



Worship me at the office altar: Why narcissistic leaders resist remote work

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ABSTRACT

Leaders have displayed diverging reactions to remote work, with some supporting it and others resisting it. Surprisingly little research has examined the personality roots of leader opposition to virtual work. Integrating the extended agency model of narcissism with media richness theory, we hypothesize that narcissistic leaders resist remote work because it threatens their motivations for power and status. In Study 1, an archival analysis of 259 Fortune 500 CEOs, unobtrusive measures of narcissism via photo size, signature size, and relative compensation predicted greater resistance to remote work in public statements early in the COVID-19 pandemic. This relationship was partially explained by exploratory proxies for narcissistic leaders' power and status motivations, contingent on their industry not depending on frontline workers. Study 2, a preregistered three-wave survey with 359 leaders, constructively replicated and extended these results. Leader narcissism predicted resistance to remote work, mediated by power and status motivations—even after controlling for trust, the Big Five, and the remaining Dark Triad traits. In Study 3, a preregistered experiment with 546 leaders, manipulating state narcissism evoked resistance to remote work via power but not status motivation. Our findings extend knowledge about remote work and narcissistic leadership.

1. Introduction

Last century, with the advent of personal computers, mobile phones, and the internet, observers predicted that remote work would become commonplace. Futurists suggested that “many people will soon be working at home” (Toffler, 1980, p. 275) and management gurus declared that “commuting to office work is obsolete” (Drucker, 1992, p. 105). However, for several decades, only a small fraction of organizations and employees adopted remote work (Barrero et al., 2023), and leaders preferred to maintain working in the office as the status quo (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Martin & MacDonnell, 2012).

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, many leaders around the globe were suddenly forced to work and manage remotely. At its peak in June 2020, remote work accounted for 60 percent of paid work hours in the U. S. (Barrero et al., 2021a), and from 2023 to 2024, it remained at approximately 25 percent (Aksoy et al., 2025). Despite these shifts, leaders still display varying reactions to remote work, with some embracing it and others resisting it by issuing return-to-office mandates (Doherty, 2024; Hogg, 2025; Smite et al., 2023). Understanding why resistance to remote work varies between leaders is important in light of evidence that such mandates can be costly for employers and employees (Ding et al., 2024), as they reduce employee satisfaction and retention

while failing to improve firm performance (Ding & Ma, 2024).

Prior studies have largely explained leader resistance to remote work in terms of opportunity and ability barriers, highlighting the impact of financial and technological constraints (for a review, see Ferdous et al., 2026) as well as a lack of personal experience and self-efficacy with relevant tools (Kasperska et al., 2024; Pérez et al., 2002; Silva-C et al., 2019; Sweet et al., 2017; Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016). Surprisingly little research has examined the role of leader personality in resistance to remote work. This is an important oversight given that personality traits carry more weight when individuals have discretion to make decisions (Meyer et al., 2010). As leaders have gained considerable experience with and access to remote communication technologies, the ability and opportunity constraints have dissipated (Barrero et al., 2021a, 2023), setting the stage for leaders' personalities to shape their stances on remote work.

Existing studies of leader attitudes toward remote work hint at relevant personality sources of resistance: leaders harbor concerns about losing control and trusting employees to work virtually (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Felstead et al., 2003; Kaplan et al., 2018; Kurland & Cooper, 2002; Parker et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2016; Spagnoli et al., 2020; Stoker et al., 2022; Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016). What these leader concerns share in common is the desire for agency—“a tendency to

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assert, expand, and develop the self" (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992, p. 1005). Research suggests that this penchant for agency is especially pronounced among narcissists, who are driven to enhance and protect their egos (Campbell & Foster, 2007).

In this article, we propose that leader narcissism is a critical but neglected source of resistance to remote work. Integrating the extended agency model of narcissism (Campbell & Foster, 2007) with media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984, 1986), we explain how the constraints of remote work interfere with the narcissistic desires for power and status. Because in-person work offers richer channels for controlling and commanding reverence from employees, in their pursuit of authority and admiration, narcissists are likely to resist remote work. We test these hypotheses across three studies: an archival study of Fortune 500 CEOs with unobtrusive measures of narcissism, power and status motivations, and public statements about remote work; a preregistered three-wave survey of leaders with narcissism predicting resistance to remote work via power and status motivations; and a preregistered experiment with leaders testing whether manipulating state narcissism evokes remote work resistance via power and status motivations.

2. Theoretical background

Our theoretical perspective and empirical findings make important contributions to the literatures on remote work and narcissistic leadership. First, whereas existing research documents when and where leader resistance occurs (e.g., Beham et al., 2015; Ferdous et al., 2026; Neirotti et al., 2013; Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010; Williamson et al., 2022), our work reveals which leaders are most likely to resist remote work, illuminating the role of leader personality. Advancing beyond the typical focus on the Big Five traits, we introduce leader narcissism as a novel and consequential antecedent of opposition to flexible work arrangements. Second, in doing so, we challenge prevailing assumptions about the psychological forces underlying leader resistance to remote work. In contrast to the dominant emphasis on leaders' fears about remote work thwarting organizational objectives related to performance and productivity (e.g., Barrero et al., 2023; Bloom et al., 2023a, 2023b; Lewandowski et al., 2025; Matysiak et al., 2025), we find that resistance is also driven by self-centered motivations, stemming from leaders' concerns about protecting their own power and status. Third, our research advances knowledge about the consequences of leader narcissism. Although past research suggests that narcissists gravitate toward virtual platforms as vehicles for obtaining gratification via curated images and enhanced visibility (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Gnambs & Appel, 2018; Liu & Baumeister, 2016), we find that they prefer to lead in person, where they can not only exhibit but also exercise power and status. As such, our research highlights how the patterns that narcissists display outside leadership roles may not mirror those that they demonstrate within them, underscoring the importance of investigating how narcissism is expressed differently in positions of authority.

2.1. Narcissistic leadership and remote work resistance

Our focus in this paper is on the relationship between leader narcissism and resistance to remote work. We define remote work resistance as leaders' opposition to allowing employees to work virtually (i.e., not physically in the office) full-time or part-time in flexible or hybrid arrangements. In general, leader resistance is known to manifest in both attitudes and actions (Oreg, 2003; Oreg et al., 2008). In the context of remote work, resistance involves attitudes expressing distaste for remote work as well as actions and policies undertaken to prohibit employees from working remotely. For example, some leaders have pressured employees to show up at the office by taking attendance (Goldberg & Hirsch, 2022), and some CEOs have threatened to fire employees who do not come in, regardless of their performance (Nicholas & Hull, 2022).

Narcissism is a dispositional tendency toward having an inflated

ego—seeing oneself as special and superior (Emmons, 1987)—which is common among leaders (Cragun et al., 2020; Grijalva et al., 2020). Our focus is on grandiose narcissism as a dimension of normal personality, not on narcissistic personality disorder as a clinical diagnosis (Miller & Campbell, 2011; Weiss & Miller, 2018). Like other traits of personality, narcissism lies on a continuum, and it is not equally salient in all situations; it is activated when the ego is on the line (Edershire et al., 2024; Tett et al., 2021). Narcissistic leaders are those individuals on the higher end of the grandiosity continuum, who are dispositionally inclined toward greater frequencies and amplitudes of ego inflation than leaders on the lower end (Mota et al., 2023). Although high levels of narcissism are generally costly to leadership and organizational effectiveness, the tendency to be confident and bold can prove adaptive when it exists in moderate doses (Grijalva et al., 2015), is counterbalanced with humility (Owens et al., 2015; Nie et al., 2022), or is channeled toward innovation (Cragun et al., 2020).

To unpack the role of leader narcissism in remote work resistance, we draw on the extended agency model of narcissism (Campbell & Foster, 2007; Foster et al., 2006) and media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984, 1986). The extended agency model explains how narcissists seek to enhance and protect their egos, and media richness theory details how the features of remote work may threaten these efforts. Taken together, these two theories reveal why narcissists are likely to react negatively to remote work.

The extended agency model conceptualizes narcissism as a dynamic self-regulatory system that is directed toward protecting and enhancing self-esteem (Campbell & Foster, 2007). To solidify their senses of uniqueness and superiority, narcissists use a range of intrapsychic and interpersonal techniques, from indulging self-serving fantasies to engaging in self-promotion (Campbell et al., 2006; Grapsas et al., 2020). Since their desire to get ahead outweighs their desire to get along (Campbell & Foster, 2007; Hogan, 1996; Wiggins, 1979), narcissists are often unafraid to select strategies that may use and abuse others (Bogart et al., 2004; Judge et al., 2009; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1997).

Narcissistic leaders are likely to resist remote work because it threatens their pursuit of agency. Compared to individuals who do not suffer from such extended agency concerns, narcissists seek and feel entitled to attention and affirmation (Grijalva et al., 2015). When the social environment is conducive to producing and sustaining high levels of agency, narcissists generally feel safe and function smoothly (Campbell & Foster, 2007). However, narcissists are highly sensitive to potential ego threats (Den Hartog et al., 2020). When their ability to look and feel superior is in jeopardy, narcissists go to great lengths to defend and enhance their esteem (Hardaker et al., 2021). They crave regular refueling of their "narcissistic supply" (Kernberg, 1975, p. 273), which is likely to be less readily available in remote work environments.

According to media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984, 1986), communication media vary in the quality and quantity of information that they provide. Rich media facilitate multiple cues, clear interpretations, and immediate feedback; transmissions via lean media are more equivocal and delayed (Potosky, 2008). Whereas rich media are high in social bandwidth, creating many opportunities for clear, natural, and dynamic exchanges, leaner media facilitate more limited interactions (Basch & Melchers, 2025).

In-person work offers the richest medium of communication, as face-to-face interaction allows for a wide range of verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal signals to be exchanged, interpreted, and clarified quickly. By contrast, remote work is more constrained: virtual interaction provides more ambiguous cues that need to be decoded through screens, and involves more asynchronous communication due to temporal and technical delays (Blunden & Brodsky, 2024; Burke et al., 1999; Ishii et al., 2019; Leonardi et al., 2024). Although virtual platforms may create the opportunity for leaders to gain curated visibility at greater scale, this does not necessarily translate to their ability to influence or impress their colleagues (e.g., Avolio et al., 2014; Spagnoli et al., 2020; Stoker et al., 2022). The obstacles to deep and fulfilling interactions are

particularly salient in multiparty settings: compared to face-to-face, virtual conversation is more cumbersome, formal, and awkward due to lags, audio interference, and unclear norms around when to speak and how to break the silence (Bleakley et al., 2022). When communicating by video, phone, email, or text, it is more difficult for leaders to command the attention—and gauge and bask in the admiration—of their employees (Cao et al., 2021; Nesher Shoshan & Wehrt, 2022). Narcissists “are motivated by social engagement and praise, the possibility of which is likely to be diminished in remote settings,” Harms et al. (2024, p. 5) suggest, noting that “the tactics that narcissists use to gain attention such as... interjecting frequently or loudly in conversations... would be severely constrained when using communication channels that facilitate remote work.”

When they are not in the same room with their employees, narcissistic leaders face constraints on their agency, as they need to rely on leaner channels that make it more challenging to feed their egos. Research suggests that in remote work, leaders face barriers to directing and inspiring employees (Avolio et al., 2014; Stoker et al., 2022). Virtual interactions curtail the dynamic verbal and nonverbal cues that leaders typically use to control and energize followers, such as hand gestures, volume, eye contact, and posture (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006; Darics, 2020; Talley & Temple, 2015). On video calls, instead of doing deference to leaders, employees are more likely to flinch at their faces (Bailenson, 2021) and look bored and fatigued (Nurmi & Pakarinen, 2023; Shockley et al., 2021), leaving narcissists feeling insecure about how others are receiving them. In virtual interactions, it is harder to make eye contact (Bailenson, 2001) and images tend to be less flattering than face-to-face (e.g., Rice et al., 2021; Silence et al., 2021). Narcissists have attempted to compensate for these limitations by investing in lighting and audio upgrades, but these cues have limited impact on signaling assertiveness and competence (Härtel & Hoch, 2025). Remote interactions also create the opportunity for misunderstandings (Byron, 2008; Keating et al., 2024; Kruger et al., 2005). As they attempt to issue orders by email, read adoration in facial expressions over glitchy and low-resolution video feeds, and assess deference in texts (e.g., Fiechter et al., 2018; Gajendran et al., 2022), narcissistic leaders may struggle to replenish their narcissistic supply. Leaders lower in narcissism, in contrast, are less prone to interpreting ambiguous social cues as slights (Lamkin et al., 2014) and less likely to see themselves as victims (McCullough et al., 2003; Ok et al., 2021). As such, they will not automatically internalize these types of social cues as personal threats.

In remote work, signals of affirmation are not only ambiguous; they are also delayed. This prevents narcissistic leaders from obtaining immediate gratification—a key agentic tactic to boost esteem (Campbell & Foster, 2007). Physical separation promotes more asynchronous work and communication (Keating et al., 2024; Leonardi et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2022). When employees are no longer confined to the same physical space as their leaders, they face more diversions. Employees are more likely to be distracted by interruptions from partners, children, and pets (Bissell et al., 2025; Bloom et al., 2015; Cummins, 2020; O'Neill et al., 2009; Teodorovicz et al., 2021) as well as digital temptations to multitask by surfing the web or answering messages (Cao et al., 2021; Karl et al., 2022). Given narcissists' agentic desires to feel special (Campbell & Foster, 2007), they are likely to be threatened when their employees fail to respond rapidly or direct their attention to others (Back et al., 2013; Emmons, 1984; Lee et al., 2013; Ohmann & Burgmer, 2016). Thus, the lack of rich communication in remote work is likely to leave these leaders fighting for their employees' attention and engagement, isolating them from their narcissistic supply (Kernberg, 1975). For narcissistic leaders, the act of resisting remote work is both an avenue for esteem maintenance and enhancement and an expression of agency.

