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The Effect of Leadership Narcissism on Organizational Citizenship Behavior: The Mediating Roles of Perceived Internal State and Need for Self-Esteem (Case Study: Eshtehard Municipality Organization)

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A B S T R A C T

This study aimed to investigate the effect of leadership narcissism on organizational citizenship behavior, considering the mediating roles of perceived internal state and need for self-esteem among managers and employees of Eshtehard Municipality Organization. This applied, quantitative, cross-sectional study employed a descriptive-correlational survey design. The statistical population consisted of 220 managers and employees of Eshtehard Municipality Organization, from whom 140 participants were selected using the Krejcie and Morgan table and simple random sampling. Data were collected using the Leadership Narcissism Questionnaire by Ames et al. (2006), the Organizational Citizenship Behavior Questionnaire by Podsakoff et al. (1990), the Perceived Internal State/Intrinsic Motivation Questionnaire by McAuley et al. (1989), and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967). Reliability and validity were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, factor loadings, the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and HTMT. Data were analyzed using SPSS 22 and SmartPLS through partial least squares structural equation modeling and the Sobel test. Leadership narcissism had no significant direct effect on organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.113$, $t = 1.831$, $p = 0.058$), but significantly predicted perceived internal state ($\beta = 0.654$, $t = 11.593$, $p < 0.001$) and need for self-esteem ($\beta = 0.649$, $t = 13.598$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived internal state significantly predicted organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.774$, $t = 15.277$, $p < 0.001$), whereas need for self-esteem did not ($\beta = 0.074$, $t = 1.343$, $p = 0.180$). The Sobel test confirmed the mediating role of perceived internal state ($z = 9.255$), while the mediating role of need for self-esteem was not supported ($z = 1.338$). Leadership narcissism influences organizational citizenship behavior primarily through employees' perceived internal state rather than through a direct pathway or need for self-esteem, highlighting the importance of employees' internal motivational experiences in translating leadership characteristics into discretionary organizational behavior.

Keywords: *Leadership Narcissism; Organizational Citizenship Behavior; Perceived Internal State; Intrinsic Motivation; Need for Self-Esteem; Municipality.*

1. Introduction

Organizations increasingly depend on employee behaviors that extend beyond formally prescribed job duties, particularly in environments where service quality, adaptability, cooperation, and responsiveness cannot be fully secured through rules, supervision, or contractual obligations alone. One of the most influential concepts developed to explain such discretionary contributions is organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), which generally refers to voluntary and constructive behaviors that support coworkers, facilitate organizational functioning, protect collective interests, and contribute to an effective social and psychological work environment. Contemporary research continues to show that OCB is associated with employee effectiveness, organizational performance, adaptability, knowledge exchange, and the ability of organizations to sustain desirable workplace outcomes over time (Suprayogo & Pandin, 2026). From an organizational behavior perspective, citizenship behaviors may also contribute to employees' own developmental processes by encouraging initiative, collaboration, learning, interpersonal support, and greater involvement in organizational life (Mustopa, 2026). Evidence from systematic reviews further suggests that OCB is not produced by a single organizational condition but rather emerges through the interaction of individual differences, leadership characteristics, perceived organizational conditions, employee attitudes, and relational mechanisms (Juniasri et al., 2026). Accordingly, identifying the psychological and leadership-related antecedents of OCB remains an important issue for both organizational theory and managerial practice.

The significance of OCB is particularly evident in public and municipal organizations, where organizational effectiveness depends not only on compliance with formal administrative procedures but also on employees' willingness to cooperate, solve problems proactively, assist colleagues, display conscientiousness, tolerate temporary difficulties, participate responsibly in organizational affairs, and maintain respectful interpersonal relations. Public organizations frequently operate under conditions of procedural complexity, resource limitations, multiple stakeholder demands, and high expectations regarding accountability and service delivery. Under such circumstances, discretionary behavior can become an important mechanism through which employees compensate for rigidities that cannot be addressed through formal structures alone. Recent research on leadership discourse and citizenship behavior has also emphasized that perceptions of leadership shape how employees understand and enact citizenship behaviors within contemporary organizational settings (Tunca et al., 2026). Similarly, evidence from public leadership research indicates that people-centered leadership can strengthen OCB through relational and attitudinal mechanisms such as leader-member exchange and employee satisfaction (Teklehaimanot et al., 2026). These findings imply that the behavior and personality of leaders are central to understanding why employees may either exceed formal expectations or restrict their efforts to minimum contractual requirements.

At the same time, organizational citizenship behavior cannot be understood solely as a response to supportive leadership. Leader characteristics may also contain darker or more ambivalent features that influence employees in complex ways. Personality-related differences have been increasingly recognized as important predictors of workplace behavior, including employees' willingness to engage in organizational citizenship activities (Rajput, 2026). Among leadership personality characteristics, narcissism has attracted substantial scholarly attention because it combines self-enhancement, a desire for admiration, entitlement, interpersonal dominance, confidence, and a tendency to protect an elevated self-image. Narcissism may manifest differently across individuals and contexts, ranging from relatively adaptive self-confidence and ambition to dysfunctional patterns of grandiosity, interpersonal exploitation, sensitivity to evaluation, and excessive concern with status. Clinical and personality research has demonstrated that narcissism is a multidimensional phenomenon embedded in broader personality organization and may involve both overt and vulnerable expressions (Krüger, 2024). Related research comparing personality organization across dark and bright personality characteristics likewise reinforces the importance of considering narcissistic tendencies as psychologically complex rather than simply equating them with confidence or assertiveness (Salman Nasab et al., 2024). Studies of pathological narcissism have also shown that narcissistic dimensions may be associated with broader forms of personality organization and emotional functioning, underscoring the relevance of internal psychological processes when examining narcissistic behavior in organizational settings (Newcomb et al., 2024).

Within organizational research, managerial and leadership narcissism has been examined as a potentially

consequential force affecting decisions, interpersonal relations, organizational climate, strategic behavior, and employee outcomes. Research on the antecedents and consequences of managerial narcissism suggests that narcissistic tendencies can originate from a combination of individual, organizational, and managerial factors and may subsequently influence multiple organizational processes (Feizi et al., 2019). Organizational-level analyses have similarly indicated that narcissistic patterns may become embedded in organizational structures and managerial practices rather than remaining confined to the personality of a single leader (Jafarinia et al., 2021). This is important because leaders occupy positions that allow their personal orientations to shape resource allocation, recognition systems, interpersonal norms, communication, and the interpretation of employee behavior. In such circumstances, a narcissistic leader may influence employees not only through explicit decisions but also through repeated social cues about whose contributions are valued, how recognition is distributed, whether disagreement is tolerated, and whether employee initiative is perceived as supportive or threatening.

The consequences of narcissistic leadership are not necessarily uniform. Narcissistic leaders can sometimes appear charismatic, bold, visionary, self-assured, and willing to undertake ambitious initiatives. Such characteristics may be advantageous under specific strategic conditions, particularly where organizations seek visible change or aggressive growth. For example, research on chief executive narcissism has shown that narcissistic executives may react distinctively to performance outcomes and may be more inclined toward risky organizational change under certain aspiration conditions (Kavusan et al., 2025). Likewise, evidence from digital transformation research indicates that CEO narcissism can shape strategic transformation processes, although the nature and magnitude of such effects depend on contextual conditions (Xu et al., 2025). These findings suggest that narcissism is not uniformly dysfunctional at the strategic level. Nevertheless, the same characteristics that can stimulate bold action may create interpersonal costs when leaders become excessively self-focused, seek admiration, monopolize credit, devalue others, or interpret employee autonomy as a challenge to their superiority.

