Mirror Mirror on the Wall, You Are Indeed the Most Effective of Them All:

The Curvilinear Relationship between Leader Narcissism and Leader Effectiveness,

Moderated by Leader Instrumentality
Current research into perceived leader effectiveness of narcissistic leaders at work, considering leaders’ instrumental value, is established in 2019. In collaboration with five other master’s students of the Policy, Communication, and Organization stream and my thesis supervisor Dr. E.P. Sleebos, we constructed hypotheses, designed the digital survey, recruited respondents, and separately analysed, reported, and interpreted the research data.

Particularly, predicting employees’ evaluations of leaders’ performance, in the light of narcissistic leaders’ instrumental value in pursuing personal employee goals, appealed to me after one of my best friends told me that he aimed to gain a promotion; he positively adjusted his leader’s annual evaluation at work, as he expressed: “all you have to do is provide my narcissist-like supervisor with feedback on how well he is doing.” Interestingly, my friend indeed got promoted after two months. Writing this research report was the ultimate challenge for me to bring together the experience of writing research reports over the past years, in a masters-worthy thesis, and I hope I have succeeded. Moreover, I hope the whole process of conducting and writing my master’s thesis and/or this report may bring me one step closer to pursuing a Ph.D. position later on.

Hereby, I would like to thank Floris Adrichem Boogaert, Tessa de Jongh, Aniek Ignatius, Cheryl Vooren, and Shona Willekes MacDonald for their contribution in the construction of the digital survey, the coordination of premaster students during the data collection phase, and recruiting teams. I am also very grateful for the 125 premaster students’ contribution in providing teams and, therefore, helping gather data for the study. Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude for my master’s thesis supervisor Dr. E.P. Sleebos for supporting me at every stage of the study and providing valuable feedback on the initial draft of this research report.
LEADER NARCISSISM, EFFECTIVENESS, AND INSTRUMENTALITY

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Abstract
Research showed that narcissistic leaders’ performance within organizations is constantly under scrutiny. Specifically, previous research showed a curvilinear effect between narcissistic leaders and leader effectiveness (inverted U-shape). This research builds upon this work by suggesting that this curvilinear effect is influenced by perceived leader instrumentality. A cross-sectional research design was applied, utilizing multiple source data within 541 existing teams at work, consisting of 541 leaders and 1,719 employees, selected by convenience sampling. Contrasting with theory, multiple regression analysis revealed that narcissism in leaders was not curvilinearly related to leader effectiveness and that perceived leader instrumentality did not moderate this relationship. Most notably, however, perceived leader instrumentality was strongly related to leader effectiveness evaluations. This paper discusses why and how employees may exert influence on their leaders – including narcissistic leaders – for personal gains. Implications of the results for (managerial) practice and future research are discussed.

*Keywords:* leader narcissism, leader effectiveness, and leader instrumentality
Mirror Mirror on the Wall, You Are Indeed the Most Effective of Them All:
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Humanity has been intrigued by narcissists for a century now (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Research showed that although narcissism is a Dark Triad personality trait (like psychopathy and Machiavellianism) (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Wisse & Sleebos, 2016), narcissists are highly successful in increasing their empire of influence (Wisse & Sleebos, 2016), as they gradually obtain a higher percentage of shareholding and receive, for example, more salary and bonuses, as compared to their non-narcissistic counterparts (O’Reilly, Doerr, Caldwell, Chatman, 2014; Spurk, Keller, & Hirschi, 2016). Specifically, while narcissists are in love with themselves (Spotnitz & Resnikoff, 1954), they are suggested to be highly dislikeable as they are associated with socially toxic behaviours, power misusing (Mead, Baumeister, Stuppy, & Vohs, 2018), envy, schadenfreude (Krizan & Johar, 2012), aggression (Vize et al., 2019), bullying (Fanti & Frangou, 2018; Fanti & Henrich, 2015), manipulation, and even exploitation (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010). Moreover, narcissists derogate others (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliot, 2000; Vazire & Funder, 2006), ingratiate (i.e., flatter others), and take credit (even though this success may belong to someone else) (Hart, Adams, Burton, & Tortoriello, 2017). Interestingly, people still tend to intentionally allow these narcissists to gain ground, authorizing them to manage their organizations, be a figurehead in the society (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006), or even exert power in romantic relations (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002). Examples of these narcissists, put in extremely influential positions, are former Apple CEO Steve Jobs (“Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice”), professional footballer Zlatan Ibrahimovic (“You’re talking to God,” referring to himself), or politician Silvio Berlusconi (“I am the Jesus Christ of politics”). How is it even possible that these narcissists are tolerated at the top?
Clearly, there must be a valid explanation of why narcissists are not explicitly banned from most influential positions in society, as narcissists cannot reach such positions without help. Notably, as mankind recognizes narcissists seamlessly (Brunell et al., 2008; Brunell, Wicker, Deems, & Daddis, 2018; Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008), people hiring and promoting others could prevent them from gaining ground within organizations (Brunell et al., 2018). By this means, narcissists’ behaviours may be detected, such as distancing themselves from failure (Campbell et al., 2000; Vazire & Funder, 2006) and exaggerating their accomplishments to cultivate their desired self-image in other people (Hart et al., 2017). Nevertheless, narcissists are often seen as leaders, for example, because of their extraversion – one trait strongly associated with leadership (Brunell, et al., 2008; Grijalva et al., 2015) and vision (a view that is also related to transformational leadership and excellence of organizations; Maccoby, 2000). Research has for long concluded that narcissists are generally pushed forward for occupying leading positions (even by equals in leaderless discussions) (Brunell et al., 2008). Evidently, narcissists’ widespread occupation of leading positions within the organizations (Brunell et al., 2008; Deluga, 1997; Nevicka, De Hoogh, Van Vianen, Beersma, & McIlwain, 2011a; Pech & Slade, 2007; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006) is not solely justified on behalf of the narcissist and their desire to lead (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2011; Gardner & Pierce, 2011; Nevicka et al., 2011a; Wallace & Baumeister, 2002).

Fascinatingly, narcissists’ voluntary and/or ‘forced’ occupation of high exposure positions in organizations (Braun, 2017) does not mean that they are predominantly experienced as effective leaders (Grijalva et al., 2015; Hoffman et al., 2013; O’Reilly, Doerr, & Chatman, 2018). Although subordinates admire narcissists as leaders (Back et al., 2010; Oltmanns, Friedman, Fiedler, & Turkheimer, 2004), the latter are also associated with dysfunctional interpersonal relationships (Brunell & Campbell, 2011) and ineffective
coordination of resources to achieve group goals, due to self-overestimation (O’Reilly et al., 2018). It has been highlighted that moderately narcissistic leaders appear to be experienced as most effective by employees compared to those leaders who depict low and high narcissism (Grijalva et al., 2015). Research demonstrates that an increase in low narcissism leads to more adaptive manifestations of narcissism such as the construction of a positive self-image, promoting leader effectiveness, whereas an increase in high narcissism evokes non-adaptive narcissism such as entitlement, which decreases the reported leader effectiveness (Grijalva et al., 2015). Nevertheless, several positive relations between leader narcissism and leader effectiveness have been found (Nana, Jackson, & Burch, 2010; Nevicka, Ten Velden, De Hoogh, & Van Vianen, 2011b). This begs the question as to how highly narcissistic leaders, regardless of the supposed curvilinear relationship and their highly maladaptive behaviours, can in fact be evaluated as highly effective.

