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# The Narcissistic Salesperson: A Framework of Their Relationships with Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Customer Orientation

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**Abstract** — Narcissistic salespersons can have detrimental effects on customer relationships and voluntary turnover. These impediments to organizational effectiveness occur through their relationships with customers, coworkers, supervisors, and the organization. Conversely, narcissistic salespersons also possess some attractive salesperson characteristics such as charm, resilience, confidence, competitiveness, and initial likeability. In this paper, I draw from the psychology, marketing, sales, and organizational literatures to develop a conceptual framework which illustrates the relationships of narcissistic salespersons with customers and critical job-related attitudes that affect their relationship with the organization. Specifically, this framework contains empirically testable proposed relationships between narcissism and the following specific outcomes of interest to selling organizations: a salesperson's customer orientation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Thus, narcissism in salespersons could affect long-term customer relationships and turnover in the sales force. Specifically, I propose the relationships of narcissism with the selling and customer orientation dimensions of a salesperson's customer orientation, and narcissism's proposed relationship with the coworker, supervisor, work, pay, and promotion satisfaction dimensions of job satisfaction, as well as with organizational commitment. Implications for organizational stability and productivity are addressed, and managerial recommendations are made.

**Keywords** — salesperson, narcissism, job satisfaction, customer orientation, organizational commitment, turnover

**Relevance to marketing educators, researchers, and practitioners** — Narcissism is prevalent in society in general, more prevalent in salespeople, and younger generations are more narcissistic than previous ones. Furthermore, more narcissistic individuals tend to create more favorable responses in the employee selection process than those lower in narcissism. Thus, future sales forces should tend to become even more narcissistic. Narcissism has the potential for destructive effects on sales organizations by negatively affecting customer relationships, job satisfaction,

organizational commitment, and turnover in sales organizations. Despite its negative characteristics, particularly regarding interpersonal relationships, very little research exists that investigates the linkage of narcissism with outcomes of interest for sales organizations such as customer relationships and turnover. This research seeks to provide direction for future empirical studies to ascertain the true nature of narcissism's relationship with these critical business outcomes and provide suggestions for the means to attenuate the effects of narcissism on these undesirable organizational outcomes.

## Introduction

There is an “epidemic of narcissism” in the United States, and the age cohort entering the work force appear to be the more narcissistic than ever (Twenge and Campbell 2009, p. 2). Narcissism, in this paper, refers to the sub-clinical form (or “flavor”) of narcissism known as grandiose narcissism, which is a personality trait normally distributed in the general population (Wurst et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2011; Rhodewalt and Petersen 2009). That means that, like any other personality trait, individuals possess it in strengths represented by a continuum ranging from low to high levels. It is not identical to pathological narcissism (Twenge and Campbell 2009, p. 22; Sedikides et al., 2004) indicated by a clinical assessment of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) described in the psychiatric literature. But while not identical, the social-personality construct of narcissism does predict many behaviors noted in the clinical description of narcissism such as entitlement, fantasies of success, and a desire for admiration (Exline et al., 2004). This grandiose narcissism, the focus of this paper, is characterized by four facets which are: Entitlement/Exploitativeness, Superiority/Arrogance, Self-absorption/Self-admiration, and Leadership/Authority (Emmons, 1987; Raskin and Hall, 1979).

Individuals with high levels of narcissism lack empathy, are exploitative (Sedikides et al., 2004), and have a selfish orientation to relationships (O'Boyle et al., 2012; Campbell et al. 2000) with a strong sense of entitlement which impairs their ability to experience empathy (Buss, 1999). They are preoccupied with their own needs, goals, and desires, and are defined as having “a cognitive-affective preoccupation with the self” (Westen, 1990). In interpersonal relationships, they exhibit less agreeableness, empathy, and gratitude with more anger, hostility and distrust of others, and are usually abrasive and dismissive in these interpersonal relationships (Sedikides et al., 2004). They can be exploitative and ruthless towards others with little to no empathy (Soyer et al., 1999). They also do not deal well with failure, are not aware of others' feelings, and are prone to create conflict with others (Wallace and Baumeister, 2002).

However, individuals high in narcissism can also be charming, charismatic, confident, interpersonally skilled, entertaining, assertive, gregarious, bold, extroverted, and attractive to others (Back et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 2011; Back et al., 2010; Soyer et al., 1999). While some research has positioned narcissism in a group of “dark triad” personality types (O'Boyle et al., 2012; Paulhus and Williams, 2002), it is not surprising that researchers refer to the “bright” and “dark” sides of narcissism (Back et al., 2013), “bad” and “good” aspects of narcissism (Malkin, 2015), or “healthy” and “destructive” narcissism (Lubit, 2002). Clearly, narcissism is a complex personality trait (Campbell et al., 2011; Twenge and Campbell, 2009, p. 3) with high relevance to organizational studies, and sales force studies in particular.