The potential risks of narcissistic leadership become particularly important when attention shifts from strategic decision-making to employee behavior. Narcissistic leaders may prioritize personal visibility and status over employees' psychological needs, creating uncertainty regarding recognition, fairness, and interpersonal security. They may also display inconsistent support, become defensive in response to criticism, or use employees as instruments for self-enhancement. Scholars have therefore described narcissistic leadership as a serious organizational threat when it distorts communication, undermines trust, and weakens the quality of decision-making and interpersonal relations (Friedman & Fireworker, 2021). Research has further shown that narcissistic leadership may influence whether employees openly express supportive behaviors or remain silent, indicating that leader narcissism can alter the interpersonal and psychological processes through which employees decide whether to contribute beyond formal requirements (Luo et al., 2026). Such findings are directly relevant to OCB because citizenship behavior is inherently discretionary; employees are unlikely to sustain voluntary contributions when they perceive that such efforts are ignored, appropriated by leaders, or psychologically costly.

The relationship between narcissistic leadership and OCB may therefore be indirect rather than simply linear. Employees do not respond only to observable leader characteristics; they interpret those characteristics through internal psychological states. One potentially important mechanism is the employee's perceived internal state, particularly perceived intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivational states reflect the extent to which individuals experience interest, enjoyment, competence, personal importance, and manageable levels of tension while engaging in work-related activities. When employees perceive their work as internally meaningful and experience a sense of competence and involvement, they may be more inclined to undertake discretionary behaviors that benefit colleagues and the organization. Conversely, if leadership behavior generates pressure, emotional strain, diminished competence, or reduced enjoyment, employees may conserve psychological resources and limit contributions to formally required duties. This psychological mechanism provides a plausible explanation for why leadership narcissism might affect OCB through the way employees internally experience their work environment rather than through an immediate direct pathway.

This mechanism is consistent with the broader literature showing that citizenship behavior is strongly shaped by social and psychological conditions within the organization. For instance, organizational and technological changes may influence OCB through intermediate mechanisms such as social capital rather than exerting only direct effects

(Vahdati & Jalali, 2026). In a similar manner, people-centered leadership has been shown to influence citizenship behavior sequentially through relational quality and employee satisfaction (Teklehaimanot et al., 2026). These findings reinforce the theoretical importance of mediation mechanisms. Leadership behaviors are interpreted, emotionally processed, and translated into employee attitudes before they emerge as observable organizational behaviors. Accordingly, examining perceived internal state as a mediator may reveal a more realistic explanation of how leadership narcissism is transformed into employee citizenship behavior.

A second psychologically relevant variable is the need for self-esteem. Self-esteem concerns individuals' evaluation of their own worth, competence, and personal value, while the need for self-esteem reflects the importance individuals place on preserving or enhancing a positive self-view. Leadership behavior can become especially consequential when employees' sense of self-worth depends on recognition, approval, competence feedback, or interpersonal respect. Narcissistic leaders may provide admiration selectively, compete for recognition, diminish subordinates' achievements, or create relational environments in which employees repeatedly evaluate their own value relative to the leader. Under these conditions, employees with stronger self-esteem-related needs may become particularly sensitive to leader behavior. Research examining self-esteem and narcissism in professional environments has demonstrated that these personality-related characteristics can influence organizational behaviors such as knowledge sharing (Salehi & Rouhi, 2023). This suggests that self-esteem processes may not remain purely intrapersonal but can influence whether employees share, cooperate, support others, and engage constructively with organizational members.

The need for self-esteem may operate in more than one direction. Employees who perceive that their competence and value are recognized may engage in citizenship behavior as a means of reinforcing a positive occupational identity and contributing to the collective environment. By contrast, employees whose self-esteem needs are threatened may withdraw, become defensive, reduce discretionary effort, or focus more strongly on self-protection. Narcissistic leadership is especially relevant in this regard because narcissistic leaders are often highly sensitive to comparative status and interpersonal recognition. Thus, they may simultaneously stimulate and threaten employees' self-evaluations. In some cases, a dominant and high-status leader may provide employees with a strong identity reference and elevate their sense of belonging to an important unit; in other cases, the leader's self-enhancing behavior may diminish employees' sense of value. This complexity makes self-esteem a theoretically important candidate mediator between leadership narcissism and OCB.

The association between narcissism and organizationally directed behavior is further complicated by evidence that narcissistic tendencies can influence behaviors undertaken ostensibly for the organization but with ethically problematic consequences. Entrepreneurial narcissism, for example, has been linked to unethical pro-organizational behavior through mediated and moderated mechanisms, indicating that narcissistic characteristics may shape employees' or leaders' interpretations of what constitutes behavior in the organization's interest (Yu et al., 2020). Such findings are significant because they distinguish genuinely constructive citizenship behavior from behavior that merely appears organization-serving. A narcissistic leadership environment may encourage visibility, loyalty signaling, or actions designed to satisfy the leader rather than authentic citizenship directed toward organizational welfare. Therefore, studying OCB under narcissistic leadership requires attention not only to whether employees perform extra-role behaviors but also to the psychological processes that motivate such behavior.

Recent evidence also indicates that narcissism at the executive level can interact with organizational politics and broader organizational conditions to influence desirable workplace behaviors and sustainability-related outcomes (Mahmood et al., 2026). This reinforces the notion that leader narcissism should not be examined in isolation from the environment experienced by employees. Employees interpret leadership through everyday interactions, organizational norms, perceived fairness, opportunities for participation, and expectations concerning recognition and performance. These perceptions can affect motivational energy, relational trust, and willingness to undertake voluntary behavior. In public organizations, where formal authority structures are often clearly defined and managerial decisions can strongly shape employees' daily experiences, the internal psychological consequences of leadership behavior may be especially salient.

Despite growing research on narcissistic leadership, several gaps remain. Much of the literature has concentrated on top executives, CEOs, strategic change, innovation, or unethical organizational behavior rather than examining routine citizenship behavior among employees in local

public-sector organizations. Studies of CEO narcissism, for example, have highlighted strategic risk-taking and transformation decisions (Kavusan et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025), while other research has examined silence, change-supportive behavior, or broad workplace outcomes (Luo et al., 2026; Mahmood et al., 2026). Although these streams provide valuable insights, they do not fully explain how narcissistic leadership affects voluntary employee behaviors in administrative and municipal environments. Furthermore, research on OCB emphasizes numerous antecedents but continues to identify leadership, personality, motivation, satisfaction, and organizational context as interacting rather than independent influences (Juniasri et al., 2026; Rajput, 2026). Consequently, a model that integrates narcissistic leadership with employees' perceived internal state and need for self-esteem may provide a more comprehensive account of the psychological pathways underlying OCB.

The Iranian organizational context provides an additional reason for examining these relationships. Existing Iranian research has documented the organizational manifestations, antecedents, and consequences of managerial and organizational narcissism (Feizi et al., 2019; Jafarinia et al., 2021), but empirical analysis of its relationship with citizenship behavior through internal psychological mediators remains comparatively limited. This gap is especially relevant for municipal organizations, where employees interact closely with managers while simultaneously facing service demands, bureaucratic constraints, public accountability, and expectations for cooperation. In such contexts, citizenship behaviors can materially affect the speed, quality, and responsiveness of municipal services, yet these behaviors may depend heavily on how employees experience leadership and evaluate their own psychological standing within the organization.

A further theoretical contribution arises from examining two mediating mechanisms simultaneously. Perceived internal state captures employees' motivational and experiential reactions, whereas need for self-esteem represents a more self-evaluative psychological mechanism. These variables may provide different explanations for the same leadership effect. A narcissistic leader may affect OCB primarily by changing employees' intrinsic motivation and perceived competence, or the effect may emerge through employees' need to protect or enhance self-worth. Alternatively, one mediator may prove influential while the other does not, thereby clarifying which psychological pathway is more consequential in the organizational context under investigation. Such differentiation is important because interventions differ depending on the mechanism involved: motivational problems may require redesign of work experiences and leadership interactions, whereas self-esteem-related problems may require recognition, respectful communication, fair feedback, and psychologically safer leader-member relations.