Previous research may have neglected a powerful moderator of the relationship between leader narcissism and leader effectiveness, namely differences in the extent to which employees perceive their leader as instrumental for their own purposes. Clearly, as research has long underscored leaders’ role in pursuing goals within organizations (Ordóñez, Schweitzer, Galinsky, & Bazerman, 2009), it is remarkable that research on leaders’ instrumental value for pursuing personal work-related employee goals (e.g., promotional and career goals) is lacking (see Antonakis & House, 2004; Roger Rees & Segal, 1984). Notably, the instrumental value of other people – for pursuing personal goals – appears to be an essential source of information for evaluating qualities of others (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Orehek, Forest, & Wingove, 2018a). Evidence even indicates that the more useful someone is perceived to be for achieving personal goals, the more positively this person is generally evaluated (Fishbach, Shah, & Kruglanski, 2004; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). For example, people appear to evaluate others as more important (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008), responsive,
and supportive when the other person holds higher instrumental value to them (Orehek et al., 2018a). Specifically, based on prior research on instrumentality (Hoogervorst, De Cremer, & Van Dijke, 2010; Orehek et al., 2018a; Orehek & Ferrer, 2018; Orehek & Forest, 2016), leaders scoring high on instrumentality are suggested to be perceived as highly usable for achieving employees’ personal work-related goals. Therefore, employees are presumed to be highly motivated to derive the benefits from highly instrumental leaders, whereas they might give leaders low on instrumentality a cold shoulder as they may believe such leaders cannot provide them with personal benefits.

Moreover, in this research, I suggest that especially the instrumental value of narcissistic leaders is of pivotal importance in predicting leader (in)effectiveness. Although narcissists are evaluated as ‘brighter,’ compared to Machiavellians and psychopaths (i.e., the Malicious Two) (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012), narcissistic leader effectiveness evaluations are presumed to be more intentionally adjusted by employees, in case of possible personal gains. Indeed, as narcissists’ self-concept is found to be unstable (Fukushima & Hosoe, 2011), and most deceptive in comparison to corporate Machiavellians and psychopaths (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), such leaders are presumed to be more easily manipulated by their subordinates. This is because, for narcissists, being socially praised is of pivotal importance for constructing a positive sense of self (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2011; Gardner & Pierce, 2011). It follows that the greater the narcissistic tendencies in an individual, the more external confirmation they need and seek (see Fukushima & Hosoe, 2011), presumably making the narcissist more reliant on, for example, employee perspectives. Moreover, as narcissistic leaders can be beneficial for subordinates’ objective and subjective career successes, whereas Machiavellians and psychopaths appear to be detrimental for employee success (Den Hartog, De Hoogh, & Belschak, 2018; Volmer, Koch, & Göritz, 2016), adjusting employees’ leader evaluations may indeed successfully influence narcissistic leaders’ behaviours. For these
reasons, employees may be particularly capable of manipulating highly narcissistic leaders, and most motivated to do so in case of high leader instrumentality, making them more manipulative, trying to reap the benefits from positive leader effectiveness evaluations of these narcissists. The current study, therefore, examines to what extent leader instrumentality influences the supposed curvilinear relationship between leader narcissism and experienced leader effectiveness.

The current study aims to gain insight into the possible influence of leader instrumentality, on the relationship between subclinical leader narcissism and perceived leader effectiveness at work. The objective is to make clear to what extent leader instrumentality and leader effectiveness are linked to each other. Strictly speaking, it is important to shed light on this dynamic to uncover why the instrumental value, particularly of highly narcissistic leaders, plays a pivotal part in influencing employees’ assessment of their leadership, so that this study clarifies the degree to which maladaptive narcissistic behaviour of leaders seems to be tolerated by employees towards colleagues and the organization as a whole, if the leader can be used for personal gain. However, illuminating the manipulative behaviour of the narcissistic leader should not be of our main concern, as employees may be the ones to be watched.

First, it is assumed that the relationship between leader narcissism and leader effectiveness is curvilinear and follows an inverted U-shape (Hypothesis 1). Second, the relationship between narcissism in leaders and leader effectiveness is moderated by leader instrumentality (Hypothesis 2). Specifically, in case employees perceive their leader to be low instrumental to them personally, the curvilinear relationship (inverted U-shape) between narcissistic leadership and leader effectiveness will weaken. However, in the case of high leader instrumentality, it is assumed that a positive linear relationship exists between leader
narcissism and leader effectiveness. In other words, particularly highly narcissistic leaders combined with high leader instrumentality are expected to be experienced as highly effective.

The current study establishes itself within the emerging research tradition in which an attempt is made to demonstrate that the perceived effectiveness of narcissistic leaders is relative (Grijalva et al., 2015). By the same token, this relation is suggested to depend on leader instrumentality. What is more, by contrasting the current predominantly positive approach of the existing leadership literature (Bardes & Piccolo, 2010; Higgs, 2009) (e.g., on authentic leadership (Liu, Fuller, Hester, Bennett, & Dickerson, 2018), transformational leadership (Turnnidge & Côté, 2018) or ethical/servant leadership (Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018)), the negative aspect of apparently valuable leadership aspects such as high leader instrumentality is emphasized. The present study thus (a) extends the existing literature on leader narcissism and leader effectiveness by adding leader instrumentality as a moderator to the relationship, (b) contributes to the instrumentality literature by providing the first examination of the instrumental value of narcissistic leaders within organizations, (c) adds a new perspective on the relationship between narcissistic leaders and (the victims of) manipulation, by studying under which circumstances especially narcissism in leaders results in manipulative behaviours in subordinates, and (d) has practical implications in terms of why and when narcissistic leaders are most likely to be perceived as effective.

**Theoretical framework**

**The relationship between leader narcissism and leader effectiveness**

Research demonstrates that narcissism as a personality dimension is represented in the general population (Fischer, 1984; Lasch, 1979). Evidence indicates that the narcissistic trait is characterized by a normal distribution (Gardner & Pierce, 2011), of which pathological narcissism is solely the highest end (Brunell et al., 2008). Moreover, the narcissistic trait is originally derived from the narcissistic personality disorder classification criteria
(pathological narcissism): “a persistent pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behaviour), need for admiration and lack of empathy, starting at a young adult age and is present in a variety of contexts (...)” (DSM-V; American Psychiatric Association, 2014, p. 881). In this article, the term narcissist refers to those in the general population who score along the narcissism dimension. Specifically, the narcissistic trait constitutes of the following elements: authority, entitlement, exploitation, exhibitionism, superiority, vanity, and autarky (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988). People scoring low on subclinical narcissism tend to evaluate themselves as potentially having leading qualities and report generally positive feelings concerning oneself, whereas people scoring high on narcissism appear to be extremely convinced of their own leading potential, their exceptionality, and entitlement (Ackerman, Donnellan, & Robins, 2012).