Narcissism has received very limited attention in the sales literature, which is puzzling since narcissism has strong effects on interpersonal behaviors, strategies, and relationships (Wurst et al., 2017; Paunonen, et al., 2006, p.477; Rhodewalt and Morf, 1995) which are essential to personal selling. Professional sales positions typically require strong interpersonal relationships since

salespersons are boundary spanners who “interact with individuals outside of the organization” (Soyer et al., 1999, p.285) and “(S)alespeople play a key role in the formation of long-term buyer-seller relationships” (Weitz and Bradford, 1999). Furthermore, the use of sales teams has dramatically increased in importance the past few decades in implementing the sales function (Ahearne et al., 2010; Moon and Armstrong, 1994), making the ability to work with others essential. One study indicated that as many as 75% of companies used sales teams (Cummings, 2007), and there is no reason to doubt their popularity has increased since then.

Sales teams require interdependence and shared commitment to be effective, but they may lose efficiency due to interpersonal conflicts and inefficient communication (Ahearne et al., 2010). Narcissists typically behave in ways that would impede the development of productive relationships due to their abrasive and antagonistic personalities (Rhodewalt and Morf, 1995). Therefore, sales forces seem particularly vulnerable to the effects of narcissism.

Given the interpersonal characteristics of grandiose narcissists, it is easy to anticipate business outcomes that may be harmed by the behavior of narcissistic salespersons. The narcissistic characteristics of charm, high self-esteem, competitiveness and a sense of invincibility could be considered desirable in salespersons who deal with high levels of rejection and ambiguity. These same traits could make these individuals attractive to employers involved in the recruiting and selection phase of building a salesforce. But the detrimental traits such as a preoccupation with the self, exploitation, entitlement, self-superiority, and an antagonistic personality hardly seem desirable for members of a profession tasked with satisfying the needs of others, building relationships, working with others, and providing a stable sales force.

How, then, can the positive characteristics associated with narcissism reconcile with an antagonistic personality in an era when a customer orientation is regarded as necessary for salespeople to implement a market orientation? Are narcissists likely to foster the long-term customer relationships deemed desirable by focusing on the needs of customers? Do the antagonistic personalities of narcissistic salespersons cause them to have less job satisfaction due to their difficulties in establishing positive interpersonal relationships or feeling rewarded for their efforts? Will the persistent focus on the self and extreme self-enhancement characteristic of narcissistic individuals create a barrier to commitment to the organization? What effect will narcissistic salespersons have on turnover in the sales force? In spite of the fact that narcissism has the potential to influence a salesperson, customers, and the organization either positively or negatively, it has not received expansive attention in the sales literature.

In this paper, I develop a framework of the relationships of narcissism with the dimensions of a salesperson’s customer orientation, the dimensions of job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Combined, these variables influence the productivity and stability of a sales force. Both of these outcomes are of great interest to practitioners and researchers.

# Conceptual framework

This framework's conceptual core consists of three key relationships: Those between narcissism and the key job-related attitudes of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and the relationship of narcissism with the dimensions of customer orientation. In this framework, narcissism's relationship with the various facets of job satisfaction that contribute to overall job satisfaction are illustrated, instead of global job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction, as measured by the Job Descriptive Index (JDI)<sup>®</sup> (Smith et al., 1969), is a composite measure comprised of five sub-scales. Each facet contributes to an employee's perception of overall job satisfaction and can influence this overall perception positively or negatively. Global assessments of job satisfaction fail to account for specific facets which can influence an individual's overall assessment of satisfaction. This paper provides a more fine-grained framework for analysis of the relationship between narcissism and job satisfaction.

No previous studies were found which addressed the relationships of narcissism with the dimensions of a customer orientation and organizational commitment, so this framework uniquely addresses those research gaps. I extend the framework to illustrate the relationship with propensity to leave, which is the likelihood an employee will end their affiliation with an employer voluntarily in the near future (Bluedorn, 1982), and which has been shown to be an effective predictor of sales force turnover (Johnston et al., 1990). This framework is based on the premise that firms desire to have a sales force that seeks to practice a relational strategy versus a transactional strategy (Weitz and Bradford, 1999).

Job-related attitudes, like job satisfaction and organizational commitment, indicate the extent to which employees fulfill important values (Maier and Brunstein, 2001; Hochwarter et al., 1999). Salespersons with these attitudes benefit an organization since highly committed employees perform better (Hunt et al., 1985; Mowday et al., 1979), and are less likely to leave an organization (Johnston et al., 1990). Employers that recruit and select employees whose values closely match the organization's values, and promote through organizational culture the behaviors those values represent, stand to benefit from greater productivity, lower turnover, and strong adherence to organizational goals.

