

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Narcissistic admiration and rivalry, Machiavellianism and willingness to engage in unethical pro-organisational behaviour (UPB)

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BACKGROUND

This survey of Polish employees replicates research on the relationship between narcissism, Machiavellianism and unethical pro-organisational behaviour (UPB) that was previously conducted in other countries such as China, Pakistan and the US. Positive associations between narcissism, Machiavellianism and UPB were expected to occur.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

The survey covered 250 people working in large corporations across Poland. The sample included 163 women (65%) and 87 men (35%). Narcissism was measured with the NARQ questionnaire, developed as an operationalisation of the narcissistic admiration and rivalry concept (NARC). The MACH-4 scale was used to measure Machiavellianism. Readiness for UPB, on the other hand, was measured using the Polish version of the UPB Scale.

RESULTS

The research showed statistically significant positive relationships between narcissistic admiration, rivalry and Ma-

chiavellianism and the readiness to engage in UPB. At the same time, narcissistic rivalry and its components aggressiveness and striving for supremacy, and Machiavellianism correlate most strongly with UPB. Regression and mediation analyses showed that the significant variables to predict higher levels of readiness to engage in UPB are rivalry (aggressiveness) and Machiavellianism. Machiavellianism, moreover, appears as a mediator in the positive relationship of rivalry and its components (devaluation of others, striving for supremacy) with UPB.

CONCLUSIONS

Significant predictors of UPB are narcissistic rivalry, including aggressiveness, and Machiavellianism. A Machiavellian strategy may enable UPB to be undertaken by those with a tendency to dominate and devalue others.

KEY WORDS

Machiavellianism; narcissism; NARC; unethical pro-organisational behaviour; UPB

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BACKGROUND

This article fills a gap in the research on the associations of unethical pro-organisational behaviour (UPB) with narcissism and Machiavellianism among Polish employees. The article also presents a multidimensional view of narcissism, including admiration and rivalry, as well as their components (aspects).

The concept of unethical pro-organisational behaviour (UPB), created by Umphress et al. (2010; Umphress & Bingham, 2011), refers to employees engaging in unethical behaviour at work to benefit the organisation in which they work and/or members of that organisation. The concept refers to acts of behaviour which involve breaking the law, social norms or violating generally accepted values (Umphress et al., 2010). This type of behaviour does not fall within the formal requirements of the job or the rules of the employee's role, but results from the intentions of the employee, who is thus trying to help his or her organisation while perhaps indirectly aiming to strengthen their position in the organisation or obtain other organisational rewards.

UPBs are intentional behaviours and are therefore "distinct from work-related activities involving errors, mistakes or unconscious neglect" (Umphress et al., 2010, p. 770). These behaviours are also distinct from the construct of counterproductive work behaviours (CWB) (e.g. sabotage, theft, aggression towards co-workers), which are intended to harm the organisation or other members of the organisation, whereas UPBs at any given time signify benefits to the organisation (Grabowski et al., 2019).

UPBs bear some similarities to organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB) which are behaviours that "transcend the employee role", undertaken by employees on their own initiative to support their organisation or colleagues (Grabowski et al., 2019). Both UPB and OCB stem from employees' intentions and benefit the company/co-workers. However, OCB produce unequivocally positive organisational outcomes, whereas UPBs may produce adverse or even destructive results, especially in the long-term perspective (Grabowski et al., 2019). For example, exaggerating the truth about an organisation's products or services in front of customers can, in the long term, mean a reduction in prestige or even damage to a company's image.

Miles et al. (2002) proposed an integrated model of organisational behaviour based on the mediating role of positive and negative emotions occurring at the interface between the work environment and the demands of the organisational role encompassing both pro-organisational (OCB, UPB) and counterproductive behaviours (CWB). In this view, CWB are associated with negative emotions and stress, whereas pro-organisational behaviours are associated with positive emotions.

All in all, UPB should be considered as behaviours located on a dimension between clear ethical OCB (pro-organisational, pro-social) and dark unethical CWB. UPBs are "grey" behaviours that, when treated as a manifestation of commitment to the organisation and loyalty, may nevertheless harm the company just as much as unambiguously bad counterproductive behaviours (Grabowski et al., 2019). Therefore, in order to better understand the mechanisms that lead to UPBs, we highlight two potential determinants of UPBs, i.e. narcissism and Machiavellianism.

