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The Impact of Narcissistic Leadership on Employee Burnout: The Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence in Workplace Resilience in the Banking Sector

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Abstract: In contemporary organizational environments, leadership style plays a critical role in shaping employee well-being and performance. Narcissistic leaders often exhibit manipulative, self-centered, and emotionally detached behaviors, which can contribute to a toxic work atmosphere and lead to heightened stress and burnout among employees. This study investigates the relationship between narcissistic leadership and employee burnout, focusing specifically on the banking sector. Through the lens of workplace resilience, the research explores how emotional intelligence mediates this relationship among bank employees. A quantitative approach was used, collecting data from employees through structured surveys measuring perceived narcissism in leadership, levels of burnout, emotional intelligence, and resilience. We observed a significant positive correlation between narcissistic leadership and employee burnout. However, emotional intelligence was found to play a mediating role, helping individuals better manage the emotional toll of difficult leadership dynamics. Moreover, workplace resilience emerged as a buffering factor, reducing the intensity of burnout symptoms. The findings underscore the importance of fostering emotional intelligence and resilience in employees as protective mechanisms against toxic leadership styles. Organizations are encouraged to invest in leadership development and emotional competency training to create healthier and more sustainable work environments.

Keywords: narcissistic leadership; employee burnout; emotional intelligence; workspace resilience

1. Introduction

In modern organizational settings, the quality of leadership has a profound impact on employee experiences and outcomes. While strong, supportive leaders can inspire teams and improve morale, those exhibiting narcissistic traits often do the opposite. Narcissistic leadership marked by self-centeredness, a constant need for admiration, and an absence of empathy tends to foster environments where employees feel undervalued, overworked, and emotionally drained. Over time, such conditions can lead to chronic stress and burnout, diminishing both personal well-being and workplace productivity. Burnout has become a widespread concern across sectors, manifesting as emotional exhaustion, detachment from work, and a declining sense of achievement. Yet, despite similar environments, not all individuals respond to narcissistic leadership in the same way. This suggests that certain personal attributes may influence how employees cope. Emotional intelligence—the capacity to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions [1], has gained increasing attention for its potential to mitigate stress [2] and build psychological resilience [3].



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Recent empirical research across various global contexts consistently links narcissistic leadership to deteriorating employee well-being and increased symptoms of burnout [4,5], particularly within high-pressure environments such as the banking sector [6]. For instance, a survey of 310 bank employees in Pakistan found that narcissistic supervisors significantly reduced job satisfaction and well-being while increasing stress and turnover intentions [7]. Similarly, in 12 private Turkish security companies, narcissistic leadership strongly predicted all three components of follower burnout: higher emotional exhaustion and cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy [8]. Employees described such leaders as hostile and unpredictable, which diminished engagement and often triggered emotional outbursts in response to criticism. Further evidence from the Netherlands showed that employees with low self-esteem under narcissistic leaders experienced more severe burnout symptoms and perceived their supervisors as abusive [9]. In healthcare, narcissistic, self-promoting, and humiliating behavior were identified as hallmarks of toxic leadership, directly contributing to employee burnout in high-stress environments [10]. These studies—spanning countries such as Pakistan, Turkey, the Netherlands, and Greece, and industries including banking, security, and healthcare consistently demonstrate that narcissistic leadership undermines employees' psychological well-being, fosters emotional exhaustion and cynicism, and drives disengagement and counterproductive behavior. Although few studies have directly examined emotional intelligence (EI) in the context of narcissistic leadership, broader research underscores EI's protective role against burnout. Gong et al. found that employees with higher EI experienced significantly lower burnout, as emotional intelligence was positively associated with psychological capital defined by hope, resilience, and self-efficacy and negatively correlated with burnout levels [11]. Their findings suggest that emotionally intelligent individuals possess greater internal resources to manage stress and adversity, making them less susceptible to the psychological toll of narcissistic supervision. Leadership theories also support the idea that supervisors low in emotional intelligence—especially those lacking empathy and self-awareness inflict greater psychological strain on their teams [12], as these leaders often fail to mitigate the negative stressors inherent in the banking sector [13]. While no study has yet directly tested emotional intelligence as a moderating factor in the narcissistic leadership burnout relationship, existing evidence strongly suggests its potential buffering effects. Recent scholarship also highlights resilience both psychological and moral—as a critical mediator and moderator in the dynamic between narcissistic leadership and burnout. Notably, narcissistic leaders could, in some instances, energize subordinates' goal-directed efforts, thereby enhancing resilience [14]. However, this positive effect was heavily dependent on employees' psychological availability their current resource capacity. The energizing impact was most pronounced when psychological availability was low, suggesting that employees experiencing resource depletion stood to gain the most from resilience-building mechanisms. Additional evidence supports the role of resilience in mitigating burnout [15] in a large-scale study of Greek nurses, higher levels of moral resilience defined as the ability to preserve integrity under stress—were significantly associated with lower burnout levels. These findings align with the Conservation of Resources Theory [16], which posits that individuals equipped with personal and psychological resources are less likely to succumb to burnout when exposed to toxic leadership [17,18]. Collectively, these findings highlight the substantial impact of narcissistic leadership on employee burnout across diverse organizational contexts. However, emotional intelligence and resilience emerge as critical personal resources that can buffer this effect (Figure 1). Emotionally intelligent individuals tend to cultivate coping mechanisms such as optimism and self-efficacy, which protect against the stress induced by narcissistic bosses [11]. Similarly, resilient employees—especially those with strong psychological or moral reserves are better equipped to withstand or recover from the demands imposed by self-centered leaders [11,19].

