



Narcissism, perfectionism, and workplace boredom: an unexpected moderation effect

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study investigated the associations between narcissistic traits, perfectionism, and workplace boredom in a sample of 210 Hungarian employees. Drawing on prior research linking grandiose narcissism to both high perfectionistic strivings and boredom, we examined whether workplace boredom moderates the relationship between grandiose narcissism and perfectionistic strivings, expecting that individuals high in grandiose narcissism would report lower perfectionistic strivings in contexts perceived as boring. Participants completed validated self-report measures of narcissism (Pathological Narcissistic Inventory), perfectionism (Short Almost Perfect Scale), and workplace boredom (Achievement Emotions Questionnaire items). Analyses included zero-order correlations, hierarchical linear regression, and PROCESS moderation (Model 1, 5,000 bootstraps). Contrary to our hypothesis, higher workplace boredom was associated with a stronger -rather than weaker- relationship between grandiose narcissism and perfectionistic strivings ($\beta=0.22, p < .01$). Individuals with higher grandiose narcissism scores reported greater perfectionistic strivings under conditions they perceived as boring, compared to those lower in grandiose narcissism. Vulnerable narcissism was associated with perfectionistic concerns and boredom, but not strivings. These findings contribute to the growing evidence on the adaptive features of narcissism, suggesting that boredom may serve as a motivational cue. The results offer practical insights for job design, performance management, and personality-context fit strategies in the workplace.

Keywords Grandiose narcissism · Vulnerable narcissism · Perfectionistic strivings · Perfectionistic concerns · Workplace boredom · Personality-context fit

Introduction

Narcissism, perfectionism, and workplace boredom are all important predictors of workplace performance. Traditionally, narcissism and perfectionism are positioned among the “darker” aspects of personality (Marcus & Zeigler-Hill, 2015) due to their consistent associations with negative workplace outcomes. However, recent studies highlight more nuanced relationships, including circumstances in

which these traits interact to influence performance. One underexplored question is what links these constructs: when and why do narcissistic individuals behave in perfectionistic ways?

Workplace boredom -a state of low arousal and dissatisfaction arising from under-stimulating work tasks- may be a critical link. It is frequently associated with narcissism (Ksinan et al., 2021) and can undermine performance standards by prompting disengagement (Elpidorou, 2023). Yet, to our knowledge, no prior empirical study has examined how these variables jointly operate in workplace settings. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates their interrelationships to advance theories on the workplace emergence of narcissism and perfectionism and to identify conditions under which individuals high in grandiose narcissism may thrive.

On theoretical grounds, we expected that individuals high in grandiose narcissism would disengage in situations they perceived as boring. However, moderation emerged in

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the opposite direction: individuals high in grandiose narcissism displayed the greatest perfectionistic striving when experiencing relatively higher boredom, whereas those low in grandiose narcissism showed the reverse pattern. This suggests that, rather than undermining performance standards, boredom can, in some cases, fuel persistence among narcissistic individuals when such persistence aligns with their long-term goals. As the late basketball legend Kobe Bryant once reflected, achieving greatness requires embracing “those boring, agonizing moments.” Such endurance is not limited to sports; it is equally relevant in professional domains where sustained effort through monotony is essential.

In the following sections, we outline the theoretical foundations of this work, present our empirical findings, and explore potential explanations for why the observed moderation ran counter to our initial hypotheses – highlighting both theoretical implications and practical applications for organizational settings.

Literature review

Narcissism is a multidimensional construct, with one of the most common distinctions being between grandiose and vulnerable forms (Crowe et al., 2019). Grandiose narcissism involves high self-esteem, assertiveness, and confident self-presentation, whereas vulnerable narcissism reflects insecurity, hypersensitivity to negative feedback, and defensiveness. Despite their differences, both forms share a core of exaggerated self-importance, a strong need for external validation, an aversion to criticism, and a tendency toward arrogance and dismissiveness (Krizan & Herlache, 2018; Pincus & Roche, 2011). Their workplace consequences, however, differ: grandiose narcissism can sometimes relate to positive outcomes, while vulnerable narcissism is more consistently maladaptive (Biolik, 2025; Sękowski et al., 2023).

