



Original Research

Narcissism in Organization

This paper on Narcissism will explore how it can be used to better understand organizations, how it has been applied to organizational management levels, and what the outcome of this research has been.

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INTRODUCTION

Narcissism is a label most often applied to a mental disorder characterized by self-absorption, arrogance, exploitiveness, denial and rationalization. This paper investigates narcissism at different levels of management in a for-profit organization under the hypothesis that narcissistic manifestations will increase commensurate with managerial level. The purpose of the study is to see if we can measure levels of managerial narcissism and understand what it might tell us in order to help consultants, managers, and academics to better appreciate, predict, and perhaps steer organizational behavior. Given what I have discovered in this paper, I am cautiously optimistic that through psychological insights our organizations can become healthier social and economic contributors.

My research into the three top management levels of this company showed managers at lower levels in the organization had similar levels of outwardly expressed narcissism compared to those at the top of the organization. In other words, narcissistic expression in managers through the organization was not significantly different.

So as not to immediately prejudice the reader: narcissism is not all bad. In this paper, I make a distinction between narcissism that is relatively adaptive and mature and narcissism that is manifestly maladaptive, immature, and destructive. Mark Twain said once, "Except that a creature be part coward, it is no compliment to say

it is brave." Except that a creature is partly self-absorbed, neurotic, and ego-driven, it is no compliment to say it has shown maturity, sociability, and leadership.

After we have explored just what narcissism is, I will present my research, its inevitable weaknesses, its statistical outcomes, and what it might be able to tell us. There are three aspects that seem to stand out most prominently and I will analyze these separately, then in relation to each other, and finally conclude the paper with further areas of study and my impressions of narcissism in organization.

REVIEW OF NARCISSISM – WHAT IS NARCISSISM?

Narcissism is most often applied in psychoanalytic situations to the individual and is an important psychological construct in the regulation of self-esteem¹. The American Psychological Association classifies Narcissism as a mental disorder characterized by exaggerated concern with power and control resulting in interpersonal exploitiveness; an orientation to entitlement; a feeling that one is worthy of great admiration, respect, and reward regardless of one's accomplishments. It is furthermore marked by psychological fragility and feeble self-esteem. The next few pages will explore the concept of narcissism further using contemporary psychological definitions.

NARCISSISM

From the Greek myth of Narcissus, this concept of self-love made its first modern appearance in Freud's book, *On Narcissism*², where he says the human being has two sexual objects: "himself and the woman who tends him, and thereby we postulate a primary narcissism in everyone, which may in the long run manifest itself as dominating his object choice." This is no sexual perversion, but the initial stage of psychological development where the psyche is focused on itself and its physical desires.

¹ Freud, S. (1918). *On Narcissism: an introduction*. London, Hogarth.
, Alford, C. F. (1988). *Narcissism - Socrates, the Frankfurt School, and Psychoanalytic Theory*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press.
, Brown, A. (1997). "Narcissism, Identity, and Legitimacy." *Academy of Management Review* **22**(3): 643-686.

² Freud, S. (1918). *On Narcissism: an introduction*. London, Hogarth.

Through valuing and incorporating social and cultural ideals, we develop a mature³ ego ideal (the person we feel⁴ we must become for the world to love us as thoroughly as it did when we were infants). In this way, one distances oneself from the opening stage of psychological development (love for the opposite sexed parent) and begins to develop towards socially acceptable ends. The mature ego censors and civilizes itself, curbing spontaneity – love and approval not coming from an idealized parent or instant gratification, but from the projected imprint of one's ego ideal onto society⁵. Through the influence of this maturation process we develop the ethical faculty of personal conscience. However, no one is able to completely attain this ego ideal, the consequence of which can be a build up of negative defensive reactions and mechanisms associated with narcissism.

There is much opposition from psychoanalysts to certain aspects of Freud's elucidation of Narcissism. Still, many of his basic ideas dominate contemporary understanding and influence his critic's discussion of the subject. Most notable and enduring of these basic concepts is Freud's claim that narcissism is never overcome. It is only channeled and rerouted because, "it represents an especially complete and profound mode of gratification, and man is loath to abandon a pleasure once experienced."

³ I will also use words and phrases to denote "good" narcissism like: social, adaptive, long-term, mature, optimistic, and effective.

⁴ It is important to note that it is one's perception of who they need to be.

⁵ Or organizations as we shall see later.

Narcissism is a mechanism that can allow one to deal with the anxiety associated with attempting to reach the ego ideal. How we ameliorate this anxiety determines to a great extent to what degree we exhibit mature or immature narcissism.

Freud also saw a relationship between the individual's psychological state – mature or immature narcissistic expressions – and the performance of groups or "enterprises", so perhaps this indicates that its application to our modern organizations or groups is valid. Brown⁶ also applied narcissism to the concepts of organizational legitimacy and identification. In the next section, I will discuss what we know about narcissism's components, what we might see in individuals and how this might affect our organizations.

⁶ Brown, A. (1997). "Narcissism, Identity, and Legitimacy." *Academy of Management Review* **22**(3): 643-686.

NARCISSISM FOR UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

Freud states that pathological narcissism⁷ is a dangerous stumbling block for the efficient functioning of teams this implies that we can use narcissism to understand more about organizational behavior and predict what organizations are most likely to do and perhaps explain why they do it. In the coming section, I will first elaborate on the specific components that constitute our conception of narcissism. Following that, I will discuss what I expected to find and where I went looking for it.

Components of Narcissism

The components of self-esteem regulation that my survey covered are: *self-absorption & self-admiration, superiority & arrogance, exploitiveness & entitlement, and dominance & authority*⁸. These aspects, like all summaries of inherently complex constructs, are contestable. I can only say that they reflect significant areas of consensus in the literature and they constitute the primary components measured by the survey instrument I have used.

Self-aggrandizement & Self Absorption is the tendency to overestimate one's ability and accomplishments. This can lead to selective perception, extreme self-absorption, exhibitionism, claims of uniqueness, and a sense of invulnerability. Self-aggrandizement often finds its manifestation in fantasy, the unconscious longing for some satisfaction or pleasure.

⁷ I will use "pathological narcissism" to denote very low and very high self-esteem.

⁸ Emmons, R. A. (1984). "Factor Analysis and Construct Validation of the NPI." *Journal of Personality Assessment* **48**: 291-300.
, Emmons, R. A. (1987). "Narcissism: Theory and Measurement." *Journal of Personality Assessment* **5**: 11-17.

Superiority & Arrogance is the hedonic and self-serving bias that credits the self for positive and fortunate outcomes while attributing negative and unfavorable outcomes to external forces⁹. Positive results are seen as being internally produced while negative results are seen as being externally caused.

Exploitation & Entitlement is the individual's lack of empathy with others while simultaneously believing in his right to exploit them. Sadly for the narcissist, he needs the very people he exploits to give him "positive regard and affirmation" – an unenviable dilemma. Most of the other aspects of narcissism serve to enhance this feeling of entitlement.

Dominance & Authority is the individual's enjoyment in taking charge and being seen as the authority. This is the extent to which he sees himself as more capable than others and his perception that others acknowledge his right to, and his quality of, leadership and supremacy.

All of these aspects are kept in exaggerated motion by deep anxiety. The narcissist suffers from feelings of worthlessness, dejection, and hypochondria. Lasch writes: the narcissist "cannot live without an admiring audience. His apparent freedom from family ties and institutional constraints does not free him to stand alone or to glory in his individuality. On the contrary, it contributes to his insecurity."¹⁰

⁹ A component of which is Locus of Control.

¹⁰ Lasch, C. (1979). The Culture of Narcissism. New York, Warner Books.

Again, it may be helpful to note that we make the distinction between mature, constructive, adaptive narcissism and pathological, reactive, maladaptive, or immature narcissism. Narcissism is found in all of us and is "per se a normal phenomenon"¹¹. Each one of us has some level of delusion and fantasy or of "kidding ourselves", but this is normal. Indeed, *self-absorption & self-admiration*, *superiority & arrogance*, and *dominance & authority* can be contextually associated as *relatively* adaptive and with not inconceivable *potential* for being constructive and mature as well as at times being positively correlated with optimism and negatively correlated with pessimism^{12,13}. It is when narcissism is taken to extremes – high or low –, that it constitutes a mental disorder.

Some Assumptions about Management

The research I have done for this paper will examine three levels of management in one company consisting of an Executive Board, 8 divisions, and 23 sub-divisions (the fourth level – operating companies and plants – were not measured due to the number of surveys that would be needed and the geographical spread). I will use this short section to describe the three levels of management and state my hypothesis.

¹¹ Reich, A. (1960) *Essential Papers on Narcissism, Pathological forms of self esteem regulation*, N.Y. University Press, New York, pp 44-60.

¹² While *exploitiveness & entitlement* seems to have relatively no redeeming qualities or contributions to adaptive, mature narcissistic expression and is positively correlated with pessimism, negatively with optimism.

