, the study design does not allow for causal conclusions. Although hierarchical regression analyses suggest relationships between variables, experimental or longitudinal designs would be necessary to confirm causality. Future research could manipulate recognition conditions to assess their direct impact on narcissistic employees' workplace behavior.

### **Conclusion**

This study contributes to the growing body of research on personality, motivation, and workplace behavior by examining how narcissistic employees respond to recognition in the context of OCB. The findings indicate that while recognition can enhance conscientiousness, it does not significantly influence altruism, courtesy, or civic virtue. Furthermore, recognition appears to reduce sportsmanship among narcissistic employees, potentially fostering competitive or disengaged workplace behavior. Recognition programs should be designed to encourage broad-based engagement rather than inadvertently reinforcing self-enhancing motives. By considering the role of personality in shaping responses to recognition, organizations can create more effective strategies for fostering a collaborative and productive workplace culture. Future research should continue exploring these dynamics to develop more tailored and impactful employee recognition practices.

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