Job satisfaction is important for several reasons. Despite uncertainty regarding the exact nature of the relationship, job satisfaction and sales performance show a positive association (Brown and Peterson, 1993), and job satisfaction has also been shown to be causally related to organizational commitment (Brown and Peterson, 1993; Johnston et al., 1990). Both job satisfaction and organizational commitment have negative relationships with employees' intentions to leave a firm (Johnston et al., 1990; Johnston et al., 1987), and these intentions, measured by propensity to leave, represent a very effective predictor of sales force turnover (Johnston et al., 1990; Sager et al., 1988). Sales force turnover is a critically important issue due to its cost to sales organizations.

A salesperson's customer orientation is important because customer orientation has been linked to higher levels of customer loyalty and organizational performance (Weitz and Bradford, 1999), and it fosters behaviors in salespersons that should lead to long-term customer satisfaction (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Therefore, the combined effects of the variables in the framework influence the productivity, stability, and effectiveness of the sales force.

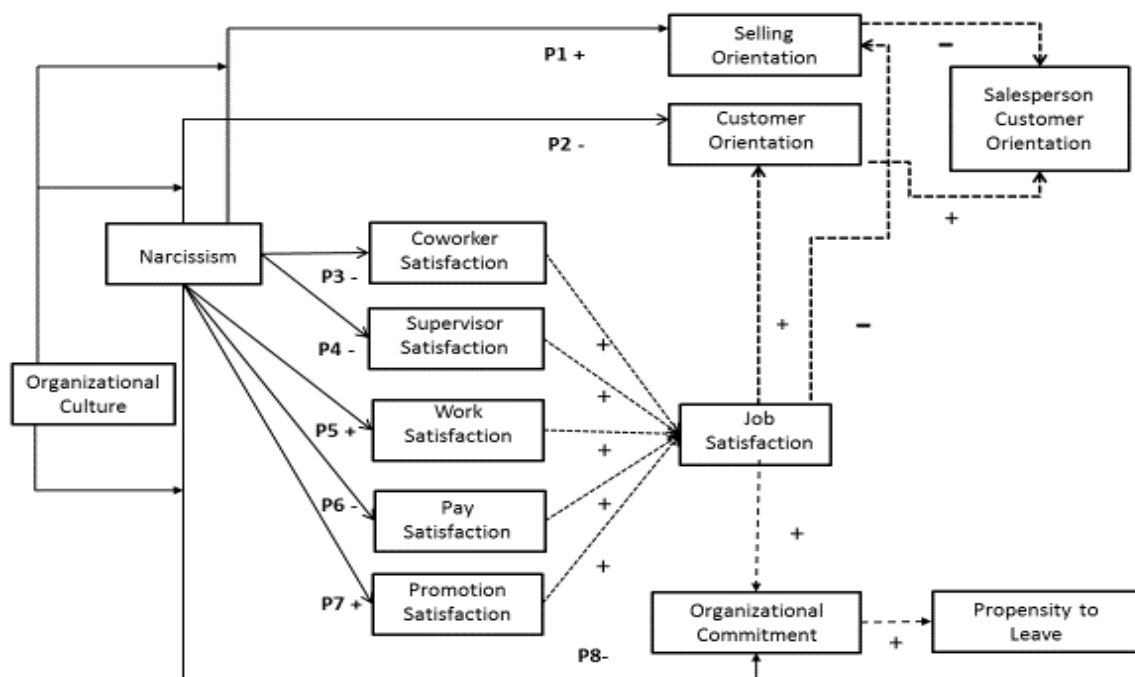
Organizational culture is positioned as a potential moderating variable in this framework since organizational cultures can encourage or discourage, through the establishment of norms, for example, certain types of behaviors. A market orientation, which is based on delivering

superior value to customers, is an example of an organizational culture focused on providing superior customer value with a long-term focus (Narver and Slater, 1990).

Campbell et al., (2011) note that coverage of the narcissism construct in the organizational sciences is “somewhat spotty,” and further state that existing research does not reveal the role narcissism may play in organizations. The framework in this study draws from the organizational, marketing, sales, and psychological literature to position narcissism’s influence on outcomes vital to effective organizational functioning. The dotted lines in Figure 1 represent relationships that are established in the sales literature, so no propositions will be created for these relationships. These dotted lines do help illustrate which job-related attitudes narcissism could affect and the relationships of those job-related attitudes with the critical outcomes of interest of salesperson customer orientation, which is related to customer loyalty, and propensity to leave, which is negatively related to voluntary turnover among salespeople.

**Figure 1**

**Conceptual Model of Relationships of Narcissism With Customer Orientation, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment**



# Literature review

## Narcissism

Westen (1990, p. 227) defined narcissism as a “cognitive-affective preoccupation with the self.” From a social-personality perspective, narcissism can be viewed as a personality trait with several dimensions (Miller and Campbell, 2008). Narcissists place their own needs, wishes, glory, and goals above others, and focus their attention on themselves. (Emmons,1987; Westen, 1990). Miller and Campbell (2008) characterize narcissists as having an antagonistic interpersonal style because they tend to be exploitative, manipulative, and lacking empathy (Rhodewalt and Morf, 1998). Empathy is defined as “an ‘other-oriented’ emotional response congruent with the perceived welfare of another person” (Batson et al., 1995).

