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# Impact of behavioral integrity on workplace ostracism

## The moderating roles of narcissistic personality and psychological distance

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between leader's behavioral integrity and his/her workplace ostracism as well as to test the moderating roles of narcissistic personality and psychological distance on that relationship.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected from 13 state universities in Turkey. The sample included 1,003 randomly chosen faculty members and deans of their faculties. The moderating roles of narcissistic personality and psychological distance on the behavioral integrity and workplace ostracism relationship were tested using the moderated hierarchical regression analysis.

**Findings** – The moderated hierarchical regression analysis results revealed that there was a significant negative relationship between leader's behavioral integrity and his/her workplace ostracism. In addition, the negative relationship between behavioral integrity and workplace ostracism was weaker when both leader's narcissistic personality and psychological distance were higher than when they were lower.

**Practical implications** – This study showed that behavioral integrity lowered workplace ostracism. Workplace ostracism could be reduced by displaying the behavioral integrity (the alignment between words and deeds) and breaking down the barriers preventing effective communication and discussion in the organization. Moreover, the results of this study indicated that psychological distance was a significant predictor of workplace ostracism. Organizational practices and policies, especially human resource practices, should be carefully designed and implemented as to minimize psychological distance, an important source of employee dissatisfaction and distrust.

**Originality/value** – The study provides new insights into the influence that behavioral integrity may have on workplace ostracism and the moderating roles of narcissistic personality and psychological distance in the link between behavioral integrity and workplace ostracism. The paper also offers a practical assistance to employees in the higher education and their leaders interested in building trust and lowering workplace ostracism.

**Keywords** Behavioural integrity, Narcissistic personality, Psychological distance, Workplace ostracism

**Paper type** Research paper



### Introduction

Scholarly work has identified that workplace ostracism should be a common and universal phenomenon that occurs in every organization (Ferris *et al.*, 2008; Wu *et al.*, 2012). Ostracism refers to the act of being excluded and ignored. Hence, workplace ostracism may decrease the opportunity for social interaction, which is essential in influencing

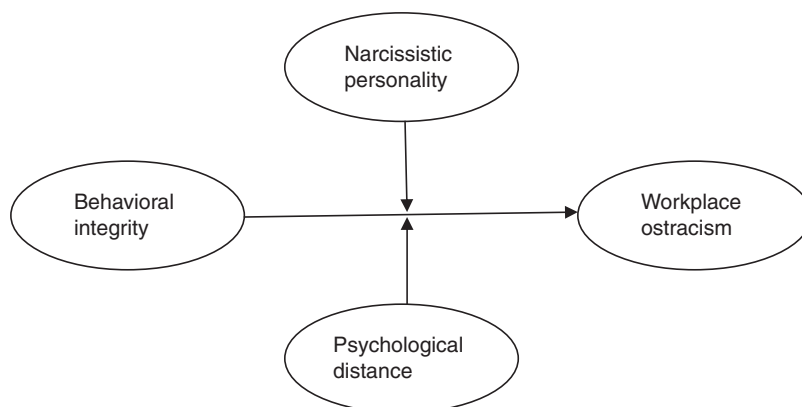
organizational members' psychological health, behavior and even performance. This is particularly true for the educational institutions because workplace ostracism threatens educational administrators' and employees' engagements, thereby leading to lower service performance. Given this deduction, researchers have sought to understand the impact of workplace ostracism in the organizations. For example, ostracized organizational members may display deteriorated psychological well-beings (Ferris *et al.*, 2008; Wu *et al.*, 2012), unfavorable job attitudes (Ferris *et al.*, 2008; Richman and Leary, 2009), job withdrawals (Ferris *et al.*, 2008), decreased job performance contributions (Hitlan *et al.*, 2006) and even workplace deviance (Ferris *et al.*, 2008; Hitlan and Noel, 2009). Despite this, researchers who have explored the outcomes of workplace ostracism have mostly paid attention to employees' psychology and performance (Wu *et al.*, 2012). The empirical literature has not extensively examined the antecedents of workplace ostracism (Ferris *et al.*, 2008; Hitlan and Noel, 2009). Moreover, although a recent research by Leung *et al.* (2011) emphasized that workplace ostracism should be a pervasive phenomenon in service organizations, researchers have not yet fully explored its impact on leaders in service industries such as higher education institutions (Leung *et al.*, 2011).