Narcissism is a complex construct with at least two facets. On the one hand, narcissism is about personal charm, extraversion and popularity in short-term acquaintanceships. On the other hand, individuals with narcissistic traits are characterised by emotional lability, aggressiveness, inverse popularity in long-term friendships and low agreeableness (Back et al., 2013; Niesiobędzka & Konaszewski, 2022; Rogoza et al., 2016; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019).

Considering the two faces of narcissism and its ambiguity, Back et al. (2013) proposed a synthetic theoretical model to explain the processes underlying narcissism, that is, the concept of narcissistic admiration and rivalry, denoted by the acronym NARC. The NARC model addresses narcissism conceptualised in terms of a personality trait. An important assumption of this concept is the thesis that the overarching goal of narcissism is to maintain a grandiose self-image. This goal can be realised through the use of two distinct social strategies: the tendency to gain social approval through self-enhancement, i.e. an admiration strategy, or the tendency to avoid social failure through self-protection, which is called a rivalry strategy (Rogoza et al., 2016; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019).

The essence of the admiration strategy lies in the pursuit of uniqueness (affective-motivational component) based on feelings of self-importance that reinforce ideas of one's own greatness (cognitive component). This aspiration is realised through charming action (behavioural component). The potential consequences of such a strategy are the attainment of recognition, praise, desired social status, as well as attractiveness or becoming a group leader. This strategy represents the adaptive face of narcissism (Back et al., 2013; Rogoza et al., 2016; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019).

The core of the rivalry strategy is to defend one's status by asserting dominance over others (affective-motivational component) based on engaging in thoughts of devaluing the achievements, status and prestige of others (cognitive component), which leads to feelings of arousal, hostility and, as a result, readiness and engaging in aggressive behaviour (behavioural component). The potential consequences of this strategy are disapproval, rejection and mistrust from others, relationship breakdown and criticism. This results in the strategy representing a mal-

adaptive face of narcissism (Back et al., 2013; Rogoza et al., 2016; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019).

Machiavellianism is associated with the figure of Niccolo Machiavelli, who was an Italian politician, diplomat and influential political theorist of the Renaissance. Based on Machiavelli's writings, Christie and Geis (1970) created the construct of Machiavellianism with the tools of MACH considered as a personality trait. This trait can be defined as the tendency to manipulate and objectively exploit others in order to achieve personal goals. This tendency is associated with cynical beliefs and pragmatic morality (Christie & Geis, 1970). Christie and Geis (1970) stated that the four basic characteristics of Machiavellianism are: lack of empathy enabling objectification of others; an instrumental view of others, reinforcing insincerity; rational, emotionless perception of others; and quick and effective problem solving. Machiavellianism can be considered as a system of attitudes and behavioural tendencies regarding people and interpersonal situations, the essence of which is a willingness to manipulate and treat others in an object-like manner. This system (which represents a certain philosophy of life) is also a set of beliefs such as "the world is a fighting arena and people are untrustworthy" (Castille et al., 2018; Pilch, 2014).

Both narcissism and Machiavellianism are, along with psychopathy, components of the so-called dark triad. Both narcissists and Machiavellians are individuals who lack empathy, but not to the same degree as psychopaths. The differences are in strategic thinking skills and long-term planning. A Machiavellian is more strategic in planning to achieve his or her own goals and demonstrates better impulse control than a narcissist (Pilch, 2014). The Machiavellian tends to appear less emotional than the narcissist. An emotionally wounded rival narcissist often either explodes with anger or withdraws when experiencing criticism or rejection (Back et al., 2013). Machiavellians are cynical about people and disregard morality. In contrast, a narcissistic individual tries to justify his or her behaviour as moral, even when his or her actions are arrogant (because narcissistic individuals seek to be perceived positively, including in the domain of morality) (Cohen & Abdo, 2024; Pilch, 2014).

