


# Chapter 5

## The “Dark Side” of Personality: Examining Narcissism in Virtual Teams

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In this chapter the authors discuss how team personality composition (i.e., team narcissism) influences virtual team performance via team processes (i.e., information sharing and team conflict). Evidence was found for the negative impact of team narcissism on information sharing. The relationship between narcissism and team conflict was not supported. Information sharing predicted virtual team performance. Practical implications regarding staffing and virtual team collaboration in higher education are discussed at the end of the chapter.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Due to technological advancements and recent global events (e.g., COVID-19), there has been an increasing reliance on virtual teams in both educational and professional contexts (Frost & Duan, 2020; Kolm et al., 2022). Virtual teams, defined as a group of dispersed individuals primarily collaborating through digital communication tools (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002), present unique opportunities and

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challenges for teamwork. While working in a virtual team offers great flexibility and unprecedented access to talent, these teams often face challenges stemming from team compositional factors (Scott & Wildman, 2015). Highlighting the importance of team composition in the virtual context, Ferrazzi (2014, p. 120; from Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017) stated: “Team composition should be your starting point. You won't get anywhere without hiring (or developing) people suited to virtual teamwork.” Team compositional research focuses on how configurations of team member attributes (e.g., age, gender, sex, personality, collective orientation; Bell, 2007; Bell et al., 2011) influence team processes and outcomes. Among the team member attributes investigated, personality traits have been historically considered to be particularly relevant (LePine et al., 2011).

When it comes to the examination of team member personality composition in virtual teams, the majority of the literature has relied on the prominent Big Five typology (Hoch & Dulebohn, 2017). Even though the Big Five personality traits provide valuable insights into team dynamics, there has been a call that research should go beyond the examination of these traits (Roberts & Woodman, 2017). One trait that seems to be particularly relevant in the context of virtual teams is narcissism. The importance of examining narcissism within the context of virtual teams stems from the idea that narcissistic tendencies (e.g., admiration, validation seeking, strong need for dominance, Back, 2018) may amplify the challenges associated with interpersonal interaction in virtual teams. For example, the strong need for dominance and admiration seeking may amplify the already existing challenges with communication and information sharing. Additionally, the strong need for dominance may make it more difficult to develop cohesion and psychological safety within virtual teams due to others not having the ability to speak up. This strong need for dominance and validation seeking may also impact the development of cohesion in virtual teams due to the constant attention seeking serving to create faultlines (i.e., hypothetical dividing lines based on one or more attributes; Lau & Murnighan, 1998) within the team as other team members become frustrated by the inability to have a voice. Despite its potential relevance, narcissism in the context of virtual teams has received little attention in the literature. Therefore, the purpose of the current research is to provide a broader understanding of how narcissism impacts team performance (i.e., team decision-making accuracy) via team processes (i.e., information sharing and relationship conflict) and in doing so provide guidance for team composition and collaboration in the context of virtual teams.

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