The aim of this study is to examine the moderating effects of narcissistic personality and psychological distance on the relationship between behavioral integrity and workplace ostracism in the higher education institutions. This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, it is a response to the call for more research on organizational, interpersonal or individual difference factors that may serve as moderators, buffers, or even antidotes to workplace ostracism and its effects (Scott *et al.*, 2013). Second, given that individual differences factors are central to most models of workplace ostracism (Wu *et al.*, 2012), it is important to examine the direct and moderating effects of individual differences factors in a single study.

Therefore, the pursuit of the identification of the major individual differences variables leading to the low workplace ostracism may give us some concrete ideas in terms of possible remedies for both leaders and employees in higher education institutions. Figure 1 summarizes the theoretical model that guided this study.

### Behavioral integrity and workplace ostracism

Follower trust in leadership and leaders is an important topic in organizational research (Palanski and Yammarino, 2009). For example, Dirks and Ferrin (2002)



**Figure 1.**  
Hypothesized model

showed that when followers trust their leaders, they tend to perform better, display more organizational citizenship behaviors and greater organizational commitment, experience greater job satisfaction, and have less intent to leave the organization. In another meta-analysis, Colquitt *et al.* (2007) showed that trust in the leader is positively related to follower risk taking, task performance, citizenship behavior and negatively related to counterproductive behavior.

Emerging research on behavioral integrity has posited strong theoretical links to trust. For example, Simons (2002) explicated the theoretical links between behavioral integrity and trust, with the key point being that a leader's high behavioral integrity may provide followers with a sense of certainty regarding the actions that the leader will take. With this sense of certainty, a follower is more likely to trust the leader. Simons *et al.* (2007) have also provided some initial empirical evidence that supports the idea that behavioral integrity may lead to trust. Based on Simons' reasoning and initial evidence, Palanski and Yammarino (2009) proposed that leader behavioral integrity has a positive impact on follower trust in the leader. In addition, Colquitt *et al.* (2007), drawing upon social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), noted that trust also plays an important role in leader-follower relationships for two additional reasons. First, in the absence of a comprehensive formal contract, leader-follower relationships have a built-in element of vulnerability, which makes trust necessary for such relationships to function. Second, as a facet of trustworthiness (Palanski and Yammarino, 2009), integrity is a type of currency, which engenders the motivation to reciprocate within a social exchange.

Belongingness theory acknowledges that individuals who are unpredictable are likely to become targets of ostracism (e.g. Kurzban and Leary, 2001; Scott *et al.*, 2013). Integrating this reasoning with research from the social exchange literature, we propose that when a leader displays inconsistency between his or her words and actions, his or her willingness to engage in mutually beneficial social exchange will be called into question, and others are likely to view him or her as untrustworthy (i.e. unpredictable from an exchange standpoint; Darley, 2004; Fitness, 2001; Robinson *et al.*, 2004). In an organizational setting, individuals are generally expected to work together to achieve common organizational goals (Dunn and Schweitzer, 2006). Inconsistency between words and actions violates this expectation and suggests that the perpetrator of the inconsistency is not genuinely concerned about others, thereby damaging trust between colleagues (Darley, 2004; Fitness, 2001). This way, lack of behavioral integrity undermines the interpersonal benevolence or goodwill that is necessary for establishing trust between workers (e.g. Gill and Sypher, 2009).

Once interpersonal trust is violated, individuals are often unwilling to form attachments with or make themselves vulnerable to others; hesitant to interact with those whom are distrusted; and reluctant to restore or maintain these relationships with those who have violated their trust (Ashleigh *et al.*, 2012; Scott *et al.*, 2013). Based on these findings, we argue that lack of leader's integrity is likely to cause employees' distrust in leader. On the other hand, employees' perception of distrust is generally viewed as a threat to individual or group prosperity, effective functioning and social exchange. With time, this is translated into leader's workplace ostracism. Therefore, it is expected that leader's integrity will lower leader's workplace ostracism:

*H1.* Behavioral integrity is negatively related to workplace ostracism.