Both narcissism and Machiavellianism are associated with a willingness to engage in unethical behaviour. Narcissism shows positive associations with CWB (Filipkowski & Derbis, 2020). Narcissistic individuals are also willing to engage in OCB insofar as this allows them to gain approval and admiration (Cohen & Abdo, 2024). Similarly, Machiavellians, on the one hand, are primarily inclined to engage in CWB, as indicated by most studies (Duradoni et al., 2023; Filipkowski & Derbis, 2020). On the other hand, however, they are able to engage in pro-organisational and pro-social behaviours as long as it is beneficial for them to do so (Castille et al., 2018). It is worth

noting that these traits are negatively correlated with OCB, but people with these traits are able to undertake OCB, for their own benefit (Machiavellianism), and to gain admiration (narcissism) (Cohen & Abdo, 2024; Pilch, 2014). However, the extent to which an employee ultimately engages in OCB, UPB, or CWB is determined by their level of organisational commitment and work engagement (Filipkowski & Derbis, 2020). CWB is associated with employees exhibiting low organisational commitment (oriented against the organisation), whereas OCB and UPB are characteristic of highly committed employees (demonstrating a favourable and cooperative orientation toward the organisation) (Grabowski et al., 2019).

These findings suggest that UPBs having both civic and counterproductive characteristics are associated with narcissism and Machiavellianism. And indeed, research shows a positive association of narcissism with willingness to engage in UPB in samples of Pakistani employees (Shah et al., 2020), a Chinese entrepreneurial group (Yu et al., 2020), and Uzbek employees (Toirova & Baek, 2021), and a positive association of Machiavellianism with UPB among US employees (Castille et al., 2018). Hence, narcissism and Machiavellianism would be expected to be associated with willingness to undertake UPB among Polish employees.

THE CURRENT STUDY

The aim of this research was to examine whether and how narcissism and its components (admiration and rivalry), as well as Machiavellianism, are associated with readiness to engage in unethical pro-organisational behaviour (UPB) among Polish employees.

Considering the concept of UPB (Umphress & Bingham, 2011) and the concepts of NARC and Machiavellianism, it was assumed that:

1. UPBs are a special form of organisational commitment and identification with the company, and by undertaking UPBs, employees act entirely for the benefit of the organisation, increasing, for example, profits (in the short term) (Grabowski et al., 2019).
2. UPBs can lead to effects that are desired and recognised in companies. Thus, the effect may be recognition and admiration, as well as occupying higher positions within the organisation (higher than others). Such an effect can be interpreted as evidence of performance (Castille et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2020).
3. On an individual level, undertaking UPB can mean obtaining such benefits as financial rewards and reputation (Umphress et al., 2010).
4. Considering the concepts of narcissism and Machiavellianism, it can be expected that UPB effects may be a source of admiration from others and result in achieving higher positions in the organi-

sation, which can sustain a grandiose self-image (according to the NARC concept) and lead to obtaining benefits (Machiavellianism approaches) (Pilch, 2014; Rogoza et al., 2016).

5. In addition, devaluing others, aggressiveness (components of narcissistic rivalry) and the philosophy of Machiavellianism may facilitate UPB, as these are ultimately unethical behaviours that harm others (Castille et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2020).

The following research hypotheses were set:

Hypothesis 1. Narcissistic admiration (namely grandiosity, uniqueness, charmingness) and narcissistic rivalry (i.e. devaluation, supremacy and aggressiveness) are positively associated with the willingness to engage in UPB.

Hypothesis 2. Machiavellianism is positively associated with willingness to undertake UPB.

Hypothesis 3. Machiavellianism is positively associated with narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry.

Hypothesis 4. Machiavellianism is a mediator in the relationship between narcissism and UPB. This hypothesis is grounded in the conceptualisation of Machiavellianism as a specific set of beliefs, encompassing both a life philosophy (perceiving the world as a competitive arena where individuals are inherently untrustworthy) and a business philosophy (prioritizing self-interest over integrity or virtue, with effectiveness regarded as the primary moral criterion). This framework suggests that Machiavellianism may originate from narcissism, considered primarily as a personality trait (McHoskey, 1995; Miesing & Preble, 1985; Pilch, 2014).

The research model is presented in Figure 1.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

PARTICIPANTS

In order to show the relationship between narcissism, Machiavellianism and UPB, 250 people working in large organisations employing more than 250 people

each across Poland were surveyed. The sample included 163 women (65%) and 87 men (35%). The average age of respondents was over 31 years ($M = 31.07$, $SD = 7.40$). The study included a group of people aged between 18 and 60 years. The middle 50% of respondents were aged between 26 (first quartile) and 35 years (third quartile). The largest number of respondents (153) had a university degree (61%). A bachelor's degree was held by 49 people (20%), secondary education by 40 people (16%), and vocational education by 8 people (3%). All the respondents were employed full-time. The average length of service of the respondents in their current company was more than 4 years ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 5.42$). Forty-three people (17%) holding managerial positions were surveyed. The study was conducted in 2024 and participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The study included employees of multinational corporations in the banking, IT and automotive sectors (in IT and automotive, mainly the finance and administration departments were surveyed). A sample resembling the Polish population working in these sectors was obtained (here women are in the majority) (Wiązowska, 2024).