Perfectionism is also a multifaceted construct, often conceptualized as perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns (Stoeber et al., 2020). Perfectionistic strivings involve setting and pursuing exceptionally high personal standards, while perfectionistic concerns encompass fear of failure, sensitivity to criticism, and negative emotional reactions to imperfection. Strivings can be performance-enhancing, whereas perfectionistic concerns tend to undermine well-being and outcomes (Rice et al., 2014; Rice & Liu, 2020; Spagnoli et al., 2021). Research has consistently found that grandiose narcissism is positively associated with perfectionistic strivings, whereas vulnerable narcissism correlates more strongly with perfectionistic concerns (Clark et al., 2010; Stoeber et al., 2015). Individuals high in grandiose narcissism often see themselves as exceptional

and, to maintain this self-image, set very high personal performance goals without significant self-doubt about failure (Stoeber et al., 2015). Conversely, those high in vulnerable narcissism possess unstable self-esteem and a strong fear of negative evaluation, making them more prone to self-critical perfectionism (Pincus et al., 2009; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010; Pincus & Roche 2011).

A different line of research points to a positive association between both forms of narcissism and boredom (Wink & Donahue, 1997; though see Ksinan et al., 2021; Zondag, 2013 for contrasting results). Boredom – an achievement-related emotion – is generally understood as a low-arousal, dissatisfying state arising from objectively repetitive tasks or from a subjective appraisal of insufficient stimulation (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993). It is typically viewed as a pervasive and detrimental affective state in workplace contexts (Kim et al., 2024; Mael & Jex, 2015). Importantly, boredom has been described as a defining feature of narcissism (Ksinan et al., 2021), with three main theoretical pathways linking the constructs.

First, grandiose narcissists’ sensation-seeking tendencies may heighten their likelihood of perceiving certain situations as boring, particularly when tasks lack novelty or stimulation (Krizan & Herlache, 2018). Second, they may view routine workplace tasks as beneath them, which can prompt psychological disengagement and reduced performance expectations. Indirect evidence suggests that narcissistic antagonism is often triggered by duty-related tasks – situations where work “simply needs to be done” (Bauditz et al., 2025). Third, when grandiose narcissistic individuals set unrealistically high standards and anticipate falling short, they may protect their ego by reframing the task as boring. This aligns with self-handicapping research linking narcissism to preemptive excuses for potential failure – one of which is perceiving the task as dull or unengaging (Rhodewalt et al., 2006). Across these scenarios, boredom serves as a mental and emotional withdrawal strategy that preserves self-image, a core motivational driver of narcissism (Beck et al., 2004).

These dynamics fit within broader psychodynamic models of narcissism (Flett et al., 2014), which emphasize a misalignment between the actual self and inner ambitions on one hand, and the grandiose self and its external aspirations on the other (Ksinan et al., 2021). This discrepancy can fuel excessively high expectations and lead to feelings of emptiness and boredom when those expectations are unmet – whether due to real or anticipated failure.

This theoretical background presents an apparent contradiction: individuals high in grandiose narcissism are often portrayed as ambitious employees maintaining high performance standards to secure recognition, yet their traits may also predispose them to perceive more situations as boring, increasing the risk of disengagement.

The present study examines whether boredom moderates the relationship between grandiose narcissism and performance strivings - specifically, whether grandiose narcissism is positively associated with perfectionistic strivings in contexts perceived as engaging, but negatively associated in situations perceived as boring, where such individuals may instead seek more stimulating opportunities. To provide a more nuanced understanding of how narcissism, perfectionism, and boredom interact, we also included perfectionistic concerns and vulnerable narcissism in the model, as these variables can further clarify the relationships between the two personality constructs and their links through workplace boredom.

We hypothesized a positive association between grandiose narcissism and perfectionistic strivings (H1), with workplace boredom moderating this relationship such that situations perceived as boring would attenuate perfectionistic strivings among individuals high in grandiose narcissism (H2). We further expected that vulnerable narcissism would be positively associated with both perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns (H3 and H4), as well as with workplace boredom (H5). Given the mixed findings in prior literature, we did not advance a specific hypothesis for the association between grandiose narcissism and perfectionistic concerns. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model.

Methods

Participants and procedure

The study involved 210 Hungarian employees who completed an on-line survey. Participants provided written informed consent prior to participation, and the study received ethical approval from [Anonymous University]. The sample consisted of 64 men and 146 women, with a

mean age of 36.89 ($SD=12.33$; range: 19–66). 174 participants held non-managerial roles, and 36 held middle management positions. The sample was relatively well-educated: 49 participants reported high school education or less as their highest level of education, 88 held a bachelor’s degree, and 73 held a master’s degree.