Hypothesis 1. Leader narcissism is positively related to resistance to remote work.

2.2. The mediating roles of power and status motivations

Narcissistic leaders are likely to resist remote work because it limits their access to power and status. A central tenet of the extended agency model is that these two motivations are manifestations of narcissists' attempts to build themselves up as special (Campbell & Foster, 2007). “Narcissists... strive for power and status,” seeking “self-enhancement through acclaim and domination” (Chatterjee & Pollock, 2017, p. 709 and 712). They are driven by “a narcissistic propensity to see their world primarily as an arena to exercise power and seek glory” (Owen & Davidson, 2009, p. 1398). These desires for power and status are so potent that some scholars have even described narcissism as a form of addiction: “cravings to feel superior, and the indulgence of those cravings, may be the defining feature of narcissism” (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001, p. 207). As noted previously, compared to the richness of in-person interaction (Daft & Lengel, 1984, 1986), the sparseness of remote communication can make it more difficult for narcissists to satisfy these cravings for power and status.

Power motivation is the desire for control and authority over others (Busch, 2018; McClelland, 1975), and status motivation is the desire for admiration and acclaim from others (Anderson et al., 2015). Although power and status are often discussed in tandem, sometimes even interchangeably, it is common for leaders to seek and obtain power without status. They may possess authority but lack the respect of their employees (Anicich et al., 2016; Fast et al., 2012b). It is also possible for leaders to pursue and attain status without power; despite having limited formal authority, they may be widely admired (Choi et al., 2025; Fragale et al., 2011; Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

Narcissists' motivations for power and status are rooted in their agentic objectives—they strive to take charge and stand out (Zeigler-Hill & Dehaghi, 2023). Whereas narcissism is a dispositional trait, we conceptualize the desires for power and status as contextual motivations (Vallerand, 1997) that leaders experience and express in their work roles. Since narcissistic leaders are more inclined to seek power and status in their jobs, they will tend to resist remote work because it threatens these motivations. As Peters et al. (2016, p. 2587) speculated, “managers will object to teleworking as this might reduce their role, status and power.”

Power motivation. Extensive research has shown that narcissistic leaders crave power (e.g., Beigi & Zeigler-Hill, 2024; Brunell et al., 2008; Grapsas et al., 2022; Rogoza et al., 2016; Zeigler-Hill & Dehaghi, 2023). Narcissistic leaders aspire to attain control and assert their superiority over others (Grijalva et al., 2015; Nevicka et al., 2011). In the extended agency model, the desire for power manifests at both the intrapsychic and interpersonal levels (Campbell & Foster, 2007). Psychologically, narcissists express high levels of power motivation (Carroll & Gillen, 1987) and are often preoccupied with aspirations for power over others (Raskin & Novacek, 1991; Raskin et al., 1991). Interpersonally, narcissists are well-versed in techniques to expand, wield, and maintain their power, striving to keep the upper hand (Locke, 2000; Locke & Heller, 2017). They are drawn to positions of power like “moths to a flame” (Steffens & Haslam, 2022, p. 236), and actively arrange their environments to feed their urges for control (Glad, 2002; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Recent research has found that narcissists are also more likely than their peers to express interest in learning about leadership theories—especially those that emphasize directive leadership (Steffens & Haslam, 2022). Accordingly, narcissists will be inclined to extend their agency by pursuing power.

Hypothesis 2a. Narcissism is positively associated with power motivation.

In turn, power motivation is likely to leave narcissistic leaders resistant to remote work. In traditional face-to-face work, narcissistic leaders wield power via dominance displays such as an imposing physical presence, being the loudest voice in the room, and locking eyes with their subordinates (Kjærviik & Bushman, 2021; Odermatt et al., 2018; Shim et al., 2021; Wohltjen & Wheatley, 2021). In remote work, these leaders face limited media richness (Leonardi et al., 2024)—fewer

channels to communicate, more delayed responses, and more uncertain and equivocal feedback—which makes it more difficult to exercise and evaluate their power. In remote work, leaders “are deprived of forms of physical control” (Spagnoli et al., 2020, p. 2). For example, they are not in a position to manage by walking around (Detert & Treviño, 2010) or summon employees to a conference room to issue commands. The leaner channels of video, voice, and text also have built-in temporal and technical delays (Blunden & Brodsky, 2024; Leonardi et al., 2024), forcing leaders to wait for scheduled virtual meetings and message replies rather than reaching employees immediately.

These leaner channels limit the quantity and quality of information that leaders can gather about their employees, hampering their ability to exercise control (Felstead et al., 2003). In remote work, leaders often lack direct visibility into when and how much their employees are working, and their ability to exert influence via electronic monitoring is limited, as it increases employee stress while failing to improve performance (Nyberg et al., 2021; see also Avgoustaki & Bessa, 2019, and Ravid et al., 2023). Virtual interaction creates uncertainty and equivocality, preventing eye contact (Bohannon et al., 2013) and making it challenging to interpret multiple and potentially conflicting reactions (Yusuf, 2025), ultimately restricting leaders’ knowledge of whether their directives have landed. In summary, remote work is likely to starve narcissistic leaders of the verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal cues to signal and reinforce their power, which are of less concern to leaders low in narcissism.

Remote work does not merely limit the power of narcissistic leaders; it also gives their employees a newfound sense of control. Extensive evidence shows that when employees have the opportunity to work from anywhere, they experience greater autonomy (Boell et al., 2016; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Gajendran et al., 2024). This puts narcissistic leaders at risk of falling off the authority balance beam (Hackman, 1998), as the balance of power tips too far toward employees. Employees can choose leaner media by turning off their cameras or communicating over email and text, which makes it easier to hide their emotions (Brodsky, 2021) from their leaders. Working virtually, it becomes possible for employees to evade the stares, fanfare, and exaggerated gestures that narcissistic leaders normally use to exhibit control (Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Vangelisti et al., 1990). Employees also have more flexibility to set work schedules that may not align with leaders’ preferences (Leonardi et al., 2024). Instead of feeling pressure to respond to leaders’ in-person demands, employees can more easily dodge or postpone responding to emails, texts, and calls (Blunden & Brodsky, 2024), exacerbating both temporal delays and uncertainty and equivocality about the meaning of their silence (Erhardt & Gibbs, 2014). Whereas leaders low in narcissism may be relatively unfazed by these responses, narcissists are likely to interpret such responses as insubordinate and ego-threatening (Baumeister et al., 1996; Campbell & Foster, 2007), reinforcing their perceived lack of power.

Taken together, the media richness limitations in a remote work environment threaten narcissists’ power. The extended agency model predicts that when narcissists feel their agency threatened, they become determined to defend themselves to restore agency (Campbell & Foster, 2007). Narcissists are likely to interpret employees’ freedom to choose where, when, and how to work as a direct appropriation of their deserved authority. Narcissists are prone to psychological reactance (Baumeister et al., 2002; Joubert, 1992), and may be even more inclined to assert their agency when their employees advocate for remote work. They may feel compelled to “attack for control” (Benjamin, 1987, p. 56) by pressuring or requiring their teams to show up at the office, where it is easier for them to wield power. Indeed, research has identified concerns about control as a common reason for opposition to remote work (e.g., Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Felstead et al., 2003; Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016). As Ding and Ma (2024, p. 4) suggest, leaders adopt return-to-office “mandates to reassert control over their workers and grab power back from employees.”

Hypothesis 2b. Power motivation is positively associated with resistance

to remote work.

Hypothesis 2c. The positive relationship between leader narcissism and remote work resistance is partially mediated by power motivation.

Status motivation. The pursuit of status is a fundamental and well-established motivation of narcissists (e.g., Grapsas et al., 2020; Jonason & Zeigler-Hill, 2018; Kroencke et al., 2023; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2018; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019). A hallmark of narcissism is high but unstable self-esteem (Bosson et al., 2008). The extended agency model (Campbell & Foster, 2007) explains how narcissists seek status to enhance and protect their egos, building self-esteem through social esteem (Sedikides et al., 2002; Horton & Sedikides, 2009). Narcissistic leaders engage in various interpersonal strategies to elevate their social standing (Campbell, 1999), seeking out “affirmation, applause, and adulation” (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007, p. 354). They are highly sensitive to status cues (Grapsas et al., 2024), vigilantly surveying their social surroundings to identify opportunities for admiration and attention (Baumeister & Vohs, 2001; Campbell et al., 2000; Grapsas et al., 2020). In their agentic quests for narcissistic supply, they gauge status in relative as well as absolute terms (Krizan & Bushman, 2011). Narcissistic leaders are not merely motivated to obtain a high level of respect; they aim to occupy the top of the respect hierarchy (Mahadevan et al., 2019; Mishra & Kray, 2022; Zitek & Jordan, 2016), consistent with sociological and organizational research on status (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Barrick et al., 2002; Flynn et al., 2006; Ridgeway, 2014; Sauder et al., 2012). Empirically, narcissists are more likely to perceive and engage in status conflict (Bendersky & Hays, 2012), especially when it comes to disagreements over who ranks higher (Xu & Benson, 2024), and respond with defensive and dominant behaviors (McGregor et al., 2023; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2021) aimed at protecting and acquiring standing.

Hypothesis 3a. Narcissism is positively associated with status motivation.

The status motivation of narcissistic leaders is likely to foster resistance to remote work. From a media richness perspective, remote work is likely to interfere with narcissistic leaders’ efforts to gain and gauge admiration, amplifying their concerns about social standing (Harold & Conger, 1997; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Working virtually constrains narcissistic leaders’ agency to pursue status by hindering their access to rich, immediate, and validating interactions. Although remote work may enable narcissistic leaders to craft desired images and reach larger audiences (Gnambs & Appel, 2018), they are likely to encounter more hurdles to signaling their status and garnering validation. There is evidence that with physical distance, leaders face barriers to enacting their strategies for earning status (Shamir, 1995), such as delivering inspiration, leading by example, and being viewed as role models (Avolio et al., 2014; Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999; Howell et al., 2005; cf. Höddinghaus et al., 2024). The absence of in-person interaction, which is the most vivid and multimodal communication channel (Daft & Lengel, 1984), deprives leaders of a coveted source of narcissistic supply. It also constrains the options that narcissistic leaders have to obtain the adulation they crave; remote work may make it more cumbersome for narcissistic leaders to convene their teams when they need a quick fix of praise (Bogart et al., 2004; Yang et al., 2022).

The pursuit of status is further complicated by the uncertainty and equivocality of remote interactions (Leonardi et al., 2024). Narcissistic leaders are likely to face more struggles to capture attention, as fatigue is heightened in virtual meetings (Nurmi & Pakarinen, 2023; Shockley et al., 2021). Compliments—a typical ego-enhancer for narcissists—may not land the same way when delivered digitally, as they are bereft of the nonverbal and expressive cues that enrich face-to-face interactions (Okdie et al., 2011). Indeed, numerous studies show that compared to face-to-face, in virtual interactions job candidates make poorer impressions; they are judged as less agentic, less likeable, and less hireable (Baker et al., 2020; Basch & Melchers, 2025; Blacksmith et al., 2016; Melchers et al., 2021). Video calls demote narcissistic leaders from the corner office to a square on a screen that is the same size as those of their direct reports, thwarting their agentic desire to feel special (Kay, 2021). Indeed, research has shown that virtual interactions can equalize status,

as relevant information about social worth is more likely to be distorted or eliminated (Dubrovsky et al., 1991; Kayworth & Leidner, 2002). The asynchronous nature of leaner media further reinforces this status-equalizing effect. Rather than standing out in person (Horton & Sedikides, 2009) and receiving immediate gratification (Ho et al., 2016), narcissistic leaders may feel unimportant and overlooked in the crowded inboxes of their teams. In contrast, less narcissistic leaders may be undaunted by fading into the background or even view delays as a sign that they are empowering their teams (Kelemen et al., 2023).

From the standpoint of the extended agency model, since status is rooted in others' perceptions, narcissists remain acutely aware that it is precarious and never guaranteed (Grapsas et al., 2020). As such, they are likely to favor in-person interactions that grant agency to enhance and secure their status over ambiguous virtual communications that undermine their perceived standing. Research shows that in response to uncertain or equivocal social cues, whereas their peers do not feel slighted, narcissists are inclined to interpret them negatively as signals of rejection or exclusion (Büttner et al., 2025). When narcissists perceive a threat to their status, they become emotionally and behaviorally reactive (Edershile et al., 2024), often showing anger and aggression toward the source of the threat (Kjærvi & Bushman, 2021; Kroencke et al., 2023). Since remote work is what jeopardizes their status, narcissistic leaders will lash out against it and fight to protect their social standing, making the agentic choice to get ahead rather than to get along (Lynch & Benson, 2024; Marinova et al., 2013). A desire for status has been shown to fuel overconfidence, especially in settings where status matters more (Mayiwar et al., 2025). Narcissistic leaders will have strong conviction in the importance of working in person, attempting to fend off virtual interactions that interfere with their ability to attain status.

Hypothesis 3b. Status motivation is positively associated with resistance to remote work.

Hypothesis 3c. The positive relationship between leader narcissism and remote work resistance is partially mediated by status motivation.

3. Overview of studies

To address the question of which leaders resist remote work and why, we employ a multimethod approach triangulating across different measures of narcissism, remote work resistance, and power and status motivations, as well as multiple time periods and multiple levels of leadership. In Study 1, an archival study of Fortune 500 CEOs, we unobtrusively assess CEO narcissism from public company reports and code resistance to remote work from public statements about return-to-office plans during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as in the following year. In exploratory analyses, we proxy power motivation by assessing whether CEOs chaired their company's board, and status motivation by assessing how many external director positions they held on Fortune 500, university, and nonprofit boards. In Study 2, a three-wave, time-lagged study with a sample of U.S. leaders, we investigate whether our results generalize beyond the pandemic and the C-suite, collect direct measures of mediating mechanisms, and rule out alternative explanations. In Study 3, an online experiment, we establish internal validity by manipulating state narcissism to explore the causal effects on leaders' resistance to remote work through their power and status motivations.