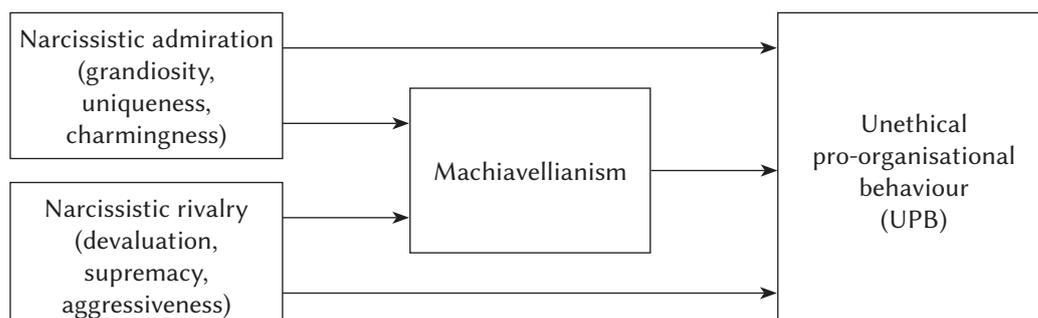
MEASURES

UPBs were measured with the scale for testing readiness to engage in UPB, developed by Umphress et al. (2010), in the Polish translation by Chudzicka-Czupała, Paruzel-Czachura and Grabowski (Grabowski et al., 2019). The respondents are asked to respond to these items on a seven-point Likert-type response scale from 1 (*I completely disagree*) to 7 (*I completely agree*). The Cronbach's α coefficient, a measure of reliability, was $\alpha = .83$ for this scale (six items) in this research, indicating a high reliability value.

Narcissism was measured using the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ) constructed by Back et al. (2013). The questionnaire consists of 18 items to which respondents respond using a 6-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*do not*

Figure 1

Model of study



agree at all) to 6 (agree completely). The translation of the test items was carried out by Rogoza et al. (2016). The NARQ contains two subscales – admiration and rivalry – constructed from 9 items. In this study, these scales obtained the following reliability measures: admiration $\alpha = .83$ and rivalry $\alpha = .87$. In addition, each of these scales contains three further subscales (each constructed from three items). Admiration contains the following subscales: grandiosity ($\alpha = .74$), uniqueness ($\alpha = .63$) and charmingness ($\alpha = .63$); while rivalry contains the following subscales: devaluation ($\alpha = .75$), supremacy ($\alpha = .85$) and aggressiveness ($\alpha = .68$).

The MACH-4 scale was used to study Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970). A set of 20 items edited by Pospiszyl and Daniecki was used (Pospiszyl, 2000) ($\alpha = .72$).

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

To verify the hypotheses, correlation coefficients were calculated, and multiple hierarchical regression analysis and mediation analysis were performed. Statistical analyses were performed using the statistical package SPSS version 29 and JASP 0.18.3.

RESULTS

The first step of the analysis was to calculate a series of correlation coefficients. Table 1 contains descrip-

tive statistics for all study variables (means, standard deviations), intercorrelations and correlations between study variables.

As can be seen from this table, UPB correlates positively with narcissism and its components, as well as Machiavellianism. More specifically, the correlation is weak with admiration and its components, and the weakest with charmingness; it is average with rivalry and its components, including the strongest with aggressiveness and supremacy, and the weakest and moderate with devaluation. Machiavellianism correlates positively and moderately with UPB. It is worth adding that Machiavellianism correlates positively with the components of narcissism, more specifically weakly with admiration, its components and on average with rivalry and its components.

In the second step of the analysis, to test hypotheses 1 and 2, a series of regression analyses were conducted. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2.

