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Research Article



Workplace Ostracism as a Mediator Between Narcissism and Imposter Syndrome: Implications for Employee Well-being in the Future of Work

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Abstract

This study examines the relationships among narcissism, workplace ostracism, and imposter syndrome in organisational settings, with a particular focus on the mediating role of workplace ostracism. Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study proposes that interpersonal exclusion serves as a key mechanism through which narcissistic tendencies influence employees' self-perceptions. Data were collected from 300 employees in the information technology sector using a cross-sectional survey design. The results, based on regression and mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro, indicate that narcissism is positively associated with workplace ostracism and imposter syndrome. Workplace ostracism was also found to significantly predict imposter syndrome and partially mediate the relationship between narcissism and imposter syndrome. These findings suggest that interpersonal dynamics play a critical role in shaping employees' psychological experiences, particularly in environments where social validation is limited. The study contributes to the literature by integrating personality traits and workplace social processes to explain imposter-related outcomes. It also highlights the importance of addressing subtle forms of workplace exclusion to enhance employee well-being, especially in the context of evolving and digitally mediated work environments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary organisations, employee well-being is shaped not only by formal job demands but also by interpersonal experiences and individual personality characteristics. Among the psychological challenges increasingly discussed in organisational research, imposter syndrome has attracted substantial attention. Imposter syndrome refers to persistent feelings of self-doubt, self-devaluation, and fear of being exposed as inadequate despite objective evidence of competence and achievement (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2021; Tewfik et al., 2024). Individuals experiencing imposter feelings often discount their accomplishments and attribute success to luck or external circumstances, which may reduce confidence, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being. Recent research further suggests that imposter experiences are not confined to early-career employees but are evident across professional levels and organisational contexts (Tewfik et al., 2024).

Alongside these internal experiences, workplace social dynamics have emerged as an important area of inquiry. One such dynamic is workplace ostracism, which refers to the perception of being ignored, excluded, or socially overlooked by coworkers or supervisors. Unlike overt hostility, ostracism is often subtle and may take the form of limited communication, social avoidance, exclusion from informal interactions, or withholding of relevant information. Even though these behaviours are indirect, their psychological consequences can be substantial, as they threaten employees' need for belonging and social acceptance (Howard et al., 2023; Jahanzeb et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021).

Personality traits may play an important role in shaping how employees are perceived and treated within organisational settings. In particular, narcissism has been widely associated with grandiosity, entitlement, and a strong desire for admiration. Although narcissistic individuals may appear confident and assertive, their interpersonal style may create strain in team-based environments, especially when self-focus overrides reciprocity and cooperation (Back et al., 2021; Campbell et al., 2020). Such interpersonal strain may increase the risk of social distancing and exclusion, thereby affecting broader psychological outcomes.

Despite the growing literature on narcissism, workplace ostracism, and imposter syndrome, these constructs have largely been examined independently. As a result, limited attention has been given to the underlying mechanisms through which personality traits may influence imposter-related experiences. Drawing on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, workplace ostracism can be understood as a depletion of valuable social and psychological resources, particularly belongingness, recognition, and interpersonal support. For individuals whose self-worth is closely tied to external validation, such resource loss may intensify self-doubt and perceived inadequacy (Halbesleben et al., 2022). These dynamics may be especially relevant in the future of work, where hybrid and digitally mediated interactions can make exclusion less visible while increasing its psychological impact (Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, this study examines whether workplace ostracism mediates the relationship between narcissism and imposter syndrome, to offer a more integrated

understanding of employee well-being in contemporary organisational settings.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Recent work in organisational behaviour increasingly recognises that employee outcomes are shaped by the combined influence of dispositional characteristics and workplace social experiences. Personality traits do not operate in isolation; rather, they interact with everyday interpersonal processes that shape how individuals see themselves and how they are treated by others. Within this broader perspective, the present study focuses on narcissism, workplace ostracism, and imposter syndrome. The following sections review the relevant literature and develop the hypotheses.

2.1 Narcissism and Workplace Ostracism

Narcissism is generally understood as a personality characteristic marked by self-importance, entitlement, admiration-seeking, and a preference for self-enhancement. In organisational contexts, individuals high in narcissism often present themselves as confident, dominant, and highly capable. While such qualities may initially be interpreted positively, their interaction patterns may gradually create tension in collaborative environments, especially when personal recognition is prioritised over collective goals (Back et al., 2021; Campbell et al., 2020).