### The moderating roles of narcissistic personality and psychological distance

Narcissism refers to a personality trait encompassing grandiosity, arrogance, self-absorption, entitlement, fragile self-esteem and hostility (Rosenthal and Pittinsky, 2006). Penney and Spector (2002) found that leader's narcissistic personality was positively related to employees' deviant behaviors. Because narcissists are coercive (Baumeister *et al.*, 2002), and may be motivated to derogate others (Morf and Rhodewalt, 2001), one would expect narcissists to be more predisposed to engage in behaviors that ultimately harm the organization and its members (Judge *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, research suggests that narcissists are likely to engage in aggressive behavior, especially when their self-concept is threatened (Stucke and Sporer, 2002). Bushman and Baumeister (1998) found that narcissists were more likely to engage in aggressive behavior because they are hyper-vigilant to perceived threats. Moreover, narcissists may be predisposed to engage in aggressive and other deviant behavior because they are predisposed to see their work environment in negative, threatening ways. Finally, Soyer *et al.* (1999) found that narcissists were more comfortable with ethically questionable sales behaviors, suggesting that narcissists are less bound to organizational rules of propriety. Putting these perspectives together, narcissism may be linked to deviance through both a perceptual and behavioral process: narcissists may be predisposed to perceive threats in the workplace, and they may be more likely to respond aggressively to those threats that are perceived. On the other hand, deviant behavior threatens the overall well-being of employees (Pulich and Tourigny, 2004). Moreover, theoretical and empirical research suggests that provocative organizational member behavior (e.g. aggressive, hostile, disagreeable, arrogant) is likely to elicit aggressive or retaliatory responses (Aquino and Bradfield, 2000; Hershcovis *et al.*, 2007; Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2007; Milam *et al.*, 2009) as well as interpersonally deviant actions (e.g. slander, work sabotage, incivility, hostility; Duffy *et al.*, 2002; Hershcovis and Barling, 2010; Tepper *et al.*, 2009). Researchers exploring the supervisor-subordinate relationship revealed a similar pattern of results – supervisors characterized as being emotionally unstable or combative are likely to be treated in an abusive manner by their subordinates (Tepper *et al.*, 2006, 2009). Considered together, these studies reinforce theory on narcissism (Campbell *et al.*, 2011), which asserts that leaders with narcissistic personality at work are more likely to become the target of mistreatment such as incivility and workplace ostracism. Thus, we expect that narcissistic behaviors (i.e. grandiosity, arrogance, self-absorption, entitlement, fragile self-esteem and hostility) displayed by leaders will be associated with higher levels of leader ostracism even if leaders have high levels of behavioral integrity-word and deed alignment.

Therefore, it is expected that leader's narcissistic personality will cause his/her workplace ostracism and neutralize the benefits of his/her behavioral integrity. Accordingly, we propose that:

- H2.* Narcissistic personality moderates the negative relationship between behavioral integrity and leader's workplace ostracism in such a way that the relationship is weaker when narcissistic personality is high than when it is low.

Psychological distance encompasses the "psychological effects of actual and perceived differences between the supervisor and subordinate" (Napier and Ferris, 1993, pp. 328-329), including demographic distance, power distance, perceived similarity and values similarity. Empirically, followers have been shown to hold leader psychological proximity as highly beneficial for the receipt of "sensitive and individually-tailored

confidence-building communication” (Yagil, 1998, p. 172). Yagil further argued that a socially and physically close leader was better able to serve as a role model of effective workplace behaviors, in addition to being increasingly approachable. Conversely, when psychological distance between leaders and followers is reduced, a leader’s influence and respect may be diminished when followers are more capable of observing perceived leader weaknesses (Odle, 2014). It has also been discussed that proximity to a leader may allow followers to view their superior as more human and fallible, increasing self-identification and trust (Odle, 2014). The way in which trust develops within the supervisor-subordinate relationship is moderated by distance because “the leader’s honesty, reliability, and trustworthiness can be directly manifested by the leader and assessed by close followers” (Torres and Bligh, 2012).