In a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the components of narcissistic admiration, i.e. grandiosity, uniqueness and charmingness, and the components of narcissistic rivalry, i.e. devaluation, supremacy and aggressiveness, and Machiavellianism were treated as explanatory variables, and UPB as the explained variable. Six models were constructed. Three blocks of variables were introduced into the hierarchical analysis framework. The first block comprised the components of admiration: grandiosity, uniqueness and charmingness. The second comprised

Table 1

Descriptive statistics (M, SD), correlations and intercorrelations between narcissism and its components, Machiavellianism and willingness to engage in unethical pro-organisational behaviours (UPB), n = 250

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Narcissism	–										
2. N. admiration	.82***	–									
3. A. grandiosity	.77***	.84***	–								
4. A. uniqueness	.69***	.86***	.60***	–							
5. A. charmingness	.59***	.81***	.49***	.57***	–						
6. N. rivalry	.86***	.41***	.47***	.33***	.22***	–					
7. R. devaluation	.64***	.26***	.33***	.18*	.14*	.79***	–				
8. R. supremacy	.73***	.31***	.38***	.25***	.13*	.90***	.54***	–			
9. R. aggressiveness	.80***	.49***	.50***	.43***	.30***	.83***	.43***	.71***	–		
10. Machiavellianism	.39***	.23***	.24***	.18**	.14*	.42***	.40***	.37***	.29***	–	
11. UPB	.46***	.28***	.29***	.23***	.18**	.49***	.34***	.43***	.47***	.42***	–
M	52.18	30.44	8.95	11.26	10.23	21.74	6.90	7.04	7.80	75.69	19.11
SD	15.21	8.59	3.60	3.44	3.21	9.49	3.84	4.01	3.44	14.61	7.75

Note. N. – narcissistic; A. – admiration; R. – rivalry; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Multiple hierarchical regression analysis, multiple regression and simple regression on the relationship of unethical pro-organisational behaviour (UPB) with narcissism and Machiavellianism

Independent variables (blocks)	1a.β	1b.β	1c.β	2.β	3.β	4.β
1. Narcissistic admiration						.08
Admiration grandiosity	.23***	.02	.01	–	–	–
Admiration uniqueness	.09	.02	.01	–	–	–
Admiration charmingness	.01	.03	.02	–	–	–
2. Narcissistic rivalry						.34***
Rivalry devaluation	–	.13	.05	.13*	–	–
Rivalry supremacy	–	.13	.07	.12	–	–
Rivalry aggressiveness	–	.29***	.30***	.33***	–	–
3. Machiavellianism	–	–	.28***	–	.42***	.26***
<i>F</i>	7.99***	13.72***	16.05***	27.35***	54.35***	35.14***
<i>R</i> ²	.09	.25	.32	.25	.18	.30
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.08	.24	.30	.24	.18	.29
ΔR^2	.09***	.16***	.06***			

Note. β – standardised regression coefficient; 1.β – multiple hierarchical regression (three blocks a. components of narcissistic admiration, b. components of narcissistic rivalry and c. Machiavellianism as independent variables); 2.β – multiple regression (only components of narcissism rivalry as independent variables); 3.β – simple linear regression (only one variable Machiavellianism as independent variable); 4.β – multiple regression analysis (three variables: narcissistic admiration, narcissistic rivalry, and Machiavellianism as independent variables); **p* < .05, ****p* < .001.

the components of narcissistic rivalry: devaluation, supremacy and aggressiveness. The third block included only one variable: Machiavellianism. A multiple regression analysis including only the rivalry components and a simple regression including only Machiavellianism were also performed. This analysis was performed to show the extent to which the individual components of narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry contribute to explaining the variance of UPB. In the last model, global indicators of the variables narcissistic admiration, narcissistic rivalry and Machiavellianism were introduced as explanatory variables.

The results show that the predictors of UPB are grandiosity, aggressiveness and Machiavellianism. The components of narcissistic admiration explain about 8% of UPB, while adding the components of narcissistic rivalry increases the explained variance by 16% and together all components of narcissism explain about 24% of UPB (of which aggressiveness is a significant predictor). Adding Machiavellianism significantly increases the explained variance of UPB by about 6%. The entire set of components of narcissism and Machiavellianism thus explains about 30% of UPB (of which aggressiveness and Machiavellianism are clearly significant predictors). At the same time, a multiple regression analysis including only the components of narcissistic rivalry showed that

these components alone explain as much as 24% of the variance in UPB (with aggressiveness being a very strong predictor in this setting and devaluation being a weaker predictor). Similarly, a simple regression analysis showed that a strong predictor of UPB is Machiavellianism, which independently explains as much as 18% of this variable. A model including global indicators showed that rivalry and Machiavellianism were clear predictors of UPB, explaining 29% of the variance in UPB.