Participants were recruited through social media and via the authors’ contacts, who were asked to distribute the survey link. The survey was hosted on Google Forms. Recruitment targeted employed individuals who worked continuously for the same company for at least six months and for a minimum of 20 h per week.

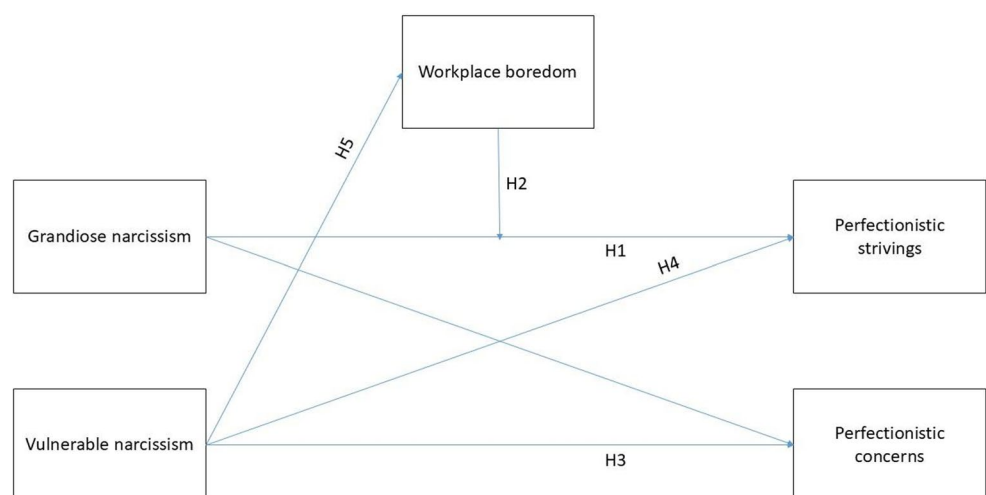
To determine the required sample size for the statistical model, we used GPower 3.1.9.7. (Faul et al., 2009). The analysis was conducted for a moderated multiple regression model with four predictors (the two independent variables, the moderator, and an interaction term). Based on a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), a significance level of $\alpha=0.05$, and a desired power of 0.95, the analysis indicated a minimum required sample of 146 participants. Additionally, following recommendations by Schönbrodt and Perugini (2013), who advise a sample size of 200–250 for stable correlation estimates, we aimed to recruit at least 200 participants. This target was met with our final sample of 210.

Participants were first informed about the study’s aims and the voluntary, anonymous nature of participation. After providing informed consent, they completed demographic questions followed by measures of perfectionism, narcissism, and boredom. Upon completion, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures

To ensure relevance to the organizational context, all items were adapted by appending phrases such as “in the workplace” or “at work.”

Fig. 1 Hypothesized conceptual model of narcissism, perfectionism, and workplace boredom



Outcome variables

Perfectionism was assessed using the Short Almost Perfect Scale (SAPS; Rice et al., 2014; Hungarian translation and adaptation by Reinhardt et al., 2021), a validated tool comprising eight self-report items. The scale is divided into two subscales, each consisting of four items: high performance standards (e.g., “I have high expectations for myself at work”), which align with perfectionistic strivings, and perfectionistic discrepancy (e.g., “Doing my best at work never seems to be enough”), reflecting perfectionistic concerns (Stoeber et al., 2020). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater levels of the respective perfectionism dimensions. Both subscales demonstrated adequate internal reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values of 0.83 for perfectionistic strivings and 0.79 for perfectionistic concerns.

Predictors

Narcissism was assessed using the Pathological Narcissistic Inventory (PNI; Pincus et al., 2009; Hungarian translation and adaptation by Prontvai et al., 2018). The PNI is a multidimensional self-report measure designed to evaluate pathological narcissism across two broad dimensions: grandiose narcissism, which encompasses exploitativeness, self-sacrificing self-enhancement, grandiose fantasy, and entitlement rage; and vulnerable narcissism, characterized by contingent self-esteem, hiding the self, and devaluing. Sample items include “In my workplace, I can make anyone believe anything I want them to” for grandiose narcissism, and “I try to hide my need for others in the workplace to admire me” for vulnerable narcissism. The inventory comprises 52 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me), with higher scores reflecting higher levels of narcissistic traits. The PNI is suitable for use in both clinical and non-clinical samples (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). In the present study, both dimensions demonstrated excellent internal reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values of 0.90 for grandiose narcissism and 0.95 for vulnerable narcissism.