We describe our sampling plan, all data exclusions, and all measures in each study. All data, analysis syntax, preregistration information, and research materials are available on OSF: https://osf.io/a8sjz/overview?view_only=2054e61b08384959bc820dab4c2b948f. This folder also includes an online supplement. Analyses were conducted using R, version 4.3.0 (R Core Team, 2023). We preregistered the study design, hypotheses, and research plans for Study 2 (https://aspredicted.org/D8Z_V4S) and Study 3 (<https://aspredicted.org/779nc4.pdf>).

4. Study 1 method

4.1. Sample, design, and procedures

Our sample consisted of CEOs from companies on the Fortune 500 list in 2020. Established in 1955, the Fortune 500 list is an annually published ranking by an American multinational business magazine (Fortune, 2020). We focused on Fortune 500 CEOs for three key reasons. First, their standing allows them to “dress up like an organization” (Staw, 1991). As the top-ranking leader in their companies, CEOs play a central role in shaping policies about where employees work, and shape public opinion through the statements they give in public interviews, earnings calls, and surveys about remote work policies (Bloom et al., 2023c). Second, CEO visibility makes it possible to unobtrusively assess their narcissism (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007) as well as their attitudes and actions (Pollock et al., 2019) with respect to remote work. Third, their oversight of large companies affords these CEOs access to many different sources of narcissistic supply that may have been constrained by remote work—from seeking status through interactions with important board members to exercising power in interactions with their executives and employees (Chatterjee & Pollock, 2017).

We constructed a sample of all the companies on the Fortune 500 list. Then, we identified their CEOs during the study time frame—the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 to May 2021). March 2020 marked the month when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic and the White House declared COVID-19 to be a nationwide emergency. We selected May 2021 as the end date to capture CEO sentiment on remote and hybrid work before COVID-19B.1.617.2 (the “Delta” variant) became widespread throughout the U.S.; the first reported case was on June 1, 2021, in India and the variant reached the U.S. shortly thereafter (CDC, 2022).

We used each company's 2020 and 2021 annual reports, publicly available on the company's website, to find the name of their CEOs. We then searched for publicly available articles in which each CEO expressed a stance on remote and hybrid work, culling the list to the 318 CEOs who expressed a clear position in at least two articles. We then searched for our key indicators of narcissism in annual reports, proxy statements, and compensation databases, which yielded a final sample of 259 CEOs with complete data on the predictor and outcome variables.¹

Of the 259 CEOs in our sample, 93% were male, and 91% were white. The average CEO was 59.46 years old ($SD = 5.89$) and had an average tenure in their current CEO job of 11.02 years ($SD = 10.14$). These CEOs represented 17 industries, including manufacturing (18.1%), utility/energy (13.9%), retail (11.6%), and finance (10.0%). We assessed CEO

¹ For companies that did not have the same CEO in 2020 and 2021, we chose the CEO for whom we had publicly available articles on their stance on remote and hybrid work. Since two companies had co-CEOs, there were $N = 502$ CEOs in the 2020 Fortune 500 list. For these companies, consistent with prior CEO narcissism research, we treated each CEO independently (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007). When we exclude co-CEOs from the analyses, the results are consistent in direction, magnitude, and significance. We also identified one instance in which two Fortune 500 companies merged into one company under a single CEO (Raytheon and United Technologies merged in April 2020), and in this case we only included the CEO of the merged company. Of the 318 CEOs met our criterion of two publicly available quotes on remote work. In this sample of 318 CEOs, $N = 2$ CEOs led private insurance companies that did not have annual reports, as they were not subjected to the same reporting requirements of other Fortune 500 companies. As such, they did not have the photo size indicator available, reducing the sample to $N = 316$ CEOs. Among these, 267 CEOs had publicly available signatures. Most CEO signatures were in company annual reports; where that was not possible, CEO signatures were collected from annual proxy statements, which were also published on company websites. Compensation data were available on Execucomp for 259 of those CEOs, which constituted our final sample.

narcissism as well as power and status motivations in 2020–2021, and coded remote work resistance for the same time period.

4.2. Measures

Narcissism. In the interest of maximizing data availability and minimizing social desirability and self-deception biases, we measured CEO narcissism unobtrusively (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007; Grijalva et al., 2020). Consistent with prior research on CEO narcissism (e.g., Cragun et al., 2020; Ham et al., 2017; Ham et al., 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2014), we collected four unobtrusive indicators of CEO narcissism and created a composite index: (1) the prominence of the CEO's photograph in the company's annual report; (2) the CEO's signature size; (3) the CEO's cash compensation divided by that of the second-highest paid executive in the firm; and (4) the CEO's non-cash compensation divided by that of the second-highest-paid executive in the firm (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007; Ham et al., 2017). These formative indicators reflect CEOs' tendencies to be portrayed as special and superior—both in centering their images and identities in company communications and in displaying entitlement to pay themselves more than others (e.g., Oesterle et al., 2016; Rijssenbilt & Commandeur, 2013). Of the 318 CEOs, 259 CEOs had available data for all four indicators. To ensure the most accurate representation of where each CEO fell in the population, we standardized each narcissism indicator using all available data.² Our results were consistent in magnitude and direction when we standardized the data after removing CEOs with missing data from the sample.

Remote work resistance. To assess CEOs' resistance to remote work, we focused on their public statements. CEOs' public statements are communicative speech acts—behavioral representations of leaders' stances on specific issues (Pollock et al., 2019; Staw, 1991; Staw et al., 1983). These constituted a more direct measure of resistance than remote work policies, which were set in consultation with top management teams and boards, subject to the constraints and affordances of their organizations and industries. For each CEO in our sample, we employed a systematic, purposeful sampling strategy to identify two unique articles that captured the CEO's opinion on remote work arrangements within the study time frame (79% of articles were published in 2020) (Neuman, 2014; Rousseau et al., 2008). To minimize selection bias, our search terms excluded evaluative terms such as “support” and “resistance” (Hiebl, 2023). The majority of articles were company press releases that included direct quotes from the CEO. Additional articles included authored social media posts, transcripts of interviews conducted by journalists or financial analysts, and transcripts of CEO speeches. When direct quotes were not available, we included formal documents signed by the CEO, such as the letter from the CEO in the Annual Report, which reflect their perspectives (Li, 2008). Leveraging direct quotes with formal authored documents ensured that we had less-public executives in our final sample.

Resistance is a function of both the strength and structure of underlying attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1995). As such, we operationalized CEO resistance to remote work by assessing both the intensity of resistance that CEOs expressed and the scope of objections that they communicated. For intensity, two independent raters blind to the study hypothesis coded CEOs' statements according to a rubric with detailed instructions. For each CEO, raters were instructed to read the two articles outlining the CEO's stance on remote work. After reading both articles, raters provided a single rating indicating the CEO's resistance to

² Following Chatterjee and Hambrick (2007), we took the simple average of all available indicators to create a single narcissism indicator. Although some scholars recommend calculating the single index by standardizing each metric and adding them together (Grijalva et al., 2020), to ensure consistency when comparing CEOs with varying numbers of available indices (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2011), we opted to calculate the single index by standardizing each narcissism index and averaging them.

Table 1
Study 1 examples of coding for the intensity of remote work resistance.

1: Supportive of remote work	4: Indifferent or unclear opinion of remote work	7: Resistant to remote work
“Over time as an organization we have proven to ourselves and to our clients base that we can work from home, we can work remotely and do it effectively...” “With COVID-19, and the inability to fly from one location to the next, the openness to look at new ways of working and how you connect is better than ever...My focus is not to get back to normal, my focus is let's go beyond, far beyond normal of what we were doing before.” “The rapid move to remote work provided [us] and other organizations with an unprecedented opportunity to reexamine people's ways of working. Ultimately, this will help our employees effectively meet business objectives and serve customers in more than 200 countries while enhancing the experience of working from a corporate workspace, bedroom office, coffee shop, or hot desk.”	“Our top priority as a company has been the health and well-being of our employees, customers, partners and the communities where we live and work...” “...We also remain steadfast in our pledge to continue to evaluate and adjust our operations to meet the evolving guidelines from the CDC and local officials around customer and associate safety.” “...As a company, we'll continue to make measured and thoughtful decisions that are in the best interest of our employees, our customers and the long-term health of the company.” “...We also want to provide additional clarity to everyone, allowing you to plan for your own childcare, eldercare and other personal considerations. While the needs of each business will vary over the next five months, we currently expect that those non-production employees who have been working remotely will continue to do so for the remainder of the calendar year...”	“The executive team's view here is, when it's safe to we will be back to work...” “As soon as you hear someone say 'the new normal' plug your ears, and say 'bull'. Since I've been CEO I've seen a lot of new normals.” “If you want to get paid New York rates, you work in New York.” “I do think for a business like ours...this is not ideal for us. And it's not a new normal. It's an aberration that we're going to correct as soon as possible...”

remote work. The raters used a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating extremely low resistance to employees working remotely (i.e., strong preference for remote/hybrid work) and 7 reflecting extremely high resistance to employees working remotely (i.e., strong preference for in-person work). The raters achieved high levels of reliability ($ICC(2) = 0.77$) and agreement ($AD = 0.39$) according to conventional guidelines (Smith-Crowe et al., 2013). Thus, we averaged the two raters' scores into one measure of CEOs' remote work resistance intensity.³

CEOs received high resistance intensity scores when they expressed a strong desire for their organization to avoid remote and hybrid work, and maintain and/or return to an in-person working environment. These CEOs often explicitly remarked on the costs associated with remote working arrangements and/or failed to acknowledge benefits beyond health and safety precautions, and articulated plans to revert to a

³ Since CEOs made these statements during the height of the pandemic, it is important to establish that they were stable indicators of their attitudes and actions with respect to remote work. To ensure that these codes were reliable indicators of remote resistance, we evaluated test–retest reliability. We followed the same procedures to measure remote work resistance for a subsample of CEOs for the following twelve-month period (June 2021 to June 2022). We were able to identify two articles for 61 of the CEOs, and the same two independent research assistants coded each CEO's stance on remote work using the same measure. They again achieved high levels of reliability ($ICC(2) = 0.78$) and agreement ($AD = 0.40$). The correlation between the resistance measures at each time frame (2020–2021; 2021–2022) was $r = 0.60$ ($p < 0.001$), suggesting considerable consistency of remote work resistance intensity over time.

traditional in-person working model. For example, one CEO stated, “By Labor Day [2020], I’ll be very disappointed if people haven’t found their way into the office and then we’ll have a different kind of conversation.” CEOs received low scores when they expressed an intention to continue providing the option to work remotely over a purely in-person model. They voiced a strong desire for their organization to allow virtual work indefinitely into the future, proposing tangible benefits to flexible working models well beyond the health and safety of their employees. One CEO expressed it this way: “We didn’t previously do...company meetings in a virtual format (before the lockdown). I think this will be part of our future offense. We’re feeling very optimistic about the future.” Another reflected, “I think technology has really helped us move to the remote workplace, which has been outstanding...” For further examples of anonymized quotes, see Table 1.

To measure the scope of remote work resistance, we assessed the range of objections that CEOs registered to remote work. In a content analysis, we identified six main categories of reasons that CEOs expressed for resisting remote work: productivity, collaboration, innovation, learning, culture, and well-being. The second author and an independent coder assessed whether each theme was present or absent in CEOs’ quotes, achieving moderate agreement (Cohen’s kappa = 0.46), and a third independent coder reconciled their disagreements. Examples of anonymized quotes for each category can be found in Table 2. We operationalized the scope of resistance by counting the number of different types of reasons that CEOs provided. Since the two resistance indicators shared considerable variance ($r = 0.36, p < 0.001$) and the same range, we averaged them to form a composite measure of resistance to remote work.

Table 2
Study 1 examples of coding for the scope of remote work resistance.

Category	Illustrative Quotations
Productivity	“We’ve seen productivity drop in certain jobs...” “...we did miss things when we were apart. It just wasn’t as efficient.”
Collaboration	“...some tasks are better performed in the office.” “it’s...important to capture the natural feeling of tapping a colleague on the shoulder and spontaneously grabbing a coffee.” “it’s very advantageous to have us co-located to where we very quickly can see each other, make decisions...” “with most of our people isolating at home, we knew they were hungry for connection.”
Innovation	“It’s very hard to draw that same...creativity and spark of ingenuity that the human spirit creates for business.” “We’re a big believer in being an innovative company and creating new opportunities—and we believe that will work better when we’re back together.”
Learning	“...an apprenticeship model...is almost impossible to replicate in the Zoom world” “...remote work virtually eliminates spontaneous learning...because you don’t run into people at the coffee machine, talk with clients in unplanned scenarios, or travel to meet with customers and employees for feedback...”
Culture	“[incoming hires] wouldn’t get the ‘direct mentorship’ they need.” “...dramatically undermine the character and culture you want to promote in your company.” “...maybe I’m just old-fashioned, but I think for new customers and employees, it is important to come to an office to learn about our culture, to learn about our company, to learn about the way we deal with each other and to reinforce those values.”
Well-Being	“...when our work regularly spills over into nights, very early mornings and weekends, it can prevent us from recharging fully, and that isn’t good for you nor, ultimately, for [us].” “...difficult to transition from a work mindset to private life...When you are working from home, it sometimes feels like you are sleeping at work.”

Frontline dependence. As noted above, during the pandemic, CEOs who relied heavily on frontline workforces were constrained in their options for remote and hybrid work. To account for this, we created a binary variable that indicated whether the industry was dependent on frontline or essential workers (0 = no, 1 = yes). We mapped the Execucomp industry definitions to categorize the following industries as reliant on frontline or essential workers: healthcare, retail, construction, restaurants, utility/energy, manufacturing, communications, wholesaler, transportation, automobiles, and tourism/hospitality. We treated frontline dependence as a control variable in hypothesis tests and as a moderator in exploratory analyses.