¹³ Emmons, R. A. (1984). "Factor Analysis and Construct Validation of the NPI." *Journal of Personality Assessment* **48**: 291-300.

Level 1 is a general manager for a business unit or a collection of operating companies. These managers are typically 35 to 45 years old and have been with the company more than 5 years. *Level 2* is a business group or divisional general manager. *Level 3* is a corporate level CEO, COO, CFO, or functional head. The majority of these managers are older than 42 years old and have been with the company for more than 5 years. The total population and responses are¹⁴:

1. Level 1 – 23 managers – I received 15 responses (65%)
2. Level 2 – 7 managers – I received 5 responses (71%)
3. Level 3 – 4 managers – I received 7 responses (100%)
4. Total: 34 – 27 responses in total and 6 different countries¹⁵

My hypothesis is that *lower levels of management will correspond with a lower overall level of narcissistic expression and higher levels will correspond with a higher level of narcissistic expression*. This hypothesis may seem extraordinary. Isn't it more natural to assume that rationalization, attribution, exploitation, and the rest would all find their pathological manifestations in lower management where the fight to climb the ladder is more intense? Isn't lower management filled with the younger, the brasher, the "immature"? Once you reach the top of the pyramid, you are confident, battle-tested, and mature.

There is an instinctive logic to this train of thought, this idea that pathological narcissism would find its grossest expression in lower management. However, I

¹⁴ As far as I can calculate, the only overlap of responses occurred at Level 3.

don't believe this takes the important role of the organization and the interplay of egos into account. Organizations play a critical psychological role intimately related to narcissism and the journey to the ego ideal¹⁶. Indeed, the organization is a mechanism, a vehicle for achieving an ego ideal. One could call it the *organizational ideal*¹⁷. This organizational ideal serves first to cover our anxiety about our vulnerability and mortality – our work and memory have a chance to live on¹⁸. But like the ego ideal, it is our perception of an ideal and not necessarily the real ideal itself so our pursuit of the prize is often doomed from the beginning by our own unconscious projection. Second, it holds out the possibility of attaining the ego ideal – the loved and valued center of the universe (albeit a smaller universe than society in general) free of anxiety and confident that the bad guys and evil are "out there". The organization becomes Freud's approving parent. Here, due to the canon of agency theory and economic rationality, the manager¹⁹ has two strong allies plowing his narcissistic furrow.

The organization provides structural and human support for the pursuit of the manager's organizational/ego ideal. On the structural side he has a remuneration system that has lost all contact with reality. It reinforces the *sense of entitlement*, *ego aggrandizement*, and *attribution*. He has an annual report, an organizational

¹⁵ Netherlands, Norway, UK, Canada, Chile, and Spain (and possibly the USA).

¹⁶ Schwartz, H. (1987). "On the Psychodynamics of Organizational Totalitarianism." *Journal of Management* **13**(1): 41-54.
, Lubit, R. (2002). "The long term organizational impact of destructively narcissistic managers." *Academy of Management Executive* **16**(127-138).

¹⁷ Freud's projection of the ego ideal.

¹⁸ Schwartz, H. (1987). "On the Psychodynamics of Organizational Totalitarianism." *Journal of Management* **13**(1): 41-54.

¹⁹ I will use the manager for the purposes of this paper and of this research.

structure, a public relations department, and other internal and external propaganda mechanisms. These resources are overwhelmingly tuned to providing plausible denial, *post hoc* logical rationalization, obfuscation of failures, exaggerations of success, and serve to justify the feeling of entitlement²⁰.

On the human side, the manager has a number of willing participants for his psychological Ponzi scheme. Organizational participants are schooled in economic rationality and agency with the effect of assuming the infallibility of the boss. The reasoning goes something like this: the manager is in his current position is an economic agent for the legal owners of the company; the manager's determination of what is in the best financial interest of the company is by default correct. If you as an employee or "hand" venture to disagree, you are guilty until proven innocent.

This psychological game is further complicated by the fact that the manager's espoused theories have to be accepted by his people as his theories-in-use. In other words, the outcome of the managers actions are justified by his position and his position is justified (or rationalized) by the organization. His guiding behavior and the outcomes of his actions are therefore "infallible". Conversely, the imbalance is that the employee's theory-in-use, where different from the leader, can always be

²⁰ Brown, A. (1997). "Narcissism, Identity, and Legitimacy." *Academy of Management Review* 22(3): 643-686.
, Vaknin, S. (2002). Analysis: Narcissism in the boardroom-I. *UPI*: 3.
, Race, T. (2003). Executives Are Smitten, and Undone, by Their Own Images. *New York Times*. NY.
, Rubin, H. (November 2002). "Power." *Fast Company*(64).
, Dorgan III, W. J. (September 2000). "Narcissus on the job." *Modern Machine Shop* 73(4).

considered by the leader – especially an immaturely narcissistic one – to be in conflict not only with himself but with the organization.

The benefit of this farce for the manager is to provide *ego attribution*, *aggrandizement*, and *sense of entitlement* while simultaneously providing the cover for failures and opportunities to take credit for any success. The desultory result in the group is skepticism, cynicism, and game playing. Alford points out, "how readily the emotionally shallow narcissist finds a home in the superficial, manipulative world of the (economic) bureaucracy..."²¹ and Lasch warns in concurrence: "Modern Capitalist society not only elevates narcissists to prominence, it elicits and reinforces narcissistic traits in everyone."

Other organizational problems resulting from immature or destructive narcissism are boredom and constant change of direction resulting in organizational frustration. The narcissistic manager devalues and exploits others through a lack of empathy and concern for their well-being. They promote themselves above others, scapegoat, curry favor with superiors, and are antagonistically defensive when criticized²².

²¹ Alford, C. F. (1988). Narcissism - Socrates, the Frankfurt School, and Psychoanalytic Theory. New Haven and London, Yale University Press.

²² Lubit, R. (2002) *Academy of Management Executive*, **16**.

Narcissism can result in personal success as their high levels of expressed self-confidence and bravado are mistaken with competence and trust²³. Executives satisfying their ego ideal "contributed to—and perhaps sometimes caused—undesirable or even destructive behavior", said the Economist in a recent article. Indignant headlines proclaim executives in breach of trust and of disproportionate rewards for the failure of a small minority²⁴.

Dennis Koslowski, former head of Tyco and investigated for fraud, was shown on CNN attending a Tyco "business meeting" with gladiators and togaed beauties costing a cool \$2 million (the meeting, not the beauties). John Paul Messier, the failed and convicted Vivendi head fought bravely for his €23.4 million severance package (and got it) and bosses at the bankrupt American Airlines salted \$41 million away in Chapter 11 protected pension funds while negotiating \$2 billion in union wage concessions to "save the company". The Italian food giant Parmalat found what could be a \$10 billion hole in its balance sheet. Its founder and chairman, Calisto Tanzi, was snug in his ego/organizational ideal until being convicted of fraud and money laundering.

²³ Lubit, R. (2002). "The long term organizational impact of destructively narcissistic managers." Academy of Management Executive **16**(127-138).

²⁴ edition, T. E. p. (2003). Executive pay: Have fat cats had their day? Economist.
, edition, F. T. E. p. (Oct 9th 2003). Executive pay: Fat cats feeding. The Economist.

Next Steps

To summarize: we have shown that the literature alludes to narcissistic game playing in organizations and that many of our western capitalist assumptions conspire to keep the game going. We have also chosen a theoretical breakdown of narcissism into component parts and have made assumptions as to what the research results will reveal to us. This next section will discuss the methodology and survey used in data collection, present the raw data, and ventures an interpretation of that data.

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

This section will review the general set up of my research that will then lead to some important criticism of the research as well as some caveats for the interpretation.

The final section will be the raw data followed by a discussion of the possible associations and implications.

As stated in the previous section, my research focused on management positions at three managerial levels in six different countries. The total population of managers was 34 and the total response was 27 (27 responses covering 24 separate managers – an actual coverage of 70%). This was a quasi-experimental study which utilized a modified questionnaire based on a well known, reliable (.83), and valid (.76) personal narcissism survey – the Narcissistic Personality Index (NPI)^{25,26}. This measures *total narcissism, sense of entitlement, dominance & authority, attributional egotism, and self-aggrandizement (self absorption)*.

The NPI was developed by Raskins and Terry²⁷. While they used a seven-factor narcissism measurement the NPI used here is an adaptation from Emmons²⁸ draws on only four factors to measure and describe overt as well as covert narcissism²⁹.

²⁵ Emmons, R. A. (1984). "Factor Analysis and Construct Validation of the NPI." *Journal of Personality Assessment* **48**: 291-300.

, Sturman, T. (2000). "The Motivation Foundations and Behavioral Expressions of Three Narcissistic Styles." *Social Behavior and Personality* **28**(4): 393-425.

²⁶ I forgo any claim to these impressive figures as the modifications I have made negate any reliability and validity that the original NPI has. However, my version might at least be a basis for illumination of the discussion.