Emmons (1987) discovered four factors in the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), which is the most frequently used measure of narcissism for personality types in the general population. These four factors are, Exploiteness/ Entitlement: a belief that one is skilled at manipulating people, and a sense of entitlement to do so. Next, Leadership/ Authority: the belief that one possesses an extraordinary ability to influence others, and a general preference for leadership and authority roles. The third factor is Superiority/ Arrogance, or the belief that one is simply “better” than others. Finally, Self-absorption/ Self-admiration is the final factor, which is an elevated sense of vanity and the belief that one’s self is special.

A common characteristic of narcissists is that of self-enhancement, a tendency to exaggerate skills and accomplishments (Paulhus, 1998). This self-enhancement rarely applies to areas described as communal domains such as caring, empathy, and concern (Campbell, et al., 2011). Narcissists are viewed as socially insensitive, hostile, and selfish (Wurst et al., 2017; Back et al., 2013). Twenge and Campbell (2009, p.220) state that “(N)arcissism is absolutely corrosive to social relationships.” In particular, narcissists typically initiate quick social relationships easily, but over time, their behaviors degrade the relationships substantially (Wurst et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2011)

## Job Satisfaction

Smith, Kendall and Hulin (1969) define job satisfaction as "the feelings a worker has about their job." These feelings include how they feel about their coworkers, supervision, pay, promotion, and work. This multi-faceted conceptualization of job satisfaction is prevalent in the sales literature (Brown and Peterson, 1993; Churchill et al., 1974; Futrell, 1979; Smith, et al., 1969) because there is substantial empirical and theoretical evidence that multiple measures of salesperson job satisfaction are more appropriate and provide richer information than single item measures (Fry et al., 1986; Johnston, et al., 1987). Among the key findings in the sales and marketing literatures are that job satisfaction is negatively related to intentions to quit (Babin and Boles, 1998) and positively related to organizational commitment, which has the strongest negative relationship to intentions to leave an organization (Johnston et al., 1990).

Research focused on the antecedents of job satisfaction has shifted appreciably since the mid-eighties from a focus on role perceptions and organizational variables to how personality traits might influence these feelings. Since narcissism is regarded as a multidimensional trait (Miller and Campbell, 2008), it fits into the latter category. It is the linkage to commitment, and ultimately commitment’s negative relationship with quitting intentions (Johnston et al., 1990), that makes job satisfaction in salespersons a desirable goal for organizations.

## Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is defined as “the degree to which individuals (1) willingly identify with their employer (2) attempt to meet the goals of their employers and (3) embrace their employer’s values” (Mowday et al., 1979, p. 226). Ricketta (2002) underscores the importance of organizational commitment with the observation that it is “assumed to influence almost any behavior that is beneficial to the organization.” Research has identified three approaches to viewing commitment as either affective, continuance, or normative commitment. But all three have a common view of organizational commitment as “a psychological state that (a) characterizes the employee’s relationship with the organization, and (b) has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organization” (Meyer and Allen 1991, p. 67). Meyer and Allen (1991) state that this affective commitment deals with an employee’s identification with, involvement in, and emotional attachment to the organization.

## Customer Orientation

Rindfleisch and Moorman (2003, p. 422) defined a firm’s customer orientation as “a set of behaviors and beliefs that places a priority on customers’ interests and continuously creates superior value.” This is consistent with the customer orientation dimension of a market orientation defined by Narver and Slater (1990) which is a characteristic of the firm.

A salesperson’s customer orientation (SCO), which is an individual characteristic, has been acknowledged as a critical factor in the formation and maintenance of customer satisfaction with a firm’s customers. Customer-oriented selling reflects the practice of the marketing concept by an individual salesperson (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). The importance of SCO is supported by several studies that found positive relationships between customer orientation and measures of performance (Brown et al., 2002; Cross et al., 2007; Siguaw et al., 1994). While Franke and Park’s (2006) meta-analysis questioned these findings, the authors stated the relationship may change “as new evidence accumulates” (Franke and Park 2006, p. 699).

SCO is conceptualized by Saxe and Weitz (1982) as having solution-focused customer oriented (CO) behaviors and avoiding more exploitive, manipulative selling-oriented behaviors (SO). Traditionally, the SO items have been reverse scored in the SOCO measure (Saxe and Weitz, 1982) and added to the positively scored CO items to indicate the degree of SCO practiced by individuals. Recently, the focus has shifted to analyze CO and SO as separate factors (Johnson et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2005; Perriatt, et al., 2004; Thomas et al., 2001), as is shown in this framework.

