

**A Person-Context Look at UPB and CWB: How Narcissism and Competitive (Cooperative)  
Organizational Context Influence Willingness to Engage in Unethical Behavior**

by

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## Abstract

Previous research has indicated that narcissism functions as a positive predictor of counterproductive work behavior (CWB). However, research on moderators of the relationship between narcissism and unethical behavior in organizations remains substantially unexamined. Drawing on a person-situation interactionist perspective and goal facilitation theory, the current study examined how organizational context and perceptions impact the relationship between narcissism and unethical organizational behavior, namely CWB and unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB). Specifically, this study examined the impacts of competitive (cooperative) organizational context and organizational instrumentality perceptions on the relationships between narcissism and CWB and UPB. Consistent with expectations, results indicated that narcissism functioned as a significant positive predictor of UPB. However, competitive (cooperative) organizational context failed to moderate this relationship. Organizational instrumentality, on the other hand, significantly weakened the relationship between narcissism and UPB. Contributions to the UPB literature and suggestions for future research are discussed further.

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## **Introduction**

Unethical behavior includes those actions deemed illegal or immoral by a larger community (Jones, 1991). Coffin (2003) estimated that unethical behavior in the form of counterproductive work behavior (CWB) costs United States organizations nearly \$50 billion each year. Unethical organizational behavior can also greatly harm consumers, employees, and investors. For example, a report issued in 2017 by Wells Fargo indicated that the company charged 570,000 customers for car insurance they did not need, which led to roughly 20,000 customers defaulting on their car loans and many having their cars repossessed (Egan, 2017). The Enron scandal serves as another example. Shareholders lost around \$74 billion in the four years before the company declaring bankruptcy, and employees lost billions of dollars in pensions (Segal, 2019).

Though researchers have often studied unethical behavior in organizations arising from desires for retribution (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997) or the benefit of the self at the expense of other organizational members (Greenberg, 2002), a more recent trend has emerged in studying unethical behavior committed in the name of the company (Umphress et al., 2010). Umphress and Bingham (2011) define unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB) as voluntary behaviors committed by employees to benefit the organization or its members but which violate societal values, laws, or standards of conduct. UPBs may harm consumers, other organizations, and, ironically, the organization employees intend to benefit by engaging in this behavior. For example, employees may commit illegal acts to aid the company. However, this behavior may lead to eventual negative ramifications for the organization in the form of steep legal penalties or a damaged reputation (Umphress et al., 2010). Though Umphress et al. (2010) admit that individuals may commit UPB partly out of self-interest (i.e., benefitting the organization may

also lead to benefits for the acting individual), UPB differs from CWB in that UPB does not involve an intent to harm the organization or its members. Instead, UPB involves an intent to benefit the organization. Due to this conceptual distinction between CWB and UPB, researchers have called for more research examining the antecedents of UPB (Pierce & Aguinis, 2015).

Lewin (1951) first posited that behavior functions as an interaction of both person and environment. Tett and Burnett (2003) employed this idea of person-situation interaction in their personality trait-based interactionist model of job performance. In their model, Tett and Burnett (2003) proposed five situational features that can impact the expression of traits relevant to job performance: job demands, distracters, constraints, releasers, and facilitators. According to their model, some events or factors within an individual's environment may facilitate a trait's expression, while other situational characteristics may inhibit a trait's expression. For example, the physical distance between a highly sociable supervisor and his or her subordinates may constrain his or her expression of sociability, while a company retreat may facilitate the release of his or her sociability (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Based on this personality-situation interactionist perspective, the current study examines the roles of both organizational context and personality in willingness to commit unethical behavior. Specifically, this study examines internally competitive versus cooperative organizational context as a moderator of the relationship between narcissism and UPB and between narcissism and CWB. Additionally, this study examines the moderating effect of organizational instrumentality on the relationship between narcissism and UPB. Though several previous studies have looked at individual characteristics associated with UPB (Grabowski et al., 2019; Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Umphress et al., 2010), the relationship between organizational context and UPB remains largely unexamined. This study contributes to the literature on unethical behavior in organizations in multiple ways. It

contributes to the CWB literature by examining organizational context as a moderator of the narcissism-CWB relationship, and it contributes to the UPB literature by examining the antecedent of narcissism and the interplay of narcissism, organizational instrumentality, and organizational context in influencing UPB.

### **Narcissism, CWB, and Organizational Context**

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) includes voluntary behaviors intended to harm the organization or its stakeholders (Spector & Fox, 2005). Due to the cost CWBs pose to organizations, many researchers have examined antecedents of CWB, including personality traits (Judge et al., 2006; O'Boyle et al., 2012). Of the Dark Triad personality traits (i.e., narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy), research suggests that narcissism has the strongest positive relationship with CWB (O'Boyle et al., 2012).

Narcissism refers to a personality trait characterized by a cognitive-affective preoccupation with the self (Westen, 1990). Grandiose narcissism includes four facets: entitlement/exploitativeness, superiority/arrogance, self-absorption/self-admiration, and leadership/authority (Emmons, 1987). Grandiose narcissism also involves exhibitionism, antisociality, and low agreeableness (Thomas et al., 2012). In interpersonal relationships, narcissists exhibit lower empathy and gratitude and greater hostility, anger, and distrust (Lambe et al., 2018; Sedikides et al., 2004). Given these qualities, researchers have unsurprisingly found a positive relationship between narcissism and CWB in multiple meta-analytic studies (Judge et al., 2006; O'Boyle et al., 2012).