Control variables. We controlled for CEO and firm factors that may influence CEO narcissism and/or resistance to remote work. At the CEO level, given that narcissism is known to decline with age (Foster et al., 2003; Weidmann et al., 2023) but younger CEOs are more likely to adopt remote work (Aksoy et al., 2026), we controlled for CEO age using Execucomp data. Given that women are on average less narcissistic than men (Ingersoll et al., 2017; Muris et al., 2017), we controlled for CEO gender, obtained from company annual reports, proxy statements, and biographical information. Since narcissistic tendencies have proven to be stronger among more individualistic groups (Foster et al., 2003), we also controlled for CEO race, obtained from publicly available sources including self-identification in interviews, business press reporting, and profiles in industry directories. We also controlled for job tenure as a potential factor in CEO leverage to make decisions (Simsek, 2007), calculated using start dates in Execucomp and corrected using a log transformation to adjust for positive skewness (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012; Ham et al., 2018).⁴ To control for a source of CEO structural power within the organization, we created binary codes to capture whether the CEO was the founder of the company (O’Reilly et al., 2014).

At the firm level, we controlled for firm size because larger firms tend to have more resources to advance their decisions (Wales et al., 2013) and are more likely to mandate return to office (Ding & Ma, 2024). We operationalized firm size using three metrics: the number of employees (Al-Shammari et al., 2019), total revenue (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007), and market capitalization (Capalbo et al., 2018). To mitigate against the risk of temporal aberrations or overweighing one year (Hmieleski & Baron, 2009), each firm size metric was calculated as the average of the 2020 and 2021 figures.⁵

4.3. Study 1 results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for our focal study variables are presented in Table 3.

4.3.1. Narcissism and remote work resistance

We conducted ordinary least squares regression analyses predicting remote work resistance from CEO narcissism with and without control

⁴ Given that CEO tenure was calculated as of December 31, 2021, there was a chance that the tenure and age information in Execucomp were for a CEO who joined after our sample period. To account for this, for all CEOs with tenure of one year or less, we examined the coded articles to ensure that the CEO in the articles was the same CEO for whom we had age and tenure data. In instances where CEOs were not the same, we identified the CEO who led the company during the sample period’s information by searching Execucomp.

⁵ Two private companies (USAA and American Family Insurance) are included in the final sample of $n = 259$ CEOs. These companies publish annual reports and the relevant data for all four narcissism indicators. However, these companies do not have market capitalization data and thus were excluded from any analyses using control variables ($n = 257$).

Table 3
Study 1 means, standard deviations, and correlations.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Narcissism	0.03	0.46	—						
2. Resistance to remote work	2.04	0.90	0.24***	—					
3. Power motivation proxy (0 = not board chair, 1 = board chair)	0.49	0.50	0.21***	0.08	—				
4. Status motivation proxy (board directorships 1–5)	2.00	1.63	0.22***	0.08	0.22***	—			
Industry Controls:									
5. Industry frontline (0 = not dependent, 1 = dependent)	0.72	0.45	−0.13*	0.09	0.04	−0.06	—		
CEO Controls:									
6. Age	59.46	5.89	0.09	0.01	0.31***	0.19**	−0.07	—	
7. Org. tenure	11.02	10.14	−0.03	0.07	0.11	−0.03	−0.04	0.16**	—
8. Gender (0 = female, 1 = male)	0.93	0.25	−0.02	0.08	0.14*	−0.16**	−0.03	0.06	0.14*
9. Race (0 = nonwhite, 1 = white)	0.91	0.29	0.11	0.00	0.04	0.04	−0.01	0.05	0.05
10. Founder (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0.03	0.18	0.14*	0.00	0.07	−0.01	−0.12	0.11	0.10
Company Controls:									
11. Employees	75993.18	106325.70	0.10	0.18**	0.02	0.02	0.09	0.07	0.06
12. Revenue	39631.83	60785.80	0.17**	0.14*	−0.01	0.12*	0.06	0.06	−0.04
13. Market capitalization	75242.51	152376.31	0.25***	0.18**	0.04	0.14*	−0.09	−0.05	0.01
14. Resistance intensity	3.72	1.30	0.16**	0.89***	0.05	0.04	0.18**	0.00	0.04
15. Resistance scope	0.36	0.87	0.26***	0.74***	0.08	0.10	−0.09	0.02	0.09

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Narcissism	0.03	0.46							
2. Resistance to remote work	2.04	0.90							
3. Power motivation proxy (0 = not board chair, 1 = board chair)	0.49	0.50							
4. Status motivation proxy (board directorships 1–5)	2.00	1.63							
Industry Controls:									
5. Industry frontline (0 = not dependent, 1 = dependent)	0.72	0.45							
CEO Controls:									
6. Age	59.46	5.89							
7. Org. tenure	11.02	10.14							
8. Gender (0 = female, 1 = male)	0.93	0.25	—						
9. Race (0 = nonwhite, 1 = white)	0.91	0.29	−0.08	—					
10. Founder (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0.03	0.18	0.05	−0.01	—				
Company Controls:									
11. Employees	75993.18	106325.70	−0.05	−0.04	0.20**	—			
12. Revenue	39631.83	60785.80	−0.20**	−0.03	0.07	0.46***	—		
13. Market capitalization	75242.51	152376.31	0.05	−0.22***	0.19**	0.46***	0.40***	—	
14. Resistance intensity	3.72	1.30	0.06	0.03	−0.11	0.09	0.07	0.01	—
15. Resistance scope	0.36	0.87	0.07	−0.06	0.17**	0.25***	0.18**	0.37***	0.36***

Note. Correlation table shows pairwise correlations. $N = 259$ for all cells, except those corresponding to market capitalization, where $N = 257$ due to two private companies without market capitalization data. Employees, revenue, and market capitalization variables are computed as averages of 2020 and 2021 values. Employees variable was measured as number of employees, revenue and market capitalization variables were stated in \$ millions, and CEO's age and organizational tenure were measured as number of years.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

variables. Without controls, CEO narcissism was positively associated with remote work resistance, $b = 0.47$, $SE = 0.12$, $\beta = 0.24$, $t = 3.96$, $p < 0.001$ (Table 4, Model 1). This relationship was robust even when including all of the relevant controls, $b = 0.45$, $SE = 0.12$, $\beta = 0.23$, $t = 3.61$, $p < 0.001$ (Table 4, Model 2). CEO narcissism was also significant when we analyzed the two remote resistance indicators separately (without controls, intensity $b = 0.46$, $SE = 0.18$, $\beta = 0.16$, $t = 2.64$, $p <$

⁶ As mentioned above, we also analyzed the indicators of the narcissism index separately. Of the four indicators, two had positive relationships with remote work resistance. Relative cash compensation was significantly associated with remote work resistance ($r = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$), photo size was marginally associated with remote work resistance ($r = 0.11$, $p < 0.10$), as was relative non cash compensation ($r = 0.11$, $p < 0.10$). In a model including these three variables and frontline worker-dependent industry, relative cash compensation and relative non-cash compensation were significant independent predictors of remote work resistance (relative cash compensation: $b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.07$, $\beta = 0.25$, $t = 4.21$, $p < 0.001$; relative non cash compensation: $b = 0.26$, $SE = 0.13$, $\beta = 0.12$, $t = 2.08$, $p < 0.05$). Photo size was a marginal predictor of remote work resistance ($b = 0.11$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = 0.12$, $t = 1.90$, $p = 0.06$). Further, narcissistic CEOs were significantly more likely to express concerns about collaboration, $b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.04$, $\beta = 0.21$, $t = 3.49$, $p < 0.001$, and learning, $b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.03$, $\beta = 0.21$, $t = 3.41$, $p < 0.001$, but not about productivity, culture, creativity, or well-being, although the base rates for the latter three categories were particularly low.

Table 4
Study 1 regression results for remote work resistance.

Variables	Model 1 <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>t</i>	Model 2 <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>t</i>
Narcissism	0.47 (0.12)	3.96***	0.45 (0.12)	3.61***
CEO Control Variables:				
Founder (0/1)			−0.31 (0.31)	−1.02
Company Control Variables:				
Employees			0.01 (0.01)	1.60
Revenue			0.00 (0.01)	0.15
Market capitalization			0.01 (0.00)	1.24
Industry Control Variables:				
Frontline-dependent industry (0/1)			0.22 (0.13)	1.72
R^2		0.06***		0.10***
ΔR^2		—		0.04*

Note. $N = 259$ for Model 1 and $N = 257$ for Model 2 due to two private companies without market capitalization data. Employees, revenue, and market capitalization variables are computed as averages of 2020 and 2021 values. Revenue and market capitalization are in \$ millions. To aid interpretation, we scaled the variables so that revenue and market cap are measured in units of \$10 billion, and number of employees is per 10,000 employees.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 5a

Study 1 regression results: moderated mediation by power motivation and frontline-dependence.

Variables	Model 1: Power Motivation		Model 2: Power Motivation		Model 3: Remote Work Resistance		Model 4: Remote Work Resistance		Model 5: Remote Work Resistance	
	b (SE)	z	b (SE)	z	b (SE)	t	b (SE)	t	b (SE)	t
Narcissism	1.04 (0.32)	3.32***	1.12 (0.33)	3.35***					0.42 (0.13)	3.23**
Mediators:										
Power motivation proxy					0.11 (0.11)	0.96	0.46 (0.21)	2.16*	0.42 (0.21)	1.96
Status motivation proxy					0.04 (0.04)	1.08	0.04 (0.03)	1.17	0.01 (0.03)	0.31
CEO Controls:										
Founder (0/1)			0.53 (0.76)	0.70					−0.33 (0.31)	−1.08
Company Controls:										
Employees			0.00 (0.02)	0.14					0.01 (0.01)	1.56
Revenue			−0.02 (0.03)	−0.82					0.00 (0.01)	0.02
Market capitalization			−0.00 (0.01)	−0.02					0.01 (0.00)	1.47
Industry Controls:										
Frontline-dependent industry (0/1)			0.41 (0.30)	1.38			0.41 (0.17)	2.40*	0.46 (0.17)	2.68**
Interaction:										
Power motivation proxy*Frontline-dependent industry (0/1)							−0.50 (0.25)	−1.99*	−0.52 (0.25)	−2.12*
R ²		—		—		0.01		0.03		0.12***
ΔR ²		—		—		—		—		0.09***

Note. $N = 259$ for Model 1 and $N = 257$ for Model 2 due to two private companies without market capitalization data. Employees, revenue, and market capitalization variables are computed as averages of 2020 and 2021 data. Revenue and market capitalization are in \$ millions. To aid interpretation, we scaled the variables so that revenue and market cap are measured in units of \$10 billion, and number of employees is per 10,000 employees.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

0.01; scope $b = 0.58$, $SE = 0.17$, $z = 3.42$, $p < 0.001$; with controls, intensity $b = 0.59$, $SE = 0.18$, $\beta = 0.21$, $t = 3.28$, $p < 0.01$; scope $b = 0.44$, $SE = 0.20$, $z = 2.18$, $p < 0.05$).^{6, 7} Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Among the control variables, CEO narcissism was significantly related to being a founder, having higher average revenue and market capitalization, and not working in an industry that is dependent on in-person work (see bivariate correlations in Table 3). As expected, being dependent on in-person work predicted significantly higher resistance to remote work. Although narcissistic CEOs were less likely to be in industries that depended on in-person work, they were more likely to resist remote work whether or not we controlled for this factor, which also did not moderate the relationships of CEO narcissism with resistance to remote work.⁸

4.3.2. Exploratory analysis of mechanisms and boundary conditions

To further investigate the relationship between narcissism and remote work resistance, we sought to obtain proxies for both mechanisms. For power motivation, we measured whether CEOs were also the chairman of their company's board, an important source of structural power for CEOs (Finkelstein, 1992; Harrison et al., 1988; Westphal, 1998). For status motivation, we assessed the number of external board directorships that CEOs held on Fortune 500, university, and nonprofit boards, as these prestigious positions provide CEOs with access to the corporate elite, which we capped at five to eliminate skewness (Acharya & Pollock, 2013, 2021; Chatterjee & Pollock, 2017). Results for the full

measure are also reported.

CEO narcissism was a significant predictor of the power motivation proxy of being chairman of the board, $b = 1.04$, $SE = 0.32$, $z = 3.32$, $p < 0.001$ (Table 5a, Model 1) as well as the status motivation proxy of board directorships, $b = 0.78$, $SE = 0.22$, $\beta = 0.22$, $t = 3.60$, $p < 0.001$ (Table 5b, Model 1). With controls, the results remained significant for the exploratory measures of both power motivation ($b = 1.12$, $SE = 0.33$, $z = 3.35$, $p < 0.001$; Table 5a, Model 2) and status motivation ($b = 0.68$, $SE = 0.23$, $\beta = 0.19$, $t = 2.95$, $p < 0.01$; Table 5b, Model 2). However, the exploratory proxies were not significant direct predictors of remote work resistance (Table 5a, Model 3; Table 5b, Model 3).

To gain insight into the nonsignificant relationships of the exploratory mechanisms with remote work resistance, we turned our attention to a potential boundary condition. Frontline work dependence is a contingency that may have limited CEOs' opportunities to express their motivations during the pandemic. Relying on frontline workers represented a strong situation (Meyer et al., 2010), as it imposed constraints on the adoption of remote work and placed pressure on CEOs to accommodate employees, and may thereby have discouraged CEOs from expressing their true views. Thus, CEOs' power and status motivations should be more likely to predict remote work resistance when their industries are not reliant on frontline workers.