Positive influences on SCO, which have a negative influence on SO and a positive influence on CO, have been identified in the sales and marketing literatures. These include organizational level constructs such as the market orientation of the firm (Kirca et al., 2005; Williams and Attaway, 1996; Siguaw et al., 1994), job-related attitudes (O’Hara et al., 1991), and personality traits (Brown et al., 2002). There are fewer studies which focus on personality traits such as narcissism which have the potential to negatively affect overall SCO through the SO and CO dimensions.

SCO is an important determinant of customer satisfaction since highly customer oriented salespersons act in ways targeted to increase long-term customer satisfaction (Saxe and Weitz,



1982). These actions are likely to stimulate repurchase and positive referrals from their satisfied customers (Kotler, 2003) which would be indicative of customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction is frequently initiated and nurtured at the individual level through the efforts of salespeople (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Bendapudi and Berry, 1997).

## Organizational Culture

Organizational culture has been defined as "the pattern of shared values and beliefs that help individuals understand organizational functioning and that provide norms for behavior in the organization" (Deshpande and Webster, 1989, p.4). A popular framework for classifying cultures, the competing values model (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983), differentiates them into four quadrants described as clan, adhocracy, hierarchy, and market. Each type of culture is defined according to four dimensions: dominant attributes, leadership style, bonding, and strategic emphases. Typical characteristics of each culture along these dimensions are described below (Deshpande, et al., 1993). This framework has been utilized several times in the marketing literature (White et al., 2003; Deshpande et al., 1993).

The dominant attributes of clan cultures are cohesiveness and team work with leaders viewed as mentors and parent-figures. Loyalty and interpersonal cohesion typify bonding in clans and the strategic emphases are on developing human resources, commitment, and morale. Adhocracy cultures feature dominant attributes of entrepreneurship, creativity, and adaptability. Leaders are innovators and risk takers, and bonding is based on flexibility and risk. The strategic emphases in adhocracy cultures are on innovation and growth. Hierarchy cultures' dominant attributes are order, rules and regulations, and uniformity. Leaders in hierarchy cultures play the role of administrator and coordinator. Typical strategic emphases are on stability, smooth operations, and predictability. Market cultures' dominant attributes are competitiveness and goal achievement, with leaders who are decisive and achievement-oriented. Bonding in this culture is based on competitiveness, production, and goal-orientation with the strategic emphases on market superiority and competitive advantage (Deshpande et al., 1993).

A market orientation is a culture designed to provide superior value for customers, and has an explicit long-term focus (Narver and Slater, 1990). The values underlying the behaviors that typify a market oriented firm include collaboration, respect/empathy/perspective taking, keeping promises, openness, and trust (Gebhart et al., 2006). This type of culture would seem likely to strengthen a salesperson's customer orientation and organizational commitment for less narcissistic salespersons since it encourages teamwork and long-term relationships. Other types of organizational cultures may promote transaction oriented selling which may encourage both a selling orientation and strengthen the organizational commitment of a narcissistic salesperson due to the selfish nature of that type of selling.

# Propositions

Narcissists are exploitative, manipulative, and lack empathy. Their strong sense of entitlement, in the most selfish sense, impairs their ability to experience empathy (Campbell et al., 2011; Buss, 1999). Narcissistic entitlement runs counter to a customer orientation's focus on customer needs and goals since this type of entitlement causes a narcissist to focus on their own experience, outcomes, and needs (Twenge and Campbell, 2009). In sum, narcissists are preoccupied with their own needs, goals, and desires, and focus their attention on themselves (Westen, 1990). They have a tendency to exploit others for personal gain (Wurst et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2011; Sedikides et al., 2004), and emphasize immediate short-term personal gains (Robins and Beer, 2001). This innate selfishness stands in opposition to a customer orientation that focuses on the needs of others and the fostering of long-term customer relationships (Saxe and Weitz, 1982) which rely heavily on salespeople for their creation (Weitz and Bradford, 1999).

A salesperson with a selling orientation will be more transaction-oriented with a goal to stimulate demand for their product. Salespeople who use selling-oriented tactics are more apt to use pressure and deceit to reach their goal of making the sale for personal gain with relatively little regard for the well-being of the customer (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). These tactics would align with the exploitive and entitled nature of narcissists

Conversely, a salesperson with a strong customer orientation should have a desire to provide customer satisfaction, establish long-term relationships, and avoid behaviors that sacrifice a customer's interest in order to make a sale in the short-term (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). These tactics would contrast with the self-absorption, exploitive, and entitled aspects of narcissists. Based on the above reasoning, the following propositions are offered.

P1- Higher levels of narcissism in a salesperson have a positive relationship with higher levels of a salesperson's selling orientation.

P2- Higher levels of narcissism in a salesperson have a negative relationship with higher levels of a salesperson's customer orientation.