Napier and Ferris (1993) suggested that less functional distance is associated with higher subordinate performance, higher satisfaction and decreased withdrawal. Increased psychological distance has been shown to negatively affect the quality of manager-subordinate relations (Story and Barbuto, 2011) and inhibit self-identification and trust development. Bass (1990) noted that distance, generally, has a negative effect on the quality of the supervisor-subordinate exchange and reduces the leader’s influence because of the reduced richness of information transmission. Previous research has indicated that leader-member exchange quality is greatly reduced in environments of increased psychological distance (Brunelle, 2013; Odle, 2014). As such, we would expect to observe a reduction in leader-member exchange quality as psychological distance among them increases.

The process of maintaining social stability through informal social consensus – known as social exchange (Blau, 1964) – provides a basis for orderly, productive and predictable social systems to thrive (Rutti *et al.*, 2013). Of considerable importance is the norm of reciprocity, which requires individuals to help (and not harm) individuals who help them (van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2015). Studies of social exchange suggest that individuals who are unwilling to engage in reciprocal exchange prevent the establishment of mutually beneficial and supportive relationships and are likely to become targets of corrective actions, such as ostracism (Scott *et al.*, 2013). We argue that leaders with high psychological distance are viewed as a threat to relationship or group functioning because such behavior weakens rather than strengthens social exchange relationships. These leaders are likely to be viewed as social liabilities in the workplace and are targeted for exclusionary actions. Thus, we expect target psychological distance to be positively related to employees’ ostracism of the leader:

- H3.* Psychological distance moderates the negative relationship between behavioral integrity and employees’ workplace ostracism in such a way that the relationship is weaker when psychological distance is high than when it is low.

## Methods

### *Participants*

The sample for this study was drawn from 13 state universities in Turkey. These universities were randomly selected from a list of 123 state universities in the country (The Council of Higher Education Turkey, 2014).

This study was completed in October-November 2014. Participants were told that the study was designed to collect information on the faculty members’ perceptions of faculty deans’ behavioral integrity and workplace ostracism in the higher education

workforce. They were given confidentially assurances and told that participation was voluntary. Questionnaires were collected immediately after they were filled.

A randomly selected group of faculty members completed the behavioral integrity and psychological distance scales (73-119 faculty members per university, totaling 1,300). Those faculty members' deans completed the workplace ostracism and narcissistic personality scales (4-6 deans per university, totaling 53). Deans' reports of narcissistic personality were used instead of faculty members' reports in order to avoid same-source bias. In total, 63 percent of faculty members were male with an average age of 30.13 years. Moreover, 72 percent of deans were male with an average age of 50.26 years. The response rate turned out to be 77 percent.

### Measures

*Leader behavioral integrity.* We measured employees' perceptions of the leader's behavioral integrity in the written scenarios with an eight-item scale developed by Simons *et al.* (2007). Sample questions include, "If (manager) promises something, it will happen" and "There is a match between (manager's) words and actions." All items were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this measurement was 0.89.

*Workplace ostracism.* A ten-item scale developed by Ferris *et al.* (2008) was used to measure workplace ostracism. Response options ranged from 1, "strongly disagree," to 7, "strongly agree." Sample items included: "Others ignore me at work," "Others leave the area when I arrive" and "My greetings have gone unanswered at work." A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the unidimensional structure of this measure. The model's overall  $\chi^2$ , the comparative fit index (CFI) (Bentler, 1990), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) (Tucker and Lewis, 1973) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Browne and Cudeck, 1993) were used to assess model fit. Convention suggests that a value over 0.90 for CFI and TLI and a value below 0.08 for RMSEA are indicative of a good fit between the proposed model and the observed data (Ting, 2011). When we apply those norms to our data, we observe that the fit is quite good ( $\chi^2 = 91.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; RMSEA = 0.06; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.93). The reliability of this scale was 0.86.