A body of research has focused directly on leader effectiveness, that is the extent to which employees perceive their leader as an effective leader, which is a commonly used benchmark to map narcissistic leaders’ performance (Grijalva et al., 2015; Hoffman et al., 2013; Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009; Nevicka, Van Vianen, De Hoogh, & Voorn, 2018; O’Reilly et al., 2018; Van Knippenberg & Van Knippenberg, 2005). Notably, effective leadership is crucial for the successful functioning of teams within organizations (Yukl, 2012; Zaccaro, 2001). All the same, a high score on experienced leader effectiveness does not mean that the leader is indeed highly effective (Lord & Maher, 2002; Nevicka et al., 2011b). Subjective performance measurements are generally used as measures of leader effectiveness (De Cremer & Van Knippenberg, 2004; Pierro, Cicero, Bonaiuto, Van Knippenberg, & Kruglanski, 2005), which is rarely supplemented by objective measurements (Van Knippenberg & Van Knippenberg, 2005). In fact, narcissistic leaders appear to inhibit the exchange of information between group members at the expense of group performance
(Nevicka et al., 2011b). Nevertheless, the explicit evaluation of leaders by employees is suggested to provide an adequate indication of leader’s performance (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008). Furthermore, research has long underpinned the power of perceptions and attitudes in influencing behaviour (Petty & Brinol, 2010), even over actual measurements (Clarkson, Hirt, Jia, & Alexander, 2010), suggesting that employee perceptions on leader effectiveness may be more meaningful within organizational life compared to actual performance measurements. For these reasons, narcissistic leaders’ performance is mapped by assessing their perceived leader effectiveness.

The relationship between leader narcissism and perceived leader effectiveness is assumed to be curvilinear and follows an inverted U-shape (Grijalva et al., 2015). Deviant results on this relationship, reported in previous studies (e.g., Judge et al., 2009; Nevicka et al., 2018; O’Reilly et al., 2018) are logically explained by preliminary presuming linearity in this case of non-linearity (Grijalva et al., 2015). The meta-analysis by Grijalva et al. (2015) found evidence for the behavioural threshold theory, which states that (a) non-adaptive behaviours are expressed at a high narcissism level, and adaptive behaviours at a low narcissism level, and that (b) different compositions of the narcissistic trait can have a different impact on leader effectiveness. The part of the narcissistic trait ‘positive self-image’ is, for example, adaptive and positively related to leader effectiveness (low threshold), whereas ‘exploitative behaviour’ is non-adaptive and negatively associated with leader effectiveness (high threshold) (Grijalva et al., 2015). It was found that an increase in low narcissism leads to more adaptive manifestations of narcissism that promote leader effectiveness, whereas an increase in high narcissism evokes non-adaptive narcissism such as entitlement, which negatively affects leader effectiveness (Grijalva et al., 2015). Therefore, it is stated that moderate narcissistic individuals perform better in terms of leader effectiveness,
compared to low and high narcissistic individuals (Grijalva et al., 2015).

Hypothesis 1: The relationship between leader narcissism and leader effectiveness is curvilinear (inverted U-shape). The initial positive relationship changes into a negative relationship with an increasing level of narcissism, whereby the maximum perceived effectiveness is achieved with a moderate level of narcissism.

Furthermore, several researchers argued that the extent to which narcissism in leaders cause either positive or negative leader evaluations in subordinates is not solely contingent on the degree to which the leader possesses this narcissistic trait (De Hoogh, Den Hartog, & Nevicka, 2015; Hoffman et al., 2013; Owens, Wallace, & Waldman, 2015), as dispositional tendencies and contextual factors should also be considered in predicting perceived leader effectiveness. Particularly, the interplay between narcissistic leaders and employees may influence perceived leader effectiveness evaluations. Namely, highly narcissistic individuals are especially susceptible to feedback concerning their self-image (e.g., their image as an effective leader) (Horvath & Morf, 2009), and these leaders may – as suggested by neurological evidence – be most easily manipulated by employees, as they need others’ validation to construct a positive sense of self (see Chester, Lynam, Powell, & DeWall, 2015; Fukushima & Hosoe, 2011; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Most notably, however, I argue that employees do have to be motivated to actually manipulate the narcissistic leader. This raises the question as to under which circumstances narcissists’ vulnerability to employee evaluations on their leadership actually results in (intentional) manipulation by employees. Accordingly, I argue that the degree to which narcissism in leaders will result in positive leader effectiveness evaluations by their employees will depend on leaders’ perceived instrumentality.
The role of perceived leader instrumentality

Research has long underscored the people-as-means approach, which implicates the importance of other people in personal goal pursuit (Converse & Fishbach, 2012; Orehek et al., 2018a; Orehek & Forest, 2016; Orehek, Forest, & Barbaro, 2018b), as people in interpersonal relationships are suggested to be of use by, for example, investing their time, knowledge, and resources and/or offering support (Orehek et al., 2018b). Here, the people-as-means approach is applied to the leader-employee relationship within the organizational context: leaders’ instrumental value is reflected by the degree to which this leader is experienced as helping or hindering the achievement of work-related employee goals. Clearly, organizational leaders may help or hinder subordinates’ personal goal striving, as this role within the organization may give them power – to some extent – over which goals to strive for (Maner & Mead, 2010; Ordóñez et al., 2009). Nevertheless, leaders’ instrumental value to employees may differ widely across leaders (Antonakis & House, 2004), as for example some leaders may be authorized by organizational budgeting to pursue individual employee goals (e.g., stimulating personal learning and development), whereas other leaders may not. Therefore, employees should presumably be mindful of their leaders’ instrumental potential to achieve successful goal striving within organizations personally.

Interestingly, employees may indeed be aware of leaders’ instrumental value. Notably, people are found to be capable of identifying various personal goals (i.e., self-generated goals); other people within interpersonal relations are perceived to be instrumental for (Orehek et al., 2018a). Moreover, peoples’ instrumental value seems to be continuously (re)assessed (Converse & Fishbach, 2012; Finkel & Eastwick, 2015; Fitzsimons & Fishbach, 2010). Research indicates, for example, that people lose attraction in others, in case they come closer to achieving their goal (Finkel & Eastwick, 2015). Therefore, employees are suggested
to be highly receptive to cues for assessing their leaders’ instrumental value. Moreover, as employees are aware of the leaders’ instrumental value, they may be determined to act on these cues to benefit from leaders’ instrumental value, as there is so much (potentially) to gain personally. Indeed, research has emphasized that people are strongly motivated to accomplish their goals (Moore et al., 2018). However, people serving as means to achieve goals does not per se imply calculatedly taking advantage of someone else’s usability (Orehek & Forest, 2016). Nonetheless, employees are expected to be highly motivated to deliberately influence their highly instrumental leaders to reap (potential) benefits as their stake is high (i.e., as it concerns personal goals). Moreover, as highly narcissistic leaders are presumed to be most susceptible to this employee manipulation as argued before (i.e., employee evaluations on narcissists’ leadership), employees may particularly expect to be highly successful in influencing leaders scoring high on narcissism and, thereby, be more prone to do so.

Highly narcissistic leaders are also presumed to act on employees’ leader effectiveness evaluations (i.e., feedback concerning them personally). Research indicates that feedback directed to narcissists’ personally influences such leaders’ attitudes (Kernis & Sun, 1994) and, ultimately, their behaviours (Horton & Sedikides, 2009). Evidence on negative ego-threatening feedback has profoundly indicated that narcissists usually respond to these critiques aggressively (Twenge & Campbell, 2003) and denigrate criticizing subordinates (Horton & Sedikides, 2009). It follows that negative leader evaluations conflict with narcissists’ exaggerated self image, evoking negative leader behaviours towards these employees. Research on positive feedback, however, is in its infancy; narcissists’ attitudinal change towards evaluators is examined instead of studying their actual behavioural change towards them (Kernis & Sun, 1994). Presumably, as positive leader evaluations lead to more positive attitudes in narcissists towards their evaluators (i.e. evaluating them as more
competent) (Kernis & Sun, 1994), this attitudinal shift towards others may also manifest itself in narcissists expressing more positive behaviours towards these employees such as helping them. Indeed, Maccoby (2012) proposes that the widely held conception that narcissists are not able to express altruistic behaviours is false. However, their helpful behaviours are presumed not to be driven by ‘concern for others,’ as they appear to lack these feelings towards others (Lubit, 2002). Rather, narcissists are, as mentioned before, primarily driven to deduce positive subordinate evaluations to construct a positive sense of self (e.g., Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2011; Gardner & Pierce, 2011). In this way, positive employee evaluations on perceived leader effectiveness are expected to positively influence narcissistic leaders’ willingness to be of instrumental value to these employees, although it is solely intended to selfishly keep receiving positive employee feedback (i.e., narcissistic goals may be best met by acting more helpfully towards employees). Clearly, although narcissists may have ‘destructive’ intentions, the outcomes are not necessarily negative (Spain, Harms, & LeBreton, 2014).