²⁷ Raskins, T. a. T., R. N. (1988). "A Principle Components Analysis of the NPI and Further Evidence of its Construct Validity." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* **54**: 890-902.

²⁸ Emmons, R. A. (1984). "Factor Analysis and Construct Validation of the NPI." *Journal of Personality Assessment* **48**: 291-300.

, Emmons, R. A. (1987). "Narcissism: Theory and Measurement." *Journal of Personality Assessment* **5**: 11-17.

The NPI is normally employed as a self-reporting Likert test of 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree or not sure, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. However, I changed the wording of the original questions so that respondents did not answer for themselves, but for the *impact* that their direct manager (or colleague) had on them. In other words, instead of rating the statement, "I am a good leader" on a 1 to 5 scale, the questions were altered to read, "My manager thinks he is a good leader". This was done for two reasons: first, the actual level of personal narcissism that a manager has is of less importance than the manifestation of actions associated with narcissism that he displays. Second, the political hurdles and dangers of getting upper managers to fill in the NPI outweighed the benefits. Finally, humans seem to be less accurate in rating themselves, but quite accurate in rating the effect of others on them³⁰.

The instructions the respondents received were very careful to state that this questionnaire was not a reliable tool for psychoanalysis and that the actual internal level of personal narcissism was not measured and was not the concern of the study³¹. The aim was to measure the perceived level of narcissistic behavior as experienced by the participant. This measurement is the difference between *intention* and *impact*; only the impact is easily identifiable and describable.

²⁹ Sturman, T. (2000). "The Motivation Foundations and Behavioral Expressions of Three Narcissistic Styles." *Social Behavior and Personality* **28**(4): 393-425.

³⁰ Robins, R. a. B., Jennifer (2001). "Positive Illusions about Self: Short term benefits and Long term costs." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* **80**(2): 340-352.

My analysis of the scores was done using two methods. One was an average of the raw scores. The other used the work of Robert Emmons. He looked at the four NPI factors and calculated to what extent each question correlated with the four factors. He postulated, "Hypothetically all factors should be related to each other, since it is their combination which results in narcissism"³². His correlation factors were multiplied by the raw scores to give another dimension to interpretation of the data (see figure below).

Modified NPI Questions - Manager (NIS)	Factor Loadings			
	Exploiteness & Entitlement	Leadership & Authority	Superiority & Arrogance	Self-absorption & Self Admiration
Will never be satisfied until he gets all that he deserves	0,58	0,03	0,07	0,14
Expects a great deal from other people	0,57	-0,06	-0,07	0,02
Is envious of other people's good fortune	0,52	0,10	-0,15	0,19
Is very concerned with his appearance (likes to display body in NPI)	0,07	0,26	0,00	0,38
Is assertive	0,17	0,49	0,35	0,04
Often shows off if he gets the chance	0,46	0,22	0,05	0,10
Gets upset when people don't compliment him when he is in public	0,46	0,19	-0,03	0,13
Insists upon being respected	0,45	0,14	0,06	0,08
Hates to lose	0,42	0,01	0,02	0,05
Thinks he is more capable than other people	0,41	0,07	0,12	0,29
Thinks people always recognize that he is a leader	0,15	0,67	0,08	0,00
Thinks he will be a great person	-0,04	0,09	0,30	0,42
Really likes to be the center of attention	0,25	0,48	0,03	0,12
Thinks he has a natural talent for influencing people	0,20	0,57	0,24	-0,12
Likes having authority over other people	0,19	0,50	0,00	0,11
Likes to be the center of attention	0,25	0,48	0,03	0,12
Thinks everyone recognizes his authority	0,35	0,40	0,19	0,09
Describes himself as a strong person	-0,20	0,38	0,10	0,23
Sees himself as a good leader	0,15	0,67	0,08	0,00
Thinks he can make anybody believe anything	0,27	0,12	0,51	0,06
Thinks he can read people like a book	0,08	0,02	0,48	-0,02
Thinks he is a born leader	0,18	0,21	0,48	0,04
Thinks that people like to hear his stories	0,12	0,11	0,47	0,02
Would do almost anything on a dare	0,04	0,16	0,45	0,07
Thinks if he ruled the world it would be a better place	0,01	0,08	0,44	0,14
Thinks he is at his best when the situation is at its worst	-0,30	0,13	0,43	0,13
Thinks he always knows what he is doing	-0,12	-0,09	0,42	-0,03
Thinks he is witty and clever	-0,01	0,22	0,14	0,35
Thinks he can talk his way out of anything	0,33	0,12	0,35	-0,17
Thinks people gravitate to him naturally	0,08	0,17	0,35	0,12
Likes to look at his body	0,15	0,11	0,13	0,62
Finds it easy to manipulate people	0,50	0,17	0,14	0,09
Has strong willpower	0,48	0,21	0,20	0,06
Likes to look at himself in the mirror	0,11	0,24	0,18	0,53
Thinks he is a special person	0,00	0,18	0,15	0,53
Thinks he is an extraordinary person	0,06	0,04	0,09	0,51
Thinks he will be a great person	-0,04	0,09	0,30	0,42
Thinks he is a leader	0,09	0,68	0,05	0,10
Thinks he is great because everyone tells him so	0,27	0,11	0,18	0,36
Likes to take responsibility for making decisions	0,01	0,22	0,14	0,36

³¹ See Appendix for full respondent instructions

³² Emmons, R. A. (1984). "Factor Analysis and Construct Validation of the NPI." *Journal of Personality Assessment* **48**: 291-300.

To illustrate: a raw score of "3" on question one in the first analysis would simply be taken as a "3". Using Emmons work here, that three would be multiplied by: .58 to weigh the score's correlation to Exploiteness, .03 to weigh the score's relation to Dominance, .07 to weigh the correlation with Superiority, and .14 to take the Self-Agrandizement factor into account.

Discussion of other Variables

I was also very careful to not tread on any ethical toes. I do have the names of who filled in the surveys as they were all interested in receiving a copy of this paper, but no names, departments, or locations are on the surveys and no attempt has been made to categorize the surveys in any way other than the three management levels stated previously. Knowing who filled the survey in did help in determining how much if any overlap the surveys had, however.

Being a quasi-experimental approach, there are a number of other things that should rightly raise the social scientist's bushy brows. Deciding what will be looked at and what will fall to one side are complex decisions to be made with great care. Furthermore, before one can begin one must make a number of subjective assumptions. I will address these dimensions here in this section before moving on to the research results.

I have not addressed or measured some important things such as gender (the NPI might not be appropriate for female expressions of narcissism³³), culture, age, work experience, salary, psychological type, time in the job, or whether the narcissistic expression is inborn or socially constructed. The only thing that was relevant for me and for this study is to see what narcissistic expressions manifest themselves at three organizational levels of management.

³³ Tschanz, B. T. (May, 1998). "Gender differences in the structure of narcissism: a multi-sample analysis of the narcissistic personality inventory." Sex Roles: A Journal of Research.

Some assumptions about this study were a *fait accompli*. For example, I assumed that managers would not unreservedly nor accurately fill in the NPI; but I never tried to measure this, either. The alternative in this instance would have been to ask a manager to fill in the NPI then ask a subordinate to fill in my modified NPI and compare the two. This is a level of entanglement not to be taken lightly.

Furthermore, there is some literature³⁴ that suggests that self-enhancement bias in assessments is higher in those with high narcissistic tendencies making their inputs less useful for my purposes.

Other assumptions were that subordinates would be eager, but thoughtful and accurate, to fill the survey in. Here might lurk the issue of my own bias. Did I choose people who were willing to grind an axe or were, conversely, filling the survey in as if their manager might one day see it? Were respondents unconsciously still "playing the game" and filling in organizationally acceptable answers? I cannot say for sure but the questions I got from these people as they filled in the survey were of conscientious clarification and the general feel was one of people wanting to fill the instrument in accurately. I also tried to limit my own bias in choosing participants by using mainly those employees who attended corporate development programmes. This, too, could present a bias if only people who submitted to the "game" were allowed to attend these courses.

³⁴ Robins, R. a. B., Jennifer (2001). "Positive Illusions about Self: Short term benefits and Long term costs." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology **80**(2): 340-352.

Probably the most disappointing weakness is that the survey does not measure *rationalization, anxiety, or denial*. It was my intention to use a tested organizational measurement tool. When I did not find one, I modified an existing personality indicator to fit my purpose of analyzing management. The NPI has no questions pertaining to *denial, anxiety, or rationalization*.