The practical implications are therefore substantial. If leadership narcissism directly reduces citizenship behavior, organizations may need to prioritize leadership selection, assessment, coaching, and accountability. If the effect operates principally through perceived internal states, however, organizations may be able to mitigate harmful leadership effects by strengthening employee autonomy, competence, meaningfulness, participation, and intrinsic motivation. If need for self-esteem acts as a mediator, recognition systems and interpersonal respect may become central managerial tools. Moreover, because contemporary research increasingly emphasizes the importance of OCB for employee development, organizational performance, sustainability, and adaptation (Mustopa, 2026; Suprayogo & Pandin, 2026), identifying the mechanisms through which leadership facilitates or inhibits such behavior has both theoretical and operational value.

Taken together, the literature indicates that OCB is a critical discretionary behavior shaped by leadership, personality, organizational context, and employee psychological processes; that narcissistic leadership can have complex consequences extending from strategic change to interpersonal dysfunction; and that internal motivation and self-evaluative needs may explain how employees translate leadership experiences into constructive or withdrawn organizational behavior. Although recent studies have advanced understanding of OCB, narcissistic leadership, self-esteem, and mediated behavioral mechanisms, there remains a need for integrated empirical research within municipal organizations, where leadership dynamics and employee citizenship behaviors directly influence organizational effectiveness and public service delivery (Tunca et al., 2026; Vahdati & Jalali, 2026). Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the effect of leadership narcissism on organizational citizenship behavior, considering the mediating roles of perceived internal state and need for self-esteem among managers and employees of Eshtehard Municipality Organization.

2. Methods and Materials

The present study employed an applied, quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate the effect of leadership narcissism on organizational citizenship behavior, with perceived internal state and need for self-esteem considered as mediating variables among managers and employees of Eshtehard Municipality Organization. In terms of purpose, the study was applied because it sought to generate findings that could be used to better understand and address organizational and managerial issues within a real administrative setting. With respect to the temporal dimension, the study was cross-sectional because the required data were collected from the participants during a single period rather than through repeated observations over time. The research logic was inductive, as empirical observations obtained from the study participants were used to examine the proposed relationships among the study constructs. In terms of implementation, the study followed a descriptive-correlational survey design and was conducted as a field study. The descriptive nature of the research arose from the fact that none of the study variables were experimentally manipulated and the existing levels of leadership narcissism, organizational citizenship behavior, perceived internal state, and need for self-esteem were measured as they occurred naturally in the organizational environment. The survey approach was appropriate because standardized questionnaires were used to obtain information about participants' perceptions, attitudes, and organizational behaviors, whereas the field component involved direct collection of empirical data from members of the target organization.

The statistical population consisted of all managers and employees working in Eshtehard Municipality Organization, with the total population reported as 220 individuals. The required sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table, according to which 140 participants were selected for inclusion in the study. Simple random sampling was employed so that each eligible member of the target population had an equal opportunity to participate in the research, thereby reducing systematic selection bias and improving the representativeness of the sample. The questionnaires were distributed among the selected managers and employees and were collected following completion. The unit of analysis was the individual employee or manager. The conceptual model proposed that leadership narcissism would influence organizational citizenship behavior both directly and indirectly through perceived internal state and need for self-esteem. Accordingly, leadership narcissism was considered the principal predictor variable, organizational citizenship behavior was treated as the outcome variable, and perceived internal state and need for self-esteem were examined as mediating constructs.

Data required for the theoretical background and development of the conceptual framework were obtained through library-based sources, including scientific books, Persian- and English-language journal articles, academic databases, and relevant electronic resources. The empirical component of the study relied on field-based questionnaire administration. The use of standardized instruments was intended to enhance consistency in operationalizing the constructs and to permit quantitative examination of the hypothesized structural relationships. Before the main statistical analyses, the suitability of the measurement instruments was examined in terms of face validity, content validity, construct validity, convergent validity, and internal consistency reliability. Face and content validity were assessed through review by the academic supervisor, advisor, and subject-matter experts, whose evaluations indicated that the questionnaire items were appropriate for measuring the intended constructs within the context of the study.

Leadership narcissism was assessed using the standard Narcissistic Personality Inventory developed by Ames and colleagues in 2006. The instrument is a 16-item forced-choice measure consisting of 16 pairs of statements, producing a total of 32 alternative statements presented in two response columns. For each pair, respondents select the statement that best represents their characteristics or perceptions. Narcissistic alternatives receive a score of 1, whereas non-narcissistic alternatives receive a score of 0. Consequently, the total score can range from 0 to 16, with higher scores representing a higher level of narcissistic characteristics and lower scores indicating lower narcissism. In the present research, the measure was operationalized as an indicator of leadership narcissism. A score of 8 or above was treated as indicative of a comparatively high level of narcissistic leadership characteristics. The construct reliability obtained in the present sample was very high, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .979. The composite reliability coefficient was .981 and the average variance extracted was .764, supporting the reliability and convergent validity of the construct within the measurement model.

Organizational citizenship behavior was measured using the standard Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Questionnaire developed by Podsakoff and colleagues in 1990. The questionnaire consists of 20 items rated on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, representing a very low degree, to 5, representing a very high degree. The instrument assesses several major dimensions of discretionary organizational behavior. Items 1 through 4 assess altruistic and helping-oriented behavior, items 5 through 7 assess conscientiousness, items 8 through 10 assess sportsmanship, items 11 through 13 assess civic virtue, and items 14 through 20 assess courtesy and respectful interpersonal behavior. The total set of items was used to represent the broader construct of organizational citizenship behavior, with higher scores reflecting a greater tendency to engage in voluntary, constructive, and extra-role behaviors that support colleagues and organizational functioning. In the present study, the questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .961. Composite reliability was .965 and the average variance extracted was .580, indicating adequate construct reliability and convergent validity.

Perceived internal state, operationalized in the present study as perceived intrinsic motivation, was measured using the instrument developed by McAuley and colleagues in 1989. This self-report questionnaire contains 15 items and assesses participants' subjective internal motivational experiences. Responses are scored using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. The instrument encompasses four dimensions. Interest and enjoyment are assessed using items 4, 6, 9, 12, and 14; effort and importance are assessed through items 3, 7, and 10; perceived competence is measured using items 2, 5, and 13; and tension or pressure is evaluated through items 1, 8, 11, and 15. Together, the 15 items provide an overall representation of respondents' perceived internal motivational state. Appropriate reverse scoring was applied where necessary so that the resulting scores could be interpreted consistently with the intended direction of the construct. In this study, the scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .948. Its composite reliability coefficient was .953, while the average variance extracted was .578, providing evidence of satisfactory construct reliability and convergent validity.

Need for self-esteem was assessed using the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory originally developed in 1967. The instrument uses dichotomous yes/no responses and includes substantive self-esteem items together with a lie-scale designed to identify potentially socially desirable or invalid response patterns. The scoring procedure assigns values of 0 and 1 depending on the direction of each item, with negatively keyed items scored in reverse. The substantive scale produces a possible total score ranging from 0 to 50, with higher scores representing a higher level of self-esteem-related evaluation. The instrument also contains eight lie-scale items, namely items 6, 13, 20, 27, 34, 41, 48, and 55. A score greater than 4 on these lie-scale items was regarded as indicating reduced response validity because it could suggest an attempt by the respondent to present an unrealistically favorable image of the self. In the present study, the construct demonstrated an exceptionally high Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .997. Composite reliability was .996 and the average variance extracted was .861, indicating very strong internal consistency and convergent validity.

The psychometric quality of the measurement instruments was further evaluated within the structural equation modeling framework. Composite reliability values greater than .70 were considered indicative of acceptable construct reliability, while average variance extracted values greater than .50 were considered evidence that the indicators explained an adequate proportion of the variance in their corresponding latent constructs. Convergent validity was additionally assessed by examining standardized factor loadings, with values above .50 considered acceptable and values approaching or exceeding .70 regarded as preferable. In the present study, the reported composite reliability coefficients ranged from .953 to .996, while average variance extracted values ranged from .578 to .861. All constructs therefore exceeded the recommended thresholds for composite reliability and average variance extracted. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients also ranged from .948 to .997, substantially exceeding the conventional minimum value of .70 and demonstrating a high degree of internal consistency across the measurement instruments.