Researchers have found contextual moderators of the relationship between narcissism and CWB, however (O'Boyle et al., 2012; Grijalva & Newman, 2014). A meta-analysis conducted by Grijalva and Newman (2014) revealed that ingroup collectivist culture weakens the

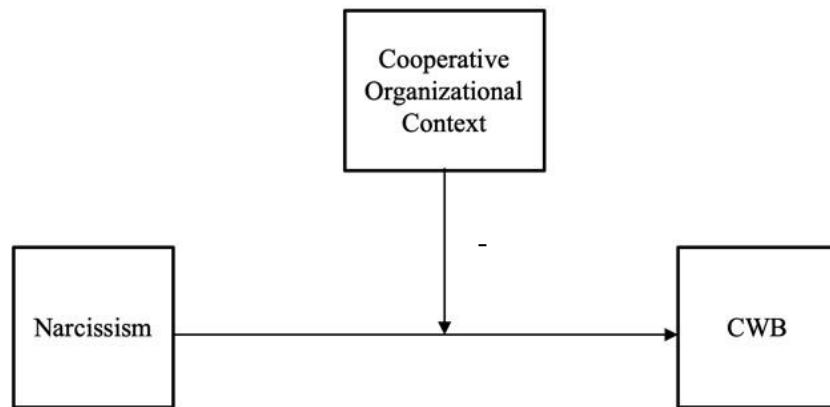


narcissism-CWB relationship. The relationship between narcissism and CWB may be weaker when ingroup collectivist culture is high because collectivist cultures stress loyalty to and cohesiveness among the group and its members (House et al., 2004), and members of these cultures may express less tolerance of CWB enacted by narcissists (O'Boyle et al., 2012). Though ingroup collectivist culture and cooperative organizational context differ in that ingroup collectivist culture refers to the predominant culture of the area an organization resides in, rather than a characteristic of the organization itself, they may both function as moderators of the narcissism-CWB relationship. In this study, cooperative organizational context refers to an organizational environment in which organizational policies, values, and beliefs emphasize unity and cohesion. A cooperative organizational context may also weaken narcissism's relationship with CWB because it signals to narcissists that the organization and its members will have less tolerance for CWBs enacted by them. Hypothesis 1 is as follows:

*H1: Organizational context will moderate the relationship between narcissism and CWB, such that the relationship will be weaker in the cooperative organizational context condition than in the competitive organizational context condition.*

**Figure 1**

*Visual representation of Hypothesis 1*



### **Narcissism, UPB, and Organizational Context**

Though research has pointed to a positive association between narcissism and CWB (Judge et al., 2006; O'Boyle et al., 2012), some may presume narcissism has a negative relationship with UPB. Previous research has found a negative association between narcissism and affective commitment (Choi, 2019) and a positive relationship between affective commitment and UPB (Ebrahimi & Yurtkoru, 2017). Also, narcissists have higher self-absorption levels (Emmons, 1987) and, therefore, may seem unlikely to engage in voluntary behavior to benefit the organization in which they work.

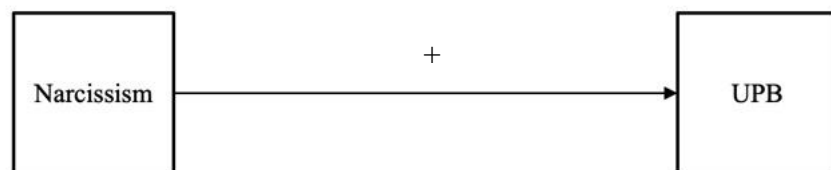
However, other evidence points to a potential positive association between narcissism and UPB. Umphress et al. (2010) found a positive relationship between positive reciprocity beliefs and UPB, and Lee et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between psychological entitlement and UPB. Lee et al. (2019) also found that status striving mediated the relationship between personal entitlement and UPB. Narcissism entails a sense of entitlement (Emmons, 1987), or the belief that one deserves good outcomes irrespective of the quality of one's efforts. Research has also shown that narcissists have higher status striving levels (Zeigler-Hill et al.,

2017). Due to a high sense of entitlement (Emmons, 1987) and a strong desire to attain high status (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2017), narcissists may commit UPB more frequently because they expect rewards from the organization and perceive they can elevate their status by engaging in this behavior. Narcissists also tend to place a higher value on the potential benefits from taking risks and engage in riskier financial decisions (Foster et al., 2009). This tendency may lead narcissists to commit UPB more frequently because they possess a greater willingness to take on the risks associated with violating laws and social norms in committing UPB. Based on this evidence, Hypothesis 2 is as follows:

*H2: Narcissism will positively predict endorsement of UPB.*

**Figure 2**

*Visual representation of Hypothesis 2*



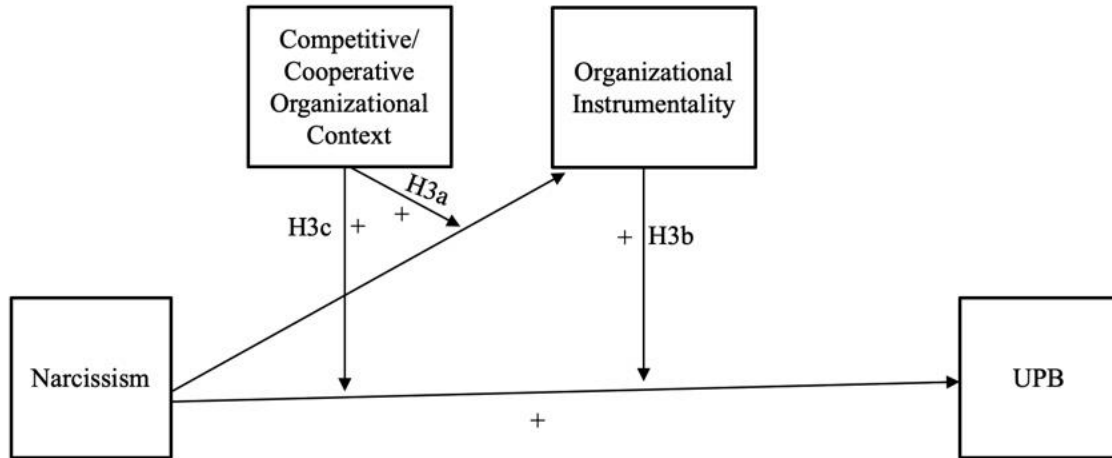
The relationship between narcissism and UPB may depend on context, however. According to goal facilitation theory, individuals assess their social environment to locate opportunities to accomplish valued goals (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). Narcissists may be more willing to engage in UPB if they feel an organization helps them achieve their goals because they feel they stand more to gain more from engaging in such behavior. Previous research has shown that narcissists engage in prosocial behavior when they perceive an opportunity to personally gain from the behavior (Konrath et al., 2016). Concerning competitive versus cooperative organizational context, narcissists may be more willing to engage in UPB in a competitive organizational context because they believe this behavior will help them achieve their desires to