The mediation analysis as a verification of hypotheses 3 and 4 performed in JASP 0.18.3 (SEM, mediation analysis) (Table 3) showed that narcissistic rivalry is related to UPB (30% of explained variance), both directly and through Machiavellianism (MACH-4) (18% of explained variance). More specifically, the analysis conducted on the admiration and rivalry subscales revealed that supremacy and devaluation are most likely to affect UPB via Machiavellianism, while aggressiveness is directly affected.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Thus, the results of the analyses clearly showed the following relationships. Firstly, the readiness to undertake UPB is most likely to be fostered primarily by narcissistic rivalry and its components, including es-

Table 3

Machiavellianism (MACH4) as a mediator (M) in the relationship between narcissism (X) and UPB (Y). Results of a mediation analysis

Effects, variables and paths				Estimate	SE	95% CI		
X	M	Y	Lower			Upper		
Direct effects								
Admiration	→	UPB	0.070	0.053	-0.030	0.174		
Rivalry	→	UPB	0.281***	0.051	0.171	0.385		
Indirect effects:								
Admiration	→	MACH4	→	UPB	0.015	0.015	-0.011	0.052
Rivalry	→	MACH4	→	UPB	0.084***	0.023	0.043	0.140
Total effects								
Admiration	→	UPB	0.085	0.054	-0.018	0.189		
Rivalry	→	UPB	0.365***	0.049	0.264	0.464		
Path coefficients								
MACH4	→	UPB	0.139***	0.031	0.071	0.204		
Admiration	→	UPB	0.070	0.053	-0.030	0.174		
Rivalry	→	UPB	0.281***	0.051	0.171	0.385		
Admiration	→	MACH4	0.108	0.107	-0.104	0.314		
Rivalry	→	MACH4	0.608***	0.097	0.409	0.800		
Subscales of admiration and rivalry NARQ (only statistically significant effects and pathways are shown)								
Direct effects								
Aggressiveness	→	UPB	0.671***	0.183	0.238	1.098		
Indirect effects								
Devaluation	→	MACH4	→	UPB	0.151**	0.050	0.068	0.273
Supremacy	→	MACH4	→	UPB	0.113*	0.053	0.033	0.231
Total effects								
Aggressiveness	→	UPB	0.659***	0.192	0.202	1.082		
Path coefficients								
MACH4	→	UPB	0.150***	0.031	0.086	0.214		
Aggressiveness	→	UPB	0.671***	0.183	0.238	1.098		
Devaluation	→	MACH4	1.010***	0.259	0.522	1.460		
Supremacy	→	MACH4	0.753*	0.317	0.204	1.298		

Note. UPB – unethical pro-organisational behaviour; NARQ – Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire. Delta method standard errors, bias-corrected percentile bootstrap confidence intervals (5000 replications), ML estimator. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

pecially aggressiveness, devaluation, as well as grandiosity, being a component of narcissistic admiration. Thus, hypothesis 1 can be partially accepted.

Secondly, Machiavellianism also appears as a predictor of UPB. Hence, hypothesis 2 should be accepted unequivocally.

Thirdly, the components of narcissistic rivalry (devaluation, supremacy) are predictors of Machiavel-

lianism. Hypothesis 3 should therefore also be partially accepted.

Fourthly, hypothesis 4 can also be accepted in part. Rivalry, including its components devaluation and supremacy, can affect the UPB through Machiavellianism.

In summary, narcissistic and Machiavellian individuals are inclined to undertake UPBs because, by

doing so, in pursuit of the organisation's goals, they can obtain reassurance that they are more competent, more effective, etc., and thus assert their supremacy over others. This is because UPBs can lead to benefits for the organisation. In turn, UPB submitters may receive recognition, rewards and promotion from the organisation as a result. Undertaking UPB can thus be another form of implementing a rivalry strategy that reinforces a grandiose self-image. UPBs can be considered a form of self-enhancement. Their function of elevating organisational status can serve to gain attention, admiration, popularity and eventually dominance. It may also serve merely to gain self-interest such as possessions or reputation (Pilch, 2014), but even these Machiavellian goals may stem from a narcissistic drive to maintain a grandiose self-image and to reinforce a "self" whose essence is to be above others (Bonfá-Araujo, 2024). It can be assumed that Machiavellianism plays a mediating role in the narcissistic rivalry relationship with the UPB. Indeed, Machiavellian thinking (business and life philosophy) and behaviour may determine effective actions (such as UPB) which signify the affirmation that "I am superior to others". Machiavellian strategic thinking can therefore allow a person with a high degree of devaluation and supremacy to achieve higher positions in the organisation and satisfy the need for supremacy and dominance.