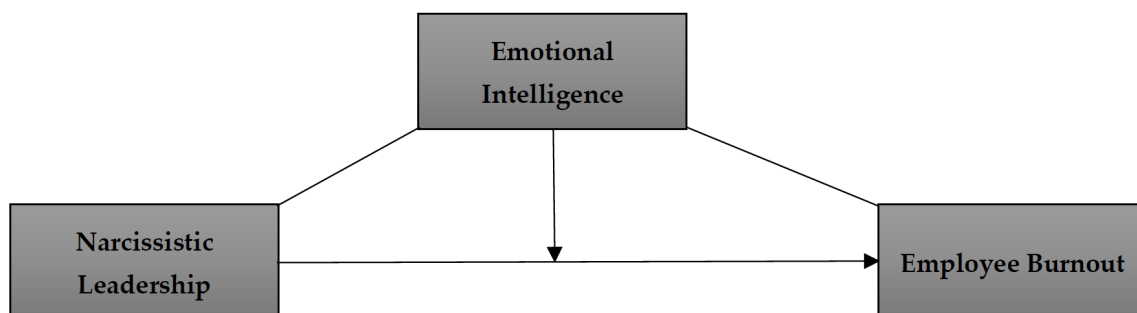


Figure 1. Schematic model of the role of Emotional Intelligence in modulating the relationship between Narcissistic Leadership and Employee Burnout.

The role of Emotional Intelligence in mediating the relationship between narcissistic leadership and employee burnout remains underexplored. Furthermore, organizations continue to face challenges in mitigating burnout and fostering resilience, especially in high-stress environments. Although leadership training programs and employee well-being initiatives exist, they often fail to address the complex dynamics between toxic leadership styles and employee emotional resilience. Understanding whether and how emotional intelligence can serve as a protective factor against the detrimental effects of narcissistic leadership is crucial for developing targeted interventions that promote a healthier and more sustainable work environment. Aiming to examining the mechanisms through which narcissistic leadership influences burnout and the extent to which emotional intelligence plays a mediating role in this relationship, this research first investigates the direct link between narcissistic leadership and employee burnout, highlighting how narcissistic behaviors heighten the risk of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and diminished professional effectiveness. Simultaneously, it examines the potential of emotional intelligence to act as a protective buffer, enabling employees to sustain resilience in toxic workplace conditions.