Data analysis was performed using both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics were used initially to summarize the characteristics of the participants and the distributions of the principal research variables. Demographic characteristics considered in the analysis included gender, age, educational attainment, marital status, and work experience. Frequencies and percentages were used for categorical demographic variables, while appropriate measures of central tendency and dispersion were used to summarize quantitative study variables. Before testing the hypothesized relationships, the data were screened for completeness, coding accuracy,

response validity, and distributional characteristics. Skewness and kurtosis coefficients were examined to evaluate the distribution of the observed variables and to identify substantial departures from acceptable distributional patterns.

The measurement model was evaluated before interpretation of the structural relationships. Factor analysis was used to examine the association between the observed indicators and their corresponding latent constructs. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, while convergent validity was assessed using standardized factor loadings and average variance extracted. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values of at least .70 were considered satisfactory, and average variance extracted values greater than .50 were interpreted as evidence of adequate convergent validity. The reported psychometric results supported the suitability of the study constructs for subsequent structural analysis, as leadership narcissism yielded a composite reliability of .981 and an average variance extracted of .764, organizational citizenship behavior yielded values of .965 and .580, perceived internal state yielded values of .953 and .578, and need for self-esteem yielded values of .996 and .861, respectively.

Structural equation modeling was subsequently used to test the conceptual model and assess the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships among leadership narcissism, perceived internal state, need for self-esteem, and organizational citizenship behavior. The structural model was used to estimate the magnitude and statistical significance of the path coefficients and to determine whether leadership narcissism was directly associated with organizational citizenship behavior and whether this association was transmitted through the proposed mediating variables. The mediating effects of perceived internal state and need for self-esteem were additionally assessed using the Sobel test to determine whether the indirect pathways from leadership narcissism to organizational citizenship behavior were statistically significant. SPSS version 22 was used for data preparation, descriptive analyses, reliability assessment, and preliminary statistical procedures, whereas SmartPLS was employed for the measurement model and structural equation modeling analyses. Statistical decisions were based on conventional significance criteria, and the combined evaluation of measurement quality, direct structural paths, and indirect effects was used to test the proposed research model.

3. Findings and Results

Descriptive statistics were first calculated for the four principal variables of the study, namely leadership narcissism, organizational citizenship behavior, perceived internal state, and need for self-esteem. All analyses were based on 140 valid observations. As shown in Table 1, leadership narcissism had a mean of 1.4567 and a standard deviation of 0.23143, while organizational citizenship behavior had a mean of 3.3239 and a standard deviation of 0.79439. The mean score for perceived internal state was 3.3610 with a standard deviation of 0.79265, whereas need for self-esteem had a mean of 1.5039 and a standard deviation of 0.13117. For leadership narcissism, the median was 1.4375, the mode was 1.56, and the variance was 0.054. Organizational citizenship behavior had a median of 3.5000, a mode of 3.45, and a variance of 0.631. The corresponding values for perceived internal state were 3.4000, 3.73, and 0.628, respectively, while need for self-esteem had a median of 1.5172, a mode of 1.57, and a variance of 0.017. The observed scores for all four variables ranged from 1 to 5.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Main Study Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Variance	Minimum	Maximum
Leadership narcissism	140	1.4567	1.4375	1.56	0.23143	0.054	1	5
Organizational citizenship behavior	140	3.3239	3.5000	3.45	0.79439	0.631	1	5
Perceived internal state	140	3.3610	3.4000	3.73	0.79265	0.628	1	5
Need for self-esteem	140	1.5039	1.5172	1.57	0.13117	0.017	1	5

The distributional characteristics of the variables were subsequently examined using skewness and kurtosis coefficients. Leadership narcissism had a skewness coefficient of 0.088 and a kurtosis coefficient of −0.482. Organizational citizenship behavior showed a skewness coefficient of −0.109 and kurtosis of 0.417. Perceived internal state had skewness of −0.270 and kurtosis of −0.133, while need for self-esteem had skewness of −0.819 and

kurtosis of 2.167. These statistics indicated some variation in the shape and symmetry of the distributions, particularly for need for self-esteem. Nevertheless, partial least squares structural equation modeling does not require strict multivariate normality and is generally robust to non-normal distributions. Therefore, the observed distributional characteristics did not preclude continuation of the PLS-SEM analyses.

The structural model was subsequently estimated in SmartPLS. Standardized path coefficients were used to evaluate the magnitude and direction of the proposed relationships, while bootstrapped t-values were used to assess statistical significance. The standardized structural model and the model containing significance coefficients are represented by Figures 1 and 2, respectively.