exhibit superiority and achieve glory (Thomas et al., 2012) due to the stratification in these organizations. On the other hand, because cooperative organizations focus more on collective performance than on individual performance relative to other organizational members, narcissists may not feel that engaging in UPB will help them achieve their desires in these organizations. In other words, narcissists may perceive greater organizational instrumentality, or the perception that an organization helps one reach their goals, in a competitive than in a cooperative organizational context. Therefore, Hypotheses 3a-3c are as follows:

*H3: (a) Narcissism will be associated with greater perceptions of organizational instrumentality in the competitive organizational context condition than in the cooperative organizational context condition; (b) organizational instrumentality will moderate the relationship between narcissism and UPB, such that higher levels of organizational instrumentality will strengthen the positive relationship between narcissism and UPB; and (c) organizational context will moderate the relationship between narcissism and UPB, such that the relationship will be stronger in the competitive organizational context condition than in the cooperative organizational context condition.*

**Figure 3**

*Visual representation of Hypothesis 3*



## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Participants consisted of 210 undergraduate students, eighteen years of age or older, enrolled in a university in the Southeastern United States who participated for extra credit toward their grade in the course. These participants were 40% male, had an average age of approximately 20 years ( $M = 19.84$  years,  $Mdn = 20.00$  years,  $SD = 1.25$  years), and were predominantly Caucasian (83% Caucasian, 10% Asian or Asian American/Pacific Islander, 4% Black or African American, 1% Hispanic, 1% Native American, and 1% Other).

### **Procedures**

Participants for this study were recruited from two sources within the university. First, students were recruited to participate in the study via an email sent to them by their business analytics professor. Then, students were recruited through the university's SONA system to participate for extra credit in a psychology course in which they were enrolled. All data were collected through Qualtrics survey software, and participants were notified that their responses to

the survey would remain anonymous. After participants agreed to participate in the study, they filled out demographic information (i.e., age, gender identity, and ethnicity). The participants then completed the narcissism component of the SD-3. After completing the narcissism questionnaire, participants were presented with either the competitive or the cooperative organizational context and asked to answer the following questions as though they were employees within the organization described. Next, the participants responded to the organizational instrumentality scale, the CWB scenarios, and the UPB scenarios, respectively. The participants then completed the same process in the other organizational context condition (i.e., competitive organizational context or cooperative organizational context). All scenarios and scales used in this study are provided in Appendix A.

### **Measures and Materials**

**Organizational context.** Organizational context (i.e., competitive organizational context and cooperative organizational context) was manipulated via two scenarios presented to participants. The organizational context scenarios aligned with Fletcher and Nusbaum's (2009) conceptualization of a competitive work environment and were adapted from Ritterbush's (2018) scenarios. Each participant was presented with the competitive context condition and the cooperative context condition. These conditions were counterbalanced in order to reduce the possibility of order effects. The competitive organizational context condition consisted of the following: "You are an employee at Company A, a company that makes desktops, laptops, and tablet computers. At Company A, employees are encouraged to become top performers in order to gain annual personal bonuses that are available only to the top employees and to gain opportunities for promotion. Company A lays off the bottom 10% of performers in every department each year because it is primarily interested in investing in its best performers. The

organizational culture of Company A encourages a competitive work environment for its employees.” The cooperative organizational context condition, on the other hand, presented participants with the following scenario: “You are an employee at Company X, a company that makes desktops, laptops, and tablet computers. Company X’s core belief is based on collaboration and succeeding as a team. Company X provides a deferred profit-sharing plan for all of its employees to help them save for retirement. Each year, the company deposits a portion of its profits into a deferred profit-sharing plan account set up for every employee. Company X believes “the strength of the organization is each member. The strength of each member is the organization.” The organizational culture of Company X aims to foster a cooperative work environment for its employees.”

**Narcissism.** Narcissism was measured using the narcissism component of the Short Dark Triad scale (SD-3) developed by Jones and Paulhus (2013), which consists of nine items on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree ( $\alpha = 0.66$ ) (e.g., “Many group activities tend to be dull without me.”).

**Organizational instrumentality.** Organizational instrumentality was measured using Cardador et al.’s (2011) scale for organizational instrumentality, which consists of four items on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree ( $\alpha = 0.79$  in the competitive context and  $\alpha = 0.85$  in the cooperative context) (e.g., “My organization helps me to achieve my professional goals.”). Participants were instructed to imagine themselves as employees of the organization working in their desired career field when answering the organizational instrumentality items.

**CWB.** Counterproductive work behavior was assessed using four scenarios designed to capture CWB. The scenarios were designed using Spector et al.’s (2006) 32-item CWB checklist

and the Personal Selling Ethics-2 (PSE-2) scale developed by Donoho and Heinze (2011) as references. Specifically, two items were adapted from items 4 and 8 on Donoho and Heinze's (2011) scale, and two items were adapted from items 16 and 17 of Spector et al.'s (2006) 32-item CWB checklist. For example, item 4 on the PSE-2 provides the participant with a scenario in which he or she must decide whether to sneak vacations on company time, and the following item represents the corresponding CWB scenario designed for this study: "You are going out of town to meet with a potential customer/client for the company. The company allows you to charge the hotel room, rental car expenses, and plane ticket on the company's card as the trip is for business purposes. Employees frequently, however, use the car and the room an extra day or two for personal use to sneak "mini-vacations" without taking time off because the company allots several days for the business venture. Choose from one of the following:

- A. Stay an extra day or two after meeting with the potential client/customer and use the company card to pay for the car and hotel room.
- B. Book a plane flight to return immediately after meeting with the client."