To explore these dynamics, the following research questions have been developed:

- (1) To what extent does narcissistic leadership influence employee burnout in modern organizational settings?
- (2) How does narcissistic leadership affect emotional intelligence in workplace resilience?
- (3) What is the impact of emotional intelligence in workplace resilience on employee burnout?
- (4) Does emotional intelligence in workplace resilience mediate the relationship between narcissistic leadership and employee burnout?

2. Methods

In order to explore the impact of narcissistic leadership on employee burnout and examine the mediating role of emotional intelligence in workplace resilience, a mixed-method approach was applied. The research was conducted with a focus on employees working under direct managerial supervision aiming to gather real-life data to answer the primary research questions.

The research population comprises the total workforce of Bank Al Sharq, totaling approximately 200 employees. From this population, a representative random sample of 82 participants (approximately 41% of the workforce) was obtained through the Human Resources (HR) department in a strictly confidential manner. The data collection process was formally authorized by the Human Resources Directorate at Bank Al Sharq following a comprehensive review of the research objectives and survey instruments.

All participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from each respondent prior to data collection. The researcher provided a formal pledge that all gathered data would be used exclusively for scientific research purposes, guaranteeing the complete anonymity of the participants. Furthermore, the study was conducted in strict adherence to the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki regarding research involving human subjects.

The primary data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture the dimensions and variables of the research. The questionnaire consisted of the following two main sections:

- (1) Demographic Information: This section included questions related to the personal and professional characteristics of the respondents, such as age group, years of experience, and job title.
- (2) Study Variables: This section measured Narcissistic Leadership, assessed using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16) [20], Emotional Intelligence and Workplace Resilience defined based on the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) [21] and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) [22]. All these scales elicit the responses to the single questions on a 5–7 point Likert scale. A hypothetical mean of 3.0 was adopted as a benchmark to compare with the overall arithmetic mean of the responses.

This comparison served as the basis for accepting or rejecting the study hypotheses.

To assess the reliability of the instrument used in this study, we employed Cronbach's Alpha coefficient method, which measures the degree of internal consistency among the questionnaire items. This statistical test determines the reliability and dependability of the measurement tool in capturing the intended constructs.

Employee Burnout was defined as the primary outcome variable, measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-HSS) [23], which assesses three dimensions: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. For the purpose of this analysis, burnout was treated as a continuous score derived from the weighted average of these dimensions to allow for a more granular understanding of the impact of leadership.

To ensure the appropriateness of the statistical methods, the data were first tested for normality using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. However, to address the categorical nature of the independent variables, specific cut-off points were established based on the three-tier classification of mean scores (Low: 1.00–2.33; Moderate: 2.34–3.66; High: 3.67–5.00).

Univariate analyses were conducted using parametric or non parametric methods as appropriate.

Multivariable logistic regression was conducted to predict the burnout score as a results of age (continuous), sex, job role (entry, mid, senior+executives), job seniority (<6 months, 6–12 months, 1–3 years, >3 years), narcissistic behavior (yes/no), emotional intelligence (yes/no), and workplace resilience (yes/no).

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 26.

3. Results

Table 1 shows selected characteristics of the study population.

Table 1. Relative distribution of the study population by selected characteristics.

Variables	Categories	Count	%
Age	21–30	67	81.7%
	31–40	8	9.8%
	51+	5	6.1%
	Under 20	2	2.4%
	Total	82	100.0%
Gender	Men	40	48%
	Female	42	52%
Job role	Entry-level	36	43.9%
	Mid-level	33	40.2%
	Senior-level	3	3.7%
	Executive	10	12.2%
	Total	82	100.0%
Work Experience	Less than 6 months	27	32.9%
	6 months to 1 year	14	17.1%
	1–3 years	30	36.6%
	3–5 years	6	7.3%
	More than 5 years	5	6.1%
Total	82	100.0%	

In terms of age distribution, the majority of participants (81.7%) were between 21 and 30 years old, while 9.8% fell within the 31 to 40-year age group, and 6.1% were aged 51 and above. Female employees were slightly prevalent. Regarding job level, 43.9% of the respondents were in entry-level positions, 40.2% held mid-level roles, and 12.2% were in executive-level positions. The age and job level distributions reflect a predominantly young and early- to mid-career workforce, which is significant for understanding perceptions of leadership and burnout within the studied organization.