Moderators

Workplace boredom was assessed using 11 self-report items from the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ; Pekrun et al., 2011), translated into Hungarian by our research

group following established methodological guidelines (Hambleton, 2001). The process involved translation and back-translation, with the original and back-translated versions compared by an independent reviewer to ensure semantic equivalence.

The items evaluated various aspects of boredom, including feelings of boredom (“I easily get bored during my work”), mind wandering (“Since I get bored at work, I start thinking about other things”), perceptions of meaninglessness (“I find my work meaningless”), and the slowing down of time (“Since time drags on, I often check my watch while working”), capturing the conceptual breadth of workplace boredom. Participants rated their responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree).

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using maximum likelihood extraction with promax rotation. Results indicated a unidimensional factor structure, with all items loading at least 0.65 or higher on the primary factor. A composite score for workplace boredom was calculated by averaging the items, which demonstrated excellent internal reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.94).

Data analytic procedure

All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 29. To fully capture the model, we performed the following analyses. First, before hypothesis testing, we addressed the potential for common method variance (CMV) due to the exclusive use of self-report measures by conducting Harman’s single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2024). Second, we calculated zero-order correlations to examine the relationships between all study variables. Third, we conducted two separate hierarchical linear regression analyses. In both models, the predictor variables were grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism, and workplace boredom. The dependent variable was perfectionistic strivings in the first model and perfectionistic concerns in the second model. Multicollinearity was assessed prior to regression analysis using VIF and tolerance values to ensure that predictors did not exhibit problematic levels of multicollinearity. Finally, we used the PROCESS macro version 4.1 for SPSS (Hayes, 2022) to test the proposed moderation model (Model 1). A standard procedure was followed, using a 5,000 bootstrap sample to generate 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. In the moderation model, grandiose narcissism was the predictor variable, workplace boredom was the moderator, perfectionistic strivings was the dependent variable, and vulnerable narcissism was included as a control variable.

Results

Preliminary results

Before conducting the main analyses, we assessed the potential impact of common method variance using Harman’s single-factor test. The analysis revealed that a single factor did not account for most of the variance (25.95% < 50%), suggesting CMV was not a serious concern in this dataset (Podsakoff et al., 2024).

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables (i.e., means and standard deviations), and the bivariate correlations between them.

As expected, the correlational analyses revealed positive associations between grandiose narcissism and perfectionistic strivings. Positive associations were also observed between grandiose narcissism and workplace boredom, as well as between grandiose narcissism and perfectionistic concerns. Similarly, as hypothesized, vulnerable narcissism was positively correlated with workplace boredom and perfectionistic concerns. However, there was no significant association between vulnerable narcissism and perfectionistic strivings. As anticipated, grandiose narcissism positively correlated with vulnerable narcissism, and perfectionistic strivings was positively correlated with perfectionistic concerns.

Main analysis

After calculating correlations between the variables, two separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated acceptable levels for all predictors, with VIF values ranging from 1.1 to 2.4 and

tolerance values above 0.42, confirming no significant multicollinearity concerns.

As shown in Table 2, grandiose narcissism was a significant positive predictor of perfectionistic strivings, while workplace boredom was a significant negative predictor. Vulnerable narcissism, however, was not significantly associated with perfectionistic strivings.

For perfectionistic concerns, vulnerable narcissism was a strong positive predictor, whereas grandiose narcissism demonstrated a significant negative association. Workplace boredom was not significantly related to perfectionistic concerns.

These results remained consistent when controlling for demographic variables, including gender, age, and education. Table 2 presents detailed coefficients and statistics.

The moderation analysis revealed a significant interaction between grandiose narcissism and workplace boredom in predicting perfectionistic strivings ($B=0.22, p < .01$). Simple slope analyses further clarified the nature of this interaction: at high levels of workplace boredom (+1 SD), grandiose narcissism was a significant positive predictor of perfectionistic strivings ($B=0.43, p < .001$). At moderate levels of boredom (mean), the relationship was marginally significant ($B=0.18, p = .06$), whereas at low levels of boredom (-1 SD), the relationship was non-significant ($B=0.10, p = .34$). The overall model explained 13.5% of the variance in perfectionistic strivings, $R^2 = 0.15, F(4, 205) = 7.995, p < .001$.