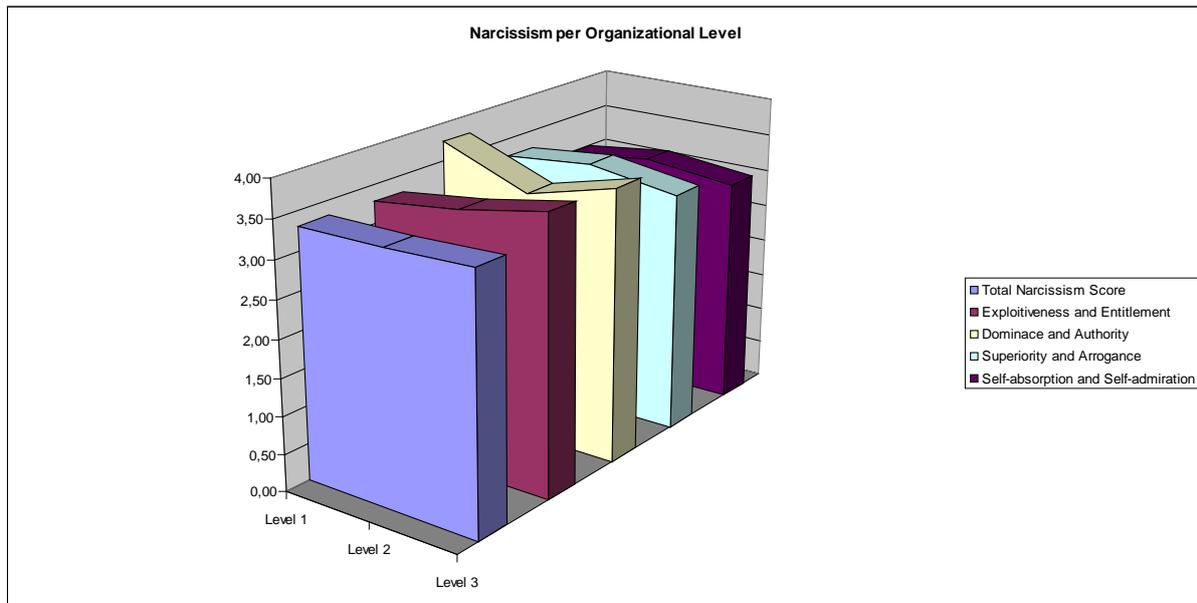
This leads to the last important criticism. Raskin's NPI is valid and reliable, my survey here is not. Though it is based on the same questions as the original NPI, it has not been tested. That having been said, the survey does have two things in its favor:

- 1) The set-up is logically compelling – given that people with exaggerated self esteem are rather poor at rating themselves and that the impact of narcissism on one is more important than the actual internal level of narcissism, the survey does have an element of common sense.
- 2) The test seemed stable and reliable – though there were variations in responses, the fact that there was some consistency in the responses is encouraging.

Let us keep in mind the weaknesses and assumptions examined here, but let us also suspend them before us and take advantage of the opportunity to get a closer look at the collected data.

Research Data & Discussion

The raw results in the graph below show a striking homogeneity in the scores across the three management levels. All are between **2.99** (Level 1 Self Absorption) and **3.76** (Level 1 Dominance and Authority).



	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Total Narcissism Score	3,31	3,32	3,37
Exploitiveness and Entitlement	3,29	3,44	3,66
Dominance and Authority	3,76	3,31	3,62
Superiority and Arrogance	3,27	3,38	3,20
Self-absorption and Self-admiration	2,99	3,14	3,02

The factor with the greatest range is that of Sense of Entitlement or Exploitiveness & Entitlement. The difference between Level 1 **3.29** and Level 3 **3.66** is 9%. This in itself is no great difference. However, it does merit comment as:

- 1) it fits the hypothesis, i.e. that narcissism will rise with organizational level
- 2) it matches what the literature would have us expect, i.e. higher levels of narcissism – especially exploitation – at higher management levels

3) it shows by far the highest variation between a number of characteristics that are otherwise homogeneous

If this is indeed a significant result, what might it mean? It could mean three things: That entitlement is structurally built into the organizational structure. This would agree with Brown³⁵ and Lasch³⁶. Second, this might signal a culture of continuous political machination with high personal and organizational costs as a consequence of low incentive for cooperation. Finally, it may be a sign of a heavy emphasis on reward-punishment psychology in the management style and the compensation system which in turn would negatively influence organizational identification, cohesion, and the psychological safety needed for innovation and creative thought.³⁷

Interestingly, the results did not for the most part correspond to the hypothesis. This could be that the hypothesis is wrong. However, it was based on considerable literature and research, so I imagine that there is something else at work.

Could it be that this organization is quite decentralized to the extent that there are individual "kingdoms"? This might explain the homogeneity of all the scores except exploitation as there are more structural organizational mechanisms at higher management levels to help with rationalization and denial and that serve to enhance

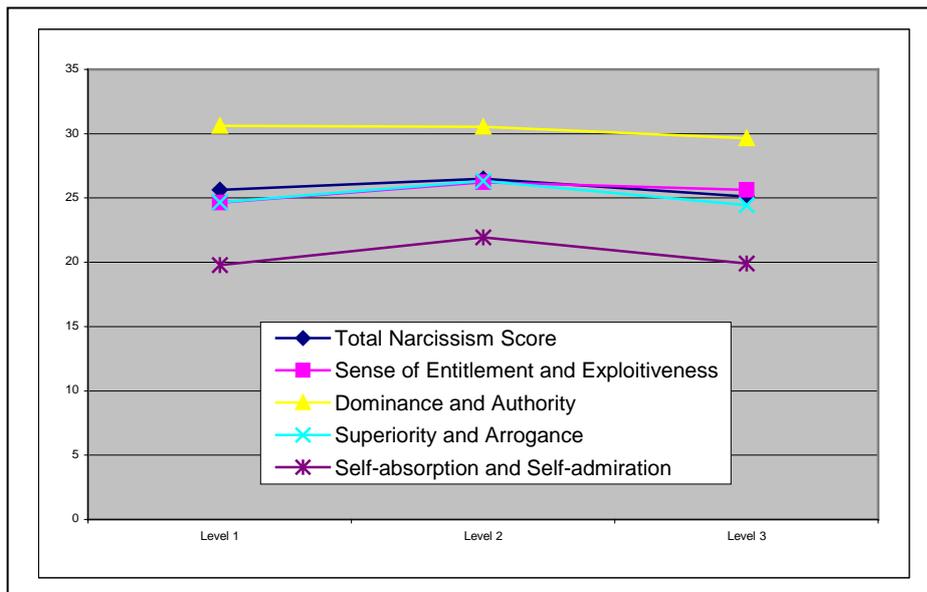
³⁵ Brown, A. (1997). "Narcissism, Identity, and Legitimacy." *Academy of Management Review* **22**(3): 643-686.

³⁶ Lasch, C. (1979). *The Culture of Narcissism*. New York, Warner Books. & Brown, A. (1997). "Narcissism, Identity, and Legitimacy." *Academy of Management Review* **22**(3): 643-686.

³⁷ Levinson, H. (1994). *Why the Behemoths Fell - The Psychological Roots of Corporate Failure*. American Psychological Association - Annual Conference.

a sense of entitlement. If this is so, then there is a danger that Level 2 & 3 management is relatively more apt to blind themselves to market and organizational realities.

The rest of the factors using the raw scores are not different enough to draw and conclusions or correlations other than significant similarity³⁸. However, the weighted scores give us a different perspective:



	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Total Narcissism Score	26	26	25
Sense of Entitlement and Exploiteness	25	26	26
Dominance and Authority	31	31	30
Superiority and Arrogance	25	26	24
Self-absorption and Self-admiration	20	22	20

This gives an entirely different look at the numbers, but still shows the same remarkable homogeneity³⁹ between Levels 1, 2, & 3. If we only consider the relative relation of the factors to each other, we should recognize the comparatively low Self-absorption & Self-admiration and the high Dominance & Authority. Let's consider these in turn.

³⁸ Other variances are in the Appendix and a Least Squares Regression Analysis, but these only serve to confirm the homogeneity.

Low Self Absorption & Self-admiration should lead away from the tendency to overestimate one's ability and accomplishments. The benefits for the organization could be a better match between internal capabilities and external realities, a healthy recognition of vulnerability in certain contexts, and an appreciation that one's situation is not supremely unique. The organization can therefore better respond to the market and we can expect relatively healthy interpersonal relationships.

The high Dominance & Authority score signals something potentially less benign. To review, Dominance & Authority is the individual's enjoyment in taking charge and being seen as the authority. This is the extent to which he sees himself as more capable than others and his perception that others acknowledge his right to, and his quality of, leadership and supremacy.

This could be indicative of an attitude that feels exempt from normal rules. The managers might see themselves as the embodiment of the organizational ideal – the Siegfried or Jung's collective archetype of the Hero. This could instill resentment and animosity among direct reports. High scores here also indicate that they possibly will submit to authority when it might give a personal benefit or when idolizing a superior for personal gain. However, the sort of person with high scores actually believes they should be in charge and be the subject of adoration.

³⁹ For a more visual effect, see the scatter diagram for the weighted scores toward the end of the Appendix.