The results of the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the key study variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha coefficient value for the study variables.

	No.	Cronbach's Alpha
Emotional Intelligence	5	0.66
Workspace Resilience	5	0.62
Narcissistic Leadership	5	0.71
Employee Burnout	5	0.64

As shown in Table 2, all values exceed the commonly accepted minimum threshold of 0.60 for exploratory research (30), indicating acceptable levels of internal consistency for each variable. These results confirm the instrument's reliability and its suitability as a primary data collection tool for this study.

3.1. Descriptive and Univariate Analyses

The univariate analysis results presented in Table 3 indicate that narcissistic leadership behaviour is significantly associated with increased burnout levels, with higher narcissistic behaviour corresponding to higher burnout scores (Median: 3.40 vs. 3.10, $p = 0.036$). Emotional intelligence showed a highly significant association with burnout levels, where employees with high emotional intelligence demonstrated lower burnout scores compared to those with low emotional intelligence (Median: 2.90 vs. 3.45, $p = 0.003$), suggesting that emotional intelligence serves as a protective factor against burnout. In contrast, workplace resilience did not demonstrate a statistically significant relationship with burnout (Median: 3.12 vs. 3.05, $p = 0.388$), and no significant differences

were observed based on gender ($p = 0.412$). These findings suggest that while leadership styles and emotional capabilities are key determinants of employee burnout, resilience levels and demographic factors do not appear to have a substantial impact in this specific context

Table 3. Univariate analysis of burnout score according to key predictors.

Variable	Category	Burnout Score, Median (Q1–Q3)	p-Value
Narcissistic behaviour	High	3.40 (3.03–3.77)	0.036
	Low	3.10 (2.70–3.50)	
Emotional Intelligence	High	2.90 (2.56–3.24)	0.003
	Low	3.45 (3.13–3.77)	
Workplace Resilience	High	3.12 (2.78–3.46)	0.388
	Low	3.05 (2.70–3.40)	
Sex	Men	3.22 (2.83–3.61)	0.412
	Women	3.28 (2.87–3.69)	
Total		3.25 (2.85–3.65)	

3.2. Multivariable Regression Analysis

After reciprocal adjustment in a multivariable linear regression model, as shown in Table 4, narcissistic leadership behaviour remained a significant positive predictor of burnout ($B = 0.079$, $p = 0.039$), indicating that each one-unit increase in narcissistic behaviour is associated with a measurable rise in employee burnout levels. Conversely, emotional intelligence was a significant negative predictor ($B = -0.411$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that higher emotional intelligence corresponds to a substantial reduction in burnout. Age, sex, job role, job seniority, and workplace resilience were not statistically significant predictors. Overall, the results presented in Table 4 indicate that narcissistic leadership behaviour increases burnout directly ($p = 0.039$), while emotional intelligence independently reduces burnout ($p < 0.001$). Workplace resilience and demographic variables did not significantly influence burnout. Notably, emotional intelligence functioned as an independent protective factor rather than a mediator of the relationship between narcissistic leadership and burnout.

Table 4. Multivariable regression model predicting employee burnout.

Variable	Regression Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	p-Value
Age	-0.012	0.009	0.180
Sex	0.041	0.052	0.430
Job role	0.065	0.058	0.270
Job seniority	0.021	0.017	0.220
Narcissistic behaviour	0.079	0.038	0.039
Emotional Intelligence	-0.411	0.095	0.000
Workplace Resilience	-0.018	0.020	0.391

4. Discussion

Our results provide several important insights into the relationship between leadership dynamics and employee well-being at Bank Al Sharq. The findings consistently demonstrate that narcissistic leadership functions as a direct antecedent to employee burnout: higher levels of narcissistic leadership were significantly associated with increased burnout among employees. Although the explained variance was modest ($R^2 = 6.3\%$), this pattern aligns with previous research indicating that self-centered, manipulative, and empathy-deficient leadership behaviors create stressful work environments that drain employees' psychological resources. According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, such environments accelerate resource depletion, thereby heightening vulnerability to emotional exhaustion and burnout.