In workplace settings, these tendencies may shape how colleagues respond to narcissistic individuals. Coworkers may perceive them as arrogant, self-centred, or insensitive to others' contributions, which can reduce willingness to engage with them in meaningful ways. Rather than leading to open conflict in every case, these reactions may emerge through more subtle forms of distancing, such as reduced communication, avoidance, exclusion from informal interactions, or restricted information sharing. Such patterns closely reflect workplace ostracism (Fatima et al., 2021; Howard et al., 2023).

From a relational perspective, workplace interactions are sustained through reciprocity, mutual regard, and social balance. When one individual repeatedly prioritises self-interest and admiration, coworkers may respond by withdrawing engagement. Over time, this withdrawal may be experienced as exclusion. Empirical evidence suggests that stronger narcissistic tendencies are associated with poorer interpersonal outcomes, including social tension and reduced acceptance within teams (Fatima et al., 2021). Accordingly, narcissism is expected to be positively associated with workplace ostracism.

H1: Narcissism is positively associated with workplace ostracism.

2.2 Workplace Ostracism and Imposter Syndrome

Workplace ostracism has emerged as a significant concern because of its subtle but powerful influence on employees' psychological experiences. It refers to situations in which employees feel ignored, excluded, or overlooked by others in the workplace. Unlike explicit aggression, ostracism often occurs indirectly and may therefore be harder to identify, even though its effects can be deeply personal and psychologically disruptive (Howard et al., 2023; Jahanzeb et al., 2023).

The experience of being excluded can reshape how employees interpret their own place within the organisation. Human beings have a fundamental need to belong, and when that need is repeatedly frustrated, individuals may begin to question their value, legitimacy, and contribution. In organisational environments, exclusion can gradually erode confidence and heighten uncertainty regarding one's role and competence.

This mechanism is particularly relevant to imposter syndrome. When employees receive fewer signals of inclusion, recognition, and validation, they may become more vulnerable to self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy. Empirical findings indicate that workplace ostracism is associated with emotional strain, lower job satisfaction, and reduced professional confidence, all of which are consistent with imposter-like experiences (Li et al., 2021; Jahanzeb et al., 2023). Repeated exclusion may also be internalised as evidence of personal deficiency, thereby reinforcing imposter-related beliefs. On this basis, workplace ostracism is expected to be positively associated with imposter syndrome.

H2: Workplace ostracism is positively associated with imposter syndrome.

2.3 Narcissism and Imposter Syndrome

Although narcissism is often associated with confidence and self-assurance, recent scholarship suggests that such outward confidence may not always reflect a stable internal sense of self. In many cases, narcissistic tendencies are associated with a strong dependence on external affirmation, meaning that self-worth remains contingent on recognition, status, and admiration from others (Back et al., 2021).

Within organisational settings, where performance is continuously evaluated and social comparison is common, this need for validation may create psychological pressure. Individuals high in narcissism may feel compelled to sustain an idealised image of competence and superiority. While this may motivate visible performance, it may also increase sensitivity to situations that threaten status or self-presentation. Even relatively minor setbacks, criticism, or lack of recognition may trigger concerns about being perceived as inadequate.

This dynamic can be interpreted through self-discrepancy logic. When a gap develops between an individual's idealised self-image and their perceived actual performance, uncertainty may intensify. Such internal inconsistency can foster the kinds of doubts central to imposter syndrome, including fear of exposure, perceived inadequacy, and persistent questioning of one's abilities. Prior research similarly indicates that fragile or unstable self-esteem may coexist with outward confidence and contribute to self-doubt (Bravata et al., 2020; Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2021). Thus, narcissism may also be positively associated with imposter syndrome.

H3: Narcissism is positively associated with imposter syndrome.

2.4 Mediating Role of Workplace Ostracism

Existing research increasingly suggests that the influence of personality traits on employee outcomes is often indirect, operating through everyday social experiences in the workplace. In this study, workplace ostracism is proposed as an

explanatory mechanism linking narcissism to imposter syndrome.