Figure 2 illustrates this interaction effect, demonstrating that workplace boredom amplifies the association between grandiose narcissism and perfectionistic striving behaviors, particularly at moderate to high levels of boredom.

Table 1 Zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics for study variables

	Range	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Grandiose narcissism	[0, 5]	2.02	0.90	-	0.74**	0.18**	0.22**	0.26**
2. Vulnerable narcissism	[0, 5]	1.50	0.83		-	0.30**	0.13	0.48**
3. Workplace boredom	[1, 5]	1.70	0.85			-	-0.16*	0.14*
4. Strivings	[1, 7]	5.90	0.89				-	0.30**
5. Concerns	[1, 7]	3.41	1.41					-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Strivings = Perfectionistic Strivings. Concerns = Perfectionistic Concerns

Table 2 Regression of perfectionism (strivings and concerns) on narcissism (grandiose and vulnerable), and workplace boredom

	Perfectionistic Strivings						Perfectionistic Concerns					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i> 95% <i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> _{semi-partial}	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i> 95% <i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i> _{semi-partial}		
Grandiose narcissism	.25	.10	.05, .44	.01	.16	-.34	.14	-.62, -.07	.02	-.15		
Vulnerable narcissism	.01	.11	-.21, .22	.95	.00	1.11	.16	.80, 1.42	<.01	.42		
Workplace boredom	-.22	.07	-.37, -.08	<.01	-.16	-.45	.03	-.24, .18	.77	-.02		
Model summary	$R^2 = .09, F(3, 206) = 6.73, p < .001$						$R^2 = .26, F(3, 206) = 23.56, p < .001$					

B = unstandardized regression coefficient. These findings also hold true when controlling for demographic variables (gender, age, and education)

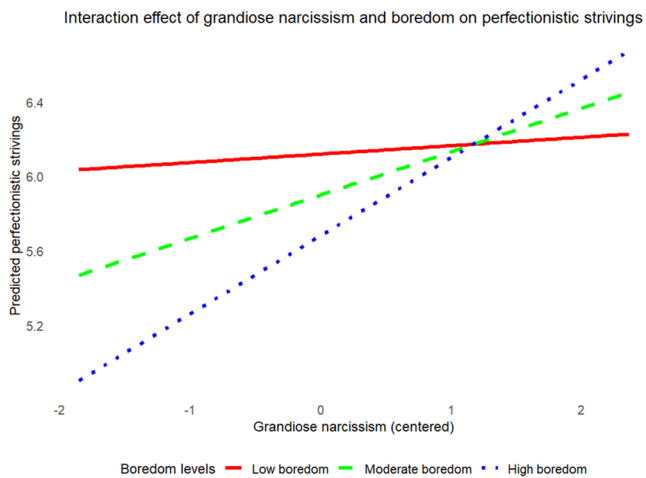


Fig. 2 Interaction effect of grandiose narcissism and boredom on perfectionistic strivings

Discussion

This study examined the associations between grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, perfectionistic strivings and concerns, and workplace boredom, a phenomenon increasingly recognized as relevant in organizational contexts (Schott & Fischer, 2023). Consistent with prior research, grandiose narcissism was positively associated with perfectionistic strivings, reinforcing the view that some narcissistic traits align with high achievement goals and self-imposed performance demands (Stoeber et al., 2015). However, in contrast to our expectations, the interaction between grandiose narcissism and boredom emerged in a direction opposite to our initial hypothesis. Specifically, individuals high in grandiose narcissism reported increased perfectionistic strivings under conditions of higher perceived boredom – a pattern not observed among participants lower in grandiose narcissism.

This finding challenges the common assumption that boredom typically leads to disengagement and diminished performance (Ksinan et al., 2021). While the cross-sectional nature of our data precludes causal conclusions, one interpretation is that boredom may sometimes be experienced by individuals high in grandiose narcissism as an opportunity to reaffirm competence and persistence. Rather than withdrawing, they may view enduring monotonous tasks as a way to differentiate themselves (“I can endure these boring, agonizing moments”), consistent with self-enhancement motives.

In contrast, vulnerable narcissism was unrelated to perfectionistic strivings, replicating prior findings that it is more strongly linked to perfectionistic concerns (Clark et al., 2010; Stoeber et al., 2015). This aligns with conceptualizations of vulnerable narcissism as characterized by unstable self-esteem, fear of negative evaluation, and heightened sensitivity to personal shortcomings.