We tested whether CEOs' power and status motivations only predicted remote work resistance when their industries were not reliant on frontline workers. For the power motivation proxy, the relationship between CEO chairmanship and remote work resistance was moderated by frontline work dependence, $b = -0.50$, $SE = 0.25$, $\beta = -0.27$, $t = -1.99$, $p < 0.05$ (Table 5a, Model 4), controlling for the status motivation proxy. CEOs who held the board chair role expressed more resistance to remote work if their industry did not depend on frontline workers ($b = 0.46$, $SE = 0.21$, $\beta = 0.26$, $t = 2.16$, $p < 0.05$), but not if their industry relied on frontline workers ($b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.13$, $\beta = -0.02$, $t = -0.28$, $p = 0.78$). To complete the test of moderated mediation, we conducted a second-stage moderated mediation analysis bootstrapped with 10,000 random samples in Mplus without controls. Narcissism had a significant indirect effect on resistance to remote work through the power motivation proxy in industries that were not

⁷ Given that scope is a count variable with a high proportion of zero values and overdispersion, we estimated a zero-inflated negative binomial model.

⁸ Examining specific industries, there were only three significant correlations: CEOs of technology firms were less likely to resist remote work ($r = -0.13$, $p < 0.05$); CEOs of healthcare firms were more likely to resist remote work ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$), and CEOs of finance firms were more likely to be narcissistic ($r = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$). The positive relationship between CEO narcissism and remote work resistance remained significant when adding three additional industry control variables for technology, healthcare, and finance, $b = 0.44$, $SE = 0.12$, $\beta = 0.22$, $t = 3.71$, $p < 0.001$.

Table 5b

Study 1 regression results: moderated mediation by status motivation and frontline-dependence.

Variables	Model 1: Status Motivation		Model 2: Status Motivation		Model 3: Remote Work Resistance		Model 4: Remote Work Resistance		Model 5: Remote Work Resistance	
	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>
Narcissism	0.78 (0.22)	3.60***	0.68 (0.23)	2.95**					0.43 (0.13)	3.36***
Mediators:										
Status motivation proxy					0.04 (0.04)	1.08	0.22 (0.06)	3.41***	0.18 (0.06)	2.89**
Power motivation proxy					0.11 (0.11)	0.96	0.10 (0.11)	0.87	0.04 (0.11)	0.33
CEO Controls:										
Founder (0/1)			−0.49 (0.57)	−0.87					−0.32 (0.30)	−1.05
Company Controls:										
Employees			−0.01 (0.01)	−0.91					0.01 (0.01)	1.71
Revenue			0.03 (0.02)	1.34					0.00 (0.01)	0.19
Market capitalization			0.01 (0.01)	1.19					0.00 (0.00)	1.02
Industry Controls:										
Frontline-dependent industry (0/1)			−0.14 (0.23)	−0.62			0.69 (0.20)	3.47***	0.71 (0.20)	3.60***
Interaction:										
Status motivation proxy*Frontline-dependent industry (0/1)							−0.25 (0.08)	−3.28**	−0.24 (0.07)	−3.23**
<i>R</i> ²		0.05***		0.07**		0.01		0.06**		0.14***
ΔR^2		—		0.02		—		—		0.08***

Note. *N* = 259 for Model 1 and *N* = 257 for Model 2 due to two private companies without market capitalization data. Employees, revenue, and market capitalization variables are computed as averages of 2020 and 2021 data. Revenue and market capitalization are in \$ millions. To aid interpretation, we scaled the variables so that revenue and market cap are measured in units of \$10 billion, and number of employees is per 10,000 employees. * *p* < 0.05. ** *p* < 0.01. *** *p* < 0.001.

dependent on frontline work (indirect effect = 0.51, 95% CI [0.05, 1.36]), but not in those that were dependent (indirect effect = −0.009, 95% CI [−0.27, 0.29]). The index of moderated mediation was significant (index = −0.52, 95% CI [−1.38, −0.01]).

For the status motivation proxy, the relationship between board directorships and remote work resistance was also moderated by frontline work dependence, *b* = −0.25, *SE* = 0.08, β = −0.45, *t* = −3.28, *p* < 0.01 (Table 5b, Model 4), controlling for the power motivation proxy.⁹ CEOs who held more board positions expressed more resistance to remote work if their industry did not depend on frontline workers (*b* = 0.20, *SE* = 0.07, β = 0.31, *t* = 2.72, *p* < 0.01), but not if their industry relied on frontline workers (*b* = −0.02, *SE* = 0.04, β = −0.04, *t* = −0.56, *p* = 0.58). In a second-stage moderated mediation analysis without controls, narcissism had a significant indirect effect on resistance to remote work through status motivation in industries that were not dependent on frontline work (effect = 0.12, *SE* = 0.07, 95% CI [0.01, 0.27]), but not those that depended on frontline work (effect = −0.03, *SE* = 0.03, 95% CI [−0.10, 0.02]). The index of moderated mediation was significant (index = −0.15, 95% CI [−0.33, −0.02]).¹⁰

4.4. Study 1 discussion

Our study provides initial evidence that leader narcissism is associated with resistance to remote work. Narcissistic CEOs resisted remote work more intensely and expressed a wider range of rejections to it. Our exploratory analyses also offer preliminary support for the role of power

and status motivations as explanatory mechanisms. The relationship between CEO narcissism and resistance to remote work was partially mediated by their quests for power in chairing their companies' boards and status in serving as a director on other organizations' boards, provided that they were not dependent on frontline workers.

However, our findings are subject to several limitations inherent to analysis of publicly available archival data. First, CEOs are an extreme sample, and it remains to be seen whether the results would generalize to a more diverse group of leaders at various hierarchical levels of organizations (Kennedy et al., 2013; Nevicka et al., 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2021). Similarly, the pandemic presented an unusually disruptive environment, and it is important to study whether the phenomenon of narcissistic leaders' remote work resistance would generalize beyond this context. Second, it is not clear whether the results will hold for other measures of narcissism, and whether the results are unique to narcissism or driven by traits with shared variance such as extraversion (Grijalva et al., 2015). Third, we were only able to analyze a nonrandom sample of articles that were published online (Call et al., 2022), and it is possible that CEOs' publicly expressed views of remote work did not fully align with their privately held opinions (Fiol, 1995), or that their views were shaped or even drafted by colleagues. If this is true, it would constrain the effects of CEO narcissism on remote work resistance, rendering our analysis a more conservative test, but it is necessary to survey leaders themselves to directly assess remote work resistance. Finally, although we found preliminary support for power and status motivations as exploratory mechanisms, they were proxy measures and only predicted remote work resistance in industries that were not dependent on frontline workers. Although the results for status motivation were more robust than for power motivation, this may be a function of the fact that the binary variable of board chairman was a coarser measure than the number of board directorships. Further, both measures are imperfect proxies for power and status motivations. It is possible that resistance was driven not by the motivations for power and status per se, but rather by narcissistic leaders gaining formal power (French & Raven, 1959) as chairmen and idiosyncrasy credit (Hollander,

⁹ These results were consistent when we did not cap the number of board directorships at five. The interaction of board seats and frontline dependence was significant (*b* = −0.22, *SE* = 0.06, β = −0.46, *t* = −3.46, *p* < 0.001).

¹⁰ In parallel moderated mediation analyses, without controls, the interaction of status motivation with frontline dependence remained significant (*b* = −0.22, *SE* = 0.08, β = −0.39, *t* = −2.90, *p* < 0.01) but the interaction for power motivation dropped below significance (*b* = −0.29, *SE* = 0.25, β = −0.16, *t* = −1.19, *p* = 0.24).

1958) as directors, which may have made it easier to express and enforce resistance.

In Study 2, we sought to address these limitations with a conceptual replication (Crandall & Sherman, 2016; Lykken, 1968) and extension of our findings. We increased generalizability with a multiwave survey of leaders across different levels post-pandemic, this time obtaining direct measures of both narcissism and remote work resistance, as well as a number of personality controls to isolate the incremental contribution of narcissism. We also assessed power and status motivations directly as mediating mechanisms along with an alternative mechanism of trust, which has often been identified as a source of leader resistance to remote work (e.g., Clark et al., 2012; Kaplan et al., 2018; Mortensen & Gardner, 2021; Parker et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2021; Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016).

5. Study 2 method

5.1. Sample, design, and procedures

We tested our hypotheses in a three-wave, preregistered study in 2023, with an interval of approximately one week between waves. We collected multi-wave data to reduce concerns associated with common method variance in self-report survey data (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In our Time 1 survey, we collected data on the independent variable (narcissism), control variables, and work demographics. In our Time 2 survey, we collected data on mediating mechanisms (power motivation, status motivation, trust). In our Time 3 survey, we collected data on the dependent variable (remote work resistance).

To achieve sufficient statistical power to detect a small effect (Cohen, 1988), we targeted a final sample of 350 U.S.-based leaders with complete data across all three waves. We recruited participants via Prolific, an online research panel. Research indicates that data collected from these online samples are comparable in quality to data from conventional field sources (Ramsey et al., 2016; Walter et al., 2019). Consistent with our preregistration, we used a pre-screener survey to recruit a random sample of current U.S. leaders who would receive the Wave 1 survey; we intentionally invited a large sample upfront in anticipation of attrition due to eligibility criteria (current leaders with at least one direct report), quality checks, and data missingness in time-lagged studies. To ensure quality data, we adopted a conservative approach, employing five attention checks in each survey that used a variety of indicators based on recommendations for panel-based research (Aguinis et al., 2021; Meade & Craig, 2012).¹¹ The final sample of 359 leaders

¹¹ Of the 981 respondents who completed the Time 1 survey, we excluded 277 participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria. Specifically, as preregistered, at T1, we asked participants to confirm their leadership responsibility and removed those whose responses did not match those in the pre-screener survey (To et al., 2024). We also removed 104 who did not meet employment eligibility criteria (i.e., were currently unemployed and had no direct reports). An additional 172 participants failed at least one of five attention checks, and one participant failed the speed check (average response rates faster than 1 s per item across all Likert-style questions in a given survey). We invited the remaining 704 participants to the Time 2 survey and received 516 complete responses (73% response rate). Applying the same quality checks, we removed 54 participants who failed at least one attention check (no incremental participants failed the speed check), resulting in a final sample of 462 leaders who qualified for the Time 3 survey. We received completed surveys from 377 participants (82% response rate), and proceeded to exclude 15 participants who failed at least one of five attention checks (as in T2, no additional participants failed the speed check), resulting in a sample of N=362. Upon review of the final dataset, we identified three participants who completed all three surveys who did not qualify. While they self-reported that they were leaders in a pre-screen survey, they then characterized their position as “Staff (with no supervisory responsibilities)” in the T1 survey. Thus, after removing these three individuals, the final sample consisted of N=359 leaders.

with complete survey data at all three time points, who passed all attention and quality checks within each survey. The participants were 55.2% male and 67.4% Caucasian with an average age of 38.13 years ($SD = 10.54$). In total, 33.7% were lower-level, 40.4% were middle-level, and 25.9% were upper-level leaders, with average organizational tenure of 6.98 years ($SD = 5.93$) and an average of 10.97 direct reports ($SD = 28.44$).¹² The five most common industries were retail (12.8%), healthcare and social services (11.4%), financial services and insurance (7.5%), construction (5.3%), and restaurants and food services (5.3%).

5.2. Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all items were assessed using a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (“disagree strongly”) and 7 (“agree strongly”). Full scales of all focal measures are reported in the Online Supplement. We assessed narcissism at the dispositional trait level and power and status motivations at the contextual level (Vallerand, 1997, 2000) at work.

Narcissism. We measured narcissism with the 9-item narcissism subscale from Jones and Paulhus’ (2014) Short Dark Triad (SD3) scale. Sample items include “I know that I am special because everyone keeps telling me so” and “I hate being the center of attention (reverse-scored)” ($\alpha = 0.83$).¹³

Remote work resistance. We measured remote work resistance as a continuous variable with six items, adapting measures of resistance to change (Oreg, 2006). Participants indicated their level of agreement with three attitudinal items (“Employees should come in most days even if they have a long commute”; “Employees should work in the office unless they have proven that they deserve an exception”; “Employees should be at the office even if they think they’re more efficient working from home”; $\alpha = 0.94$) and three behavioral items (“I’d make sure there were negative consequences for employees who don’t come onsite enough”; “I’d create a cap on the number of days employees can work remotely”; “I’d set guidelines to make sure employees are coming into the office”; $\alpha = 0.92$). We operationalized the dependent variable as the mean of these six items ($\alpha = 0.95$), and examined each subscale independently in exploratory analyses.

Power and status motivations. We assessed power motivation with seven items adapted from an existing measure of dominance motivation (Cheng et al., 2010): “I enjoy having control over my team”; “I am willing to use aggressive tactics to get my way with employees”; “My team knows it is better to let me have my way”; “I enjoy having authority over my team”; “I often try to get my own way regardless of what my direct reports may want”; “I try to control employees rather than permit them to control me”; and “Some employees are afraid of me” ($\alpha = 0.89$). We assessed status motivation using four items adapted from existing measures (Choi et al., 2025; Flynn et al., 2006): “I put a lot of effort into making sure my team admires me”; “I want my employees to respect me and hold me in high esteem”; “It would bother me if my employees didn’t recognize my status”; and “I care about my position of prestige and social standing at work” ($\alpha = 0.81$).¹⁴

¹² One respondent reported an outlier value (1900 direct reports; including this observation: $M = 16.23$, $SD = 103.67$). This participant was excluded in any analyses including direct reports as a variable due to listwise deletion.

¹³ As preregistered, we also collected an additional measure of narcissism for exploratory analyses—the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, NPI-16 (Ames et al., 2006)—and conducted analyses using the full 16-item measure ($\alpha = 0.89$) as well as a shortened 8-item version that removed potentially confounding items ($\alpha = 0.83$).

¹⁴ Since there are not well-validated scales to assess contextual power and status motivations, we also collected second measures of each motivation. Following guidance from the Editor and reviewers to focus on the measures with high face validity, we report the results from the alternative operationalizations in the online supplement.