Each scenario included one option consistent with CWB and one option that does not represent CWB. Participants' CWB was averaged across scenarios. A score of 1 indicated the participant endorsed CWB in every scenario, while a score of 0 indicated the participant did not endorse CWB in any of the scenarios.

**UPB.** Unethical pro-organizational behavior was assessed using four scenarios designed using items from the Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior scale developed by Umphress et al. (2010). The Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior scale consists of six items (Umphress et al., 2010). Scenarios were adapted from items 1, 3, 4, and 5 on the scale. For example, item 3 on the Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior scale states, "If it would benefit my organization, I would



withhold negative information about my company or its products from customers and clients.”

The UPB scenario corresponding to this item created for this study reads as follows: “Imagine yourself as a salesperson in Company A(X). A potential customer asks you if the product you are trying to sell him has any deficiencies. You know of a couple deficiencies that the product possesses, but you are worried that if you tell the customer, you will lose the sale. The company would benefit from the sale. Choose from one of the following:

- A. Disclose the product’s deficiencies to the potential customer, despite risking losing the sale.
- B. Choose not to disclose the product’s deficiencies to the potential customer.”

Each scenario included one option consistent with UPB and one option inconsistent with UPB. Participants’ UPB was averaged across the scenarios. A score of 1 indicated the participant endorsed UPB in every scenario, while a score of 0 indicated the participant did not endorse UPB in any of the scenarios.

## **Results**

### **Examining the factor structure of the unethical behavior scenarios.**

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to confirm the two-factor structure (i.e., UPB and CWB) of the unethical scenarios. Data from 210 participants were included in the factor analysis, and the data from the competitive organizational context were utilized for the factor analysis.

The CFA was conducted using the lavaan statistical software package in R (Rosseel, 2012) and utilized diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS) estimation due to the data's binary nature. The model fit indices for all the models run are provided in Table 1.

Though DWLS estimation has been shown to lead to higher CFI and TLI estimates and lower RMSEA values relative to maximum likelihood estimation, little guidance has been offered regarding cutoff criteria for fit indices when utilizing DWLS estimation (Xia & Yang, 2019). Therefore, the criteria for evaluating the model fit followed the recommendations of Finney & Distefano (2013) for CFA using DWLS estimation. According to Finney and DiStefano (2013),  $CFI \geq 0.95$ ,  $TLI \geq 0.95$ , and  $RMSEA \leq 0.05$  indicate acceptable model fit.

First, a one-factor model in which all eight scenarios loaded onto a deviant behavior factor was conducted. This model fit the data poorly ( $\chi^2(28) = 31.33$ ,  $p = 0.051$ ,  $CFI = 0.89$ ,  $TLI = 0.85$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.05$ , 90% CI [0.00, 0.09],  $SRMR = 0.11$ ). Then, a two-factor model with four items per factor was conducted. This model fit the data well ( $\chi^2(19) = 20.66$ ,  $p = 0.356$ ,  $CFI = 0.98$ ,  $TLI = 0.98$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.02$  90% CI [0.00, 0.07],  $SRMR = 0.09$ ). A chi-square difference test employing an adaptation of Satorra's (2000) scaling correction factor adjustment for chi-square was conducted to compare the one-factor model to the two-factor model. The results of this test indicated that the two-factor model fit the data significantly better than the one-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 7.03$ ,  $p = 0.008038$ ).

For the two-factor model, the standardized loadings of the four UPB items ranged from  $\lambda = 0.46$  to  $\lambda = 0.69$ . Although the factor loading of one item fell slightly below Hair et al.'s (2010) standard of 0.5 as an acceptable standardized loading (i.e.,  $\lambda = 0.46$ ), this item was retained to better capture the scope of the theoretical construct given the low number of items used to measure the construct in the current study. Three of the CWB items for the two-factor model had standardized loadings from  $\lambda = 0.47$  to  $\lambda = 0.80$ . Once again, though one item had a loading slightly below Hair et al.'s (2010) standard of 0.5 (i.e.,  $\lambda = 0.47$ ), this item was retained to attempt to better capture the scope of the theoretical construct given the low number of items.

However, one CWB item had a standardized loading of  $\lambda = 0.20$ . This item was removed, and another factor analysis was run with three items loading onto the CWB factor and four items loading onto the UPB. This model fit the data well ( $\chi^2(13) = 13.52, p = 0.408, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.01$  90% CI [0.00, 0.07], SRMR = 0.05). The standardized factor loadings for the three CWB items ranged from  $\lambda = 0.45$  to  $\lambda = 0.79$ , and the standardized factor loadings for the UPB items ranged from  $\lambda = 0.45$  to  $\lambda = 0.70$ . The two items with loadings slightly below the recommendation by Hair et al. (2010) (i.e., the items with loadings of  $\lambda = 0.45$ ) were once again retained. Therefore, four items assessing UPB and three items assessing CWB were used in the hypothesis testing.