Figure 1

Structural Model of the Study with Standardized Path Coefficients

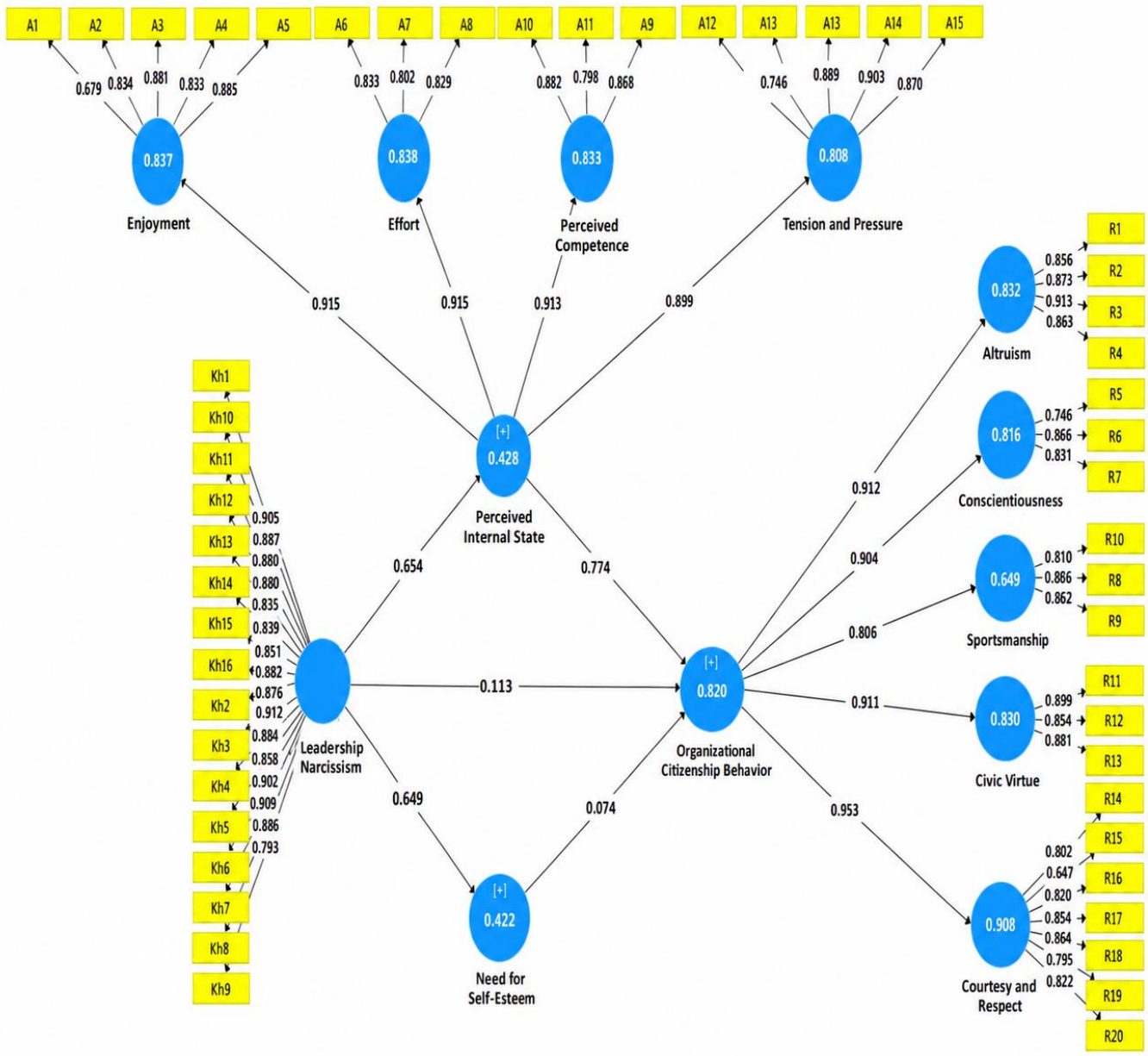
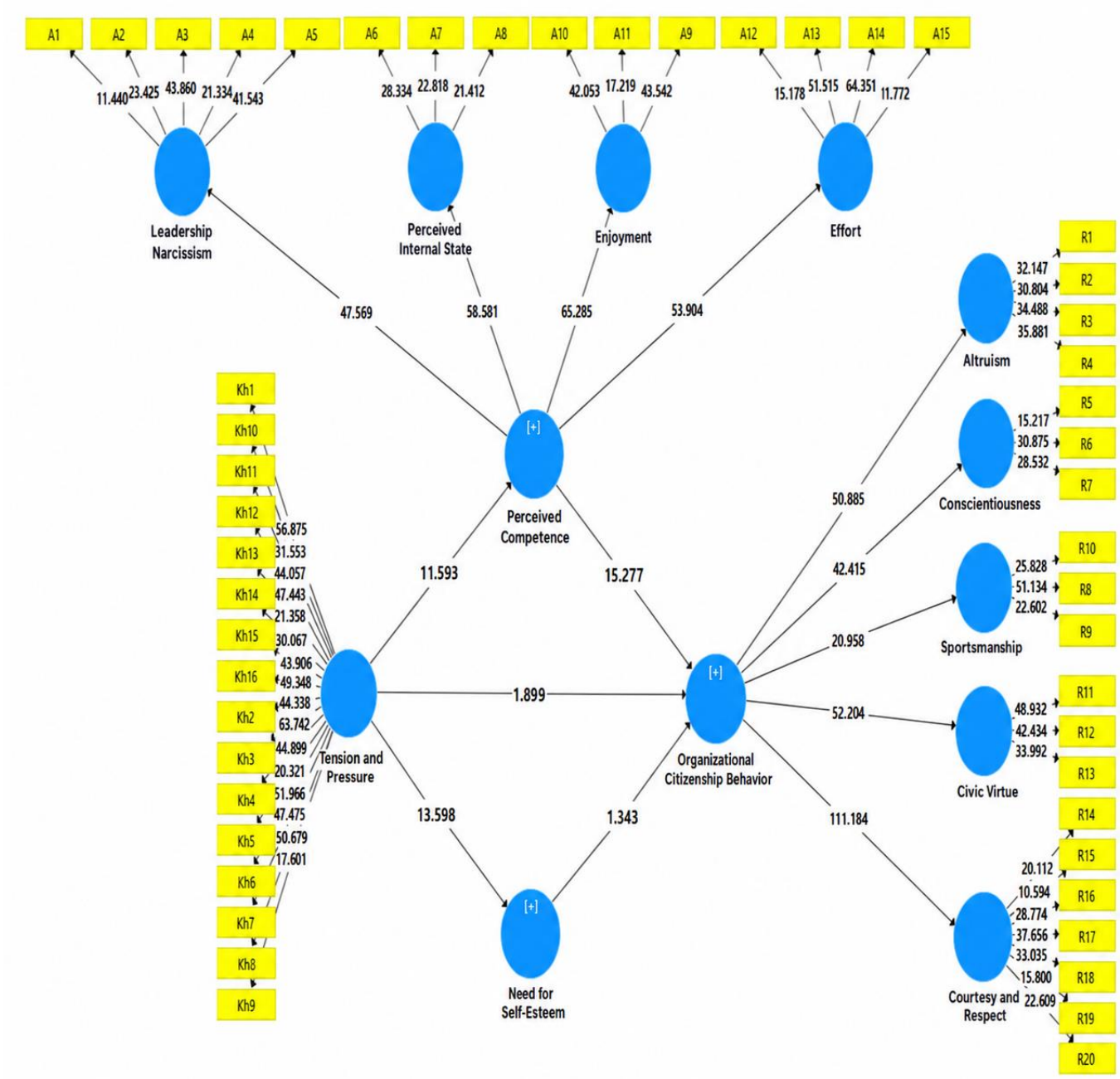


Figure 2

Structural Model of the Study with Significance Coefficients



Before testing the structural hypotheses, the adequacy of the measurement model was examined. Indicator reliability was first assessed through the outer factor loadings. Indicators with insufficient loadings were excluded during model refinement, and all indicators retained in the final model exceeded the minimum acceptable loading of 0.40. For leadership narcissism, the retained factor loadings were Kh1 = 0.905, Kh2 = 0.876, Kh3 = 0.912, Kh4 = 0.884, Kh5 = 0.858, Kh6 = 0.902, Kh7 = 0.909, Kh8 = 0.886, Kh9 = 0.793, Kh10 = 0.887, Kh11 = 0.889, Kh12 = 0.880, Kh13 = 0.835, Kh14 = 0.839, Kh15 = 0.851, and Kh16 = 0.882. Thus, the loading coefficients for leadership narcissism ranged from 0.793 to 0.912.

For organizational citizenship behavior, the retained factor loadings were R1 = 0.856, R2 = 0.873, R3 = 0.913, R4 = 0.863, R5 = 0.746, R6 = 0.866, R7 = 0.831, R8 = 0.886, R9 = 0.862, R10 = 0.819, R11 = 0.899, R12 = 0.854, R13 = 0.881, R14 = 0.802, R15 = 0.647, R16 = 0.820, R17 = 0.854, R18 = 0.862, R19 = 0.795, and R20 = 0.822. The corresponding factor loadings therefore ranged from 0.647

to 0.913, with all retained items exceeding the minimum criterion.

For perceived internal state, the loadings were A1 = 0.679, A2 = 0.834, A3 = 0.881, A4 = 0.833, A5 = 0.885, A6 = 0.833, A7 = 0.802, A8 = 0.829, A9 = 0.882, A10 = 0.798, A11 = 0.868, A12 = 0.746, A13 = 0.889, A14 = 0.903, and A15 = 0.870. Accordingly, the factor loadings ranged between 0.679 and 0.903, supporting satisfactory indicator reliability.

For need for self-esteem, the retained loadings were E1 = 0.934, E2 = 0.944, E3 = 0.922, E4 = 0.926, E5 = 0.933, E6 = 0.931, E7 = 0.923, E8 = 0.927, E9 = 0.930, E10 = 0.926, E11 = 0.938, E12 = 0.936, E13 = 0.930, E14 = 0.915, E15 = 0.932, E16 = 0.901, E17 = 0.925, E18 = 0.935, E19 = 0.940, E20 = 0.933, E21 = 0.932, E22 = 0.918, E23 = 0.930, E24 = 0.927, E25 = 0.931, E26 = 0.937, E27 = 0.930, E28 = 0.931, E29 = 0.924, E30 = 0.928, E31 = 0.929, E32 = 0.924, E33 = 0.925, E34 = 0.937, E35 = 0.932, E36 = 0.936, E37 = 0.916, E38 = 0.922, E39 = 0.920, E40 = 0.929, E41 = 0.931, E42 = 0.934, E43 = 0.928, E44 = 0.931, E45 = 0.928, E46 = 0.929, E47 = 0.927, E48 = 0.920, E49 = 0.921, E50 = 0.911, E51 = 0.922, E52 = 0.937, E53 = 0.919, E54 = 0.922, E55 = 0.937, E56 = 0.919, E57 = 0.922, and E58 = 0.915. These coefficients ranged from 0.901 to 0.944 and consequently demonstrated very strong indicator reliability.