Based on these findings, the expectation is that the curvilinear relationship (inverted U-shape) between narcissistic leadership and leader effectiveness will weaken in the case of low leader instrumentality (Figure 1). Considering that people low on instrumental value are generally evaluated more negatively (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Fishbach et al., 2004; Orehek et al., 2018a), it is said that low, moderate, and high narcissistic leaders, will be evaluated as less effective by employees, in case their leader is experienced as low instrumental to them personally. Plausibly, this could be explained by the fact that employees, who consider their leader as low instrumental to them personally, do not expect that they would benefit from evaluating their leader positively. However, in the case of high leader instrumentality, the curvilinear relationship between leader narcissism and leader effectiveness is expected to
assume a positive linear relationship. Likewise, based on Fitzsimons and Shah (2008) and Orehek et al.’s (2018a) work, it is suggested that leaders with a highly perceived instrumental value are experienced as being more effective. However, because higher narcissists are most reliant on others’ perspectives compared to lesser narcissists (e.g., Chester et al., 2015), it is suggested that employees may be most manipulative in case of a highly instrumental and highly narcissistic leader, trying to exert influence on these leaders for personal gain by evaluating them as more effective. This leads to the second hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 2:* Leader instrumentality moderates the reversed U-shape relationship of leader narcissism and leader effectiveness in a way that when employees consider the leader to be highly instrumental, the leader is perceived as less effective in response to low and moderate leader narcissism compared to high leader narcissism.

*Figure 1.* The conceptual model that shows the effect of perceived leader instrumentality on the curvilinear relationship between narcissism in leaders and perceived leader effectiveness.

**Method**

**Participants**

Quadratic relations may be relatively small in magnitude and, therefore, harder to detect (Baltes, Bauer, Bajdo, & Parker, 2002; Le et al., 2011). Previous research indicates that the quadratic relations between narcissism in leaders and leader effectiveness were found to
be small to medium in magnitude (Grijalva et al., 2015). Hence, a small to medium effect size was assumed, whereby 296 to 1,966 participants were needed to generate a power of 95 percent to be able to detect an effect with a significance level of .05 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). Therefore, and feasibility considered, over 685 teams were approached to participate in the current study, of which 653 teams participated, resulting in 541 validly measured teams.

The research group comprised 541 teams, from different organizations stationed in the Netherlands or Netherlands Antilles (respondents had to master the Dutch language) and arbitrary branches within both profit and non-profit sectors (e.g., from listed company to hospital and municipality to local cosmetics store). Within each team, data was collected from both the leader and its employees. The selection criteria for the approval of existing teams was that each team should consist of at least three members, whereby the leader and at least 50 percent of their employees (i.e., half of the actual employee count) were given the opportunity to complete the questionnaire. The sampled group of leaders included 291 men, 248 women and two non-defined individuals, who were aged 18 to 70 years ($M = 40.85$, $SD = 11.53$). On average, leaders’ organization tenure was 9.55 years ($SD = 9.43$), and team tenure was 5.16 years ($SD = 5.76$). The group of employees counted 1,719 employees, of which 766 were men, 945 were women, and eight were non-defined; their age range was from 16 to 80 years ($M = 35.17$, $SD = 12.90$). On average, employees’ organization tenure was 6.68 years ($SD = 8.61$), and team tenure was 3.87 years ($SD = 5.24$).

Evidently, the sampled group of leaders (54% males and 46% females) differed from the target population, wherein men occupied 74% and women 26% of the leading positions within organizations (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS), 2019). However, male and female leaders’ age here, approached the population means of 47.41 and 43.76 years,
respectively (CBS, 2019). Although, perhaps, slightly differing from the target population, leaders’ team tenure here approached leaders team tenure in the comparable Dutch sample from Wisse and Sleebos (2016). Moreover, the sampled group of employees (45% males and 55% females) approached the target population, as men and women were also relatively equally represented in non-managerial functions within organizations according to CBS statistics (52% males and 48% females) (CBS, 2019).

Procedure

A cross-sectional research design was applied, utilizing multiple source data within existing teams at work, selected by convenience sampling. This cross-sectional design was preferred over an experimental design, as narcissism in leaders is not susceptible to manipulation (see Bryman, 2015; Del Rosario & White, 2005). Therefore, as inherent to all correlational studies, no causal inferences could be made here (Bryman, 2015). However, narcissism in leaders presumably precedes experienced leader effectiveness, so that causal inferences may be made with caution. Multiple source data was used to rule possible same source bias out (Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater, & James, 2002). Moreover, leadership can best be captured in non-artificial situations, in naturally occurring groups, in existing groups that have a history and a future (Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2004), increasing study’s external validity. Additionally, convenience sampling was chosen, as it was aimed to sample a large variety of teams. Notably, convenience sampling is time and cost effective, easily applicable, and appears to be more common within organizational research than probability sampling (Bryman, 2015). More extensive and varied samples – as sampled here – may reduce potential power reduction of such a sampling method. Provided the standardization benefits of a structured digital interview (for asking questions and saving answers) (Bryman, 2015), and the relatively large research group to be sampled, this survey study was applied.
Data were obtained as part of a “Leadership and Work in the 21st Century” study. Participants were recruited in February to May 2019. Over 130 master and premaster students, studying Organizational Sciences at VU Amsterdam, approached leaders or team members from various work-related teams. These students each delivered at least five teams from one or more organizations, to which access could be gained (usually from their personal and work network or acquaintances’ network). Respondents were contacted face-to-face, by telephone, by email and via social media. Email addresses and organizational roles (leader versus employee) of the participants were requested. Subsequently, the leader and their employees were linked to each other in Qualtrics (2018) before the participants received an email, depending on their position, with either the ‘leader’ or the ‘employee’ questionnaire.

The questionnaire started with a short introduction. It was stated that the data was treated strictly confidential and made anonymous wherever possible. It was also ensured that the data obtained would only be used for educational and scientific purposes. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire as truthfully as possible. The respondents then digitally signed the informed consent before they were given access to the actual survey. The questionnaire for leaders consisted of 14 validated scales, and that for employees consisted of 20 validated scales. At the end of the survey, demographic data was requested, and the respondents were thanked for their participation. Both questionnaires took on average 15–20 minutes to be completed. Participation was on a voluntary basis and no compensation was provided. Filling in the questionnaire often took place during working hours.

Measures

Full scales of ‘narcissism,’ ‘perceived leader effectiveness,’ and ‘perceived leader instrumentality’ can be found in Appendix A.