The study presented here confirmed the results of studies on the relationship between narcissism, Machiavellianism and UPB conducted previously (Castille et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2020; Toirova & Baek, 2021; Yu et al., 2020). Associations between these variables are therefore also most likely to occur in Polish organisations. However, this research has enriched the picture of the relationship with a multidimensional view of narcissism. Thus, strong associations with UPB are primarily exhibited by narcissistic rivalry – including its component aggressiveness ("I find it hard when attention is directed away from me") – as well as Machiavellianism. Moreover, Machiavellianism appears to act as a mediator in the relationship between rivalry (i.e., devaluation and supremacy) and UPB.

At the same time, such components of rivalry as devaluing others and Machiavellian beliefs may facilitate undertaking UPBs, which are ultimately unethical actions that harm others, e.g. customers. Devaluing others and belittling them may serve to justify undertaking UPB, potentially through a mechanism similar to dehumanisation (Haslam, 2006). It is easier to be aggressive and unethical towards people who are devalued. This mechanism is particularly relevant in the case of narcissistic individuals, who can build up an image of being highly moral and even morally superior to others (according to the NARC model). Narcissistic individuals may engage in unethical behaviour primarily when they believe that others are morally inferior, i.e., they themselves act unethically.

In the context of such beliefs, a narcissistic person may accept a Machiavellian philosophy that justifies the pursuit of personal gain. Such a philosophy may make it possible to achieve benefits while maintaining a grandiose self-image (Cohen & Abdo, 2024; Pilch, 2014).

The results of this study firstly showed the importance of diagnosing the personality traits of employees within an organisation. Through it, knowledge is gained about who is potentially capable of undertaking UPB (those high in rivalry, devaluation and dominance, and narcissists adhering to Machiavellian philosophy). Such knowledge can facilitate management, recruitment and employee development. Secondly, the results also point to the importance of organisational practices aimed at building a strong organisational culture and an ethical climate that clearly indicates what employee behaviour is appropriate and desirable, as well as admirable. In an organisational culture that does not encourage UPBs, such behaviours should be clearly identified as inappropriate and undesirable, and actions that in the long run lead to harm rather than benefit (Shah et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2020).

It is worth emphasizing that within the context of such an organisational culture, even narcissists and Machiavellians may function as conscientious employees. Research indicates that both narcissism and Machiavellianism are associated with higher levels of organisational commitment (Cesinger et al., 2023). Naturally, this commitment may stem from narcissistic identification – where individuals perceive themselves as a central, even defining element of the organisation – which in turn may lead to the emergence of seemingly pro-organisational behaviours (Galvin et al., 2015).

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study presented in this article has a number of limitations. First, it is a cross-sectional and correlational study. All variables were examined at a single time point using self-report methods. UPB was examined using a 7-point Likert scale. The use of such a scale is associated with the presence of response style bias that is also dependent on culture (Paulhus, 1991). Hence, future research should: 1) separate the measurement of explanatory variables from explained variables; 2) add observational tools of the variables studied, such as rating scales completed by supervisors (Cohen & Abdo, 2024); 3) enrich UPB measurement with context-specific tasks designed to elicit UPB in particular scenarios (Liu et al., 2025).

Second, these studies did not include all components of the dark triad (DT). Psychopathy was missing. Machiavellianism and narcissism were included be-

cause these two traits have been included so far in UPB research. Hence, a third DT variable – psychopathy – should be added in future studies (Pilch, 2014).

Third, this research omitted a number of moderators from the organisational context area, such as organisational change (Shah et al., 2020). Thus, moderators such as environmental complexity should be included in the future (Yu et al., 2020).

Fourth, there was a preponderance of women over men in this research. Admittedly, this reflects the structure of the population in which the research was done (large multinational corporations mainly in the financial sector) (Wiązowska, 2024), but such a sample does not reflect the entire population of working Poles. Hence, future surveys should include employees from a wide range of industries, thus increasing the percentage of men in the sample.

DISCLOSURES

This research received no external funding. The research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology in Katowice at SWPS University (Approval No. WKEB96/05/2024).

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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