Job satisfaction is regarded as consisting of several different dimensions that, when combined, produce an overall personal assessment of one's feelings about their job (Smith, et al., 1969). That is, rather than each dimension being influenced by an overall sense of job satisfaction, the sum of the individual dimensions produces the overall attitude of satisfaction with one's job. Therefore, each dimension has the potential to profoundly affect a salesperson's overall assessment of their job satisfaction.

Two dimensions of job satisfaction with a distinct interpersonal focus are coworker satisfaction and supervision satisfaction. These are particularly important because most components of narcissism relate to interpersonal behaviors (Wurst et al., 2017; Paunonen et al., 2006). Narcissists are usually abrasive and dismissive in their interpersonal relationships (Sedikides et al., 2004), and this is most likely due to the exploitiveness/entitlement and superiority/arrogance components of their narcissistic personality. They are not aware of others' feelings, and are not reluctant to create conflict with others (Wallace and Baumeister, 2002).

Regarding coworkers, the argument by Wallace and Baumeister (2002) claiming narcissists are not good team players is especially relevant here since many modern selling situations involve team efforts, which put salespersons in more frequent contact with coworkers, and the use of sales teams has rapidly increased (Ahearne et al., 2010). In fact, it is suggested that narcissists may be “the very antithesis of a team player” (Judge et al., 2006). Finally, Judge et al., (2006) note that narcissists’ inflated sense of importance and belief they are extraordinary seems likely to foster an environment of distrust and competitiveness. Due to their sense of superiority, narcissists are arrogant, feel they are better than fellow coworkers, antagonistic, and refuse to compromise (O’Boyle et al., 2012; Campbell et al., 2011; Miller and Campbell, 2008; Campbell et al., 2000; Rhodewalt and Morf, 1995) which leads to social conflict (Back et al., 2013) that they are not hesitant to cause (Wallace and Baumeister, 2002). Their propensity to be exploitive and feel entitled leads them to overlook their obligations, have a lack of respect for others, and be unforgiving (Campbell et al., 2011; O’Boyle et al., 2011, Twenge and Campbell, 2009; Exline et al., 2004). For the reasons mentioned above, the following proposition is presented.

**P3-** Higher levels of a salesperson’s narcissism are negatively related to higher levels of coworker satisfaction.

A narcissist’s satisfaction with their supervisors would be subject to the same influences mentioned above along with a few other factors. Because of the leadership/authority and superiority/arrogance components of a narcissist’s personality, they are apt to believe they are more qualified to lead than their supervisors. Since narcissists think so highly of themselves, in response to criticism from a supervisor, they are unwilling to learn from their mistakes, likely to experience anger or rage and blame others for their own shortcomings (Twenge and Campbell, 2009; Rhodewalt and Morf, 1998).

Due to their tendency to be antagonistic, narcissists have a low regard for others and do not trust them (Bettencourt et al., 2006). Conversely, Rhodewalt and Morf (1998) also found that narcissists respond extremely well to praise. While supervisors should praise work well done, it is unlikely that a substantial number of salespersons would be exempt from criticism related to job performance. Narcissists may become angry, hostile, aggressive, and derogatory when given failure feedback (Judge et al., 2006) or dismiss feedback entirely, if it is negative, in order to maintain their inflated view of self (O’Boyle et al., 2012). Negative feedback for narcissists seems likely since they seem to withhold effort when the situation does not offer the promise of self-enhancement for top performers (Wallace and Baumeister, 2002).

Narcissistic individuals are prone to commit more acts of counterproductive work behaviors (Michel and Bowling, 2013; O’Boyle et al., 2012) and salesperson deviance (Jelinek and Ahearne, 2006) due to their entitled nature and proneness to deflect blame. Since supervisory positions in sales require providing feedback on failures and successes, as well as attempting to correct counterproductive or deviant behaviors, I draw on the evidence above to develop the following proposition.

**P4-** Higher levels of a salesperson’s narcissism are negatively related to higher levels of supervisor satisfaction.

Satisfaction with one’s work is drawn from the challenge and intrinsic rewards it brings. While the sales profession is rewarding for many involved with it, many sales positions involve relatively mundane, behind-the-scenes activities that go unrecognized, yet are crucial to continued success. A narcissist’s need for admiration and desire to attain glory stands in contrast to these requirements (Campbell et al., 2011). Due to their glory-seeking personal goals, narcissists appear to withhold effort when a situation does not offer the chance of self-

enhancement for top performers (Wallace and Baumeister, 2002). Many sales positions require planning, follow-up and administrative work, which are generally regarded as routine activities.

