

The impact of manager feedback on narcissists defensive voice and counterproductive behaviours: A two-study investigation

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Aims for the SGM are to develop ideas and build a network with the longer term goal to consider European funding.

Research Summary

Purpose: Feedback from a supervisor provides opportunities for employees to engage in formal voice mechanisms (O'Shea & Murphy, 2020) but whether or not employees choose to do so depends on whether they feel psychologically safe. Drawing on Edmondson (Edmondson, 1999, 2003) and Van Dyne, Ang and Botero (2003), we investigated the impact of employees' psychological safety on behavioural reactions to

feedback across two studies. In addition, we explored how variations in the personality trait of narcissism impacted these relationships.

Design/Methodology: Study 1 (N = 348) utilised a 2x2 experimental design which manipulated feedback valence (positive vs negative) and target (self or colleague). We measured vulnerable and grandiose narcissism, psychological safety, along with voice and silence as forms of approach versus withdrawal behaviours. In study 2, we further investigated the role of individual feedback (positive vs negative) from a manager, using a lagged three-wave design, and expanded the behavioural outcomes to include counterproductive work behaviours.

Results: In study 1, we found that those higher in both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism were more likely to engage in defensive voice, compared to prosocial or acquiescent voice across conditions. Both forms of narcissists reported experiencing lower psychological safety in the negative feedback directed towards themselves condition, and higher psychological safety in the condition of witnessing negative feedback directed towards a colleague. In study 2 (N = 203), we demonstrated that psychological safety moderated the relationship between both vulnerable and grandiose narcissism and the withdrawal component of counterproductive work behaviours, but not the abuse component. We did not find differences by sector (e.g. health and social services sector compared to others).

Research/Practical Implications: Our research demonstrates that narcissists are more likely to engage in defensive voice in response to negative individual feedback. Additionally, we found evidence that when narcissists feel less psychologically safe they engage in more self-protective behaviours (defensive voice in study 1, and withdrawal counterproductive behaviours in study 2) rather than overtly aggressive behaviours.

Originality/Value: Past research has tended to focus on the impact of narcissists on others, but there has not been substantial focus on the experience of narcissists themselves in the workplace. In examining the reactions of narcissists to negative feedback from a manager, this research highlights that both grandiose and vulnerable narcissists tend to engage in self-protective behaviours and that this response is magnified by feeling less psychologically safe.

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