*Leader's narcissistic personality.* It was assessed by using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16 (Ames *et al.*, 2006;  $\alpha = 0.89$ ). This is a 16-item scale. It contains 16 pairs of items, each consisting of two conflicting proposals between which the participant must choose (e.g. "I like to be the center of the attention" vs "I prefer to blend in with the crowd"). Total scores range from 0 to 16. Cronbach  $\alpha$  for this scale in the study was 0.91.

*Psychological distance.* It was measured by using three-item psychological distance scale developed by Napier and Ferris (1993). The statement, "Think about your supervisor and how similar he or she is to you, and then respond with your agreement to the following items" preceded the three items: "I feel very similar to my supervisor," "My supervisor and I share much in common" and "My supervisor isn't that different from me." Items loaded onto a single factor with acceptable reliability. All items were measured on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this measure was 0.93.

*Control variables.* The demographic factors: age, gender and organizational tenure, found to be significantly related to workplace ostracism (Scott *et al.*, 2013), were controlled. Age and tenure were measured in years while gender was measured as a dichotomous variable coded as 1 for male and 0 for female.



**Results**

A CFA analysis on the four constructs of behavioral integrity, workplace ostracism, narcissists' personality and psychological distance were performed to measure the internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the constructs in the proposed model. The results revealed that the composite reliability (CR) of each construct ranged from 0.80 to 0.93, exceeding the 0.60 CR threshold value, and giving evidence of internal consistency reliability (Ting, 2011). In addition, the factor loadings of the individual items in the four-factor model were all significant (all  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating preliminary evidence for the convergent validity of the measurement model. Meanwhile, the average variance extracted (AVE) of all constructs ranged from 0.62 to 0.72, exceeding the 0.50 AVE threshold value (Calvo-Mora *et al.*, 2006), and thus the convergent validity was acceptable. Moreover, the estimated intercorrelations among all constructs were less than the square roots of the AVE in each construct. This provides preliminary support for discriminant validity (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

Table I shows the means, standard deviations and correlations for the study variables. *HI* was tested with hierarchical regression analysis (Table II). Control variables were entered in step 1 while behavioral integrity were entered in step 2. As can be seen in the related section of the table (showing the values yielded by step 2), behavioral integrity was significantly, negatively related to workplace ostracism ( $\beta = -0.30, p < 0.001$ ), a finding that supports *HI*.

**Table I.**  
Means, standard deviations and correlations among variables<sup>a</sup>

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	30.13	1.06						
2. Gender	0.63	0.37	0.04					
3. Job tenure	8.93	1.03	0.26**	0.01				
4. Narcissistic personality	3.16	0.80	0.09	0.04	0.10			
5. Psychological distance	3.66	0.90	0.08	0.05	0.07	0.31***		
6. Leader behavioral integrity	3.09	0.87	-0.06	-0.07	-0.03	-0.27**	-0.30***	
7. Workplace ostracism	3.99	0.93	-0.10	-0.06	-0.06	0.30***	0.33***	-0.31***

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup> $n = 1,003$ . \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table II.**  
Results of hierarchical regression analysis for workplace ostracism<sup>a</sup>

Steps and predictor variables	Models	
	1	$\beta$
<i>Step 1</i>		
Age	-0.09	-0.07
Gender	0.04	0.01
Job tenure	-0.06	-0.03
<i>Step 2</i>		
Leader behavioral integrity		-0.30***
<i>F</i> (df)	0.73	2.61**
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.09	0.23
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.08	0.22

**Notes:** <sup>a</sup> $n = 1,003$ . \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

*H2* and *H3* in the study were tested by using moderated hierarchical regression, according to the procedure delineated in Cohen and Cohen (1983). The significance of interaction effects was assessed after controlling all main effects. In the models, gender, age and job tenure were entered first as control variables while behavioral integrity and predictor variable were entered in the second step. Moderator variables (i.e. narcissists' personality and psychological distance) were entered in the third step. Lastly, interaction terms were entered in the fourth step. In order to avoid multicollinearity problems, the predictor and moderator variables were centered and the standardized scores were used in the regression analysis (Aiken and West, 1991).