**Table 1**

*Fit indices for CFAs*

	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
One-factor model	31.23	28	0.89	0.85	0.05	0.11
Two-factor model with 4 items for each factor	20.66	19	0.98	0.98	0.02	0.09
Two-factor model with 4 items for UPB and 3 items for CWB	13.52	13	0.99	0.99	0.01	0.05

### Results of Hypothesis Testing

The participants were instructed to answer the organizational instrumentality items as if they were working in their desired career field, and the scenarios were set in a company that produced desktop computers, laptops, and tablet devices. Consequently, participants who stated their major did not fall under a business- or a technology-related field (e.g., finance, accounting, computer science, etc.) might differ in their responses to the organizational instrumentality items from those in business- or technology-related majors. However, the results of a *t* test indicated that students in business- and technology-related fields did not significantly differ in their responses to the organizational instrumentality items from students in other majors ( $t(208) = -$

0.97,  $p = 0.334$ ). Therefore, all undergraduate participants were included to test the hypotheses irrespective of their indicated major. After excluding those who did not have complete data for both organizational context conditions, data from 160 participants were used to test the hypotheses. These participants had an average of 19.96 years of age ( $Mdn = 20.00$  years,  $SD = 1.47$  years), were 44% male, and were 76% White (12% Asian or Asian American/Pacific Islander, 6% Black/African American, 2% Hispanic, 1% Native American, and 3% Other). The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations between the study variables for these individuals are provided in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.56	0.50	1.00	-0.13	-0.17*	0.25**	-0.23**
2. Age	19.96	1.47	-0.13	1.00	0.11	-0.12	0.11
3. Narcissism	3.13	0.50	-0.17*	0.11	1.00	0.11	0.28**
4. Organizational Instrumentality	3.75	0.62	0.25**	-0.12	0.11	1.00	0.10
5. UPB <sup>b</sup>	0.34	0.24	-0.23**	0.11	0.28**	0.10	1.00
6. CWB	0.33	0.25	-0.03	0.11	0.12	-0.23**	0.18*

*Note.*  $N = 160$ . <sup>a</sup>Male=0. Female=1.

<sup>b</sup>For UPB and CWB, 1=endorse the behavior, 0=fail to endorse the behavior.

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Hypothesis 1 proposed that organizational context would moderate the relationship between narcissism and CWB, such that the relationship would be stronger in the competitive organizational context than in the cooperative organizational context. The moderation was tested using the MEMORE macro (Montoya, 2018) for SPSS because one variable was between subjects (i.e., narcissism) and one variable was within-subjects (i.e., competitive and cooperative organizational context). The MEMORE macro utilizes the procedure described by Judd et al.

(2001) to test two-instance repeated measures moderation (Montoya, 2018). This procedure tests moderation by regressing the difference in the dependent variable between the two conditions, or instances, on the between-subjects independent variable (Judd et al., 2001). The positive relationship between narcissism and CWB was stronger in the competitive organizational context ( $F(1, 158) = 2.76, p = 0.0984, R^2 = 0.02, \beta = 0.09$ ) than in the cooperative organizational context ( $F(1, 158) = 0.5521, p = 0.4586, R^2 = 0.00, \beta = 0.03$ ). However, narcissism failed to significantly predict CWB in either context, and the model examining the interaction between narcissism and organizational context on CWB was not significant ( $F(1, 158) = 1.78, p = 0.1873, R^2 = 0.01$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that narcissism would positively predict UPB. A linear regression was conducted in SPSS to test this hypothesis. The results of the analysis were significant ( $F(1, 158) = 13.32, p < 0.0001$ ) and explained roughly 8% of the variance in willingness to commit UPB ( $R^2 = 0.08$ ). The regression indicated that for every standard deviation increase in narcissism, willingness to commit UPB increased by roughly 0.28 standard deviations ( $\beta = 0.28$ ).

Hypothesis 3a predicted that narcissism would be associated with higher organizational instrumentality perceptions in the competitive organizational context than in the cooperative organizational context. As with Hypothesis 1, the MEMORE macro in SPSS (Montoya, 2018) was used to test this hypothesis. Narcissism failed to significantly predict organizational instrumentality perceptions in either context. Though the positive association between narcissism and organizational instrumentality was stronger in the competitive organizational context ( $F(1, 158) = 2.92, p = 0.0893, R^2 = 0.02, \beta = 0.21$ ) than in the cooperative organizational context ( $F(1, 158) = 0.08, p = 0.7761, R^2 = 0.00, \beta = 0.03$ ), the model examining the interaction between

narcissism and organizational context on organizational instrumentality was not significant ( $F(1, 158) = 1.43, p = 0.2338, R^2 = 0.01$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3a was not supported.

Hypothesis 3b predicted that the relationship between narcissism and UPB would be moderated by organizational instrumentality perceptions, such that greater organizational instrumentality perceptions would strengthen the relationship between narcissism and UPB. Hypothesis 3b was tested by conducting hierarchical regression analysis in SPSS. Narcissism and average organizational instrumentality perceptions (i.e., averaged for a participant across the two conditions) were mean-centered and added to the model in Step 1. Then, the interaction term was entered in Step 2 of the model. The results of this analysis are provided in Table 3. The addition of the interaction between narcissism and organizational instrumentality in Step 2 of the analysis significantly improved model fit ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.05, \Delta F(1, 158) = 8.83, p = 0.003$ ). However, contrary to expectations, higher organizational instrumentality perceptions weakened, rather than strengthened, the relationship between narcissism and UPB ( $\beta = -.23, p = 0.003$ ). When examining the simple slopes, the relationship between narcissism and UPB was significant at average levels of organizational instrumentality ( $\beta = 0.14, p < 0.01$ ) and at low levels of organizational instrumentality (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean) ( $\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01$ ). However, the relationship between narcissism and UPB was no longer significant at high levels of organizational instrumentality (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean) ( $\beta = 0.04, p = 0.42$ ). The plot for the simple slopes is shown in Figure 6. Possible explanations for this contradictory finding are offered in the Discussion section.