However, narcissists may be attracted to the sales role because of the autonomy it provides, its competitive nature, perks associated with the position, and the opportunity to receive attention for significant accomplishments (Soyer et al., 1999). The opportunity to shine comes with sales presentations and closing activities where a narcissist could use their charming, extraverted personality and manipulative techniques (Campbell et al., 2011; Back et al., 2010; Morf and Rhodewalt, 2001; Emmons, 1987) to realize a short-term gain. On balance, it seems reasonable to make the following proposition:

**P5-** Higher levels of a salesperson's narcissism are positively related to higher levels of work satisfaction.

Two dimensions of job satisfaction are unrelated to interpersonal relationships. Instead, they address personal evaluations of the self in relation to satisfaction with pay and promotion opportunities. Because salespersons with a high level of narcissism have a strong sense of entitlement (Campbell et al., 2011; Emmons 1987), their feelings about satisfaction with pay seem likely to be strongly salient to them. Their affective preoccupation with self refers to a preoccupation with their own wishes, goals, ambitions, glory, and superiority (Westen, 1990). Narcissists tend to overrate their own performance relative to supervisory ratings (Judge et al., 2006) and this could explain the finding that narcissists tend to perceive themselves as overqualified for the jobs they hold (Maynard et al., 2015). Considering the unique and combined effects of a sense of entitlement and a sense of superiority, it is easy to consider salespersons high in narcissism as regarding themselves as underpaid. Thus, the following proposition is presented.

**P6-** Higher levels of a salesperson's narcissism are negatively related to higher levels of pay satisfaction.

Because of the leadership/authority and superiority/arrogance components of a narcissist's personality, they are likely to honestly believe they are more qualified to lead than their own supervisors. Therefore, it is likely they feel they are currently employed in positions beneath what their capabilities (Maynard et al., 2015), and self-inflated accomplishments, would merit. Additionally, being a salesperson is not as prestigious as being a manager. A managerial title would feed their excessive sense of self-importance (Judge et al., 2006). While a narcissistic salesperson would not be in a position of management, which carries the recognition and power that would boost their sense of self-importance, they would be likely to strive for promotion, and perform at their best when positions are available, in order to receive the "glory" they seek (Campbell et al., 2011; Wallace and Baumeister, 2002). Thus, the following proposition is provided.

**P7-** Higher levels of a salesperson's narcissism are positively related to higher levels of promotion satisfaction.

The extreme self-focus of narcissists, combined with their sense of entitlement/exploitativeness, and feelings of superiority make it unlikely they will identify with the values of an organization or develop an affective attachment to it. Narcissists love themselves to the point that "it's all about them," and only show commitment to something that benefits them personally (Twenge and Campbell, 2009, p. 213). This coincides with the notion of compliance, as opposed to identification or internalization, as a mechanism to adopt specific behaviors. Compliance is

used when behaviors are adopted simply to gain rewards, and not because of shared beliefs (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986).

Since organizational commitment is “a psychological state that ... characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization,” (Meyer and Allen 1991, p. 67), and the affective commitment deals with an employee's emotional attachment to the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991), it seems plausible that this relationship will fare no better than other relationships narcissists are involved in. It may start out well, but will ultimately deteriorate (Twenge and Campbell, 2009). Campbell's “chocolate cake model” of narcissism summarizes this in comparing a relationship of any kind with a narcissist to eating chocolate cake. At first, it is very appealing, but the longer-term effects are detrimental (Campbell et al., 2011; Twenge and Campbell, 2009).

Narcissists are also more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors that are intended to harm the organization or organizational members (Campbell et al., 2011; Penney and Spector, 2002), and due to their selfish nature, sense of entitlement, exploitive personalities, sense of superiority, and social callousness, they seem quite likely to engage in deviant organizational and deviant interpersonal dimensions of salesperson deviant behaviors described by Jelinek and Ahearne (2006). Based on the reasons provided, the following proposition is presented.

**P8-** Higher levels of a salesperson's narcissism are negatively related to higher levels of organizational commitment.

## Potential moderating variable

Organizational culture is positioned as a potential moderating variable in this framework. As illustrated, it is conceptualized as a moderator of the relationship of narcissism with organizational commitment, and of the relationships of narcissism with the selling orientation and customer orientation dimensions of a salesperson customer orientation. Organizational culture is rooted in values (Deshpande and Webster, 1989; Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983), and an important dimension of organizational commitment is the extent to which employees “embrace their employers' values” (Mowday et al., 1979, p. 226).

Values can be conceptualized as desirable ways of behaving or desirable end states (Verplanken and Holland, 2002; Feather, 1995). Values may be considered as motives and the strength of values may affect effort, persistence, and choices of alternatives (Feather 1995). Therefore, the values typical of a market oriented firm, for example, such as trust, openness, collaboration, respect/empathy/perspective taking, and keeping promises (Gebhart et al., 2006), should foster higher levels of customer orientation and greater organizational commitment in salespersons who also deem those end states as desirable.