Theoretical contributions

These results can be integrated into the broader literature on the nature of narcissism and workplace boredom. Our findings reinforce the importance of distinguishing between the two forms of narcissism – grandiose and vulnerable. Consistent with prior research, the present results support the view that grandiose narcissism is not “all dark,” whereas vulnerable narcissism “appears to have nothing but drawbacks” (Zondag, 2013, p. 571). This distinction aligns with recent efforts to clarify the mixed effects of narcissism, particularly its potential benefits in performance and career success (Fatfouta, 2019; Furnham et al., 2013; Szabó et al., 2023).

If one considers the criteria by Marcus and Zeigler-Hill (2015) – that “dark” traits should consistently display associations with problematic outcomes – the present findings contribute to a growing literature indicating that grandiose narcissism does not fully meet this criterion. That said, it is important to acknowledge that all forms of narcissism can be problematic in workplaces “where empathy, care, and concern for others are desired: practically everywhere” (Prusik & Szulawski, 2019). In this light, our results do not imply that grandiose narcissism is broadly desirable, but rather that it may, under certain conditions, be associated with adaptive performance-related outcomes.

In essence, narcissism’s impact depends on its form: grandiose narcissism may promote performance through perfectionistic strivings and traits such as resilience (Papa-georgiou et al., 2019), mental toughness (Szabó et al., 2022), leadership potential (Paunonen et al., 2006), and positive work attitudes and motivation (Szabó et al., 2023). In contrast, vulnerable narcissism is associated with perfectionistic concerns and other maladaptive patterns (Biolik, 2025).

The present study also adds to the reconceptualization of boredom as a self-regulatory cue rather than a purely aversive state. For highly goal-oriented individuals – such as those with grandiose narcissistic traits – boredom may function as a motivational signal to re-engage and demonstrate competence (Elpidorou, 2018). According to Westgate and Wilson (2018) boredom arises when an activity lacks congruence with one’s active (often short-term) goals; overcoming boredom thus involves reframing the task’s meaning. Individuals with grandiose narcissism may be especially adept at such reframing, enabling them to maintain or even increase their performance standards.

This interpretation aligns with deliberate practice theory (Ericsson et al., 1993), which emphasizes that long-term mastery requires sustained effort through repetitive, often unstimulating activities. From this perspective, boredom is not merely an obstacle but an emotional challenge that must be managed. Individuals with high achievement orientation may perceive enduring boredom as part of the

path to success, even deriving pride from persistence. This contrasts with flow theory (Csikszentmihályi, 1990), which focuses on intrinsically rewarding experiences. As Ericsson and Ward (2007) argue, the belief that success comes from effortless engagement can be a “destructive myth,” overlooking the role of deliberate effort in skill development.

Finally, the ability to sustain motivation under boredom may also relate to self-generated feedback mechanisms. Flow theory emphasizes the role of immediate feedback for engagement, but many real-world tasks, particularly in routine or low-stimulation environments, lack such reinforcement. Given their strong achievement orientation (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006), individuals high in grandiose narcissism may compensate through internal self-monitoring and self-evaluation, sustaining effort in the absence of external rewards.

Practical contributions

These findings hold practical implications for performance management, talent acquisition, and job design. While the interaction effect between grandiose narcissism and boredom was modest, it aligns with recent theorizing by Schott & Fischer (2023), who argue that bored employees are not necessarily problematic. Rather than seeking to eliminate boredom altogether, managers might benefit from creating conditions -or identifying individuals- that enable positive engagement with monotony.

Our results suggest that individuals high in grandiose narcissism may possess dispositional traits that help them sustain performance under low-stimulation conditions, offering a complementary pathway to managing boredom in the workplace. In roles where monotony is difficult to avoid -but long-term success delivers recognition, prestige, or influence- HR professionals could consider matching personality traits to job demands. This type of motivational fit may reduce productivity loss and enhance job satisfaction, supporting sustainable employee engagement.

However, such traits must be managed with care. While grandiose narcissism can facilitate persistence under monotony, it is also linked to interpersonal challenges such as arrogance, hypercompetitiveness, and reduced receptiveness to feedback. Personality-task alignment should therefore complement, rather than replace, broader interventions that promote intrinsic motivation, constructive feedback, and a stimulating work climate.