As argued earlier, narcissistic individuals may engage in behaviours that disrupt relational balance, leading others to respond through subtle social distancing. These distancing behaviours can accumulate into perceived ostracism. At the same time, repeated experiences of exclusion may weaken employees' sense of belonging, reduce social validation, and increase doubts regarding competence and acceptance.

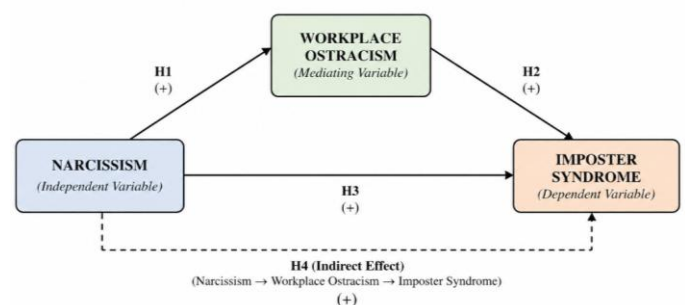
This sequence helps explain how narcissism may translate into imposter-related experiences. Rather than assuming that narcissism directly produces self-doubt in all cases, the present model suggests that interpersonal consequences are an important part of the process. Workplace ostracism, therefore, serves as a key intervening mechanism through which the social consequences of narcissistic behaviour shape internal self-perceptions and increase imposter feelings.

H4: Workplace ostracism mediates the relationship between narcissism and imposter syndrome.

3. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework proposes that narcissism influences imposter syndrome both directly and indirectly through workplace ostracism. In this model, narcissism is treated as the independent variable, workplace ostracism as the mediating variable, and imposter syndrome as the dependent variable. The framework assumes that narcissistic tendencies affect interpersonal experiences in the workplace, which in turn influence employees' perceptions of competence, legitimacy, and belonging.

The proposed conceptual model includes three direct paths: narcissism to workplace ostracism, workplace ostracism to imposter syndrome, and narcissism to imposter syndrome. In addition, an indirect effect is proposed, whereby workplace ostracism mediates the relationship between narcissism and imposter syndrome.



Note. Solid arrows represent direct effects. The dashed arrow represents the proposed indirect effect of narcissism on imposter syndrome through workplace ostracism.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the relationships among narcissism, workplace ostracism, and imposter syndrome.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among narcissism, workplace ostracism, and imposter syndrome in organisational settings. The primary objective is to assess both the direct association

between narcissism and imposter syndrome and the indirect pathway through workplace ostracism.

A cross-sectional approach was considered appropriate because the study focuses on employees' perceptions of personality-related tendencies, workplace experiences, and psychological states within a defined time frame. Such designs are widely used in organisational research when the aim is to identify meaningful relational patterns among variables. Although cross-sectional data do not permit strong causal claims, they offer a useful basis for examining theoretically grounded associations and testing mediation models.

4.1 Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from employees working in the information technology (IT) sector, which is characterised by collaboration, performance monitoring, and team-based interaction. These features make the IT context particularly relevant for studying interpersonal experiences such as workplace ostracism and psychological outcomes such as imposter syndrome (Tewfik et al., 2024).

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used because of the practical difficulty of obtaining organisational access across multiple firms. Data were gathered using a structured online questionnaire distributed through professional networks and corporate communication channels. A total of 300 usable responses were retained after screening for completeness and consistency. Only participants with at least six months of work experience were included to ensure sufficient exposure to organisational dynamics.

4.2 Measurement Scales

All constructs were measured using established and validated instruments. Narcissism was assessed using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) developed by Raskin and Hall (1979). Workplace ostracism was measured using the Workplace Ostracism Scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008). Imposter syndrome was measured using the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS) developed by Clance (1985).

All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha, and all values exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

4.3 Data Analysis Methods

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics and Hayes' PROCESS macro. The analysis began with descriptive statistics to summarise the sample and study variables. Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha, while construct validity was assessed using Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, followed by exploratory factor analysis.

Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine relationships among the study variables. Multiple regression analysis was then performed to test the direct effects proposed in the model. Finally, mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 4 with bootstrapping based on 5,000 resamples to assess the indirect effect of narcissism on imposter syndrome through workplace ostracism (Hayes, 2022).