As can be seen in step 4 results from Table III, the interaction effect for behavioral integrity and narcissistic personality was significant for workplace ostracism, supporting *H2* ( $\beta = -0.14, p < 0.05$ ).

*H3*, which states that psychological distance moderates the relationship between behavioral integrity and workplace ostracism, received strong support (see Table III). The interaction effect for behavioral integrity and psychological distance was significant for workplace ostracism ( $\beta = -0.18, p < 0.01$ ).

Figures 1 and 2 graphically show the interactional behavioral integrity – workplace ostracism relationship as moderated by narcissistic personality and psychological distance, for which high and low levels are depicted as one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively (Figure 3).

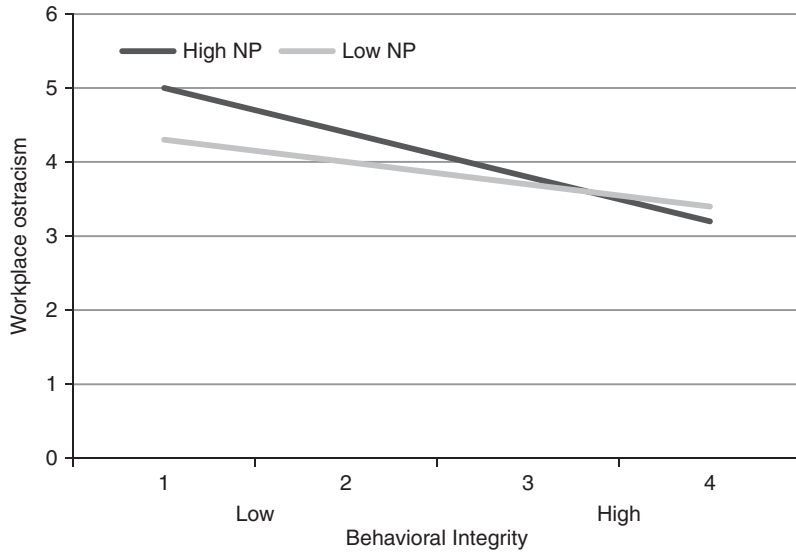
As predicted, when employees perceived high levels of narcissistic personality from their deans, the relationship between behavioral integrity and deans' workplace

Steps and predictor variables	Models							
	Narcissistic personality				Psychological distance			
	$\beta$							
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
<i>Step 1</i>								
Age	-0.09	-0.07	-0.06	-0.05	-0.09	-0.07	-0.05	-0.03
Gender	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.01
Job tenure	-0.06	-0.03	-0.02	-0.01	-0.06	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02
<i>Step 2</i>								
Leader behavioral integrity (LBI)		-0.30***	0.27**	0.25**		-0.30***	0.29**	0.27**
<i>Step 3</i>								
Narcissistic personality (NP)			0.29**	0.27**				
Psychological distance (PD)							0.33***	0.31***
<i>Step 4</i>								
LBI $\times$ NP				-0.14*				
LBI $\times$ PD								-0.18**
$R^2$	0.09	0.23	0.29	0.35	0.09	0.23	0.32	0.40
Change in $R^2$		0.14	0.06	0.06		0.14	0.09	0.08
$F$		2.61**	3.19***	4.13***		2.61**	3.66***	5.69***