Within the competing values framework (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983), different influences might be expected in organizations with a clan culture that emphasizes cohesiveness and teamwork, which would clash with a narcissist's selfishness, exploitiveness, sense of entitlement, and sense of superiority (Emmons, 1987). Examples of these different influences follow. An adhocracy culture might appeal more to narcissists due to its emphasis on risk taking, and narcissists are risk takers due to their inflated self-confidence (Twenge and Campbell, 2009). Hierarchy cultures may have a negative influence on the commitment of narcissists since predictability and uniformity are promoted, and narcissists believe they are special and unique due their sense of superiority (Campbell et al., 2011). Market cultures may resonate with narcissists since they emphasize competitiveness which aligns with narcissists' need to self-enhance and maintain their sense of superiority (Campbell et al., 2011).

## Discussion

The goal of this paper was to present a framework to illustrate how narcissism in salespersons may influence their customer orientation, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This study illustrates two ways salespersons high in narcissism can undermine the effectiveness of a sales organization. First, narcissism in a salesperson can undermine organizational efforts to implement marketing strategies based on relationships with customers by affecting each dimension of a salesperson's customer orientation. A narcissistic salesperson would be less likely to focus on a customer's needs due to their lack of empathy. This would undermine the customer orientation dimension. A salesperson high in narcissism would also be more likely to be exploitive to make a sale for their personal gain, which would strengthen the selling orientation. The net effect would be counterproductive to fostering customer loyalty and building long term, profitable customer relationships based on trust and mutual goals.

Second, the proposed adverse effects of narcissism on several of the various dimensions of job satisfaction could negatively affect overall job satisfaction and could contribute directly to higher levels of voluntary turnover. Finally, the proposed lack of organizational commitment, independently and in combination with the potential adverse effects on job satisfaction, could lead to higher levels of voluntary turnover in the sales force. Higher levels of turnover impede the stability of the sales force and produce high costs for the organization.

Narcissism in salespersons presents a challenge to sales organizations. It would be easy to recommend that narcissistic applicants be screened out of sales jobs, but it would be very unrealistic to accomplish this for several reasons. Individuals with relatively higher levels of narcissism seem to be attracted to sales positions (Soyer et al., 1999), the coming generation of applicants will likely be more narcissistic than previous generations (Twenge et al., 2010; Twenge and Campbell, 2009), and narcissists tend to be more favorably evaluated by trained interviewers (Campbell et al., 2011). This may be due to their boldness, high self-confidence, gregariousness, charm, and ambition (Back et al., 2010; Paulhus, 1998).

Turnover in sales positions is a persistent and pervasive problem, so recruiting is a vital aspect of keeping a sales force consistently productive. Since the youngest generation in the work force (Gen Y, or Millennials) were born between 1982 and 1999, and represent the vast majority of new entrants in the work force (Twenge et al., 2010), it appears a more important objective will lie in developing strategies and tactics to effectively manage narcissistic salespersons effectively instead of screening them out in the selection process.

Trait narcissism seems to be a candidate for inclusion in managerial assessments of job candidates. A narcissistic salesperson can be quite charming, self-confident, competitive, and resilient. All of these can be favorable characteristics for salespersons in terms of personality traits. However, if accompanied by high levels of narcissism including entitlement, exploitiveness, and antagonistic behaviors, detrimental outcomes could result. Hiring less narcissistic salespersons should lead to more customer-oriented behaviors by salespersons and result in higher levels of customer loyalty. Additionally, selling activities involving teams would be more likely to succeed since credit for accomplishments would be shared and a more cooperative, versus competitive, environment would be present. The use of a selling orientation, which is exploitive and can lead to short term personal success, fits a narcissist's personal goals

quite well. This orientation has been associated with lower performance, lower satisfaction, and increased turnover (McFarland, 2003; Singh and Rhoads, 1991; Teas, 1983).

Finally, certain variables, such as organizational culture, which can influence the nature of the sales job, may produce intervening effects on the proposed relationships in the model. However, as a potential remedy to narcissistic behaviors among salespersons, completely changing an organizational culture is impractical. It may be more reasonable to focus on enhancing the desirability of specific instrumental values (Feather, 1995) in order to attenuate the effects of narcissism on salespersons' attitudes and behaviors. Such actions could help an organization accomplish their goals highlighted by their terminal values (Feather, 1995).

Twenge and Campbell (2009) provide two specific suggestions of such instrumental values to combat the negative effects of narcissism. First, they encourage practicing gratitude and encouraging others to reflect on what they are grateful for as a means to counteract entitlement (Twenge and Campbell, 2009). They also encourage practicing and encouraging the practice of forgiveness, which has been shown to have a beneficial effect on relationships. Forgiveness and gratitude have been shown to have positive relationships with customer orientation, and forgiveness a negative relationship with a selling orientation in salespersons (Smith, 2012). Empirical research to test these propositions and potential intervening variables in this framework is encouraged to provide a more complete understanding of narcissism's effect on salespersons' job-related attitudes.

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