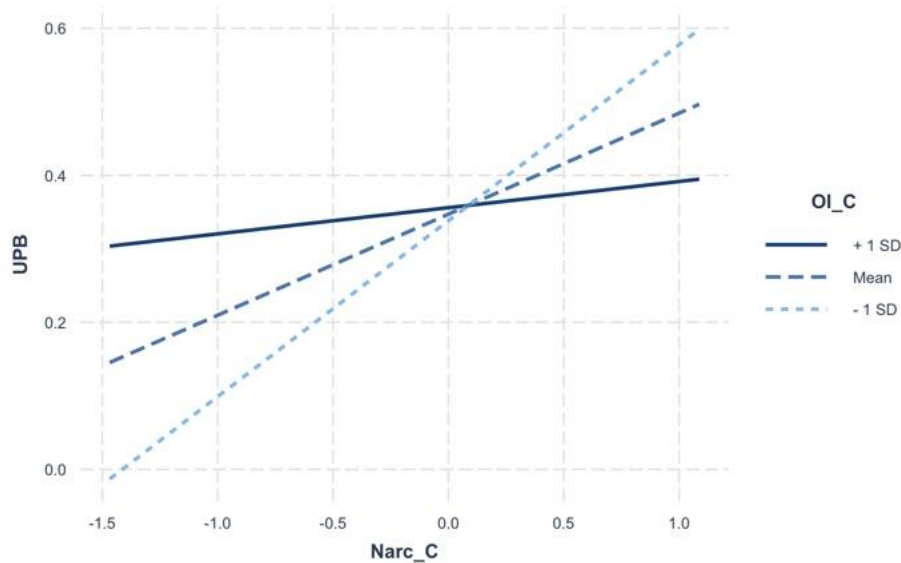
**Table 3***Hierarchical regression results for Hypothesis 3b*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
<b>Step 1</b>				
Narcissism (centered)	0.12	0.04	0.27	3.53**
Organizational Instrumentality (centered)	0.03	0.03	0.07	0.97
<b>Step 2</b>				
Narcissism (centered)	0.14	0.03	0.31	4.03**
Organizational Instrumentality (centered)	0.01	0.03	0.04	0.48
Narcissism (centered)*Organizational Instrumentality (centered)	-0.16	0.06	-0.23	-2.97**

Note. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**Figure 6**

*Simple slopes for Narcissism-UPB relationship at levels of Organizational Instrumentality*



Note. Narc\_C indicates mean-centered narcissism, and OI\_C indicates mean-centered organizational instrumentality.

Hypothesis 3c predicted that the positive relationship between narcissism and UPB would be stronger in the competitive organizational context than in the cooperative organizational context. Narcissism significantly positively predicted UPB in both organizational contexts, with

the association between narcissism and UPB being slightly stronger in the cooperative organizational context ( $F(1, 158) = 12.76, p = 0.0005, R^2 = 0.08, \beta = 0.12$ ) than in the competitive organizational context ( $F(1, 158) = 9.23, p = 0.0028, R^2 = 0.06, \beta = 0.13$ ). However, the interaction between narcissism and organizational context on UPB was not significant ( $F(1, 158) = 0.05, p = 0.8238, R^2 = 0.00$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3c was not supported.

## **Discussion**

The current study examined the relationship between narcissism and unethical behaviors in organizations, namely CWB and UPB, and moderators of this relationship, relying on a personality trait-based interactionist perspective and goal facilitation theory. Concerning narcissism and CWB, a cooperative organizational context was expected to weaken narcissism's relationship with CWB. Regarding narcissism and UPB, narcissism was expected to function as a positive predictor of UPB, and a competitive organizational context and perceptions of organizational instrumentality were hypothesized to strengthen this association.

None of the hypotheses regarding the moderating effects of cooperative (competitive) organizational context were significant. Organizational context failed to moderate the relationship between narcissism and unethical behaviors in organizations and between narcissism and organizational instrumentality. The failure to find significant moderating effects of organizational context may stem from the scenarios' hypothetical nature. Previous research has indicated that hypothetical moral decisions can differ from moral decisions made in the real world (FeldmanHall et al., 2012). Previous research indicates that responses to hypothetical moral scenarios do not always correlate highly with behavior in the real world for two reasons: 1) hypothetical scenarios often lack contextualization, and 2) the personal gains associated with behavior are not as salient in hypothetical scenarios as in real life (FeldmanHall et al., 2012).



Efforts were made to make the organizational context scenarios sufficiently contextualized. However, the personal gains and losses associated with the behavior in both the organizational context conditions (e.g., financial rewards, praise, ostracism) were likely less salient to individuals participating in this study than they would be in real life, potentially leading to the nonsignificant findings.

The association between narcissism and UPB failed to significantly differ between the two organizational contexts. This association was slightly stronger in the cooperative organizational context than the competitive organizational context. Different reasons for engaging in UPB in the two contexts may explain the failure to find significant results. As stated previously, narcissists desire to achieve glory (Thomas et al., 2012) and exhibit superiority (Emmons, 1987). Internally competitive organizational environments may present narcissists with opportunities to achieve these goals due to stratification (i.e., Some employees receive promotions and bonuses, while others do not). However, narcissists also desire to acquire other indicators of social status, such as adulation (Back et al., 2013). In a cooperative organizational context wherein organizational members value unity, narcissists may perform unethical behaviors for the organization's benefit because they think they will receive praise for demonstrating a commitment to the organization. Therefore, the status motive may exist and motivate UPB for narcissists in competitive and cooperative organizational contexts.

Narcissism's failure to significantly predict CWB in either organizational context condition served as another surprising finding, given that previous research has consistently found that narcissism positively predicts CWB (Judge et al., 2006; O'Boyle et al., 2012). This finding could be the result of the scale utilized to measure narcissism in the current study. Previous research suggests that the narcissism subscale of the Short Dark Triad (SD-3) may not

capture the antagonistic and aggressive characteristics of narcissism to the degree of other scales purporting to measure narcissism (Rogoza & Ciecuch, 2019), and these components could play a role in narcissism's relationship with CWB (Penney & Spector, 2003).

The proposed positive relationship between narcissism and UPB was supported. This finding comports with previous research suggesting that personal entitlement and status striving play a role in committing UPB, as narcissists have both higher levels of status striving (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2017) and entitlement (Emmons, 1987). Future research needs to investigate the explanatory mechanism(s) behind this positive association, however.