Narcissism. Narcissism in leaders was defined as the extent to which organizational
leaders possess the non-clinical narcissistic trait (Nevicka et al., 2018), which is measured by assessing, for example, the extent to which the given leader reported to be an extraordinary person or how easily he/she manipulated other people. Narcissism was measured among leaders, using Dutch translations (Barelds & Dijkstra, 2010) of the 16-item scale “Narcissistic Personality Inventory” (NPI-16) from Ames, Rose, and Anderson (2006), which is found to have sound internal and predictive validity. Leaders had to indicate the degree of agreement for 16 statements (e.g., “I think I am special.”) on 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). NPI-score was obtained by the sum of the items, with a high score indicating a high level of narcissism ($\alpha = .86$). However, it must be noted that despite narcissists’ vulnerability (e.g., hypersensitivity to criticisms, and problems to regulate their sense of self-esteem) (Ackerman, Donnellan, & Wright, 2018), this facet was not measured by the NPI-16.

*Perceived leader effectiveness.* Perceived leader effectiveness pertains the degree to which leaders are experienced as effective leaders, measured by the extent to which employees evaluate their leader to be an effective leader (O’Reilly et al., 2018). Employees evaluated their leader on a 4-item scale, which is the slightly adjusted “Perceived Leader Effectiveness” scale, originating from Van Knippenberg and Van Knippenberg (2005), which was shown to have good to excellent reliability across samples, in order to measure experienced leader effectiveness. Employees had to assign their supervisors a score along with four propositions (e.g., “My supervisor is a good leader.”), on 5-point Likert scales (1 = low; 5 = high). The score on experienced leadership effectiveness is obtained by averaging the answers to each item ($\alpha = .95$), where a high score means that the leader is experienced as highly effective by their employees.

*Perceived leader instrumentality.* Perceived leaders’ instrumentality reflects the extent
to which employees perceive their leader as instrumental for their own purposes (see Orehek et al., 2018a); it is measured by the degree to which this leader is evaluated as helping to pursue this employees’ personal work-related goal(s). Leader instrumentality was also measured among employees, on the 5-item scale “Perceived Leader Instrumentality Scale”, which is based on the “Perceived Partner Instrumentality Scale” proposed by Orehek et al. (2018a). Employees had to indicate to what extent the leader helps or hinders the achievement of five employee goals (e.g., “Promotion and career goals”) on 11-point scales (−5 = extremely hindering, 5 = extremely helping). The score for leader instrumentality was obtained by the sum of the items, with a high score reflecting a high degree of experienced leader instrumentality (α = .92).

Controls

Leader age (Zacher, Rosing, Henning, & Frese, 2011) and gender (De Hoogh et al., 2015) is controlled for, as these variables are found to correlate respectively with leader effectiveness and leader narcissism in prior studies. Additionally, Machiavellianism and psychopathy is also controlled for, as the three Dark Triad traits are found to intercorrelate (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Wisse & Sleebos, 2016). Leader’s team tenure is excluded for further analyses (Nevicka et al., 2018), as it does not significantly relate to leader narcissism, leader effectiveness, or leader instrumentality here.

Analytical strategy

Data were obtained, organized and labeled online in Qualtrics (2018), and analyzed utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS, 23.0.0.0, 2016). The main focus of the analyses was on team level data (i.e., the correlation between leader’s score and averaged employee scores). Multiple regression was chosen as a categorical (i.e., leader’s gender), and multiple continuous independent variables had to be added, in predicting a
continuous outcome variable, and this analysis allows for curvilinearity (via adding a quadratic term). First, measurement analyses were performed to assess constructs’ internal consistency and the distinctiveness of the constructs. Subsequently, univariate statistics were assessed (e.g., correlations and means), to identify possible irregularities in the current data. Then, the assumptions of multiple regression were examined to rule out possible violations. Multiple regression analyses were performed with leader narcissism, experienced leader instrumentality, and the interaction between leader narcissism and leader instrumentality as independent variables and experienced leader effectiveness as a dependent variable. Leaders’ gender, age, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy were controlled for. Finally, hierarchical regression analyses (multilevel) were performed after conducting multiple regression analyses, to assess whether initial team level analyses (i.e., the leader with aggregated employee data for each team) yield different results from individually assessing each employee and their leader (that is multilevel analysis).

**Results**

**Measurement analyses**

Data were gathered in 2019 in the months February to May and analysed in May. Correlation analyses were performed per scale, to assess abnormalities in correlation patterns of scales’ indicators (e.g., negative correlations, indicating reversed items). After finding four negative correlations, and checking the specific items, four items for the psychopathy scale, which is a control variable, were reversed coded. Subsequently, Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA) were performed, confirming the distinctiveness of the multisource variables used: leader narcissism, perceived leader effectiveness, and leader instrumentality. In Table 1, factor loadings from these CFA’s are presented (Appendix B). The data for narcissism was suitable for factor analysis (KMO = .86; $X^2 = 2675.72, df = 120, p < .001$), indicating that
CFA results are reliable. The same holds for CFA on leader effectiveness and leader instrumentality (KMO = .92; $X^2 = 4577.49$, $df = 36$, $p < .001$). Scales’ internal consistency was found to be good for narcissism ($\alpha = .86$), Machiavellianism ($\alpha = .81$), and psychopathy ($\alpha = .86$) and even excellent for perceived leader effectiveness ($\alpha = .95$) and leader instrumentality ($\alpha = .92$), indicating that all study’s scales are reliably measured.

**Correlations**

The descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the variables in the current study are presented in Table 2. In accordance with previous research (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Grijalva et al., 2015), male leaders scored higher on narcissism compared to female leaders. Furthermore, in line with previous research (Wisse & Sleebos, 2016), correlations between narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy were moderately high. Corresponding to the study from Foster et al. (2003), older leaders appeared to report less narcissistic tendencies compared to younger leaders. Most notably, the quadratic effect for narcissism was not significantly related to perceived leader effectiveness, although it was found in the expected curvilinear direction (i.e., very weak and negatively related to leader effectiveness; inverted U-shape) (Grijalva et al., 2015). Moreover, leader instrumentality was strongly related to leader effectiveness, i.e., leaders scoring high on perceived leader instrumentality also scored higher on perceived leader effectiveness. Note that, correlations between independent variables and leader effectiveness were low, except from instrumentality ($r = .66$); no correlations exceeded .30, albeit correlations between .30 and .70 were preferred (Pallant, 2013).

Furthermore, as narcissism is normally distributed in the population (e.g., Fischer, 1984), and narcissism in individuals is an antecedent for occupying leading positions (Brunell et al., 2008), on average, a negative skew was expected to be found in leaders for narcissism
(M > 3.00). Previously, supervisors were indeed found to be on average slightly more narcissistic (Wisse & Sleebos, 2016), compared to what would be expected in the general population. However, no such skew was found here; leaders even reported – with lower variability – to be less narcissistic than 3.00. Furthermore, leaders’ mean scores on Machiavellianism and psychopathy were comparable to previous findings (see Wisse & Sleebos, 2016). Further, no a priori expectations on leaders’ mean instrumental value were formulated as research on perceived leaders instrumental value lacks. However, as leaders are considered to be functionally occupied with goal pursuit within organizations (Ordóñez et al., 2009), the high mean score on perceived leader instrumentality – with relatively low variability – here may not be surprising. Additionally, perceived leader effectiveness scores are found to be, on average, slightly negatively skewed in various previously conducted experiments using student samples (Van Knippenberg & Van Knippenberg, 2005). This might suggest that leaders’ high mean effectiveness score may represent the target populations perceived effectiveness, although great caution is warranted here.