Because the organizational ideal is in reality impossible to attain, they need a vehicle on which to project their shortcomings. They do this through identification of an "enemy". For General Motors in the 1970's the enemy was Japan. Projected onto Japan were all the failings, inadequacies, shame, and contradictions that didn't add up to the member's organizational ideal. Because one and one's colleagues fall short of this ideal, the danger is that power can be further fractured to a "leadership" core within the broader organization. In this scenario, the manager and a trusted lieutenant or two become the high priests of all the organization should aspire to. The results could be a hedgehog mentality and fractiousness in the organization as a whole where groups compete against each other and against the "enemy". This may mean that the enemy is a competitor, a government, an NGO or another division or corporate head office.

Again, this can lead to difficult interpersonal relationships, lack of self awareness, "cannibalism", and a detachment from current reality – all critical aspects for leaders to address in organizations⁴⁰ and in adapting effectively to the market (reality).

On the other hand, this might be a socially constructed manifestation. In other words, managers think they are expected to display dominance and act accordingly (so the survey would measure it regardless of whether or not the manager was indeed narcissistic), but without doing any real damage to the organization.

Furthermore, it could be a reporting bias by the respondents as they might expect

⁴⁰ Ashridge Report – Leaders in Transition, 2003, United Kingdom

managers to be dominant and interpret their actions to fit their mental model.

There is some literature that suggests that managers do need higher levels of dominance & authority and that this can be healthy for the organization.⁴¹

⁴¹ Maccoby, M. (2000). "Narcissistic Leaders - the incredible pros, the inevitable cons." Harvard Business Review: 69-77.

CONCLUSIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

As stated previously, the raw scores of the managers in this company fall on a five point scale between 3 and 3.73 points. This would not lead one to believe there is rampant pathological, immature narcissism except in individual cases or individual factors. Indeed, the scores are on the high side (over 3, that is), but this is entirely consistent with what the literature would suggest is normal for the management context of today⁴².

There are many areas of interest to consider. One might be how to build a valid and reliable instrument out of the modified NPI I used. Let's call it the Narcissism Impact Survey (NIS). It should be looked at closely for content validity, comparison with other tools such as the NPI and MMPI, and then one would need to build a database of enough responses to make accurate statistical analyses.

A second area of interest might be to compare narcissism with term of employment and personal performance. In this way we could make concrete links between levels of narcissism and organizational performance. In this paper I was only able to infer what might happen a) assuming the instrument was at all accurate and b) based on the literature.

⁴² Ibid.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have tried to show that the concept of narcissism holds the potential for looking deeper into our organizations. I have measure the perceived narcissism of the top three levels in one company and found an unexpected homogeneity, keeping in mind that the survey was on its maiden voyage. I attribute this to the de-central nature of the company that, like the German princes of old, are essentially "kingdoms" in their own right. This information might help us to improve the performance of the company by modifying the organizational structure and reward mechanisms to fit the measured level of narcissistic expression and thereby bring the actions of management more in line with what the reality of the market demands rather than implicitly encouraging them to wallow in exaggerated protection of their self-esteem and anxious politicking.

In summation, I believe that the concept of narcissism provides an organizational window that holds much promise. The psychological sophistication of our organizations is underdeveloped and a way of accurately measuring organizational narcissism should be investigated to take advantage of the treasures it may uncover.

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APPENDICES

Instructions – Manager:

Directions: Please fill in the following questions as to how much you imagine it applies to your manager. This is very difficult sometimes, but fill in each question as best you can – even if it is a guess.

This test is not a reliable psychoanalysis of your manager – that can only be done by a professional. This test is designed to indicate what actions, behaviors, and impact he or she has on you and your colleagues. All results will be **confidential**; please **do not** write your name or the name of your manager on this document.

The results will be put in a paper to be written as a part of the Bradford University Ph.D. programme and will be sent to you when finished (completion deadline: December 31, 2003). This paper is investigating the level of narcissism occurring on different levels of the organization. Thank you very much.

MANAGER SURVEY QUESTIONS

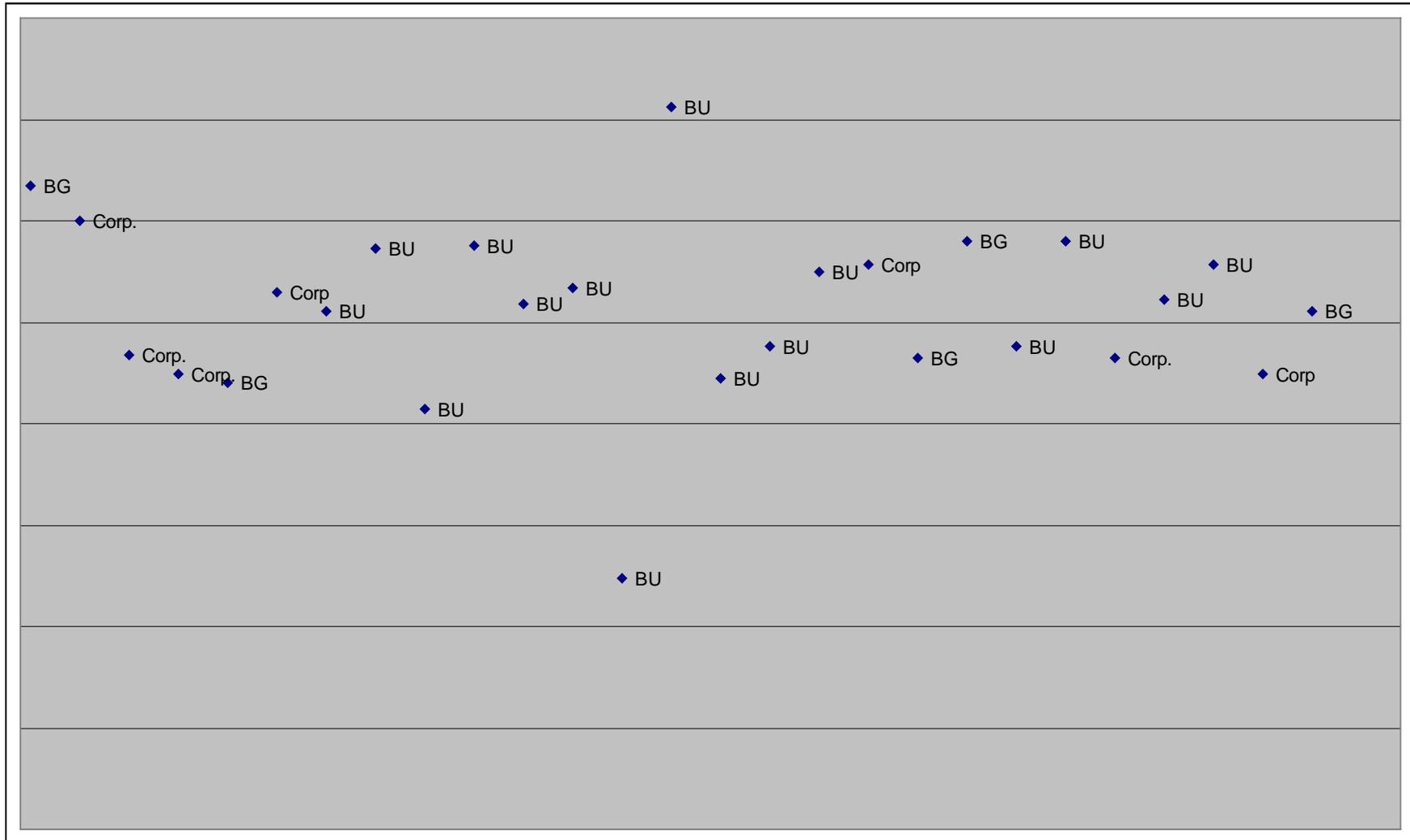
1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = neither agree nor disagree		4 = agree		5 = strongly agree	
My manager:				Circle one:	
1.	Will never be satisfied until he gets all that he deserves	1	2	3	4 5
2.	Expects a great deal from other people	1	2	3	4 5
3.	Is envious of other people's good fortune	1	2	3	4 5
4.	Is very concerned with his appearance	1	2	3	4 5
5.	Is assertive	1	2	3	4 5
6.	Often shows off if he gets the chance	1	2	3	4 5
7.	Gets upset when people don't compliment him when he is in public	1	2	3	4 5
8.	Insists upon being respected	1	2	3	4 5
9.	Hates to lose	1	2	3	4 5
10.	Thinks he is more capable than other people	1	2	3	4 5
11.	Thinks people always recognize that he is a leader	1	2	3	4 5
12.	Thinks he will be a great person	1	2	3	4 5
13.	Really likes to be the center of attention	1	2	3	4 5
14.	Thinks he has a natural talent for influencing people	1	2	3	4 5
15.	Likes having authority over other people	1	2	3	4 5
16.	Likes to be the center of attention	1	2	3	4 5
17.	Thinks everyone recognizes his authority	1	2	3	4 5
18.	Describes himself as a strong person	1	2	3	4 5
19.	Sees himself as a good leader	1	2	3	4 5
20.	Thinks he can make anybody believe anything	1	2	3	4 5
21.	Thinks he can read people like a book	1	2	3	4 5
22.	Thinks he is a born leader	1	2	3	4 5
23.	Thinks that people like to hear his stories	1	2	3	4 5
24.	Would do almost anything on a dare	1	2	3	4 5
25.	Thinks if he ruled the world it would be a better place	1	2	3	4 5
26.	Thinks he is at his best when the situation is at its worst	1	2	3	4 5
27.	Thinks he always knows what he is doing	1	2	3	4 5
28.	Thinks he is witty and clever	1	2	3	4 5
29.	Thinks he can talk his way out of anything	1	2	3	4 5
30.	Thinks people gravitate to him naturally	1	2	3	4 5
31.	Likes to look at his body	1	2	3	4 5
32.	Finds it easy to manipulate people	1	2	3	4 5
33.	Has strong willpower	1	2	3	4 5
34.	Likes to look at himself in the mirror	1	2	3	4 5
35.	Thinks he is a special person	1	2	3	4 5
36.	Thinks he is an extraordinary person	1	2	3	4 5
37.	Thinks he will be a great person	1	2	3	4 5
38.	Thinks he is a leader	1	2	3	4 5
39.	Thinks he is great because everyone tells him so	1	2	3	4 5
40.	Likes to take responsibility for making decisions	1	2	3	4 5
My manager works on the _____ level: (circle one)					
Business Unit		Business Group		Corporate	