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics to examine the relationships among narcissism, workplace ostracism, and imposter syndrome. The analysis included descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, validity testing, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation analysis.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the central tendencies of the study variables. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of study variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Narcissism	3.21	0.71
Workplace Ostracism	3.08	0.69
Imposter Syndrome	3.34	0.73

The findings indicate moderate levels of narcissism, workplace ostracism, and imposter syndrome among the respondents. The relatively similar standard deviation values suggest a reasonable spread of responses without excessive variability.

5.2 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Reliability analysis of study constructs

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Narcissism	10	0.86
Workplace Ostracism	10	0.91
Imposter Syndrome	12	0.89

All constructs demonstrate high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70. These results indicate that the scales are reliable for subsequent analysis.

5.3 Validity Testing

Construct validity was assessed using exploratory factor analysis. Before factor extraction, the suitability of the data was examined using the KMO measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's test

Test	Value
KMO measure of sampling adequacy	0.87
Bartlett's test of sphericity (χ^2)	1654.32
Degrees of freedom	231
Significance	p < 0.001

The KMO value of 0.87 indicates a high level of sampling adequacy. Bartlett's test is statistically significant, confirming that the correlation matrix is suitable for factor analysis.

Table 4. Factor loadings of measurement items

Construct	Item	Factor Loading
Narcissism	N1	0.72
	N2	0.75
	N3	0.69
	N4	0.77
Workplace Ostracism	WO1	0.81
	WO2	0.84
	WO3	0.79
Imposter Syndrome	IS1	0.74
	IS2	0.78
	IS3	0.71

All factor loadings exceed 0.60, ranging from 0.69 to 0.84, indicating satisfactory convergent validity and acceptable alignment between items and their respective constructs.

5.4 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the study variables. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Correlation matrix

Variable	1	2	3
1. Narcissism	1		
2. Workplace Ostracism	0.42**	1	
3. Imposter Syndrome	0.36**	0.48**	1

*Note: * $p < 0.01$

The results indicate that narcissism is positively and significantly correlated with workplace ostracism and imposter syndrome. Workplace ostracism is also positively and significantly correlated with imposter syndrome. These moderate associations provide initial support for the proposed hypotheses.

5.5 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to examine the direct relationships among the study variables. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Regression results

Predictor	Dependent Variable	Beta (β)	Significance
Narcissism	Workplace Ostracism	0.42	$p < 0.001$
Narcissism	Imposter Syndrome	0.21	$p < 0.001$
Workplace Ostracism	Imposter Syndrome	0.41	$p < 0.001$

The findings indicate that narcissism has a significant positive effect on workplace ostracism, supporting H1. Narcissism also has a significant positive effect on imposter syndrome, supporting H3. In addition, workplace ostracism significantly predicts imposter syndrome, supporting H2.

5.6 Model Summary

The explanatory power of the regression models was evaluated using R^2 values, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Model summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
Narcissism → Workplace Ostracism	0.42	0.18	0.17	0.64
Narcissism, Workplace Ostracism → Imposter Syndrome	0.54	0.29	0.28	0.61

The results indicate that narcissism explains 18% of the variance in workplace ostracism. When narcissism and workplace ostracism are considered jointly, they explain 29% of the variance in imposter syndrome. These values suggest moderate explanatory power.

5.7 Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrapped resamples to examine the indirect effect of narcissism on imposter syndrome through workplace ostracism. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Mediation analysis results

Path	Effect	SE	95% Confidence Interval
Narcissism → Workplace Ostracism	0.44	0.05	[0.34, 0.54]
Workplace Ostracism → Imposter Syndrome	0.39	0.06	[0.28, 0.50]
Narcissism → Imposter Syndrome (Direct Effect)	0.18	0.07	[0.05, 0.31]
Indirect Effect	0.17	0.04	[0.10, 0.26]

The indirect effect is statistically significant because the confidence interval does not include zero. In addition, the direct effect of narcissism on imposter syndrome remains significant after the inclusion of the mediator, indicating partial mediation. Thus, H4 is supported.