Table 2
Pearson’s correlations of all variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age</td>
<td>40.85</td>
<td>11.53</td>
<td>–14***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Machiavellianism</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>–14*** –19***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Psychopathy</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>–15*** –21*** 0.65***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Narcissism</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>–18*** –13*** 0.39*** 0.40***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employee</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Leader instrumentality</td>
<td>8.19</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>–.01</td>
<td>–.02</td>
<td>–.02</td>
<td>–.03</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Leader effectiveness</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>–.03</td>
<td>–.04</td>
<td>–.02</td>
<td>–.02</td>
<td>.66***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 541 (listwise); <sup>a</sup>0 = Male, 1 = Female. * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001 (two-tailed).
Assumptions regression analysis

The assumptions for multiple regression were assessed by performing tests for normality and multiple regression analyses (Pallant, 2013). First, tests for normality, as proposed by Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk, indicated that the multivariate normality assumption was violated, as data for leader effectiveness was negatively skewed (Razali & Wah, 2011). However, regression analysis is suggested to be robust against violations of the normality assumption, as the current sample size largely exceeds the minimum amount of observations per variable (Schmidt & Finan, 2018). Second, a quadratic term was added to the regression equation (i.e., narcissism^2) to be able to test for curvilinearity between leader narcissism and leader effectiveness, and preventing violating the linearity assumption. Further, leader instrumentality was indeed found to be linearly related to effectiveness. Third, for assessing homoscedasticity, in the scatter plot, two outliers (i.e., values smaller than –3.3 or greater than 3.3) were detected (both below –3.3) (Pallant, 2013). However, Cook’s distance statistic indicated that no influential outliers were present in the data, indicating that no point within the data was assumed to affect the regression model negatively (Pallant, 2013). Therefore, no action is taken on outliers. Fourth, correlations between the independent variables indicated no violation of the assumption for multicollinearity, as no correlation exceeded .70. Fifth, for statements to justify the current sample size see Participants. For these reasons, it is proposed that multiple regression assumptions are not violated.

Hypotheses testing

Multiple regression analyses were performed to test whether narcissism in leaders is curvilinearly related to perceived leader effectiveness (H1), and whether perceived instrumentality moderated this relationship (H2) (Table 3). The variables are standardized,
and the interaction term was created based on these standardized scores. Afterwards, the control variables were added to the regression equation (step 1), which was followed by the variables for identifying the main effects (step 2) and the linear two-way interaction, to be able to check for a potential linear relationship (step 3). After that, a new variable was created and added to the equation to detect the expected curvilinear relationship between leader narcissism and leader effectiveness (H1) (step 4). This new variable was the standardized variable leader narcissism squared. A non significant multiple regression equation was found for this model as a whole, $F(6, 534) = 0.51$, $p = .804$, $R^2 = .01$. Although visual inspection indicated that the curvilinear relation between narcissism and leader effectiveness yielded a slightly better fit compared to the linear slope, no significant curvilinear effect for leader narcissism was found on perceived leader effectiveness ($b = -0.34$, $SE = 0.32$, 95% CI = [−0.96, 0.29], $p = .287$). This indicated that narcissism in leaders is not curvilinearly related to perceived leader effectiveness. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Subsequently, a moderated multiple regression analysis was performed to determine whether the experienced leader instrumentality moderated the reversed U-shape relationship between leader narcissism and leader effectiveness (H2). The interaction term (squared leader narcissism x leader instrumentality) was added to the regression equation in order to test Hypothesis 2 (step 5). A significant multiple regression equation was found for this model, $F(9, 531) = 47.20$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .44$, which indicated that there was a significant effect between all predictor variables and leader effectiveness collectively. However, the regression analysis yielded that leader instrumentality did not significantly moderate the curvilinear relationship between leader narcissism and leader effectiveness ($b = -0.96$, $SE = 1.29$, 95% CI = [−3.51, 1.58], $p = .456$). The relation between narcissism in leaders and perceived leader effectiveness by employees does not differ in case leaders are experienced as highly
instrumental as opposed to when leaders are experienced as low instrumental to employees. In other words, narcissism in leaders was not associated with higher leader effectiveness evaluations when perceived leader instrumentality was high, compared to when perceived leader instrumentality was low. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. As the regression analysis yielded no significant interaction effect, no simple slope analyses were performed.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>95% confidence interval</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
<th>ΔF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>–0.02 0.03 –0.08 0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>–0.03 0.03 –0.10 0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machiavellianism</td>
<td>–0.05 0.04 –0.13 0.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychopathy</td>
<td>0.01 0.05 –0.07 0.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>209.55***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader narcissism</td>
<td>–0.66 1.29 –3.19 1.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader instrumentality</td>
<td>0.29 0.47 –0.64 1.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader narcissism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x Leader instrumentality</td>
<td>1.21 1.55 –1.82 4.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader narcissism²</td>
<td>0.57 1.23 –1.85 2.99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 5</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader narcissism²</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x Leader instrumentality</td>
<td>–0.96 1.29 –3.51 1.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 541 (listwise); LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. The full model predicts 44% of the variance (F = 47.20 ***). * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001 (two-tailed).
Furthermore, reducing the model to the main effects (model 2 or step 2), the multiple regression equation for this model as a whole was significant, $F(6, 534) = 70.40, p < .001, R^2 = .44$. Moreover, analyzing the main effects, no significant main effect for narcissism on leader effectiveness was found ($b = 0.00, SE = 0.04, 95\% CI = [-0.07, 0.08], p = .909$). Most notably, however, a significant main effect for perceived leader instrumentality was revealed ($b = 0.67, SE = 0.03, 95\% CI = [0.60, 0.73], p < .001$), indicating that leaders scoring high on perceived leader instrumentality were also experienced as being more effective leaders. Specifically, the positive semi-partial correlation between leader instrumentality and leader effectiveness was large in magnitude and significant, $r = .66, t = 20.47, p < .001$, indicating that leaders who are experienced as highly instrumental also tend to have better leader effectiveness scores, even after controlling the latter for narcissism scores in leaders (and for the control variables).

**Multilevel analyses**

Results for multilevel analyses were comparable to team level analyses (i.e., no different results were found). Therefore, and as team level analyses – by the stepwise procedure – were proposed to be more insightful in how multiple regression analyses were performed here (particularly concerning curvilinearity), multilevel analyses are not further explicated.

**Discussion**

**Conclusion**

The current study investigated whether moderate narcissistic leaders are perceived as more effective leaders compared to low or highly narcissistic leaders and whether this relationship is moderated by experienced leader instrumentality. For this means, multisource data from 541 teams from various organizations were gathered by applying convenience
sampling. First, results showed that the hypothesis that moderate narcissistic leaders are perceived as more effective is not supported. Second, results indicated that experienced leader instrumentality does not moderate the proposed curvilinear relationship between leader narcissism and experienced leader effectiveness. Most notably, however, perceived leader instrumentality strongly relates to perceived leader effectiveness. That is, the higher the leaders’ instrumental value, the higher the leaders’ evaluations of effectiveness. In line with previous studies (Fishbach et al., 2004; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Orehek et al., 2018a), this finding thus testifies the importance of leaders’ perceived usability for personal gain in influencing employees’ leader perceptions at work.