Internal consistency reliability and convergent validity were evaluated through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. Table 2 presents the results for both the principal latent variables and their component dimensions. All Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. Furthermore, every AVE value exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.50. Leadership narcissism produced $\alpha = 0.979$, CR = 0.981, and AVE = 0.764. Organizational citizenship behavior yielded $\alpha = 0.961$, CR = 0.965, and AVE = 0.580. Perceived internal state yielded $\alpha = 0.948$, CR = 0.953, and AVE = 0.578, whereas need for self-esteem yielded $\alpha = 0.997$, CR = 0.996, and AVE = 0.861. The corresponding component-level statistics were also satisfactory.

Table 2

Reliability and Convergent Validity of the Measurement Model

Construct/Dimension	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Leadership narcissism	0.979	0.981	0.764
Organizational citizenship behavior	0.961	0.965	0.580
Altruism/helping behavior	0.899	0.930	0.768
Conscientiousness	0.746	0.856	0.665
Sportsmanship	0.818	0.892	0.733
Civic virtue	0.852	0.910	0.771
Courtesy and respect	0.906	0.927	0.645
Perceived internal state	0.948	0.953	0.578
Interest/enjoyment	0.880	0.914	0.682
Effort/importance	0.759	0.862	0.675
Perceived competence	0.807	0.886	0.722
Tension/pressure	0.874	0.915	0.730
Need for self-esteem	0.997	0.996	0.861

Discriminant validity was evaluated using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations. For the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square roots of AVE were 0.874 for leadership narcissism, 0.761 for organizational citizenship behavior, 0.928 for need for self-esteem, and 0.760 for perceived internal state. Each of these values exceeded the corresponding correlations with the other constructs. The correlation between leadership narcissism and organizational citizenship behavior was 0.668, that between leadership narcissism and need for self-esteem was 0.649, and that between leadership narcissism and perceived internal state was 0.654. Organizational citizenship behavior correlated at 0.665 with need for self-esteem and at 0.658 with perceived internal state, while the correlation between need for self-esteem and perceived internal state was 0.668. These findings satisfied the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

The HTMT ratios also supported discriminant validity. Specifically, the HTMT value was 0.688 between leadership narcissism and organizational citizenship behavior, 0.656 between leadership narcissism and need for self-esteem, 0.677 between leadership narcissism and perceived internal state, 0.680 between organizational citizenship behavior and need for self-esteem, 0.841 between organizational

citizenship behavior and perceived internal state, and 0.688 between need for self-esteem and perceived internal state. All ratios remained below the conventional threshold of 0.90.

Table 3

Discriminant Validity Based on the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and HTMT

Construct Pair	√AVE, Construct 1	√AVE, Construct 2	Interconstruct Correlation	HTMT
Leadership narcissism – Organizational citizenship behavior	0.874	0.761	0.668	0.688
Leadership narcissism – Need for self-esteem	0.874	0.928	0.649	0.656
Leadership narcissism – Perceived internal state	0.874	0.760	0.654	0.677
Organizational citizenship behavior – Need for self-esteem	0.761	0.928	0.665	0.680
Organizational citizenship behavior – Perceived internal state	0.761	0.760	0.658	0.841
Need for self-esteem – Perceived internal state	0.928	0.760	0.668	0.688

Following confirmation of the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated using the coefficients of determination, predictive relevance statistics, communalities, and the global goodness-of-fit index. The R^2 coefficient for organizational citizenship behavior was 0.820, indicating that 82.0% of the variance in organizational citizenship behavior was explained collectively by the predictor variables included in the structural model. The R^2 value for need for self-esteem was 0.422 and that for perceived internal state was 0.428. Relative to the commonly used benchmarks of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 for weak, moderate, and substantial explanatory power, respectively, the model therefore exhibited substantial explanatory power for organizational citizenship behavior and moderate explanatory power for the two mediating constructs.

Predictive relevance was examined using Stone-Geisser's Q^2. Organizational citizenship behavior produced Q^2 = 0.433, need for self-esteem produced Q^2 = 0.334, and perceived internal state produced Q^2 = 0.226. Because values of approximately 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent weak, moderate, and strong predictive relevance, respectively, the model exhibited strong predictive relevance for organizational citizenship behavior and moderate predictive relevance for both mediating constructs.

The communality coefficients were 0.764 for leadership narcissism, 0.580 for organizational citizenship behavior, 0.578 for perceived internal state, and 0.861 for need for self-esteem. The mean communality value was 0.695, while the mean R^2 value used in calculating the global fit criterion was 0.556. The resulting GOF value was 0.621. Because a GOF greater than 0.36 has traditionally been interpreted as indicating strong overall model fit under this criterion, the obtained value supported the adequacy of the overall model.

Table 4

Structural and Overall Model Fit Indices

Construct/Index	Communality	R^2	Q^2
Leadership narcissism	0.764	—	—
Organizational citizenship behavior	0.580	0.820	0.433
Perceived internal state	0.578	0.428	0.226
Need for self-esteem	0.861	0.422	0.334
Mean/overall criterion	0.695	0.556	—
GOF	—	0.621	—

The direct structural relationships among the study variables were then examined. As presented in Table 5, leadership narcissism had a positive but statistically nonsignificant direct effect on organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.113$, $t = 1.831$, $p = 0.058$); therefore, the first hypothesis was not supported. Leadership narcissism, however, had a strong positive and statistically significant effect on perceived internal state ($\beta = 0.654$, $t = 11.593$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the second hypothesis. Leadership narcissism also had a statistically significant positive effect on need for self-esteem ($\beta = 0.649$, $t = 13.598$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the third hypothesis.

Perceived internal state had the strongest direct association with organizational citizenship behavior among

the paths included in the model. The standardized path coefficient was β = 0.774, with t = 15.277 and p < 0.001, indicating a strong positive and statistically significant relationship and providing support for the fourth hypothesis. In contrast, the direct effect of need for self-esteem on organizational citizenship behavior was small and nonsignificant (β = 0.074, t = 1.343, p = 0.180); therefore, the fifth hypothesis was not supported.

Table 5

Direct Structural Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesized Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Result
Leadership narcissism → Organizational citizenship behavior	0.113	1.831	0.058	Not supported
Leadership narcissism → Perceived internal state	0.654	11.593	<0.001	Supported
Leadership narcissism → Need for self-esteem	0.649	13.598	<0.001	Supported
Perceived internal state → Organizational citizenship behavior	0.774	15.277	<0.001	Supported
Need for self-esteem → Organizational citizenship behavior	0.074	1.343	0.180	Not supported

The mediation effects were finally examined using the Sobel test. The absolute Sobel z-value was compared with the critical value of 1.96. A value exceeding 1.96 was interpreted as evidence of a statistically significant indirect effect. The conceptual model proposed two potential mediation mechanisms: perceived internal state as a mediator of the relationship between leadership narcissism and organizational citizenship behavior, and need for self-esteem as a mediator of the same relationship.

The pattern of structural coefficients was consistent with a significant indirect pathway through perceived internal state. Leadership narcissism significantly predicted perceived internal state (β = 0.654), and perceived internal state significantly predicted organizational citizenship behavior (β = 0.774), whereas the direct path from leadership narcissism to organizational citizenship behavior was not statistically significant (β = 0.113, p = 0.058). The Sobel statistic for this indirect pathway was z = 9.255, which was substantially greater than 1.96. Thus, the mediating effect of perceived internal state was statistically significant. Given the significant indirect effect in conjunction with the nonsignificant direct effect, the findings were consistent with a full or indirect-only mediation pattern in which leadership narcissism was associated with organizational citizenship behavior primarily through perceived internal state.

The corresponding mediation pathway through need for self-esteem was not supported. Although leadership narcissism significantly predicted need for self-esteem (β = 0.649), need for self-esteem did not significantly predict organizational citizenship behavior (β = 0.074, p = 0.180). Consistent with this result, the Sobel statistic for the indirect effect through need for self-esteem was z = 1.338, which was below the critical value of 1.96. Therefore, need for self-esteem did not significantly mediate the relationship between leadership narcissism and organizational citizenship behavior.