5.8 Hypothesis Testing Summary

Table 9: Hypothesis testing summary

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Narcissism is positively associated with workplace ostracism	Supported
H2	Workplace ostracism is positively associated with imposter syndrome	Supported
H3	Narcissism is positively associated with imposter syndrome	Supported
H4	Workplace ostracism mediates the relationship between narcissism and imposter syndrome.	Supported

All proposed hypotheses are supported. The findings indicate that workplace ostracism partially mediates the relationship between narcissism and imposter syndrome.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings provide meaningful insight into the interplay between personality, workplace relationships, and employee

psychology. As expected, narcissism was positively related to workplace ostracism and imposter syndrome, while workplace ostracism was also positively associated with imposter syndrome. Most importantly, workplace ostracism partially mediated the relationship between narcissism and imposter syndrome, indicating that interpersonal experiences form an important pathway through which personality-related tendencies influence internal psychological outcomes.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings suggest that narcissism should not be viewed only as an expression of confidence or self-importance. Rather, the results support the view that narcissistic tendencies may coexist with a fragile and externally dependent sense of self. Individuals high in narcissism may seek affirmation and recognition, yet their interpersonal style may generate social distancing within teams. When such distancing is interpreted as exclusion, it can reduce social validation and increase doubts about competence and legitimacy. In this way, workplace ostracism becomes a mechanism through which outward self-enhancement is translated into inward self-doubt.

The finding of partial mediation is especially important because it indicates that narcissism affects imposter syndrome both directly and indirectly. This means that imposter experiences may stem not only from internal pressure to preserve an idealised self-image but also from the social consequences of one's workplace behaviour. This result extends prior research by showing that imposter syndrome is not solely an internal cognitive phenomenon; it is also shaped by relational and contextual processes.

These findings are particularly relevant in the context of the future of work. As organisations increasingly rely on hybrid, remote, and digitally mediated forms of interaction, opportunities for informal support and immediate social feedback may become more limited. In such environments, subtle forms of exclusion may be harder to detect but potentially more damaging. Therefore, understanding workplace ostracism is especially important for supporting employee well-being in emerging work arrangements.

7. Implications

7.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the organisational behaviour literature by integrating narcissism, workplace ostracism, and imposter syndrome into a single framework. In doing so, it advances a more process-oriented understanding of how personality traits influence psychological outcomes at work. Specifically, the study identifies workplace ostracism as a key explanatory mechanism linking narcissistic tendencies to imposter-related experiences.

The findings also extend the literature on imposter syndrome by positioning it as an outcome shaped not only by internal cognition but also by interpersonal workplace conditions. This broader perspective helps explain why seemingly confident individuals may still experience self-doubt when workplace relationships undermine belonging and validation.

7.2 Practical Implications

The findings offer useful implications for organisations seeking to improve employee well-being. Because workplace ostracism

plays a mediating role, organisations should pay greater attention to subtle forms of exclusion that may not be immediately visible but may still carry significant psychological consequences.

Managers can help reduce such risks by fostering transparent communication, inclusive team interactions, and respectful collaboration. Interventions such as peer inclusion practices, team-based feedback systems, and leadership development focused on interpersonal awareness may reduce exclusionary dynamics. These efforts may be especially important in contemporary work settings where reduced face-to-face interaction can increase the risk that social exclusion goes unnoticed.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to make strong causal inferences regarding the relationships among the variables. Future research may adopt longitudinal or time-lagged designs to examine how these relationships develop over time.

Second, the study relies on self-reported data, which may introduce response bias. Future studies may incorporate multi-source data, such as peer or supervisor ratings, to improve the robustness of the findings and further examine workplace ostracism and imposter syndrome in different organisational contexts.

9. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships among narcissism, workplace ostracism, and imposter syndrome in organisational settings. The findings indicate that narcissistic tendencies are associated with both workplace ostracism and imposter syndrome, and that workplace ostracism serves as an important mechanism linking the two. These results show that seemingly confident personality traits may coexist with adverse psychological experiences, particularly when workplace relationships weaken feelings of belonging and competence.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of addressing subtle forms of exclusion in contemporary organisations. By highlighting the role of workplace ostracism, the study contributes to a better understanding of how employee well-being is shaped by both personality and interpersonal context.

Beyond organisational relevance, the study also carries broader social significance. In increasingly competitive and digitally mediated work environments, subtle exclusion may become less visible but more psychologically consequential. Addressing these dynamics can contribute not only to healthier organisations but also to more respectful, inclusive, and equitable work cultures.

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