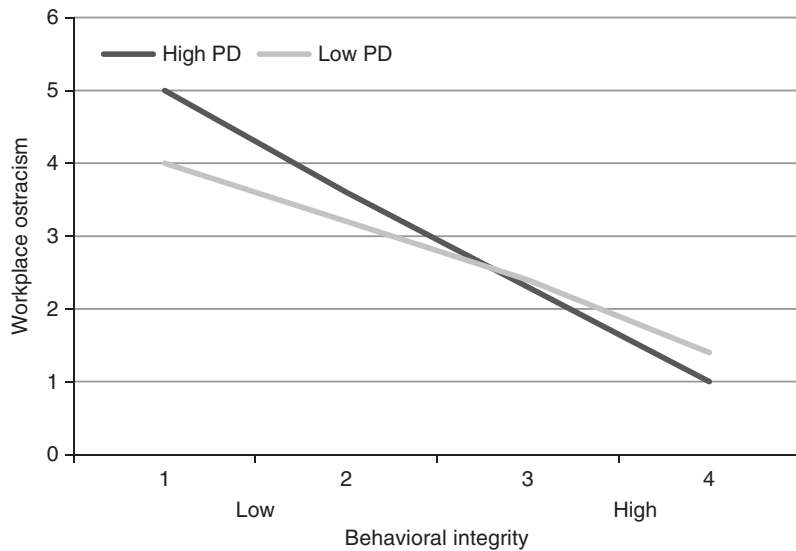
Notes: <sup>a</sup> $n = 1,003$ . \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table III.** Results of hierarchical moderated regression analysis for narcissistic personality and psychological distance on workplace ostracism<sup>a</sup>

**Figure 2.**  
Interactive effects of behavioral integrity and narcissistic personality (NP) on workplace ostracism



**Figure 3.**  
Interactive effects of behavioral integrity and psychological distance (PD) on workplace ostracism



ostracism was weaker. Similarly, it was found that psychological distance weakened the negative relationship between behavioral integrity and ostracism. As presented in Figure 2, the negative relationship between behavioral integrity and ostracism was less pronounced when an employee's perception of psychological distance was high.

### Discussion

The results of this study revealed that both leader's narcissistic personality and psychological distance moderated the negative relationship between behavioral integrity and workplace ostracism. These findings are consistent with previous research

suggesting that narcissistic personality (Aquino and Bradfield, 2000; Hershcovis *et al.*, 2007; Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2007; Milam *et al.*, 2009) and psychological distance (Bass, 1990; Brunelle, 2013; Odle, 2014) have moderating effects. In this study, employee's perception of psychological distance was positively and significantly associated with leader's workplace ostracism. In order to minimize workplace ostracism, managers need to be aware of employees' expectations, focus on building trust and loyalty and devise ways to improve communication. Moreover, managers should recognize and reward employees for their success and contributions and should involve employees more in solving job-related problems and making decisions.

Similarly, an employee's perception of leader narcissistic personality may increase leader's workplace ostracism in a university. Leaders with a narcissistic personality demonstrate a "pervasive pattern of grandiosity" coupled with a "need for admiration and lack of empathy" (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 717). They have an inflated self-concept that is enacted through a desire for recognition and a high degree of self-reference when interacting with others. Patterns of behavior that have been associated with narcissistic personality involve a grandiose sense of self-importance, a tendency to exaggerate achievements, a preoccupation with fantasies of power and success, excessive self-admiration, hostility toward criticism and intolerance toward compromise (Judge *et al.*, 2006; Lubit, 2002) which, in turn, lead to workplace ostracism.

The results in this study suggest that researchers should continue to investigate psychosocial and contextual factors such as person-job fit (Vigoda-Gadot and Meiri, 2007), organization structure and size (Vaccaro *et al.*, 2012), organizational politics (Davis and Gardner, 2004) and a leader's power bases (Davis and Gardner, 2004), in unveiling perceptions and behaviors. It is plausible that narcissistic personality and psychological distance were relevant individual difference and interpersonal variables in this setting because they were the main sources of macro variation across universities in the study. In other words, the findings in this study may be sample-specific and in need of replication. In different settings, other contextual factors, such as organizational culture or human resource practices, might become relevant. In developing theoretical explanations for the roles of interpersonal and contextual factors, researchers are encouraged to consider aspects of the organizational context that are most important to the population under investigation. Identifying contextual factors affecting workplace ostracism seems to be a promising research area.