RAW SCORES

	My manager:	1	3	4	5	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1	Will never be satisfied until he gets all that he deserves	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	1	1	4	4	4	1	4	4	5	3	4	3	4	3	4	2	3	4
2	Expects a great deal from other people	5	4	4	4	3	5	4	3	4	4	4	4	2	5	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	3	4	4	5
3	Is envious of other people's good fortune	2	2	4	2	2	3	3	2	2	3	2	1	1	5	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	4
4	Is very concerned with his appearance	3	3	3	2	2	3	5	1	2	3	2	1	3	5	1	3	2	3	3	3	2	5	2	1	4
5	Is assertive	5	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	5	4	4	5	3	4	3	4	5	4	5	4	3	4	1	4	5
6	Often shows off if he gets the chance	5	4	3	2	3	3	4	4	2	4	3	3	1	3	4	3	3	2	1	2	2	5	3	2	2
7	Gets upset when people don't compliment him when he is in public	3	5	2	2	1	3	1	4	1	1	2	2	1	4	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	4	2	1	2
8	Insists upon being respected	4	5	4	3	4	4	3	4	1	4	3	3	1	3	2	2	2	5	3	4	4	4	2	4	4
9	Hates to lose	5	5	3	4	3	5	3	5	4	4	4	5	2	5	6	4	5	5	3	5	4	5	2	4	5
10	Thinks he is more capable than other people	5	5	2	3	3	5	4	4	4	4	3	3	1	5	3	3	5	4	3	5	3	4	4	4	4
11	Thinks people always recognize that he is a leader	4	5	2	4	1	4	3	5	4	5	3	4	2	5	4	4	4	3	3	2	4	3	3	3	4
12	Thinks he will be a great person	4	3	2	3	2	3	4	4	2	3	4	3	2	5	3	4	3	4	2	3	3	4	3	3	3
13	Really likes to be the center of attention	4	5	2	2	4	3	4	3	4	5	4	4	1	5	4	4	5	4	2	4	2	4	2	2	3
14	Thinks he has a natural talent for influencing people	5	5	3	3	3	3	3	5	2	4	4	4	2	5	3	4	4	3	3	4	3	5	1	4	4
15	Likes having authority over other people	4	5	3	4	2	4	2	5	2	5	3	4	2	5	3	2	4	4	2	5	4	4	3	4	5
16	Likes to be the center of attention	4	5	2	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	1	5	4	3	5	3	2	4	2	4	3	4	3	4
17	Thinks everyone recognizes his authority	4	5	3	4	2	4	3	4	2	5	4	4	2	5	3	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	5	3	4
18	Describes himself as a strong person	4	4	2	4	3	3	4	4	1	5	4	5	2	5	2	4	4	5	2	4	3	4	4	4	5
19	Sees himself as a good leader	4	4	3	4	2	4	4	5	4	4	4	3	5	3	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5
20	Thinks he can make anybody believe anything	4	4	3	3	2	2	2	4	2	1	3	3	1	4	2	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	4	3	3
21	Thinks he can read people like a book	4	3	4	2	3	2	3	4	1	4	4	5	1	5	2	4	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3
22	Thinks he is a born leader	4	4	3	3	2	3	3	4	2	4	3	3	2	5	3	3	4	4	3	4	3	4	4	3	4
23	Thinks that people like to hear his stories	4	5	3	3	4	3	4	5	4	5	4	3	1	5	3	3	4	3	3	4	3	5	3	4	2
24	Would do almost anything on a dare	3	3	3	1	3	2	5	2	1	3	3	4	1	4	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	1	3	2
25	Thinks if he ruled the world it would be a better place	5	3	3	2	1	4	3	4	1	4	3	4	1	4	2	1	2	2	3	2	3	3	5	3	2
26	Thinks he is at his best when the situation is at its worst	4	3	4	3	4	4	2	4	5	4	3	4	1	5	3	3	4	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	4
27	Thinks he always knows what he is doing	4	3	4	4	3	5	2	4	5	2	4	4	2	5	3	4	5	3	5	5	3	4	5	4	4
28	Thinks he is witty and clever	5	4	4	3	2	4	3	4	4	4	3	4	2	5	4	4	5	4	5	4	3	4	4	4	3
29	Thinks he can talk his way out of anything	4	5	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	1	4	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	3
30	Thinks people gravitate to him naturally	4	3	3	2	4	2	2	3	1	3	3	3	1	5	2	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	3	4	4
31	Likes to look at his body	4	2	2	1	4	2	3	1	1	2	4	2	1	4	2	1	3	3	2	3	2	2	1	2	3
32	Finds it easy to manipulate people	4	3	2	3	2	4	5	4	2	4	4	3	1	4	2	2	3	4	3	4	3	4	4	3	4
33	Has strong willpower	5	3	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	5	3	5	4	4	4	4	5
34	Likes to look at himself in the mirror	3	2	2	1	3	2	3	1	1	3	2	2	1	4	2	1	3	3	2	3	2	2	1	2	3
35	Thinks he is a special person	4	4	4	2	4	3	4	5	2	4	3	3	1	5	3	1	3	4	3	4	3	3	4	4	3
36	Thinks he is an extraordinary person	3	3	3	2	3	3	1	4	2	4	3	3	1	5	1	1	3	4	3	4	3	3	4	3	3
37	Thinks he will be a great person	4	4	3	3	2	2	4	4	2	4	3	3	2	5	1	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	4	3
38	Thinks he is a leader	5	5	3	4	2	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	5
39	Thinks he is great because everyone tells him so	3	4	3	1	3	3	3	3	1	2	2	3	1	5	1	4	2	3	2	3	3	3	1	4	3
40	Likes to take responsibility for making decisions	5	3	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	3	4	5	4	5	4	3	5	4	3	2	5	4
the level: (circle one)																										
it	Business Group	Corporate	BG	Corp.	Corp.	Corp.	BG	Corp	BU	BU	BU	BU	BU	BU	BU	BU	BU	BU	Corp	BG	BG	BU	BU	Corp	BU	BU
			4,1	3,875	3,025	2,9	2,85	3,425	3,3	3,7	2,675	3,725	3,35	3,45	1,6	4,6	2,875	3,1	3,6	3,6	3,00	3,75	3,1	3,8	3	
			4,30	4,00	3,20	3,10	2,90	4,10	3,60	3,50	2,60	3,70	3,30	3,20	1,30	4,20	3,30	3,20	3,30	3,90	2,80	3,90	3,20	4,00	2,90	
			4,33	4,78	2,44	3,56	2,56	3,56	3,22	4,22	3,22	4,56	3,67	4,11	2,11	4,89	3,33	3,67	4,33	3,78	2,89	4,00	3,00	4,11	2,89	
			3,64	3,27	3,27	2,82	2,91	3,09	3,00	3,91	2,73	3,45	3,45	3,64	1,36	4,64	2,64	2,91	3,45	3,18	3,45	3,64	3,27	3,73	3,64	
			3,80	3,20	3,10	2,20	3,00	3,00	3,40	3,20	2,20	3,30	3,00	2,90	1,70	4,70	2,30	2,60	3,20	3,60	2,80	3,50	2,80	3,20	2,50	