Although it was not the central focus of the current study, the findings also suggest a different set of implications for individuals without grandiose narcissistic characteristics. For these employees, low -and in some cases even moderate- levels of perceived workplace boredom was associated with lower perfectionistic strivings. This pattern resonates

with perspectives on decent work (the basic conditions all employees are entitled to) and meaningful work (work that offers significance and purpose). If work represents a core aspect of human life, then under-stimulating environments -or environments perceived as such- may reduce opportunities for employees to experience these conditions, which are both linked to beneficial work outcomes (Blustein et al., 2023a; Kim et al., 2021).

From an equity perspective (Yan et al., 2025), supporting employees in finding work environments that align with their strengths can help promote fair opportunities for meaningful and sustainable employment. This is not solely a matter of performance – it also relates to employee mental health and well-being (Blustein et al., 2023b).

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. Most notably, its cross-sectional design prevents causal interpretations. Although many of the processes discussed are dynamic in nature, the study’s design necessitates caution when drawing conclusions. While our findings suggest that individuals with higher levels of grandiose narcissism reported greater perfectionistic strivings in situations they perceived as more boring -compared to those with lower levels- our explanatory framework remains speculative and is not the only possible interpretation. Although it is plausible to assume that personality traits precede emotional states and performance-related goals, both boredom and perfectionism can also be conceptualized as dispositional constructs, further complicating directionality.

Another methodological limitation concerns common method variance, given that all measures were self-reported and complete during the same session. We addressed this by conducting Harman’s single-factor test. However, as Podsakoff et al. (2024) note, common method variance is inherently challenging to eliminate entirely, and statistical tests provide only partial assurance. Future research should therefore consider procedural remedies -such as temporal separation of measures, multi-source data collection, or alternative measurement methods- to reduce the potential inflation of observed associations.

A further limitation concerns the measurement of boredom. The items used in this study primarily assessed general workplace boredom, making it somewhat ambiguous whether they captured state boredom or trait boredom. This distinction is theoretically important, as it shapes how the results are interpreted – particularly regarding directionality, persistence over time, and whether the observed effects reflect personality-situation interactions or enduring dispositions. Future research could address this ambiguity more precisely through ecological momentary assessment to

capture state-level fluctuations, and/or longitudinal designs to examine stability over time. Clarifying this measurement issue in future studies would allow for more precise conclusions about whether boredom functions as a situational cue or as a chronic individual tendency influencing work behavior. Such work could also explore the theoretical possibility of identifying distinct profiles of persistently narcissistic, perfectionistic, and boredom-prone employees, extending the literature on narcissistic perfectionists (Flett et al., 2014).

In terms of sample characteristics, the participants were predominantly young, educated Hungarian females, who generally reported low levels of workplace boredom. As such, what was categorized as ‘more boring’ in our study may not reflect objectively boring conditions. Moreover, the demographic composition of the sample may constrain the generalizability of our findings. Cultural factors (e.g., individualist vs. collectivist, feedback culture) may influence both narcissistic expression and boredom tolerance, and the occupational contexts represented in our sample may not reflect broader workplace experiences. It remains unclear whether similar findings would emerge in more diverse populations or under *genuinely* boring circumstances.

Future research directions

Future studies should address these limitations by employing non-cross-sectional designs, such as longitudinal or experimental studies, to better examine causal relationships. Additionally, recruiting more demographically and occupationally diverse samples would enhance generalizability. Further studies should also incorporate boredom measures that clearly distinguish between state and trait aspects, allowing for more precise interpretations. Finally, future research should move beyond performance standards and directly assess actual performance, as standards alone serve only as proxy indicators of goal pursuit and success.

Conclusion

In summary, this study highlights the nuanced ways in which narcissism, perfectionism, and workplace boredom intersect. Grandiose narcissism was linked to higher perfectionistic strivings, and -contrary to expectations- this relationship strengthened under higher perceived boredom. Vulnerable narcissism, in contrast, aligned more closely with perfectionistic concerns and showed no such moderation effect.

These findings add to the growing evidence that grandiose narcissism, while interpersonally problematic, can sometimes be associated with adaptive performance tendencies.

They also suggest that boredom may, in certain contexts, act as a motivator rather than a barrier to sustained effort.

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Data availability The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article are available on the Open Science Framework: https://osf.io/qwms7/?view_only=2cf03549178f41fab3fc0bbc3353e642.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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