The finding that narcissism in leaders is not curvilinearly related to perceived leader effectiveness is inconsistent with the meta-analysis by Grijalva et al. (2015), which found that leaders were more narcissistic brings about higher leader effectiveness evaluations, after which being too narcissistic becomes detrimental, descending leader effectiveness evaluations. It is worth mentioning, however, that quadratic relationships may be harder to detect (Baltes et al., 2002; Le et al., 2011). Nevertheless, as the current sample is relatively big, the absence of this curvilinear effect may also indicate that leader effectiveness evaluations are indeed not contingent on leaders’ narcissism. Then, this null finding could be explained by presuming that particularly moderate narcissists behave more inconsistently. Specifically, moderate narcissistic leaders may exhibit more alternating adaptive and maladaptive narcissistic manifestations, which results in more variable leader effectiveness evaluations by employees or a general decrease in perceived effectiveness, averaging the scores out to the same level of perceived effectiveness reported for high and low narcissistic leaders. However, previously reported results on the relationship between leader narcissism
and leader effectiveness (e.g., Grijalva et al., 2015; Hoffman et al., 2013; Nevicka et al., 2018) suggest a Type II error here.

The finding that effectiveness evaluations of highly instrumental and highly narcissistic leaders are not mainly adjusted is also inconsistent with previous studies (Chester et al., 2015; Fukushima & Hosoe, 2011; Paulhus & Williams, 2002), which suggested that highly narcissistic individuals are most influenceable compared to lesser narcissists. Possibly, current results may be explained as narcissists may not be equally manipulatable by all employees, restricting narcissistic leaders’ susceptibleness to positive leader evaluations. Notably, Maccoby (2012) proposes that narcissists solely have one sidekick within the organization (i.e., someone who ‘truly’ understands the narcissist, viewed as an extension to the narcissist self). By this means, adjusting leader evaluations may solely pay off for just one employee within the whole employee count of the team (or none). For this reason, employees may overall perceive highly narcissistic leaders not particularly as more influenceable compared to low or moderate narcissists, which has led these employees to objectively rate narcissistic leaders effectiveness, regardless of leaders’ instrumental value, resulting in a zero finding. Moreover, as narcissistic leaders are widely represented organizational leaders (e.g., Nevicka et al., 2011a), it remains relevant to investigate if narcissists have sidekick(s), and if so, whether this sidekick could make the narcissistic leader strive for their personal goals and, thereby, whether this employee could be educated to strive for group goals, possibly resulting in more actual effective leadership behaviours. However, the moderation effect may also not have been present in this study as employees may saw no chance of influencing the narcissistic leader (through positive effectiveness assessments) of the narcissistic leader because of the anonymous leader evaluation in the current study. By this means, employees may expected that what goes around (i.e., positive leader effectiveness evaluations) does not
come around (i.e., employee gains), making employees not particularly motivated to adjust their leader evaluations. Nevertheless, as this employee influencing of instrumental leaders may take place unconsciously, it would still be expected to find this moderation effect.

Extending prior research on instrumentality and assessing qualities of others (Fishbach et al., 2004; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Orehek et al., 2018a), the current study reveals that leaders’ instrumental value is found to be positively related to leader effectiveness evaluations. This finding suggests that for leaders, it may be sensible to maintain or increase their instrumental value, in order to receive positive leader evaluations. However, proposing that highly instrumental leaders may be particularly evaluated as being the most effective leaders feels counterintuitive. Notably, employees’ directing leaders towards the attainment of personal goals may reduce leaders’ actual effectiveness and team performance, although they would intentionally radiate the highest levels of leader effectiveness. For example, promoting employees to higher positions within the organization because of provided positive leader evaluations (e.g., instead of capabilities) could be detrimental for the team performance and signals that manipulation pays off.

**Practical and theoretical implications**

Current findings may be particularly relevant for managerial practice, as employees’ leader effectiveness evaluations may have little to do with actual leader effectiveness (De Hoogh et al., 2015; Nevicka et al., 2011b). From a managerial point of view, leaders helping employees to attain their goals may seduce employees to evaluate leaders performance, regardless of leaders actual effectiveness positively. In this light, it would be relevant to investigate whether leaders faking higher instrumental value (i.e., investing limited resources) would be sufficient to be positively evaluated by their employees. For employees, however, current findings may also pertain that positively evaluating their leader may evoke more
helping behaviours in leaders towards this specific employee(s), as there must be an explanation why employees may rate leaders with a high instrumental value as highly effective (i.e., instrumental leaders may evoke positive leader evaluations, which may cause leaders to behave (more) helpfully towards these employees). Moreover, as employees influencing leaders and leaders influencing employees may not be mutually exclusive, current findings may have shed light on the leader-employee interplay by possibly revealing how leaders secure positive employee evaluations on their leadership and what employees need to do to make use of leaders instrumental value. Therefore, both leader and employee behaviours may affect leaders’ effectiveness evaluations, which could make organizations reconsider using these evaluations and perhaps even using 360 feedback (as the same processes may occur), if not accompanied by objective performance measures, to rate leaders performance.

Additionally, in case of malfunction (e.g., not effectively pursuing group goals), it may be presumed that leaders may not solely be the problem, although it is profoundly stated (Maner & Mead, 2010), as they may be also fuelled by their (egocentric) employee(s).

The present study thus extends the existing literature on leader narcissism and leader effectiveness, by not finding the presumed curvilinear relationship, and contributes to the instrumentality literature by providing the first examination of the instrumental value of leaders within organizations (i.e., leaders’ perceived valuability in pursuing several work-related personal employee goals). Moreover, this study adds a new perspective on the relationship between leaders (including narcissists) and the ‘victims’ of manipulation, by revealing under which circumstances manipulative behaviours in subordinates towards the leaders may be evoked (i.e., in case of high leader instrumentality).

**Limitations, future directions, and final statement**

Although a primary strength of the current study is analysing multi-source data from
naturally existing work groups, a potential limitation may still be study’s external validity. Specifically, leaders themselves could decide if they wanted their team to participate, whether all employees within their team would participate, a selected group of employees (at least 50 percent of teams’ employee count), or all compositions in between. Where things are going well, leaders may be more willing to participate, possibly resulting in higher effectiveness evaluations than justified in populations’ reality. Moreover, leaders possibly (un)consciously selected employees to increase their chances on receiving best leadership evaluations, which also may unjustifiably result in a high mean leader effectiveness score (3.73 out of 5), with little variability. In case low and highly narcissistic leaders selected employees with most ‘positive’ attitudes towards them, their effectiveness scores may (falsely) not be deferrable from moderate narcissistic leader effectiveness scores, decreasing study’s power to generalize validly. Evidently, no causal inferences could be made here, as – for one thing – the researched group is not randomly selected (Bryman, 2015). However, this possible sampling error may be reduced by sampling this large variety of teams, whereby at least half of the total teams’ employee count received an invitation personally to participate in this study. Therefore, these groups of employees might still be a representative reflection of all team members, and thereby, this may not be that problematic. In the future, making sure always to invite all employees or applying an experimental research design instead of this correlational study could present themselves as possible solutions.

Moreover, the scale may not be that informative in differing between leaders on perceived effectiveness scores as the perceived leader effectiveness scale is constructed solely of general effectiveness statements (e.g. “My supervisor is a good supervisor”). Here, most of the leaders were evaluated as being moderate to highly effective. Furthermore, other than the general feeling of leader effectiveness, employees may differ widely on what they assume to
be a ‘good leader,’ ‘effective method,’ or ‘doing his/her job well.’ Perhaps by adding more specific leader effectiveness behaviours to be evaluated, such as effectively ‘setting goals,’ ‘leading changes,’ ‘coordinating resources,’ ‘building relationships,’ ‘coaching,’ and ‘communicating,’ employees will be provided with more information about what to evaluate, and thereby, it may be easier to differ leaders on perceived leader effectiveness. Additionally, adjusting general evaluations towards the leader may be more easily done, compared to more positively evaluating specific leader behaviours (which may require more conscious lying). By this means, it may be also more apparent as to what occasions leader effectiveness evaluations are indeed intentionally adjusted by employees (i.e., in case of high leader instrumentality).

