

EGT2
ENGINEERING TRIPOS PART IIA

Friday 8 May 2026 14.00 to 15.40

Module 3E6

ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

*Answer not more than **two** out of three questions.*

All questions carry the same number of marks.

*The **approximate** percentage of marks allocated to each part of a question is indicated in the right margin.*

*Write your candidate number **not** your name on the cover sheet.*

STATIONERY REQUIREMENTS

Single-sided script paper

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS TO BE SUPPLIED FOR THIS EXAM

None

10 minutes reading time is allowed for this paper at the start of the exam.

You may not start to read the questions printed on the subsequent pages of this question paper until instructed to do so.

You may not remove any stationery from the Examination Room.

1 Within organisations, narcissistic individuals often times can be very successful in terms of rising to top leadership positions and creating organisational success, while at the same time eroding employee morale. Discuss the reasons behind this phenomenon. [100%]

[Answer] Narcissism is a personality trait linked to grandiosity, self-confidence, entitlement, and a strong need for admiration. These traits can help narcissistic individuals rise to leadership positions because they may appear charismatic, visionary, decisive, and ambitious. In organisations that reward confidence, visibility, competition, and bold decision-making, narcissistic individuals may therefore be seen as strong leadership candidates.

Narcissistic leaders can also contribute to organisational success, particularly in the short term. Their ambition and confidence may lead them to set challenging goals, take risks, promote change, and create a compelling vision. However, these same traits can harm employee morale. Narcissistic leaders often prioritise their own image and success, take credit for achievements, blame others for failures, and show limited empathy. This can reduce trust, psychological safety, and perceived fairness.

Over time, narcissistic leadership may create a culture of competition, fear, and impression management rather than collaboration and openness. Thus, narcissistic leaders can be successful because organisations often reward their confidence and ambition, but they can also damage morale because their self-centred behaviour undermines employee well-being, trust, and motivation.

[Comments] Only few students chose to answer this question (23 out of 110; 21%). Students who received higher grades directly addressed this question by demonstrating their understanding of various theories in depth (e.g., mechanisms on how it affects morale). Those who received lower grades attempted to utilize various theories without specific purposes or linked them incorrectly (e.g. definition of narcissism and link to Big 5 Personality Theory).

2 Organisations continue to face a dilemma: should they require employees to return to the office or should they allow continued remote work to support flexibility? Discuss the organisational behaviour challenges associated with this dilemma. [100%]

[Answer] Remote work can support employee motivation, well-being, and performance by offering flexibility, autonomy, and better work-life balance. For some employees, especially those who are self-disciplined, introverted, or have caring responsibilities, remote work may reduce stress and improve concentration. It can also signal trust from the organisation, which may strengthen commitment and job satisfaction.

However, remote work also creates organisational behaviour challenges. It can weaken informal communication, reduce social interaction, and make it harder to build trust, group cohesion, and organisational culture. Some employees may experience isolation, blurred boundaries between work and home, or reduced motivation without direct contact with colleagues and leaders. Remote work may also make leadership more difficult because managers have fewer opportunities to observe, support, and coordinate employees.

Office-based work can improve collaboration, communication, social learning, and a shared sense of culture. It may be especially useful for teamwork, creativity, onboarding, and complex problem-solving. However, requiring employees to return to the office may reduce autonomy and flexibility, increase commuting stress, and harm morale if employees feel their needs are ignored. Therefore, the main organisational behaviour challenge is balancing flexibility and well-being with communication, cohesion, leadership, and culture. A hybrid approach may often be most effective, but only if expectations are clear and applied fairly.

[Comments] The majority of students chose this question (105 out of 110; 95%). In general, students offered good answers, also including other research covered in the module such as work on technostress and looked at the phenomenon from an individual, team and organizational perspective. Those who received lower grades did not provide theory-based rationales for their arguments and/or made bold claims without evidence.

3 A fast-growing technology firm hires highly skilled engineers and promotes several of them into leadership roles. Despite their technical expertise, the organisation begins to experience increasing conflict, poor communication, and declining morale across teams. Employees report that meetings feel unsafe, innovation is stifled, and people are reluctant to speak up. Discuss the reasons behind this issue. [100%]

[Answer] The issue may arise because technical expertise does not automatically translate into effective leadership. Highly skilled engineers may have strong task knowledge but lack the interpersonal, communication, and emotional skills needed to lead teams. If leaders struggle to listen, give constructive feedback, manage conflict, or include others in decision-making, employees may begin to feel undervalued or unsupported.

The problem can also be explained through leader–member exchange theory (or other leadership theories). If new leaders build strong relationships with only some employees while excluding others, this can create in-groups and out-groups, damaging trust and morale. Team dynamics may also suffer if roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes are unclear. In fast-growing firms, teams may form quickly without enough time to establish shared norms, mutual trust, and effective ways of working. This can lead to misunderstandings, competition between subgroups, conflict avoidance, or unproductive conflict.

Poor leadership can also reduce psychological safety, meaning employees do not feel safe to speak up, admit mistakes, or challenge ideas. This is especially harmful in technology firms, where innovation depends on open communication and the sharing of diverse perspectives. If meetings are dominated by senior or technically confident employees, quieter team members may withdraw, reducing creativity and collaboration.

Organisational culture may further contribute to the issue. If the culture rewards technical brilliance over collaboration, empathy, and learning, employees may protect themselves rather than experiment or share ideas. Therefore, the organisation's difficulties are likely caused by promoting technical experts without preparing them for leadership, combined with weak team dynamics, unclear norms, reduced trust, and low psychological safety.

Version CR/3

[Comments] Most students selected this question to answer (92 out of 110; 83%). They were, in general, good at exploring different reasons why those issues exist. Those who received lower grades only focused on one dimension (e.g., leadership). Overall, students should have looked at phenomenon from individual, team and organisational level but many only focused on one or two.

END OF PAPER