### **Managerial implications**

Workplace ostracism has received little empirical attention in the higher education literature, which makes our findings all the more salient. Our results suggest that there are potentially high costs to service organizations when leaders and employees experience workplace ostracism. In view of increasing competition among service providers, our findings suggest that steps should be taken to prevent workplace ostracism or to quickly end it when it first emerges. There are several traditional approaches to eliminate workplace ostracism, such as holding formal and informal gatherings that facilitate interpersonal understanding and interaction. Managers can also nurture positive organizational resources to help mitigate the potentially negative impact of workplace ostracism, such as fostering a strong culture of trust to enhance the leader-employee interface (Lam and Lau, 2008).

Furthermore, a preventive work environment would take corrective measures before leaders and employees become demotivated and/or disengaged from work. Individuals who perceive ostracism are more likely to interpret other events in a threatening manner

and this can escalate into a self-perpetuating cycle (Zadro *et al.*, 2006). In this context, a proactive response system for detecting ostracism can reduce its likelihood and continuation. When workplace ostracism is observed, managers should determine who ostracizes and why. Moreover, the targets and their immediate supervisors can work together to replenish the affected individuals' organizational resources (e.g. professional development training) to help improve their inclusionary status or cope with ostracism. These organizational attributes not only can increase cooperation among individuals and their contributions to their work unit, but also foster interdependence between leaders and employees. In addition, managers should consider the impacts of narcissism and psychological distance, as suggested by the moderating effects that we identified. Specifically, professional training, advice and workshops can be provided to leaders and employees to show the impacts of narcissism and psychological distance such as high grandiosity, arrogance, self-absorption, fragile self-esteem, hostility, low leader-member exchange and trust in leader. When the negative effects of high narcissism and psychological distance are weakened, the negative influence of behavioral integrity on workplace ostracism would be increased or aggravated.

Finally, the results of this study revealed that leader's behavioral integrity lowered his/her workplace ostracism. The implication is that the better the alignment between words and deeds, the greater credibility a leader has and the greater trust an employee will have in the leader. Managers have to be careful about behavioral integrity breaches, poor word-deed alignment and value misrepresentations because behavioral integrity impacts trust at all levels. Thus, organizations interested in creating trust in leaders and increasing organizational effectiveness are well advised to consider leader behavioral integrity at all levels. They should ensure that both leaders and supervisors "walk the talk."

### Strengths and potential limitations

The main strength of the investigation in this study was its multilevel research design. Most research on behavioral integrity and workplace ostracism has been conducted within single organizations, precluding an assessment of the way in which interpersonal variables influence ostracism. The multilevel design was capable of capturing the complexity of individual behaviors by considering different contexts. Second, the use of a Turkish sample added to the growing literature examining workplace ostracism in non-Western settings.

The study has several limitations that could be the subject for future research topics. First, some characteristics of the universities may have affected the findings, such as their source of funding. This study has been conducted in state universities. Whether selected universities are of state or private nature may have affected organizational cultures and their management styles, which, in turn, could influence leader-member exchange, behavioral integrity and psychological distance. Second, demographic factors might have affected the results. To illustrate, most of the samples chosen came from males genderwise, which would strongly open a debate of whether such results would be obtained if gender composition was different. Finally, this study is cross-sectional thus limiting one's interpretation of causal mechanisms. Employing a longitudinal design would have provided us with an opportunity to examine not only behavioral integrity effect on workplace ostracism but also whether workplace ostracism impacts perceptions of behavioral integrity and psychological distance.

Despite these potential limitations, this study contributes to the research on behavioral integrity and workplace ostracism by showing that narcissistic personality and psychological distance are relevant psychosocial variables in determining the

importance of workplace ostracism to leader-subordinate relationships. The results in the study support the argument that workplace ostracism is socially constructed and, therefore, studies of ostracism in relation to both antecedents and outcomes should recognize the interpersonal context. It is expected that the results of this study would pave the way for future research to consider other interpersonal variables in models of leadership and workplace ostracism such as social support (Lee *et al.*, 2013), self-monitoring (Fuglestad and Snyder, 2009) and self-disclosure (Farber, 2006).

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### Further reading

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