What is more, the narcissism scale NPI-16 did not explicitly incorporate narcissists’ vulnerability component (nor does the original NPI-40) (see Ackerman et al., 2018). Possibly, adding items to this scale that despict narcissists’ hypersensitivity to criticisms (e.g., “I never fail to detect when someone criticizes me.”) and/or items representing narcissists’ problems to regulate their sense of self-esteem (e.g., “In case my self-esteem is affected, it takes time to restore it.”), this may result in the construct narcissism being measured more comprehensively. As such, it would be interesting to investigate whether adding such ‘vulnerability’ items or adding a whole subscale to the NPI would yield different results here. In this way, it would be also possible to check whether narcissists scoring high on NPI-16 indeed scored higher on ‘vulnerability’, which would be relevant in this study. Nevertheless, as highly narcissistic leaders would be ‘highly vulnerable’ (see e.g., Chester et al., 2015), the lack of ‘vulnerability’ indicators may not have made a difference here.

First, future research may focus on identifying narcissists sidekick(s) at work and investigating to what extent they can influence the narcissistic leader to evoke helping leader...
behaviours for personal purposes, as compared to other employees’ influence. Second, it would be relevant to study the extent to which leaders who solely pretend to be more instrumental would be capable to evoke positive leader effectiveness evaluations in subordinates. Third, concerning leaders instrumental value, it would be interesting to investigate the extent to which leaders act on employee requests or their own intent. For this reason, a motivational component could be added to the perceived leader instrumentality scale, dividing leaders’ helping or hindering behaviours from achieving personal employee goals, which are internally (e.g., leaders’ wish to help) versus externally (e.g. employee request) driven. Specifically, this may further specify the extent to which employees perceive leaders instrumental value as a result of their own actions (i.e., influencing the leader) or due to the leader’s own intent. Thereby, leaders scoring high on – particularly external driven – perceived leader instrumentality might be most deceptive for employee manipulation. For this reason, employees may be particularly motivated to adjust these leader effectiveness evaluations positively. Future research may explicitly unravel this aspect.

In conclusion, although it seems preliminary to fully release narcissists from this debate, based on the current investigation, it may be suggested that, for employees, the effectiveness of a leader is dependent on leaders’ instrumental value, regardless of the extent to which the leader possesses the narcissistic personality trait. Namely, the more usable the leader is perceived to be for employees’ personal gain – that counts for all organizational leaders – the higher the leaders’ effectiveness evaluations are assumed to be. After years of investigating (narcissistic) leaders’ performance, this work postulates the importance of all leaders’ instrumental value as perceived by employees, in relation to employees’ evaluations on the leader’s performance. Specifically, employees’ perceived leader instrumentality may falsely exert influence on leader effectiveness evaluations, deriving these evaluations far from
reality. Possibly, as long as the ‘I’ wins something (i.e., for employees personal gain and for leaders higher effectiveness evaluations), it may not matter that the ‘we’ loses something (i.e., decrease in actual leaders effectiveness). So, mirror, mirror, on the wall, (narcissistic) leaders may not be solely manipulative after all.
References


wild: The systematic side effects of overprescribing goal setting. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 23*(1), 6-16. doi: 10.5465/AMP.2009.37007999


Footnotes

1 In 1898, the term “Narcissus-like” was first introduced by Ellis (Raskin & Terry, 1988). The Greek Narcissus, from which “narcissism” is derived, illustrates a myth in which Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection in the water, languished, fell over, and drowned (Spotnitz & Resnikoff, 1954). Inspired by myth, Freud clinically practiced “narcissism” from 1914 onward to describe behavioral phenomena (Raskin & Terry, 1988). The work “On Narcissism: An Introduction” by Freud was seen as the starting point for the development of the concept of narcissism (Stein, 2013). More recently, a distinction is made between clinical/pathological narcissism (the narcissistic personality disorder) and subclinical narcissism (Nevicka et al., 2011a, 2011b).

2 The narcissistic personality disorder is characterized by (1) an inflated sense of self-importance, (2) the preoccupation with (unrealistic) fantasies, (3) the conviction of their uniqueness, (4) the requirement for excessive admiration, (5) a feeling of entitlement, (6) exploitation of other people, (7) lacking empathy, (8) being envious towards other people or believing that others are envious of oneself, and (9) being arrogant or haughty in attitude or behaviour (DSM-V; American Psychiatric Association, 2014). One is classified as having a narcissistic personality disorder in case they are diagnosed of having at least five of these characteristics (DSM-V; American Psychiatric Association, 2014).
Appendix A: Scales

**Narcissism**

“The following questions are about yourself. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements. Select the answer that you find most appropriate.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I know that I am good because everybody keeps telling me so.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I like to be the center of attention.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I think I am a special person.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I like having authority over people.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I find it easy to manipulate people.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I insist upon getting the respect that is due me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am apt to show off if I get the chance.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I always know what I am doing.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Everybody likes to hear my stories.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I expect a great deal from other people.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I really like to be the center of attention.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. People always seem to recognize my authority.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I am going to be a great person.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I can make anybody believe anything I want them to.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I am more capable than other people.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I am an extraordinary person.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perceived leader effectiveness

“The following questions concern your supervisor. We would like you to give your supervisor a rating on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high) for the following statements.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My supervisor is a good supervisor.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My supervisor has an effective method.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My supervisor is doing his / her job well.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If I had to give my supervisor a rating about his / her function, I give a:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 = insufficient, 2 = reasonable, 3 = sufficient, 4 = good, 5 = very good.

Perceived leader instrumentality

“We would like to know how your supervisor influences you in achieving your goals (these can be general goals, such as generally performing well, or specific goals, such as performing well on a specific project). Please indicate to what extent your supervisor helps or hinders you in your efforts to achieve the following goals. Scale: –5 (extremely annoying) to 0 (not helping and not annoying) to 5 (extremely helping).”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>–5</th>
<th>–4</th>
<th>–3</th>
<th>–2</th>
<th>–1</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Work performance goals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social network goals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Promotional and career goals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Personal learning and development goals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Work pleasure goals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix B: Factor Analysis

**Table 1**  
*Factor Loadings for Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Leader Narcissism, and Leader Effectiveness and Leader Instrumentality With Oblimin Rotation on Team Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Narcissism</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Instrumentality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know that I am good because everybody keeps telling me so.</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to be the center of attention.</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I am a special person.</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like having authority over people.</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it easy to manipulate people.</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I insist upon getting the respect that is due me.</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am apt to show off if I get the chance.</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always know what I am doing.</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everybody likes to hear my stories.</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect a great deal from other people.</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really like to be the center of attention.</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People always seem to recognize my authority.</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am going to be a great person.</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can make anybody believe anything I want them to.</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more capable than other people.</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am an extraordinary person.</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor is a good supervisor.</td>
<td>– .89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor has an effective method.</td>
<td>– .93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor is doing his / her job well.</td>
<td>– .96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had to give my supervisor a rating about his / her function, I give a: 1 = insufficient, 2 = reasonable, 3 = sufficient, 4 = good, 5 = very good.</td>
<td>– .93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work performance goals</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social network goals</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional and career goals</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal learning and development goals</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work pleasure goals</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $N = 541$; Factor loadings $> .40$ are printed in bold. Note that, factor loadings for leader effectiveness and leader instrumentality were similar at team level ($N = 541$) and at employee level (i.e. employees considered individually) ($N = 1719$).