Table 6

Study 2 means, standard deviations, and correlations.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Narcissism	3.73	1.07	(0.83)										
2. Remote work resistance	3.05	1.81	0.30***	(0.95)									
3. Power motivation	2.95	1.21	0.39***	0.34***	(0.89)								
4. Status motivation	4.76	1.20	0.44***	0.31***	0.46***	(0.81)							
Demographic Controls:													
5. Age	38.13	10.54	0.00	0.20***	−0.04	0.03							
6. Gender (0 = female, 1 = male)	0.55	0.50	0.09	0.08	0.11*	−0.04	−0.04						
7. Race (0 = nonwhite, 1 = white)	0.67	0.47	−0.16**	−0.07	−0.01	−0.09	0.05	0.01					
8. Higher education (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0.73	0.44	0.08	−0.03	0.09	0.07	0.06	0.11*	−0.09				
9. Lives alone (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0.15	0.36	0.03	−0.04	0.02	−0.07	−0.04	−0.01	−0.12*	0.05			
10. Org. tenure	6.98	5.93	−0.02	0.18***	0.05	0.06	0.44***	0.06	0.06	0.07	−0.10		
11. Direct reports	10.97	28.44	0.03	0.03	0.02	−0.03	0.03	−0.01	0.03	0.02	0.11*	0.09	
12. Level (0 = low, 1 = high)	0.26	0.44	0.10	0.07	0.03	0.04	0.20***	0.01	−0.05	0.00	−0.06	0.23***	0.05
Dispositional Controls:													
13. Trust	4.82	0.94	−0.05	−0.15**	−0.44***	−0.20***	0.02	−0.03	0.02	−0.01	−0.05	0.04	−0.01
14. Trust propensity	3.59	0.93	0.06	0.06	−0.11*	0.03	0.18***	−0.01	0.10*	0.07	−0.03	0.12*	0.08
15. Machiavellianism	4.10	1.08	0.36***	0.20***	0.48***	0.35***	−0.05	0.11*	−0.05	0.10	−0.03	0.01	−0.05
16. Psychopathy	2.62	0.92	0.31***	0.08	0.43***	0.19***	−0.11*	0.21***	0.04	0.02	0.07	−0.03	−0.05
17. Openness	5.49	1.18	0.26***	0.02	−0.05	0.01	0.04	0.10	−0.01	−0.03	0.00	0.00	0.02
18. Extraversion	3.63	1.45	0.66***	0.19***	0.14**	0.20***	−0.05	0.05	0.00	0.01	−0.02	−0.02	0.06
19. Agreeableness	5.38	1.09	0.16**	−0.02	−0.18***	0.03	0.06	−0.17**	−0.07	−0.03	−0.03	0.00	0.03
20. Conscientiousness	5.09	1.18	0.10	0.19***	0.01	0.06	0.15**	0.06	−0.07	0.13*	−0.01	0.13*	0.08
21. Emotional stability	3.39	1.29	−0.19***	−0.12*	0.08	−0.02	−0.13*	−0.20***	0.02	−0.04	0.10	−0.13*	−0.02

Variable	M	SD	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
1. Narcissism	3.73	1.07										
2. Remote work resistance	3.05	1.81										
3. Power motivation	2.95	1.21										
4. Status motivation	4.76	1.20										
Demographic Controls:												
5. Age	38.13	10.54										
6. Gender (0 = female, 1 = male)	0.55	0.50										
7. Race (0 = nonwhite, 1 = white)	0.67	0.47										
8. Higher education (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0.73	0.44										
9. Lives alone (0 = no, 1 = yes)	0.15	0.36										
10. Org. tenure	6.98	5.93										
11. Direct reports	10.97	28.44										
12. Level (0 = low, 1 = high)	0.26	0.44										
Dispositional Controls:												
13. Trust	4.82	0.94	0.03	(0.64)								
14. Trust propensity	3.59	0.93	0.06	0.26***	(0.81)							
15. Machiavellianism	4.10	1.08	0.02	−0.34***	−0.33***	(0.84)						
16. Psychopathy	2.62	0.92	0.04	−0.16**	−0.21***	0.58***	(0.73)					
17. Openness	5.49	1.18	0.10*	0.06	0.09	−0.08	−0.02	(0.78)				
18. Extraversion	3.63	1.45	0.14**	0.09	0.18***	0.03	0.15**	0.28***	(0.84)			
19. Agreeableness	5.38	1.09	0.08	0.19***	0.27***	−0.29***	−0.28***	0.36***	0.34***	(0.77)		
20. Conscientiousness	5.09	1.18	−0.01	0.05	0.10*	−0.08	−0.26***	0.11*	0.00	0.06	(0.74)	
21. Emotional stability	3.39	1.29	−0.10	−0.20***	−0.26***	0.15**	0.18***	−0.22***	−0.20***	−0.10	−0.41***	(0.75)

Notes. This table shows pairwise correlations. $N = 359$ for all variables except Direct Reports ($N = 358$), as one respondent reported an outlier value (1900 direct reports; including this observation: $M = 16.23$, $SD = 103.67$). This participant was excluded in any analyses including this variable due to listwise deletion. Leader level is a binary variable, where 0 = low seniority (lower-level, middle-level) and 1 = high seniority (upper-level). Cronbach's α appears along the diagonal in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Control variables. We also measured a series of additional personality and demographic variables. Along with their trust in employees, we assessed leaders' dispositional trust propensity, as leaders with a trait-like tendency to trust others may be less skeptical of their subordinates' ability to perform in a remote environment despite their own limited ability to monitor and control (see Mayer et al., 1995, for a review). We measured trust with five items adapted from Mayer and Davis (1999), including "If I had my way, I wouldn't let my employees have any influence over issues that are important to me (R)" and "I would be comfortable giving my employees a task or problem which was critical

to me, even if I could not monitor their action" ($\alpha = 0.64$). We measured trust propensity using Mayer and Davis' (1999) eight-item measure ($\alpha = 0.81$).

We measured the Big Five personality traits as control variables, with a particular emphasis on extraversion given its partial overlap with narcissism (e.g., Grijalva et al., 2015) and preferences for the attention and energy of face-to-face interaction (Ashton et al., 2002; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1990; Landers & Lounsbury, 2006). We measured openness in light of its role in receptivity to change (e.g., Nadkarni & Herrmann, 2010). We used the mini-IPIP scales (Donnellan

Table 7

Study 2 regression results for remote work resistance.

Variables	Model 1 <i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>	Model 2 <i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>	Model 3 <i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>	Model 4 <i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>
Narcissism	0.50 (0.09)	5.87***	0.31 (0.13)	2.40*	0.25 (0.09)	2.65**	0.10 (0.13)	0.72
Mediators:								
Power motivation					0.32 (0.08)	3.73***	0.33 (0.10)	3.33***
Status motivation					0.23 (0.09)	2.60**	0.19 (0.09)	2.22*
Demo. Controls:								
Age			0.02 (0.01)	2.65**			0.03 (0.01)	2.92**
Race (0 = non-white, 1 = white)			-0.16 (0.19)	-0.81			-0.19 (0.19)	-1.02
Org. tenure			0.03 (0.02)	2.00*			0.02 (0.02)	1.52
Disp. Controls:								
Trust			-0.25 (0.10)	-2.48*			-0.08 (0.11)	-0.73
Machiavellianism			0.16 (0.11)	1.37			0.08 (0.11)	0.72
Psychopathy			-0.03 (0.13)	-0.25			-0.12 (0.13)	-0.94
Openness			-0.08 (0.08)	-0.92			-0.03 (0.08)	-0.40
Extraversion			0.14 (0.09)	1.57			0.16 (0.09)	1.88
Agreeableness			-0.07 (0.10)	-0.72			-0.08 (0.10)	-0.81
Conscientiousness			0.21 (0.09)	2.52*			0.18 (0.08)	2.16*
Emotional stability			-0.04 (0.08)	-0.47			-0.05 (0.08)	-0.61
R^2		0.09***		0.19***		0.16***		0.24***
ΔR^2		—		0.11***		—		0.08***

Notes. $N = 359$. Any observable differences in ΔR^2 are due to rounding. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 8a

Study 2 regression results: mediation by power motivation.

Variables	Model 1: Power Motivation <i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>	Model 2: Power Motivation <i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>	Model 3: Remote Work Resistance <i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>	Model 4: Remote Work Resistance <i>b</i> (SE)	<i>t</i>
Narcissism	0.44 (0.05)	8.11***	0.37 (0.07)	5.18***	0.33 (0.09)	3.63***	0.17 (0.13)	1.27
Mediators:								
Power motivation					0.39 (0.08)	4.92***	0.39 (0.09)	4.07***
Demo. Controls:								
Age			-0.01 (0.01)	-1.12			0.03 (0.01)	2.95**
Race (0 = non-white, 1 = white)			0.11 (0.11)	1.03			-0.20 (0.19)	-1.05
Org. tenure			0.02 (0.01)	2.04*			0.03 (0.02)	1.59
Disp. Controls:								
Trust			-0.44 (0.06)	-7.75***			-0.08 (0.11)	-0.77
Machiavellianism			0.11 (0.06)	1.71			0.11 (0.11)	1.02
Psychopathy			0.30 (0.07)	4.16***			-0.15 (0.13)	-1.13
Openness			-0.08 (0.05)	-1.76			-0.05 (0.08)	-0.55
Extraversion			-0.04 (0.05)	-0.73			0.16 (0.09)	1.76
Agreeableness			-0.03 (0.05)	-0.62			-0.06 (0.10)	-0.60
Conscientiousness			0.09 (0.05)	1.87			0.18 (0.08)	2.15*
Emotional stability			0.03 (0.04)	0.58			-0.05 (0.08)	-0.61
R^2		0.16***		0.44***		0.15***		0.23***
ΔR^2		—		0.28***		—		0.08***

Notes. $N = 359$. Any observable differences in ΔR^2 are due to rounding. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 8b

Study 2 regression results: mediation by status motivation.

Variables	Model 1: Status Motivation		Model 2: Status Motivation		Model 3: Remote Work Resistance		Model 4: Remote Work Resistance	
	b (SE)	t	b (SE)	t	b (SE)	t	b (SE)	t
Narcissism	0.49 (0.05)	9.24***	0.48 (0.08)	5.91***	0.33 (0.09)	3.59***	0.18 (0.13)	1.35
Mediators: Status motivation					0.34 (0.08)	4.10***	0.27 (0.08)	3.21**
Demo. Controls: Age			0.00 (0.01)	0.10			0.02 (0.01)	2.67**
Race (0 = non-white, 1 = white)			−0.00 (0.12)	−0.01			−0.16 (0.19)	−0.81
Org. tenure			0.01 (0.01)	1.22			0.03 (0.02)	1.82
Disp. Controls: Trust			−0.16 (0.06)	−2.55*			−0.21 (0.10)	−2.05*
Machiavellianism			0.21 (0.07)	2.94**			0.10 (0.11)	0.87
Psychopathy			−0.04 (0.08)	−0.47			−0.02 (0.13)	−0.17
Openness			−0.09 (0.05)	−1.72			−0.05 (0.08)	−0.63
Extraversion			−0.06 (0.06)	−1.09			0.16 (0.09)	1.77
Agreeableness			0.09 (0.06)	1.49			−0.10 (0.10)	−0.98
Conscientiousness			0.03 (0.05)	0.58			0.21 (0.08)	2.45*
Emotional stability			0.01 (0.05)	0.14			−0.04 (0.08)	−0.50
R ²		0.19***		0.27***		0.13***		0.22***
ΔR ²		—		0.08***		—		0.09***

Notes. N = 359. Any observable differences in ΔR² are due to rounding. * p < 0.05. ** p < 0.01. *** p < 0.001.

et al., 2006) for extraversion ($\alpha = 0.84$), openness ($\alpha = 0.78$), agreeableness ($\alpha = 0.77$), emotional stability ($\alpha = 0.75$), and conscientiousness ($\alpha = 0.74$). In addition, we captured the other two Dark Triad traits of Machiavellianism ($\alpha = 0.84$) and psychopathy ($\alpha = 0.73$) to determine whether narcissism remained a distinctive, incremental predictor of remote work resistance above and beyond these two other socially aversive traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; see also Furnham et al., 2013, for a review) using the same SD3 measure (Jones & Paulhus, 2014).

Along with these personality variables, we measured additional personal demographic variables that have correlated with narcissism in prior research: age, gender, ethnicity, and educational level (Bergman et al., 2010; Campbell & Foster, 2007; Foster et al., 2003; Roberts et al., 2010; Steffens & Haslam, 2022). Consistent with research on remote work (e.g., Aksoy et al., 2023; Barrero et al., 2023), we also collected data on employees' household characteristics—specifically whether they lived alone (1) or cohabitated with other adults and/or children (0), as this may influence employees' attitudes and ability to work from home. Finally, we included organizational tenure (e.g., Den Hartog et al., 2020; O'Reilly et al., 2018) and leader hierarchical level (0 = junior, 1 = senior), as these variables may influence the ability and opportunity to set organizational policies around working arrangements.¹⁵

¹⁵ We also asked participants to report the percentage of time they spend working remotely to account for varying remote work exposure and requirements across industries and employers. However, since it is likely that a recursive relationship exists between remote work resistance and time spent working remotely, we do not control for this variable in our primary models. We did run exploratory analyses including this as a control variable and find that the results hold: Narcissism was still a significant predictor, albeit a weaker one.

5.3. Study 2 results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for our focal study variables are presented in Table 6. We began by conducting an exploratory factor analysis of the attitudinal and behavioral resistance items, which identified a one-factor solution (Eigenvalue = 4.86, 80.97% of variance explained; the next-highest Eigenvalue was 0.42; factor loadings ranged from 0.85 to 0.93). Next, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis with lavaan (Rosseel, 2012) to assess the factor structure of the four focal variables: narcissism, power motivation, status motivation, and remote work resistance. The predicted solution achieved acceptable fit with the data ($\chi^2[293] = 838.95$, CFI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.06), and all factor loadings were statistically significant, ranging from 0.48 to 0.70 for narcissism, 0.56 to 0.78 for power motivation, 0.66 to 0.79 for status motivation, and 0.81 to 0.92 for remote work resistance.¹⁶

The regression results can be found in Tables 7 and 8. For all regression analyses, following recommended procedures (Becker, 2005; Becker et al., 2016; Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016), we included only those control variables showing significant bivariate correlations with narcissism, remote work resistance, or both.