Table 6

Sobel Test of the Mediating Effects

Indirect Relationship	Sobel z-value	Critical Value	Significance of Mediation	Conclusion
Leadership narcissism → Perceived internal state → Organizational citizenship behavior	9.255	1.96	Significant	Mediation supported
Leadership narcissism → Need for self-esteem → Organizational citizenship behavior	1.338	1.96	Not significant	Mediation not supported

Overall, the findings showed that leadership narcissism did not exert a statistically significant direct effect on organizational citizenship behavior. Instead, its relationship with organizational citizenship behavior operated primarily through perceived internal state. Leadership narcissism significantly predicted both perceived internal state and need for self-esteem; however, only perceived internal state significantly predicted organizational citizenship behavior and constituted a statistically significant mediating mechanism. Need for self-esteem neither directly predicted organizational citizenship behavior nor significantly transmitted the effect of leadership narcissism to

organizational citizenship behavior. The model demonstrated satisfactory measurement properties, adequate discriminant and convergent validity, strong explanatory power for organizational citizenship behavior, satisfactory predictive relevance, and a high overall GOF value.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigated the effect of leadership narcissism on organizational citizenship behavior, with particular attention to the mediating roles of perceived internal state and need for self-esteem among managers and employees of Eshtehard Municipality Organization. The structural model produced several noteworthy findings. Leadership narcissism did not have a statistically significant direct effect on organizational citizenship behavior, whereas it had significant positive effects on both perceived internal state and need for self-esteem. Perceived internal state, in turn, had a strong and statistically significant positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior, while need for self-esteem did not significantly predict organizational citizenship behavior. The mediation analysis further demonstrated that perceived internal state significantly mediated the relationship between leadership narcissism and organizational citizenship behavior, whereas the mediating role of need for self-esteem was not supported. Taken together, these findings suggest that the behavioral consequences of narcissistic leadership in the studied municipality are not primarily transmitted through a direct leader-to-citizenship pathway. Instead, leadership narcissism appears to affect employees' citizenship behavior mainly through changes in their internal motivational experience.

The first finding showed that leadership narcissism did not have a statistically significant direct effect on organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.113$, $p = 0.058$). Although the path coefficient was positive, it did not meet the conventional significance criterion. This finding indicates that employees' willingness to engage in altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, and courtesy cannot be explained simply by the degree of narcissism displayed by their leaders. Such a result is theoretically plausible because leadership narcissism is a complex and context-dependent characteristic whose organizational consequences may be simultaneously constructive and destructive. Narcissistic leaders may demonstrate confidence, ambition, decisiveness, visibility, and willingness to pursue challenging goals, while at the same time displaying self-centeredness, sensitivity to criticism, excessive need for admiration, or a tendency to dominate interpersonal relationships. These contrasting features may offset one another when organizational citizenship behavior is considered as an aggregate outcome.

This interpretation is consistent with research portraying managerial narcissism as a multidimensional organizational phenomenon rather than a uniformly negative leadership characteristic (Feizi et al., 2019). Similarly, organizational narcissism research has emphasized that narcissistic tendencies can become embedded in managerial relations and organizational processes in different ways depending on context (Jafarinia et al., 2021). Studies of executive narcissism have also indicated that narcissistic tendencies may facilitate some organizational actions, particularly bold strategic moves and responses to performance conditions, while simultaneously creating risks for relational and behavioral outcomes (Kavusan et al., 2025). Research on CEO narcissism and digital transformation likewise shows that narcissism can shape organizational change in ways that depend on surrounding conditions rather than producing a single universally positive or negative effect (Xu et al., 2025). Therefore, the absence of a significant direct relationship in the present study may reflect the fact that narcissistic leadership influences citizenship behavior through intervening psychological processes rather than through an immediate behavioral response.

The second finding demonstrated that leadership narcissism had a significant positive effect on perceived internal state ($\beta = 0.654$, $p < 0.001$). This result suggests that leadership narcissism was meaningfully associated with employees' internal motivational experiences, including their perceptions of enjoyment, effort, competence, and tension or pressure. One explanation is that narcissistic leaders often create psychologically salient work environments. Their high visibility, self-confidence, strong performance expectations, attention-seeking behavior, and emphasis on achievement can intensify employees' emotional and motivational reactions to work. Employees may perceive such leadership as challenging, demanding, stimulating, or competitive, which can alter their level of intrinsic involvement and perceived competence.

The result can also be interpreted in light of evidence indicating that leadership characteristics influence employees through relational and psychological mechanisms. Research on people-centered leadership has shown that leadership affects organizational citizenship behavior through intervening processes such as leader-

member exchange and employee satisfaction (Teklehaimanot et al., 2026). Similarly, contemporary analyses of leadership discourse suggest that employees interpret leadership through social and communicative processes that subsequently influence their willingness to display organizational citizenship behaviors (Tunca et al., 2026). Research on leader narcissism has further demonstrated that narcissistic leaders can shape whether employees openly support organizational change or become silent, indicating that narcissistic leadership can affect employees' internal evaluations before observable behavior emerges (Luo et al., 2026). The present finding extends this reasoning by suggesting that employees' perceived internal state is one of the important psychological domains through which narcissistic leadership becomes behaviorally relevant.

The third finding showed that leadership narcissism had a significant positive effect on need for self-esteem ($\beta = 0.649$, $p < 0.001$). This result indicates that exposure to narcissistic leadership was associated with stronger self-evaluative dynamics among employees. Narcissistic leaders often emphasize status, recognition, comparison, personal success, and external validation. In such an environment, employees may become more attentive to how they are evaluated, whether their contributions are recognized, and how their competence and worth compare with those of others. Consequently, their need to preserve or enhance self-esteem may become more salient.

The finding is compatible with the broader psychological literature emphasizing the close relationship between narcissism, self-evaluation, and personality organization. Research on personality disorders and narcissistic organization shows that narcissism is deeply connected to self-regulation, self-worth, and sensitivity to interpersonal evaluation (Krüger, 2024). Studies of pathological narcissism and broader personality organization similarly indicate that narcissistic characteristics are linked with internal self-evaluative dynamics rather than being limited to outward grandiosity (Newcomb et al., 2024). Findings concerning dark and bright personality characteristics also underscore that narcissistic features should be understood within a broader personality framework involving self-perception and interpersonal functioning (Salman Nasab et al., 2024). In organizational contexts, research has further demonstrated that self-esteem and narcissism can influence employees' workplace behaviors, including knowledge sharing (Salehi & Rouhi, 2023). Therefore, the significant relationship identified in the present study is theoretically coherent: narcissistic leadership appears capable of activating employees' concern with personal value and self-worth.

The fourth and strongest substantive finding was that perceived internal state had a significant positive effect on organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.774$, $p < 0.001$). This path was considerably stronger than the direct effect of leadership narcissism, suggesting that employees' internal motivational experience is a central determinant of whether they engage in citizenship behavior. Employees who experience greater enjoyment, perceive themselves as competent, invest effort in their work, and maintain a constructive internal motivational state are more likely to help colleagues, demonstrate conscientiousness, tolerate organizational difficulties, participate in organizational affairs, and maintain respectful interpersonal behavior.

This result is consistent with the broader OCB literature, which emphasizes that citizenship behavior depends strongly on employee attitudes and psychological experiences rather than solely on formal job requirements. Systematic evidence has shown that OCB is determined by multiple individual, relational, and organizational antecedents (Juniasri et al., 2026). A review of the relationship between OCB and employee performance likewise indicates that citizenship behavior is connected to motivational and behavioral processes that extend beyond formal task execution (Suprayogo & Pandin, 2026). OCB has also been described as an important contributor to employee self-development because voluntary helping, learning, initiative, and constructive participation reinforce both individual and organizational functioning (Mustopa, 2026). Moreover, research showing that social capital mediates the relationship between organizational conditions and OCB supports the broader proposition that internal and relational mechanisms often explain how contextual forces are converted into citizenship behavior (Vahdati & Jalali, 2026). The present study therefore reinforces the view that OCB is more likely to emerge when employees experience a psychologically supportive and internally motivating relationship with their work.