In contrast, we did not detect a significant relationship between narcissistic leadership and employees' emotional intelligence. This suggests that emotional intelligence is not shaped by leaders' narcissistic tendencies but is instead influenced by more stable individual characteristics, long-term developmental experiences, and broader organizational factors. This interpretation is consistent with the view that emotional intelligence represents a relatively enduring personal capability rather than a trait that fluctuates in response to short-term supervisory behavior.

Emotional intelligence itself emerged as a significant protective factor against burnout, indicating that employees with higher emotional intelligence reported lower levels of burnout. This finding supports existing literature suggesting that emotional intelligence enhances coping abilities, emotional regulation, and resilience, thereby reducing susceptibility to stress and exhaustion. However, the mediation analysis revealed that emotional

intelligence does not serve as a mechanism through which narcissistic leadership affects burnout. Because narcissistic leadership did not significantly predict emotional intelligence, the conditions for mediation under the Baron and Kenny [24] framework were not met. Thus, emotional intelligence operates as an independent internal resource rather than a buffer activated by leadership behavior.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The research was conducted within a single banking institution, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other sectors or organizational contexts. The cross-sectional studies design restricts causal inference, and the reliance on self-reported measures introduces the possibility of common method bias. Additionally, although demographic variables such as age, sex, job role, and job seniority were included in the multivariable model, none emerged as significant predictors, suggesting that future studies should examine these factors using larger and more diverse samples.

From the methodological perspective, the use of the Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation approach [24] is less robust than contemporary alternatives such as bootstrapping or Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Future research should employ longitudinal designs, multi-sector samples, and advanced statistical techniques to provide stronger evidence regarding the mechanisms linking leadership styles, emotional intelligence, and burnout. Incorporating additional organizational variables—such as workload, job demands, and support systems—may also enhance explanatory power and deepen understanding of burnout dynamics.

5. Recommendations

- (1) **Develop Emotional Intelligence Training Programs:** Since emotional intelligence significantly impacts employee burnout and mediates the relationship between leadership and burnout, implementing training to enhance employees' emotional intelligence can improve resilience and reduce burnout levels.
- (2) **Promote Leadership Development Focused on Emotional Awareness:** Given the direct impact of narcissistic leadership on burnout but no significant effect on emotional intelligence, leadership development should emphasize emotional awareness, empathy, and humility to mitigate negative leadership effects.
- (3) **Implement Resilience-Building Workshops:** Strengthen workplace resilience through workshops or coaching, enabling employees to better cope with stressors and challenges, which can buffer against burnout even under challenging leadership styles.
- (4) **Monitor and Address Narcissistic Leadership Behaviors:** Since narcissistic leadership directly increases employee burnout, organizational policies should include mechanisms for identifying and managing leaders who exhibit such traits, potentially through feedback, coaching, or reassignment.
- (5) **Encourage Open Communication Channels:** Foster an environment where employees feel safe to express concerns about leadership behaviors and emotional challenges, facilitating early detection of burnout risks and leadership issues.
- (6) **Regularly Assess Employee Burnout and Emotional Well-being:** Use periodic surveys and assessments to monitor employee burnout and emotional intelligence levels, allowing timely interventions and support measures to be put in place.
- (7) **Promote a Supportive Organizational Culture:** Cultivate a culture that values psychological safety, mutual respect, and teamwork to counterbalance potential negative impacts of narcissistic leadership and enhance overall workplace resilience.

Supplementary Materials

The additional data and information can be downloaded at: <https://media.sciltp.com/articles/others/2606101335581791/WAH-25120069-Supplementary-Materials.pdf>. References [25–35] are cited in supplementary materials.

Author Contributions

M.D.A. and D.A.C.: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, and writing—original draft preparation. A.W.: Supervision, validation, writing—reviewing and editing, project administration, and correspondence. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Use of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Grammarly to refine wording and correct spelling errors. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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