¹⁶ The narcissism scale has a large number of items, as do the remote work resistance and power motivation scales, and it is well established that over-identified variables can cause parameter instability due to the presence of multiple solutions, correlated residuals and cross-loadings, and increased standard errors (Little et al., 2002). Factor loadings improved when we used parceling techniques (Bandalos, 2002) to reduce the number of indicators to three parcels, ranging from 0.75 to 0.86 for narcissism, 0.83 to 0.91 for power motivation, and 0.91 to 0.95 for remote resistance. This model achieved excellent fit with the data ($\chi^2[59] = 134.43$, CFI = 0.98, SRMR = 0.04).

5.3.1. Remote work resistance

In support of Hypothesis 1, narcissism was positively associated with remote work resistance, without control variables ($b = 0.50$, $SE = 0.09$, $\beta = 0.30$, $t = 5.87$, $p < 0.001$; Table 7, Model 1), as well as with demographic and dispositional control variables¹⁷ ($b = 0.31$, $SE = 0.13$, $\beta = 0.18$, $t = 2.40$, $p < 0.05$; Table 7, Model 2).

5.3.2. Mediating mechanisms

Power motivation. We tested Hypothesis 2 by examining power motivation as a mediator of the relationship between narcissism and remote work resistance. In line with Hypotheses 2a and 2b, narcissism was positively associated with power motivation ($b = 0.44$, $SE = 0.05$, $\beta = 0.39$, $t = 8.11$, $p < 0.001$; Table 8a, Model 1), which in turn was positively associated with remote work resistance ($b = 0.39$, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = 0.26$, $t = 4.92$, $p < 0.001$; Table 8a, Model 3). These results were robust with control variables: Narcissism was positively associated with power motivation ($b = 0.37$, $SE = 0.07$, $\beta = 0.33$, $t = 5.18$, $p < 0.001$; Table 8a, Model 2), which in turn was positively associated with remote work resistance ($b = 0.39$, $SE = 0.09$, $\beta = 0.26$, $t = 4.07$, $p < 0.001$; Table 8a, Model 4). We completed our mediation analyses by bootstrapping 5,000 samples (Hayes, 2013) with replacement from the full sample. Accounting for control variables, the indirect effect of narcissism on remote work resistance through power motivation was significant (indirect effect = 0.14; 95% CI = [0.06, 0.26]). The direct relationship between narcissism and remote work resistance (95% CI = [-0.09, 0.43]) was reduced to $b = 0.17$ and was no longer significant at the $p = 0.05$ level. Thus, in support of Hypothesis 2c, power motivation mediated the relationship between leader narcissism and remote work resistance.

Status motivation. We tested Hypothesis 3 by examining status motivation as a second, independent mechanism. In accord with Hypotheses 3a and 3b, narcissism was positively associated with status motivation ($b = 0.49$, $SE = 0.05$, $\beta = 0.44$, $t = 9.24$, $p < 0.001$; Table 8b, Model 1), and status motivation was positively associated with remote work resistance ($b = 0.34$, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = 0.23$, $t = 4.10$, $p < 0.001$; Table 8b, Model 3). These findings were consistent after adding control variables: Narcissism was positively associated with status motivation ($b = 0.48$, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = 0.43$, $t = 5.91$, $p < 0.001$; Table 8b, Model 2), which in turn was positively associated with remote work resistance ($b = 0.27$, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = 0.18$, $t = 3.21$, $p < 0.01$; Table 8b, Model 4). We completed the mediation analysis using the same bootstrapping procedures as above, and the indirect effect of narcissism on remote work resistance through status motivation was significant (indirect effect = 0.13; 95% CI = [0.04, 0.24]). The direct relationship between narcissism and remote work resistance (95% CI = [-0.08, 0.45]) was reduced to $b = 0.18$ and was no longer significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Thus, in support of Hypothesis 3c, status motivation mediated the relationship between leader narcissism and remote work resistance.

Parallel mediation analyses. We then proceeded to test both mechanisms—power and status motivations—as parallel mediators in the same model. Regression results show that power motivation was still a significant predictor of remote work resistance ($b = 0.32$, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = 0.21$, $t = 3.73$, $p < 0.001$; Table 7, Model 3), as was status motivation ($b = 0.23$, $SE = 0.09$, $\beta = 0.15$, $t = 2.60$, $p < 0.01$; Table 7, Model 3). These findings were consistent after accounting for control variables

(Table 7, Model 4). Parallel mediation analyses including both mechanisms and control variables showed significant indirect effects of narcissism on remote work resistance through both power motivation (indirect effect = 0.12; 95% CI = [0.04, 0.23]) and status motivation (indirect effect = 0.09; 95% CI = [0.01, 0.19]). Thus, mediation analyses suggest that narcissists' resistance to remote work can be explained by both power and status motivations. Detailed results with additional exploratory measures can be found in the Online Supplement (Tables S1–S4).

5.4. Study 2 discussion

Our findings provide convergent support for leader narcissism as a predictor of remote work resistance with a different sample and measures. They also reveal that narcissistic resistance to remote work is explained by power and status motivations, and not by trust. However, questions remain about internal validity. To test the causal impact of narcissism on remote resistance through power and status motivations, we conducted an experiment.

6. Study 3 method

6.1. Sample, design, and procedures

To establish internal validity, we tested our hypotheses in a preregistered online experiment in 2025 randomly assigning participants to one of two conditions: narcissism and control. We activated state narcissism with procedures adapted from Kausel et al. (2015) to prompt participants to consider potential upsides of narcissistic leadership. We asked participants to read a brief description that highlighted characteristics of narcissism and how it can enable business leaders to achieve success by making bold bets on their own visions:

Scientific research shows that many great CEOs are narcissistic: they are confident, self-centered, and bold. They are visionary leaders who are not afraid to put their ambitions above all else. For example, Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, was known to ignore feedback from others and instead make big, risky bets based only on his own gut instinct. That paved the way for the success of the Mac and later the iPhone. Another example is Larry Ellison, CEO of Oracle. He became wildly successful by putting his faith in his own judgment, once even borrowing money against his own stock rather than selling equity. He once said: "It's not enough that we win; all others must lose."

In the control condition, participants did not read this description and proceeded with the survey.

To validate the manipulation, we recruited U.S.-based current leaders via Prolific. The final sample included 221 leaders who passed all quality checks (one attention check, one comprehension check).¹⁸ The participants were 44.5% male and 77.7% Caucasian, with an average age of 42.24 years ($SD = 10.58$).¹⁹ After being randomly assigned to either the narcissism or control condition, they completed the Single-Item Narcissism Scale (SINS; Konrath et al., 2014) on a 7-point scale. A between-subjects ANOVA revealed a significant difference between the narcissism ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.39$) and control condi-

¹⁷ Bivariate correlations (Table 6) show that older ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$) and more tenured ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$) employees tended to be more resistant to remote work. From a personality standpoint, remote work resistance was positively related to Machiavellianism ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$), extraversion ($r = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$), and conscientiousness ($r = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$), and negatively related to emotional stability ($r = -0.12$, $p < 0.05$).

¹⁸ We contacted a total of 1015 U.S. employees as potential participants and screened for leadership responsibility. The final sample size is higher than the pre-registered target of $N=200$ because additional qualifying responses came in before we had a chance to close the study on Prolific (Willroth & Atherton, 2024).

¹⁹ $N = 220$; 1 participant did not provide demographic data.

tions ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 1.10$), $F(1, 219) = 4.60$, $p = 0.03$; $\eta^2 = 0.02$, indicating that the manipulation of state narcissism was successful.²⁰

To test our hypotheses with this manipulation, we targeted a final sample of 500 U.S.-based leaders based on a priori power analyses to detect small effects in this design. We recruited participants via Prolific, intentionally inviting a large sample in anticipation of attrition due to eligibility criteria (current leaders with at least one direct report) and quality checks. We utilized a conservative screening approach, employing two attention checks, a comprehension check, and a time check. The final sample comprised 546 leaders with complete survey data who passed all of the checks.²¹ The participants were 51.5% male and 68.8% Caucasian with an average age of 38.78 years ($SD = 10.38$).²²

6.2. Measures

The preregistered items for all measures can be found in the Online Supplement. As in Study 2, unless otherwise indicated, all items were assessed using a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (“disagree strongly”) and 7 (“agree strongly”).

Remote work resistance. We measured remote work resistance with the same items as in Study 2 ($\alpha = 0.94$).

Power and status motivations. We measured power and status motivations with similar scales to Study 2, adapting them to the context of our experiment. Participants read the following question stem for both mediators: “As I think about managing my team, I would...” For power motivation (adapted from Cheng et al., 2010), the four items were: “Assert my authority,” “Remind them I am the boss,” “Make sure they always follow my orders,” and “Exert my control” ($\alpha = 0.87$). For status motivation (adapted from Choi et al., 2025; Flynn et al., 2006), the four items were: “Put in a lot of effort to have them look up to me,” “Ensure they respect me,” “Go out of my way to have them look up to

me,” and “Ensure they know I’m important” ($\alpha = 0.81$).²³

6.3. Study 3 results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for our focal study variables are presented in Table 9. The detailed results can be found in Table 10. We report additional exploratory findings in the Online Supplement.

6.3.1. Remote work resistance

A between-subjects ANOVA revealed a significant effect of the narcissism manipulation on remote work resistance, $F[1, 544] = 4.02$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$. In support of Hypothesis 1, participants in the narcissism condition displayed significantly higher levels of remote work resistance ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.68$) than those in the control condition ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.68$).

6.3.2. Mediating mechanisms

Power motivation. The narcissism manipulation had a significant effect on power motivation, $F[1, 544] = 10.53$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$. In line with Hypothesis 2a, power motivation was significantly higher in the narcissism condition ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.32$) than in the control condition ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.24$). In support of Hypothesis 2b, power motivation significantly predicted remote work resistance, $b = 0.48$, $SE = 0.05$, $\beta = 0.37$, $t = 9.24$, $p < 0.001$; Table 10, Model 4). Using the PROCESS macro, bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples (Hayes, 2013), the indirect effect of narcissism on remote work resistance through power motivation was significant (indirect effect = 0.17; 95% $CI = [0.07, 0.29]$). Further, the direct relationship between narcissism and remote work resistance was no longer significant (95% $CI = [-0.15, 0.38]$). Thus, in support of Hypothesis 2c, power motivation mediated the relationship between leader narcissism and remote work resistance.

Status motivation. Participants in the narcissism condition reported higher levels of status motivation ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.29$) than those in the control condition ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.30$), but the effect was not significant, $F[1, 544] = 1.37$, $p = 0.24$, $\eta^2 = 0.003$. Thus, Hypotheses 3a and 3c were not supported. However, in line with Hypothesis 3b, status motivation significantly predicted remote work resistance, $b = 0.40$, $SE = 0.05$, $\beta = 0.31$, $t = 7.49$, $p < 0.001$; Table 10, Model 5).²⁴

6.4. Study 3 discussion

These results suggest that activating narcissism caused leader resistance to remote work through power but not status motivation. The experimental approach establishes internal validity by demonstrating that narcissism had a direct impact on leaders’ opposition to virtual work.

7. General discussion

Across three studies, leader narcissism was associated with greater resistance to remote work. This pattern held when we measured

²⁰ We also collected manipulation check data in our focal experiment, adapting four items from the NPI-40 into state measures. A between-subjects ANOVA revealed no significant difference between the narcissism ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.11$) and control conditions ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.14$), $F(1, 544) = .29$, $p = 0.59$; $\eta^2 = 0.001$. One potential explanation is that the manipulation and study purpose may have been transparent to participants, a limitation documented in existing narcissism research (e.g., *Giacomin & Jordan, 2014*). Before being randomly assigned to their conditions, participants completed a measure of trait narcissism, and those in the narcissism condition then read about the well-known narcissistic business leaders and completed the mediator measurements. It is possible that their responses on the state narcissism measure were influenced by demand characteristics (*Orne, 2006*). Additionally, since the manipulation check was not shown to participants until they completed all focal variable scales, they may have been further sensitized to the purpose of the study. This led us to conduct the supplementary pre-registered experiment described above to validate our manipulation. We removed the initial trait narcissism measure and immediately randomly assigned participants to the narcissism or control condition, followed by the manipulation check (*Kausel et al., 2015; Hauser et al., 2018*). For the measure of state narcissism, to make the study purpose less obvious, we shifted to the Single-Item Narcissism Scale (*Konrath et al., 2014*). As noted above, the results demonstrated that our manipulation had a significant positive effect on state narcissism.

²¹ This number is slightly above the N=500 pre-registered target because additional qualifying responses were recorded before we had a chance to close the study on Prolific (*Willroth & Atherton, 2024*).

²² Of the 803 respondents who completed the survey, we excluded 98 who did not meet employment eligibility criteria (i.e., were not leaders, and had no direct reports). An additional 159 participants failed at least one of two attention checks and/or the comprehension check. This left us with a final sample of $N = 546$. One participant did not provide race data.

²³ Following the guidelines from *Willroth and Atherton (2024)*, we note that the pre-registration incorrectly lists *Barrick et al. (2002)* as the source with slightly different items. The items ultimately used in the experiment were adapted from *Choi et al. (2025)* and *Flynn et al. (2006)*, and are listed verbatim above.

²⁴ Examining both mediators in parallel, power motivation ($b = 0.38$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = 0.29$, $t = 6.00$, $p < 0.001$) and status motivation ($b = 0.19$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = 0.14$, $t = 3.00$, $p < 0.01$) were significant independent predictors of remote work resistance (Table 10, Model 6). In the parallel mediation analysis, the indirect effect of narcissism on remote work resistance through power motivation was significant (indirect effect = 0.13; 95% $CI = [0.05, 0.24]$), whereas the indirect effect through status motivation was not (indirect effect = 0.02; 95% $CI = [-0.02, 0.08]$).