The strong relationship between perceived internal state and OCB can also be explained through a resource-based behavioral perspective. Organizational citizenship behaviors are discretionary and require employees to expend additional cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal resources beyond formal job duties. Employees experiencing intrinsic interest, perceived competence, and meaningful effort are more likely to possess the motivational energy needed to make these additional contributions. Conversely, employees who

experience high pressure, reduced enjoyment, or low competence may conserve personal resources and restrict their behavior to formal requirements. This helps explain why perceived internal state was the strongest predictor of OCB in the structural model.

The fifth finding indicated that need for self-esteem did not significantly influence organizational citizenship behavior ($\beta = 0.074$, $p = 0.180$). Thus, although narcissistic leadership significantly affected employees' need for self-esteem, that need did not translate into greater or lower organizational citizenship behavior. This result highlights an important distinction between self-evaluative needs and work-related motivational states. A heightened need for self-esteem may shape how employees perceive themselves and respond emotionally to recognition or criticism, yet it may not necessarily produce discretionary behavior that benefits the organization. Employees may satisfy self-esteem needs through personal achievement, status seeking, professional recognition, impression management, or individual performance rather than through altruistic or citizenship-oriented conduct.

This result can be interpreted alongside evidence that personality-related characteristics do not always translate directly into OCB. Research has identified personality as one predictor of citizenship behavior, but its influence depends on occupational, organizational, and contextual circumstances (Rajput, 2026). Similarly, studies examining self-esteem and narcissism in relation to workplace knowledge sharing indicate that self-evaluative characteristics may affect particular forms of organizational behavior without necessarily producing a generalized citizenship effect (Salehi & Rouhi, 2023). The nonsignificant effect may also reflect the ambivalent nature of self-esteem motives. A need for positive self-regard can encourage prosocial behavior when helping others strengthens one's positive identity, but it may also promote self-protective or recognition-seeking behavior that is not necessarily beneficial to the collective.

The mediation findings provide the clearest explanation of the overall structural pattern. Perceived internal state significantly mediated the relationship between leadership narcissism and organizational citizenship behavior, as evidenced by the Sobel value of 9.255. In contrast, need for self-esteem did not mediate this relationship, with a Sobel value of 1.338. Because the direct effect of leadership narcissism on OCB was nonsignificant while the indirect pathway through perceived internal state was significant, the results are consistent with an indirect-only or full mediation pattern through perceived internal state. Leadership narcissism therefore appears to influence citizenship behavior primarily by changing how employees internally experience their work.

This mediation pattern aligns with contemporary leadership research emphasizing psychological and relational mechanisms. Leader behavior rarely translates directly into complex discretionary behavior; rather, employees interpret leadership through satisfaction, motivation, social exchange, trust, psychological meaning, and perceived support. The sequential mediation evidence reported in people-centered leadership research supports this general mechanism-oriented interpretation (Teklehaimanot et al., 2026). Likewise, evidence that narcissistic leadership moderates the transition from change-supportive behavior to silence demonstrates that leader narcissism can alter employees' internal decision processes about whether to express or suppress constructive contributions (Luo et al., 2026). Research on workplace sustainability and desirable employee behaviors has also shown that CEO narcissism operates in interaction with wider political and organizational conditions (Mahmood et al., 2026). Thus, the current findings support a view of leadership narcissism as an antecedent whose consequences depend substantially on what it does to employees' internal psychological experiences.

The absence of mediation through need for self-esteem is equally informative. Although narcissistic leadership influenced need for self-esteem, the latter was not sufficiently connected with citizenship behavior to transmit the leadership effect. This may suggest that self-esteem operates at a more personal and identity-oriented level, whereas perceived internal state is more directly connected to day-to-day work engagement and discretionary organizational action. Research linking entrepreneur narcissism with unethical pro-organizational behavior further demonstrates that narcissistic dynamics can generate complex organizational behaviors through specific psychological pathways rather than through generalized positive or negative behavioral tendencies (Yu et al., 2020). In the present case, perceived intrinsic experience appears to be the more behaviorally proximal mechanism.

From a broader theoretical standpoint, the findings emphasize that leadership narcissism should not be interpreted exclusively as a harmful personality characteristic. Scholars have warned that narcissistic leadership can threaten organizational functioning when leaders prioritize personal admiration, image, and

dominance over collective needs (Friedman & Fireworker, 2021). At the same time, strategic research indicates that narcissistic executives may display initiative, ambition, and willingness to engage in substantial organizational change (Kavusan et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025). The present study reconciles these apparently competing perspectives by indicating that the impact of narcissistic leadership depends heavily on employees' psychological interpretation of the leadership environment. The crucial question is therefore not merely whether a leader is narcissistic, but whether that leadership style creates an internal state characterized by competence, meaningful effort, and engagement or by pressure, psychological depletion, and reduced intrinsic motivation.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the cross-sectional design prevents definitive causal conclusions because leadership narcissism, perceived internal state, need for self-esteem, and organizational citizenship behavior were measured within the same general period. Second, the study was conducted within a single municipal organization, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other municipalities, public agencies, private organizations, or cultural settings. Third, the reliance on self-report questionnaires may have introduced common-method variance, social desirability, and perceptual bias, particularly for psychologically sensitive constructs such as narcissism and self-esteem. Fourth, leadership narcissism was assessed through respondents' questionnaire-based evaluations rather than through multiple sources such as peer reports, subordinate ratings, behavioral observations, or independent leadership assessments. Finally, the model focused on two mediating mechanisms and did not examine potentially important contextual factors such as organizational justice, trust in leadership, leader-member exchange, organizational politics, psychological safety, job satisfaction, or organizational culture.

Future studies should use longitudinal designs to examine whether changes in leadership narcissism precede changes in employees' internal motivational states and organizational citizenship behavior over time. Replication across several municipalities, public agencies, private-sector organizations, and different geographical regions would improve external validity and permit comparison across organizational contexts. Future research could also employ multilevel designs in which employees are nested within leaders or organizational units, thereby distinguishing individual employee perceptions from genuine leader-level narcissistic characteristics. Collecting data from multiple sources would reduce common-method bias; for example, leaders could complete personality assessments while supervisors or colleagues rate employees' citizenship behavior. Future models should investigate additional mediating mechanisms such as psychological safety, organizational identification, trust, leader-member exchange, perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. Moderating variables such as employee personality, tenure, power distance, organizational culture, and perceived organizational politics could also clarify the conditions under which narcissistic leadership becomes beneficial or harmful. Finally, future studies should distinguish adaptive from maladaptive dimensions of narcissism rather than treating leadership narcissism as a completely homogeneous construct.

Municipal managers and human resource decision-makers should focus not only on identifying narcissistic tendencies among leaders but also on managing the work environment through which those tendencies affect employees. Leadership development programs should emphasize respectful communication, balanced recognition, constructive feedback, employee participation, and avoidance of excessive self-promotion or credit appropriation. Because perceived internal state emerged as the principal mediating mechanism, managers should actively strengthen employees' sense of competence, meaningfulness, autonomy, enjoyment, and constructive involvement in work while reducing unnecessary psychological pressure. Human resource units should periodically assess motivational climate and employee perceptions of leadership rather than relying solely on formal performance indicators. Selection and promotion systems for managerial positions should include assessment of interpersonal functioning and capacity to support employees in addition to technical competence and decisiveness. Recognition systems should acknowledge employee contributions transparently so that leader-centered patterns do not undermine motivation. Finally, municipal leaders should create opportunities for participation, professional development, supportive feedback, and collaborative decision-making, because preserving a positive internal motivational state among employees appears to be a particularly important pathway for strengthening organizational citizenship behavior.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

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In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

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