Contrary to expectations, organizational instrumentality perceptions significantly weakened the association between narcissism and UPB. This result contradicts the hypothesis that organizational instrumentality would strengthen the association between narcissism and UPB based on a goal facilitation theory perspective. According to this perspective, individuals look for opportunities to achieve their desired goals in their environments (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). Concerning the current study, it was predicted that narcissists would view the performance of UPB as more likely to lead to valued outcomes when they perceived that the organization was instrumental to their goals and would, consequently, endorse UPB more frequently. The negative impact of organizational instrumentality on the relationship between narcissism and UPB could be explained through a cybernetic control theoretical perspective. According to the cybernetic control model, individuals examine the discrepancy between their current state and their desired state (Miller et al., 1960). When the discrepancy between the two states is low, individuals may reduce their efforts towards a focal goal through a negative feedback process (Miller et al., 1960). The perception that the organization helps them reach their goals may reduce the discrepancy narcissists feel between their current state and desired

state and, consequently, reduce the UPB they commit to achieve their goals. Therefore, narcissists may be less willing to engage in UPB when they perceive high organizational instrumentality.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The finding that narcissism interacted with organizational instrumentality in predicting UPB supports the adoption of a person-situation interactionist approach when examining ethical decision making in organizations. The results indicate that the assessment of one's environment plays a role in the relationship between narcissism and UPB. Therefore, future research examining personality antecedents of unethical organizational behavior may benefit from the addition of environmental perceptions as moderators to derive a fuller understanding of this behavior.

The finding that organizational instrumentality weakened the relationship between narcissism and UPB contradicted Hypothesis 3b. Through a goal facilitation theory perspective, it was expected that when narcissists perceived greater organizational instrumentality, they would express greater willingness to commit UPB to achieve their goals. However, organizational instrumentality negatively impacted the narcissism-UPB relationship. As expressed previously, this finding could be explained through a cybernetic control model perspective.

The negative impact of organizational instrumentality on narcissists willingness to commit UPB could indicate a discrepancy between the theoretical underpinnings of the organizational instrumentality construct and its current operationalization. The scale for organizational instrumentality (Cardador et al., 2011) uses goal facilitation theory as a foundation, which states that individuals look for opportunities or resources in their social

environment to accomplish valued goals (Fitzsimmons & Shah, 2008). The perception of these resources in one's environment then encourages and empowers individuals' action (Sillince, 2006). Cardador et al. (2011) use this rationale to posit that organizational instrumentality should facilitate goal-directed behavior. However, items in Cardador et al.'s (2011) scale, such as, "Working at [organization name] helps me to achieve my personal goals." may be construed differently than perceiving the organization offers one opportunities or resources to achieve personal goals. Opportunities require action on the part of the individual to lead to goal achievement. Conversely, perceiving that the organization helps one to achieve his or her goals may lead to feelings that one has to exert less effort at work to achieve one's goals, leading to a reduction in goal-directed behavior (Miller, 1960). Future research should, therefore, explore the nature of the organizational instrumentality construct and its operationalization further.

### **Practical Implications**

Given the cost UPB poses for organizations, such as hefty legal penalties and a loss of consumers due to a weakening of the organization's reputation (Umphress et al., 2010), screening individuals in the selection process may help organizations prevent this behavior from occurring and protect them from financial loss. The current study found that narcissism significantly predicted UPB. Previous research has also found narcissism to predict other deviant behaviors in organizations (Judge et al., 2006; O'Boyle et al., 2012). Therefore, narcissism serves as a prime personality trait for screening job applicants, particularly those applying for positions in which UPB may pose high costs for the organization.

### **Limitations**

The current study asked participants to respond to hypothetical scenarios in hypothetical organizations. As previously stated, individuals' responses to hypothetical moral scenarios may

not mirror their behaviors in the real world (FeldmanHall et al., 2012). Although the respondents were informed their responses would remain confidential, social desirability could have still impacted participants' responses. Previous research has shown that participants will respond in a more socially desirable to scenarios framed in the first person than in the third person (Armacost et al., 1991). Lastly, the current study used undergraduate students as its participants.

Undergraduate students tend to be younger than working individuals, and not all undergraduate students are employed (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Therefore, results from their data may not generalize to working individuals.

### **Future directions**

The current study found evidence supporting a positive relationship between narcissism and UPB. However, this study did not examine explanatory mechanisms for this relationship. Future research should examine potential mediators of the narcissism-UPB relationship, such as status striving behaviors, to elucidate this relationship. Additionally, this study found that the relationship between narcissism and UPB depended on organizational instrumentality perceptions. Future research should examine other moderators of the relationship between narcissism and UPB and between narcissism and CWB.

This study used data from undergraduate students responding to hypothetical scenarios. Future research should be conducted examining the relationships looked at in the current study using employed participants to enhance generalizability to working populations.

### **Conclusion**

The costs posed by unethical behavior in the form of CWBs and UPBs for not only organizations but society as a whole underscore the importance of understanding the causes of these forms of unethical behavior. This study's finding that narcissism positively predicts UPB

contributes to the growing UPB literature and answers Pierce and Aguinis's (2015) call for more research examining antecedents of UPB. This study's finding that organizational instrumentality moderates the narcissism-UPB relationship indicates that the relationship between narcissism and UPB is not necessarily straightforward. Further research examining moderators and mediators of the narcissism-UPB link is warranted to understand this association.

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## APPENDIX A

### **Competitive Organization Condition**

You are an employee at Company A/X, a company that makes desktops, laptops, and tablet computers. At Company A/X, employees are encouraged to become top performers in order to gain annual personal bonuses that are available only to the top employees and to gain opportunities for promotion. Company A/X lays off the bottom 10% of performers in every department each year because it is primarily interested in investing in its best performers. The organizational culture of Company A/X encourages a competitive work environment for its employees.