Table 9

Study 3 means, standard deviations, and correlations.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Condition	0.52	0.50				
2. Remote work resistance	3.55	1.68	0.09*	(0.94)		
3. Power motivation	3.73	1.30	0.14**	0.38***	(0.87)	
4. Status motivation	3.94	1.30	0.05	0.31***	0.56***	(0.81)

Notes. *N* = 546 for all variables and correlations.Cronbach's α appears along the diagonal in parentheses.* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.01$.**Table 10**

Study 3 regression results.

Variables	Model 1:Power Motivation		Model 2:Status Motivation		Model 3:Remote Work Resistance, No Mediators		Model 4:Remote Work Resistance, Power Motivation Only		Model 5:Remote Work Resistance, Status Motivation Only		Model 6:Remote Work Resistance, Both Mediators	
	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>t</i>
State Narcissism (1/0)	0.36 (0.11)	3.25**	0.13 (0.11)	1.17	0.29 (0.14)	2.01*	0.12 (0.14)	0.86	0.24 (0.14)	1.73	0.13 (0.13)	0.97
Power Motivation							0.48 (0.05)	9.24***			0.38 (0.06)	6.00***
Status Motivation									0.40 (0.05)	7.49***	0.19 (0.06)	3.00**
R^2		0.02**		0.002		0.01*		0.14***		0.10***		0.16***
ΔR^2		—		—		—		—		—		0.15***

Note. *N* = 546 for all variables and correlations, with the exception of race where *N* = 545 (1 participant did not provide race data). Any observable differences in ΔR^2 are due to rounding.* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.01$.

narcissism unobtrusively with behavioral indicators, assessed it directly with personality surveys, and manipulated it situationally, and when we assessed remote work resistance via public statements and private surveys. It was robust across a large, diverse sample of public company CEOs in an archival study, as well as a preregistered time-lagged three-wave field survey of current leaders and a preregistered experiment with current leaders. The tendency for narcissistic leaders to resist remote work was explained by the motivations for power and status.

7.1. Theoretical contributions

Our research makes meaningful contributions to the literatures on remote work and narcissistic leadership. First, our theoretical perspective and empirical findings offer new insights on why leaders resist remote work. Considerable research has traced resistance to opportunity and ability barriers, including technological and financial constraints (for a review, see Ferdous et al., 2026) and a lack of self-efficacy, competence, and experience with remote work (Kasperska et al., 2024; Pérez et al., 2002; Silva-C et al., 2019; Sweet et al., 2017; Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016). Our research extends beyond these opportunity and ability antecedents to highlight the important role of leader personality in resistance to remote work. In contrast to arguments that leader opposition to virtual work is due to the sociability facet of extraversion (Jacques et al., 2023), the trust facet of agreeableness (Clark et al., 2012; Kaplan et al., 2018; Mortensen & Gardner, 2021; Parker et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2021; Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016), and openness (Anderl, 2024; Parker et al., 2019), we find consistent evidence that the central explanatory trait is narcissism. As such, our research indicates that it is the agentic tendency to be self-centered and egotistical—rather than the Big Five traits or other Dark Triad traits—that proves most potent for understanding leader resistance to flexible work arrangements.

Our studies also shed light on the motivations underlying leader resistance to remote work, which have been largely neglected. The limited extant evidence highlights that opposition is a response to the constraints that leaders themselves face, such that leaders restrict employees' autonomy and flexibility when they lack autonomy in their own jobs (Parker et al., 2019). We find that resistance is not merely a reaction

to personal job restrictions, but also an agentic expression of the narcissistic desire for power and status over others. Our studies show that ego concerns may motivate even leaders with high levels of autonomy—such as CEOs and executives—to restrict freedom for employees to work virtually. These results underscore that resistance to remote work has social as well as individual roots.

In doing so, our research accentuates that opposition to virtual work arrangements is more self-centered than previous research has recognized. Departing from the dominant assumption that leaders oppose remote work out of concern for organizational goals of productivity (Barrero et al., 2023; Bloom et al., 2023a, 2023b; Lewandowski et al., 2025; Matysiak et al., 2025), our studies reveal that egotistical goals to obtain power and status figure centrally in decisions about where employees work. These choices may even come at the expense of performance, as return-to-office mandates incite turnover among senior and highly skilled employees (Ding et al., 2024) and deprive organizations of more experienced and diverse talent pools (Hsu & Tambe, 2025). Our research thereby exposes the self-serving motives underlying resistance to remote work. This discovery helps to illuminate why the explosion of digital surveillance and monitoring mechanisms (Barbaro, 2022; Corbyn, 2022; Kantor & Sundaram, 2022) has not been sufficient to encourage more widespread support for remote work. Although monitoring allows leaders to measure performance, it has failed to enrich interactions in ways that satisfy narcissistic leaders' egoistic desires to feel special and superior. As such, our research calls attention to the vital role of power and status motivations in shaping leader policies around flexibility at work.

Further, our research complicates prior findings about the consequences of leader narcissism. Existing research suggests that narcissists are drawn to virtual platforms as avenues for obtaining widespread attention while minimizing exposure to complex interpersonal interactions (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Gnambs & Appel, 2018; Liu & Baumeister, 2016). However, these studies have focused heavily on how narcissists utilize social media, overlooking that they may have different reactions to virtual interaction in positions of authority. We find that in leadership roles, narcissists have a clear preference for face-to-face interaction, where richer channels allow them to not only gain attention but also wield power and status. Although online engagement may

allow them to be widely seen, narcissistic leaders are attracted to in-person work as an arena for greater influence. This evidence suggests that narcissism has a contingent rather than consistent relationship with stances toward virtual interaction, and can manifest in distinct and even opposing ways across contexts and roles. Whereas virtual platforms may extend agency outside positions of authority, they can constrain agency within them.

Finally, by introducing resistance to remote work as a novel outcome of leader narcissism, our research challenges the common relationship between narcissistic leadership and change (Cragun et al., 2020). Existing scholarship paints narcissistic leaders as more inclined to initiate strategic change and embrace new ideas and products (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2011; Foster et al., 2009; Gerstner et al., 2013; Ingersoll et al., 2017; Kashmiri et al., 2017; Kavusan et al., 2025; Tuggle et al., 2024). However, we find that the widespread adoption of remote work represents a policy shift that narcissistic leaders resist due to power and status motivations. This suggests that narcissists may oppose changes that threaten their desires for power and status, forgoing their typical flexibility to restrict autonomy about where work is done. Our work thereby answers calls to examine when narcissistic leaders stay the course rather than embracing change (Sleesman et al., 2018) and consider a wider range of behavioral consequences of leader narcissism (Cragun et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2021). In doing so, we shift the lens from a central focus on resistance to change as a problem for leaders to overcome (Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Ford et al., 2008) to a problem that leaders can cause and exacerbate. Ironically, efforts by narcissistic leaders to extend their agency can limit organizations to the status quo.

7.2. Limitations and future directions

The contributions resulting from our studies are subject to a series of limitations. First, we found support for our narcissistic resistance hypothesis with both public statements and surveys about resistance to remote work, but questions remain about whether these responses generalize to actual remote work policies. Given the limitations of verbal communications and self-reports, future research should include measures of the decisions that leaders make about remote work. To further triangulate the narcissism results, there is also an opportunity for scholars to explore newer unobtrusive measures of narcissism from social media posts, such as listing accomplishments on LinkedIn (Härtel et al., 2024), posting self-aggrandizing information on Twitter/X (Grijalva et al., 2020), and sharing flattering selfies on Instagram (McCain & Campbell, 2018).

Second, our findings also raise unanswered questions about mediating mechanisms. Whereas power motivation was a robust mechanism across our studies, the results for status motivation were inconsistent; it was significant in Studies 1 and 2 but not in Study 3. Additional investigation is necessary to ascertain whether the effect would be detected with a stronger narcissism manipulation or a different operationalizations of status motivation, such as seeking status rank (Körner et al., 2025) or talking about one's work in grandiose terms in an attempt to gain "hero status" (Freis & Brunell, 2021). Another possibility is that narcissists may seek a specific kind of status and may be inclined to employ certain types of strategies to obtain it, which vary based on the dimensions of narcissism itself (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019, 2021).

Third, our research points to new avenues for inquiry. One such direction concerns steps for attenuating narcissistic leaders' resistance to remote work. Process-based models of narcissism suggest that narcissistic leadership may fluctuate in response to different contexts (Grapsas et al., 2020, 2022; Heyde et al., 2023). There is an opportunity to study the cures for leader narcissism as well as the costs (Hamstra et al., 2021; Sedikides & Campbell, 2017). Affirming narcissists' egos produces mixed results (Hardaker et al., 2021; Sherman et al., 2009) and sometimes backfires (Morf et al., 2011). The nascent literature on tempering state narcissism highlights two potential avenues for managing narcissism by neutralizing self-threat: (1) attenuating narcissists' egocentric

motives and (2) refocusing those motives (Giacomin & Jordan, 2014, 2015, 2018; Jordan et al., 2014). Along the former lines, self-distancing may lay the groundwork for more balanced perspective-taking (Grossmann & Kross, 2014; Kross & Grossmann, 2012; Kross et al., 2005; Mischkowski et al., 2012; Staudinger & Glück, 2011). For the latter approach, it may be possible to appeal directly to narcissists' self-centered tendencies (Mitchell et al., 2025) by presenting remote work as a vehicle for gaining personal competitive advantages. This may reframe potential threats as opportunities for glory (Morf et al., 2011; Wallace & Baumeister, 2002) and fulfill narcissists' desires to win and outperform others (Geukes et al., 2020). We encourage researchers to develop and test novel micro-interventions to counteract narcissistic tendencies (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2025), contributing to the research examining dynamic energy clashes between narcissistic leaders and their organizations (Sedikides & Campbell, 2017). Further, media richness theory suggests that as remote communication technologies provide more vivid and immediate cues, narcissistic resistance may dissipate. For example, if companies begin to operate in a metaverse, with everyone appearing as holograms using augmented reality, will narcissistic leaders feel fully capable of managing by walking around the globe virtually?

It will also be worthwhile to explore the underlying nature of narcissists' desires to gain and maintain power and status. For example, are narcissists driven by a desire to micromanage the way subordinates spend their time both within and outside of office walls (Maner & Mead, 2010)? Are narcissists more motivated by their desire to attain formal or informal interpersonal power (e.g., Peiró & Meliá, 2003)? Does narcissistic supply stem from the amount of power accumulated or the number of employees charmed into submission? Do narcissistic leaders always prefer attention and admiration displayed in-person versus virtually? Relatedly, it will also be helpful to develop theoretical frameworks that may explain when and why narcissistic leaders resist change. Do narcissistic leaders tend to embrace changes only when they can initiate bold moves on their own terms, as opposed to reacting to changes imposed by their broader environments or thrust upon them by others? Will narcissists resist other types of changes that threaten to rob them of power and status?

Finally, a broader examination of the diverging views of remote work among leaders versus employees—and their interplay—is needed. Future research may explore whether narcissistic employees are more likely to favor remote work as a source of flexibility or reject it as a limited path to power and status. Additionally, it will be fruitful to investigate the dynamic relationship between employee and leader attitudes. Among firms issuing return-to-office mandates, is it employees' reluctance to return that elicits narcissistic leaders' opposition to remote work, initiating a reactance-resistance cycle in which leaders seek revenge (Geng et al., 2025) on employees by doubling down after feeling their power and status threatened? Will narcissistic CEOs go so far as to shift company headquarters to optimize for personal convenience at the expense of employees (e.g., Tangelakis-Lippert, 2025)? How do organizations adjudicate the power struggles that ensue when employees favor remote work while narcissistic leaders reject it? As CEOs appear to be growing more receptive to the reality that the future is hybrid (Mitchell et al., 2024), to what extent will leaders' and employees' attitudes toward remote work change over time?

7.3. Practical implications

Our research offers actionable insights for leaders and employees. As organizations continue to set and revise their remote work policies, our findings shed light on a new set of factors that will be worthy of consideration. It may be wise for organizations to consider narcissism when forming committees tasked with setting and implementing remote work policies (Mitchell et al., 2025)—particularly given narcissists' preference for power- and status-conferring roles (Grijalva et al., 2020; Roberts & Robins, 2000). To limit the self-serving influence of narcissistic leaders, it may be helpful to ensure that policies about flexible

work arrangements are determined more collaboratively. For employees seeking to encourage the adoption of remote work, our findings suggest that it is important to avoid threatening leaders' power and status motivations. For example, instead of advocating assertively for remote work, it may be more prudent to consult leaders for their advice (Liljenquist, 2010; Stern & Westphal, 2010; Yukl & Tracey, 1992) on what would make hybrid arrangements palatable from their perspectives. By showing respect for their authority and accomplishments, employees may provide narcissistic leaders with validation and reduce their resistance.

8. Conclusion

Long before the pandemic, the opportunity to work virtually helped to motivate and retain employees (Bloom et al., 2015; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), who continue to show a clear preference to join and stay in organizations that offer flexibility (Barrero et al., 2021a; Barrero et al., 2021b; Bloom et al., 2024; Hsu & Tambe, 2025; Smite et al., 2023). Given that remote and hybrid work are here to stay (Bloom et al., 2023c), and organizations face increasing challenges in attracting and retaining employees (De Smet et al., 2021; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023), flexible work arrangements are likely to become even more valuable. Our findings show that narcissistic leaders' cravings for power and status are key barriers to embracing this new workplace reality. The pursuit of authority and glory may be an enemy of flexibility.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Marissa S. Shandell: Conceptualization, Writing, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Investigation, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Courtney E. Elliott:** Writing, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Investigation, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration. **Adam M. Grant:** Conceptualization, Writing, Methodology, Investigation, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Funding acquisition.

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