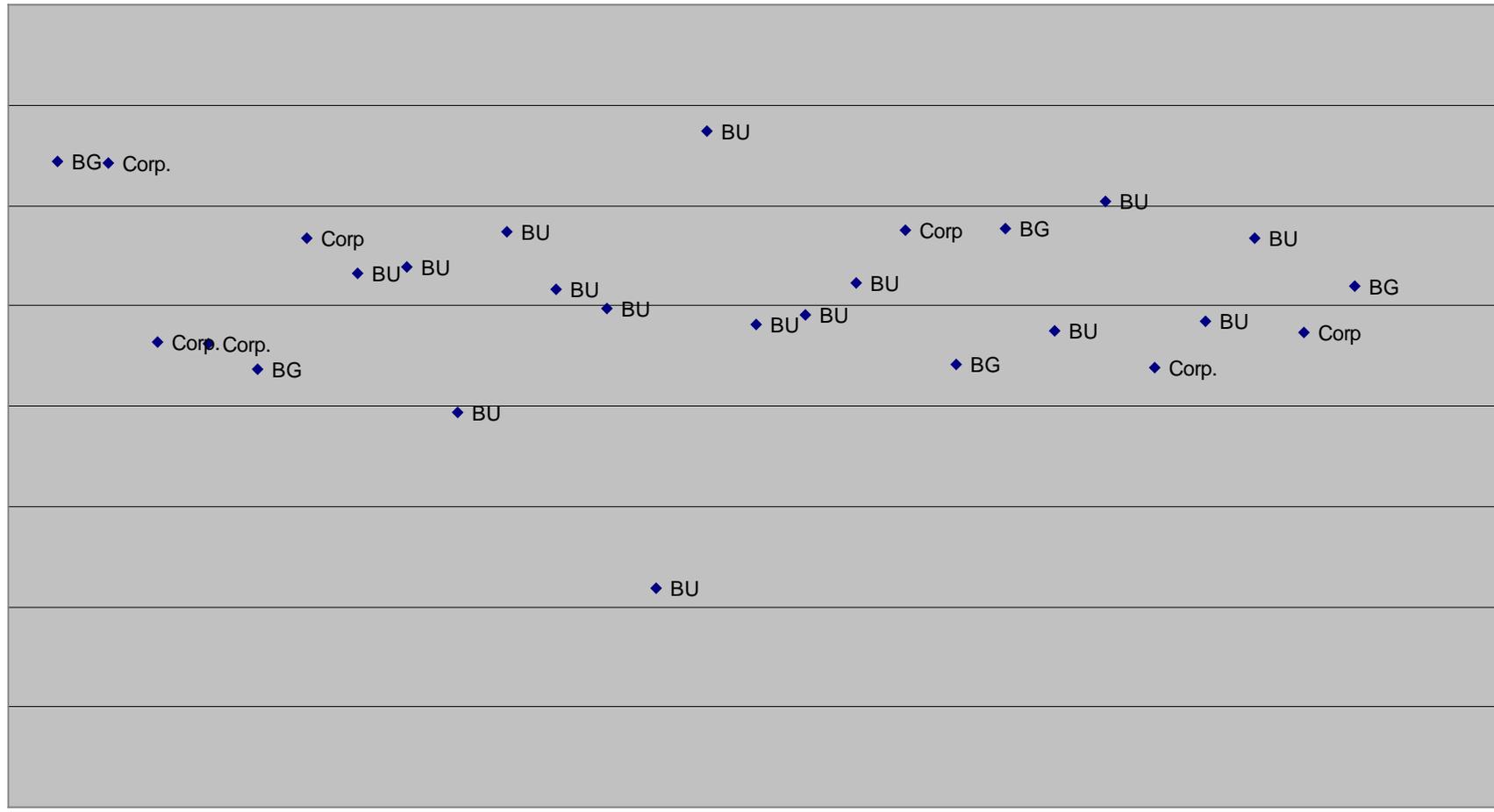


Scatter Diagram (Weighted Scores) – Total Narcissism

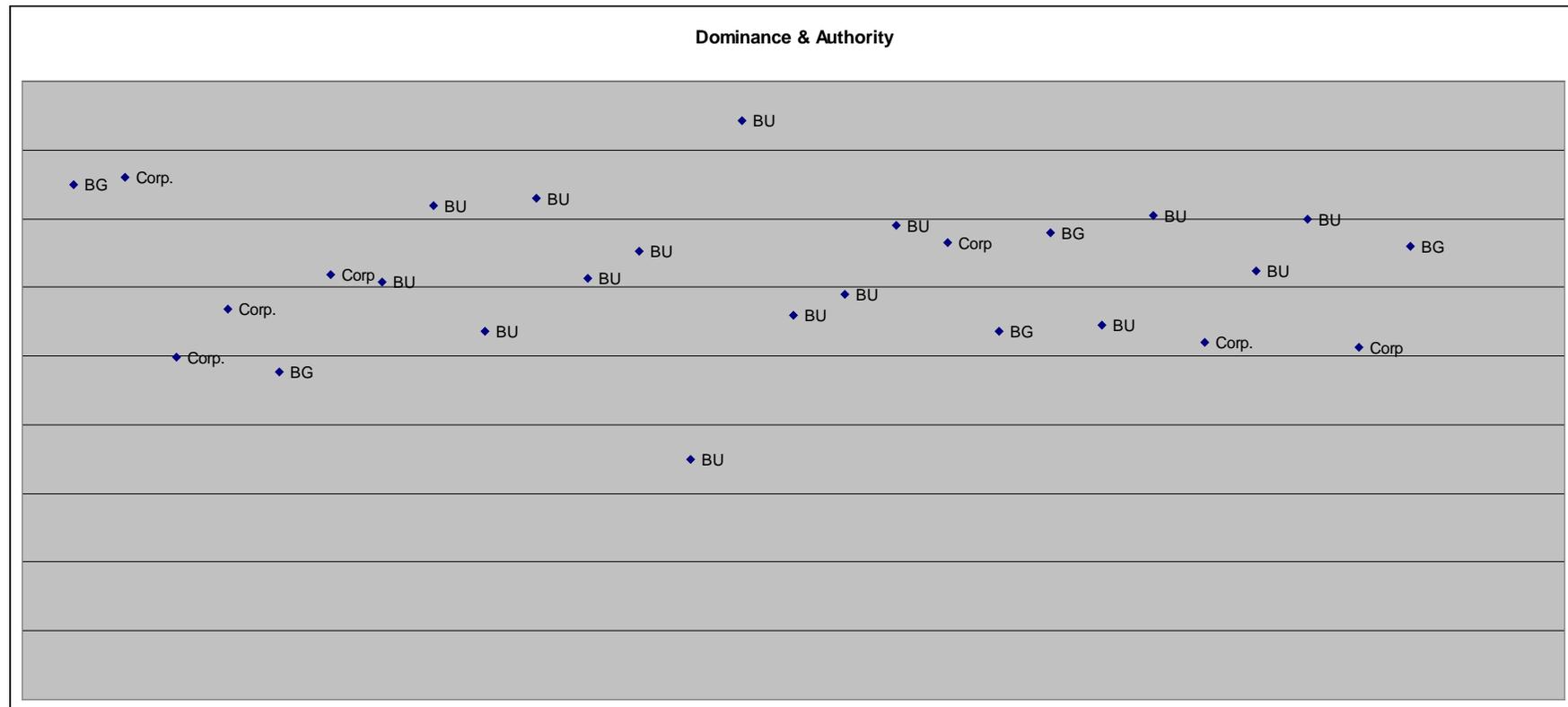


Scatter Diagram (Weighted Scores) – Exploiteness & Entitlement

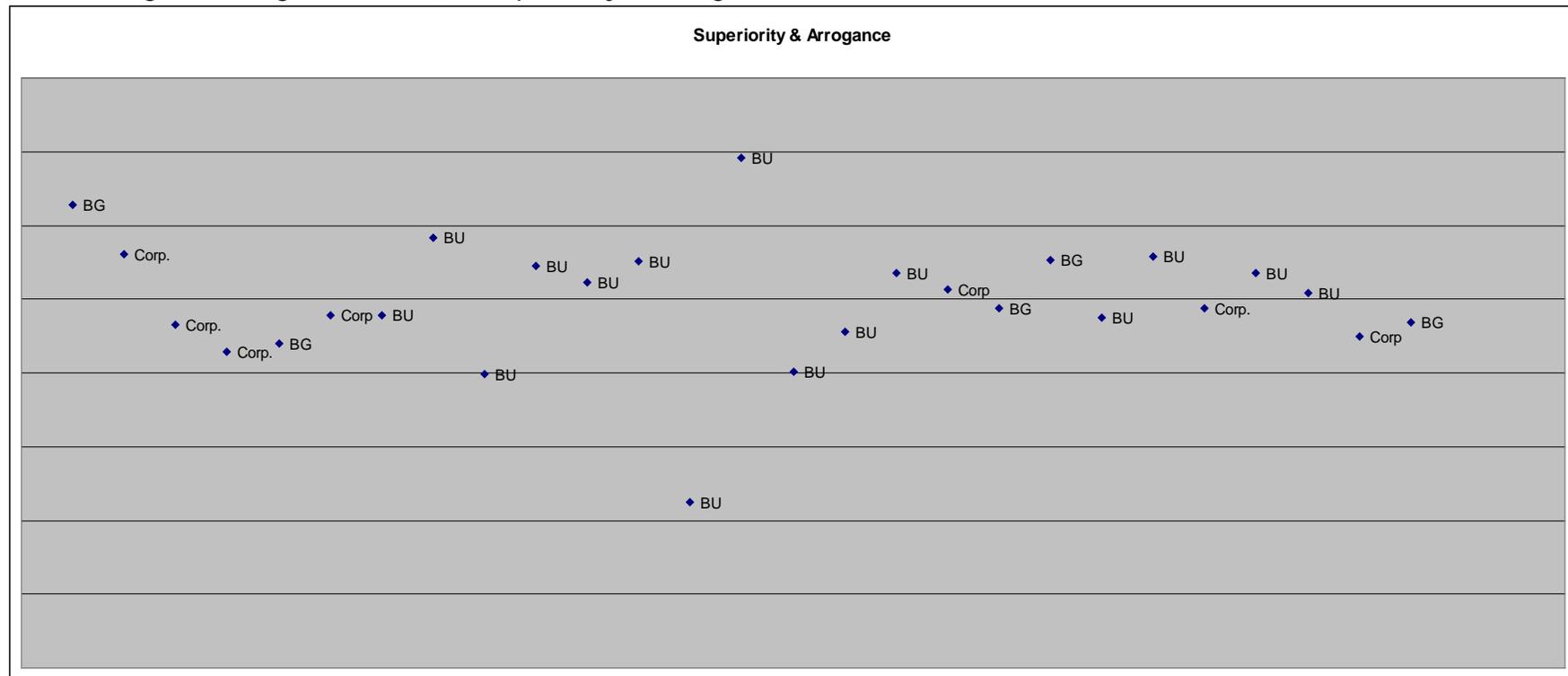
Exploiteness & Entitlement



Scatter Diagram (Weighted Scores) – Dominance & Authority



Scatter Diagram (Weighted Scores) – Superiority & Arrogance



Scatter Diagram (Weighted Scores) – Self Absorption & Self Admiration

Self Absorption & Self Admiration

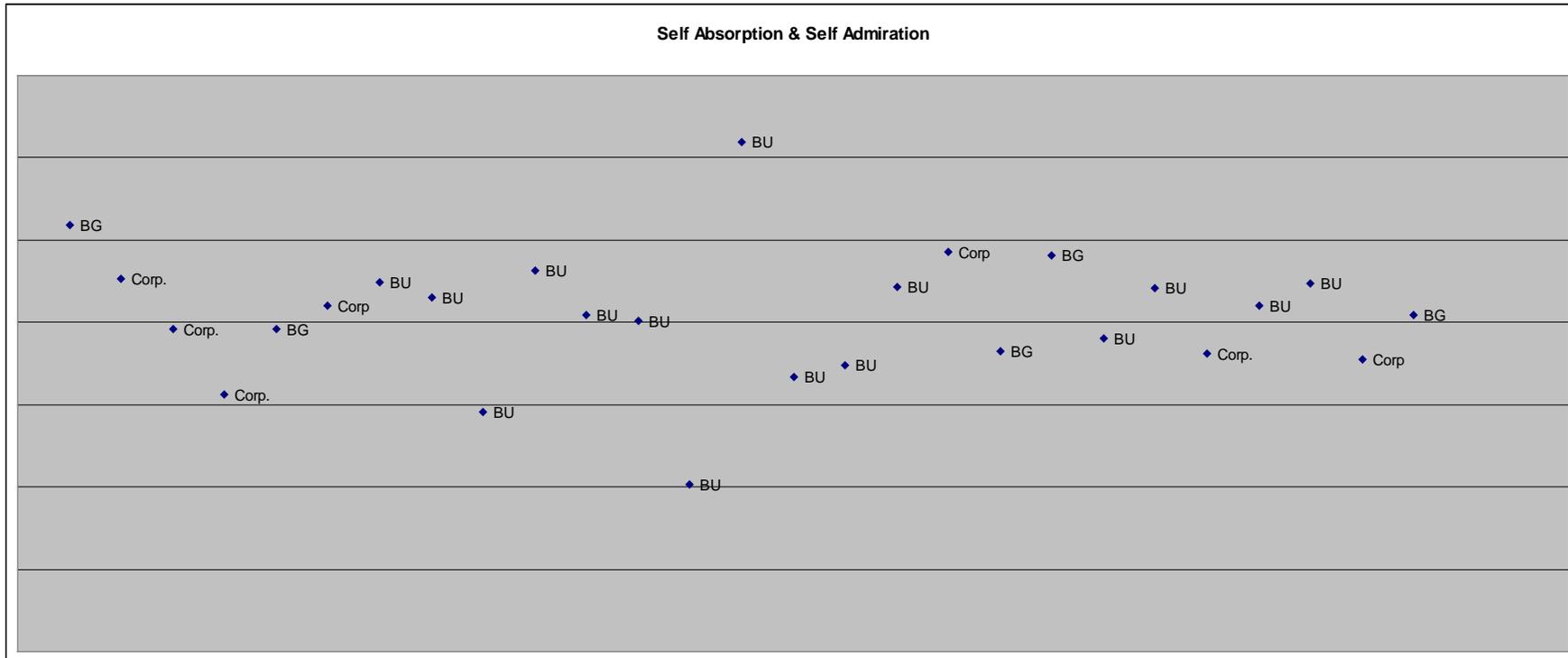
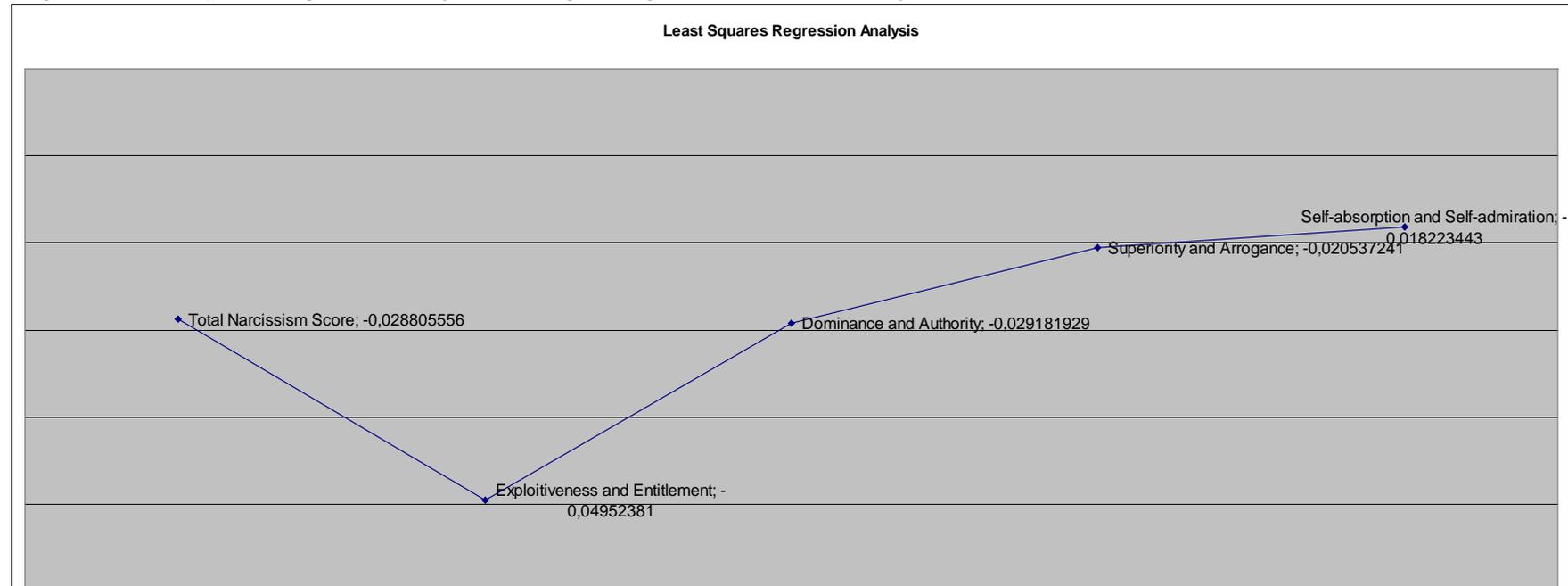


Diagram – Least Squares Regression Analysis for Weighted figures and Variance Analysis



Variance:

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	ST DEV %	Variance
Total Narcissism Score	26	26	25	2%	1%
Sense of Entitlement and Exploiteness	25	26	26	2%	1%
Dominance and Authority	32	31	30	3%	3%
Superiority and Arrogance	25	26	24	3%	3%
Self-absorption and Self-admiration	20	22	20	5%	4%
	Variance	Variance	Variance		
Total Narcissism Score	2	3	1		
Sense of Entitlement and Exploiteness	2	4	2		
Dominance and Authority	2	6	3		
Superiority and Arrogance	2	3	1		
Self-absorption and Self-admiration	1	2	1		

Original Research by GMD