### **Cooperative Organization Condition**

You are an employee at Company A/X, a company that makes desktops, laptops, and tablet computers. Company A/X's core belief is based on collaboration and succeeding as a team. Company A/X provides a deferred profit-sharing plan for all of its employees to help them save for retirement. Each year, the company deposits a portion of its profits into a deferred profit-sharing plan account set up for every employee. Company A/X believes "the strength of the organization is each member. The strength of each member is the organization." The organizational culture of Company A/X aims to foster a cooperative work environment for its employees.

### **CWB Scenarios**

1) You came home from work and realized you still have a pen that belongs to the company. It is a very nice pen, Company A/X has many of them, and you could use a pen like this one at home. Choose from one of the following:

1. Keep the pen.
2. Return the pen to the company the next day.

2) Imagine yourself as a salesperson in Company X. A customer calls to complain that her product has not arrived within the time frame that you told her it would. You were supposed to check to see if the product was out of stock prior to informing the customer of the expected arrival time, but you did not do so. You are worried the customer may give you a poor review which would come up in your performance evaluation. You reason that if you blame the department responsible for shipping in the company for the delay in the product's arrival, the customer may not give you a bad review. Choose from one of the following:

1. Blame the department responsible for shipping for the delay.

2. Take responsibility for the delay despite the likely negative impact on your performance review.

\*3) You are going out of town to meet with a potential customer/client for the company. The company allows you to charge the hotel room, rental car expenses, and plane ticket on the company's card as the trip is for business purposes. Employees frequently, however, use the car and the room an extra day or two for personal use to sneak in "mini-vacations" without taking time off because the company allots several days for the business venture. Choose from one of the following:

1. Stay an extra day or two after meeting with the potential client/customer and use the company card to pay for the car and hotel room.
2. Book a plane flight to return immediately after meeting with the client.

\*CWB scenario eliminated from use for hypothesis testing after the CFA.

4) The clock-in station at work malfunctioned today, and HR needs you to submit when you clocked in this morning because you are paid hourly. You arrived at work at 8:20 am. You anticipated you would arrive to work at 8:00 am, but traffic was worse than usual. Choose from one of the following:

1. Submit that you clocked in at 8:00 am.
2. Submit that you clocked in at 8:20 am.

### **Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior (UPB) Scenarios**

1) Imagine yourself as a salesperson in Company A/X. A potential customer asks you if the product you are trying to sell him has any deficiencies. You know of a couple deficiencies that the product possesses, but you are worried that if you tell the customer, you will lose the sale. The company would benefit from the sale. Choose from one of the following:

1. Disclose the product's deficiencies to the potential customer, despite risking losing the sale.
2. Choose not to disclose the product's deficiencies to the potential customer.

2) Imagine yourself as a salesperson in Company A/X. A customer describes to you the product he or she needs. You determine that Product A and Product B would satisfy the customer's needs, however, Product B is more expensive than Product A and would be in the best interest of the company to sell. Choose from one of the following:

1. Recommend Product A to the customer.
2. Recommend Product B to the customer.

3) John works for Company A/X. John is a bad employee. He often shows up late and gets little done while at work. Though John is a bad employee, the company keeps him because he has a family member that has a high position within the organization. John asks you to write him a recommendation letter. Though he is not a good employee, you reason that if you write him a good letter, there is a good chance he will leave the company. Company X would greatly benefit from getting rid of him. Choose from one of the following:

1. Write John a favorable/good recommendation letter.
2. Tell John you cannot write him a recommendation letter.
3. Write John an honest recommendation letter.

4) Imagine you work in the marketing department of Company A/X. You are to review the company's new advertisement. In the ad, it is stated that "Customers can receive up to 20% off on laptops and tablets." The ad does not mention that the 20% off only applies to purchases of two or more laptops or tablets. Choose from one of the following options:

1. Approve the advertisement as is because it will likely attract more customers and benefit the company.
2. Tell the team to include a disclaimer in the commercial that the 20% off will only apply to purchases of two or more laptops/tablets and risk attracting fewer customers.

### **Affective Organizational Commitment**

Imagine you are an employee of Company A/X.

1) Company A/X has a great deal of meaning for me.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

2) I feel emotionally attached to Company A/X. (R)

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree



3) I feel very happy to spend the rest of my career working for Company A/X.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

4) I do not feel like part of the family at Company A/X. (R)

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

5) I really feel as if Company A/X's problems are my own.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

6) I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to Company A/X. (R)

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

### **Narcissism**

1) People see me as a natural leader.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

2) I hate being the center of attention. (R)

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

3) Many group activities tend to be dull without me.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

4) I know that I am special because everyone keeps telling me so.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

5) I like to get acquainted with important people.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

6) I feel embarrassed if someone compliments me.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

7) I have been compared to famous people.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

8) I am an average person.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

9) I insist on getting the respect I deserve.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

### **Perceptions of Organizational Instrumentality**

Imagine you are an employee of Company A/X working in your desired field when responding to the following items:

1) Working at Company A/X helps me to achieve my personal goals.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

2) Working at Company A/X helps me to achieve my professional goals.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

3) I feel I am accomplishing something worthwhile at Company A/X.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

4) My organization reflects my work values.

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither agree nor disagree 4-Agree. 5-Strongly Agree

### **Demographics**

**What is your age in years?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is your gender identification?** (*select one*)  Male

Female

**What is your ethnicity?** (*select one*)

Native American

Asian or Asian-American/Pacific Islander  Black/African-American

Middle Eastern

White

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_ **5. 5) Are you a native English speaker?**

Yes  No

For SONA participants:

**Which of the following most closely represents your desired career field? (select one)**

-Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources

-Business, Management, and Administration

-Finance

-Hospitality and Tourism

-Marketing, Sales, and Service

-Information Technology

-Arts, Audio/Video Technology, and Communication

-Architecture and Construction

-Manufacturing

-Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

-Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics

-Health Care

-Education

-Government and Public Administration

-Human Services

-Law, Public Safety, Corrections, and Security

**Please select your current major from the following options. (select one)**

\*dropdown option with all the majors at the university provided