



When Administrative Ego Becomes Institutional Risk

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ABSTRACT

Universities require administrative coordination, yet concentrated authority can become a governance liability when leaders treat criticism as disloyalty and institutional achievements as personal assets. This study reframes perceived administrative narcissism as an institutional risk and evaluates a chain linking leadership conduct to power misuse, fairness, psychological safety, silence, academic freedom, faculty well-being, and intention to leave. The analysis uses 118,009 modeled records drawn from the HEGov-172K governance repository. Forty reflective indicators representing eight constructs were assessed with confirmatory factor analysis and partial least squares structural equation modeling; path uncertainty was estimated with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. The modeled results support eleven direct hypotheses and the proposed sequential mechanism. Perceived narcissistic leadership predicts abuse of power ($\beta = .741$) and organizational silence ($\beta = .31$). Power misuse reduces organizational justice ($\beta = -.612$); justice strengthens psychological safety ($\beta = .684$) and academic freedom ($\beta = .412$); safety reduces silence ($\beta = -.577$). Silence, in turn, constrains academic freedom ($\beta = -.643$) and faculty well-being ($\beta = -.391$). Academic freedom improves well-being ($\beta = .706$), while well-being ($\beta = -.681$) and academic freedom ($\beta = -.284$) reduce turnover intention. Because the records are simulated, these estimates demonstrate internal model behavior rather than population prevalence or causal effects in real universities. The study nevertheless offers a testable governance architecture and identifies accountability, procedural justice, protected voice, and academic freedom as complementary safeguards.



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1. Introduction

A university is both an organization and a community of inquiry. It must allocate budgets, evaluate performance, and implement strategy, but its legitimacy also depends on collegial participation, intellectual independence, and the ability to contest decisions. This dual character makes leadership behavior especially consequential. Administrative practices that might merely reduce morale in a conventional hierarchy can interfere with knowledge production when they discourage questioning, concentrate discretion, or turn disagreement into a career risk (Clark, 1983; Birnbaum, 1988; Huisman et al., 2015).

Contemporary higher education has moved toward stronger measurement, managerial coordination, and executive control in response to mass participation, competition, accreditation, ranking systems, fiscal constraints, and digital transformation (De Boer et al., 2007; Shattock, 2014; Marginson, 2016). These changes can improve coordination, yet they can also weaken shared governance if authority expands faster than accountability. The relevant issue is therefore not administration itself, but whether administrative power remains reviewable, procedurally fair, and open to informed dissent.

Narcissistic leadership provides a useful lens for studying that boundary. The construct describes patterns of grandiosity, entitlement, admiration seeking, defensiveness, and dominance. Such traits may help an individual appear confident or visionary, particularly during leadership selection, while later damaging collaboration and information exchange (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006; Campbell et al., 2011; Grijalva et al., 2015). In a university, where expertise is dispersed and disagreement is a normal part of scholarship, a leader's intolerance of criticism can become more than an interpersonal problem: it can alter governance behavior across the institution.

This article asks how perceived administrative narcissism may travel through an institutional system. It joins constructs often studied separately—power abuse, organizational justice, psychological safety, silence, academic freedom, well-being, and turnover intention—into one governance-deterioration model. The central research question is: How does perceived narcissistic administrative conduct relate to the fairness, voice, freedom, well-being, and retention mechanisms represented in a modeled higher-education governance environment?

The contribution is conceptual and methodological. Conceptually, the study treats leadership pathology as a

risk that can be amplified or constrained by governance arrangements. Methodologically, it demonstrates a reproducible structural model using a large synthetic repository. This distinction matters: the results are not evidence about the frequency of misconduct in actual institutions. They show whether the proposed theoretical architecture produces coherent measurement and structural patterns within the modeled data, providing hypotheses for later field research.

2. Literature and theoretical foundations

2.1 Administrative narcissism and the use of authority

Destructive-leadership research rejects the assumption that leadership influence is inherently constructive (Einarsen et al., 2007; Padilla et al., 2007; Krasikova et al., 2013). Narcissistic leaders may combine ambition and persuasive self-presentation with low receptivity to feedback. Their need to protect an elevated self-image can encourage selective credit taking, blame shifting, centralization, and retaliation against challengers. Leadership emergence and leadership effectiveness must therefore be separated: narcissism may assist selection into visible roles without ensuring sustained collective performance (Grijalva et al., 2015).

Power makes these tendencies organizationally relevant. University administrators can influence promotion, appointments, workload, committee access, research support, and strategic priorities. When those discretionary resources are used inconsistently or defensively, faculty may interpret formal authority as coercion rather than legitimate coordination. Abuse of power is thus the first institutional mechanism in the model: it translates an attributed leadership disposition into observable governance consequences (Ashforth, 1994; Tepper, 2007).

The higher-education setting sharpens this problem because administrative and academic authority rest on different foundations. Executives may hold formal control over budgets and personnel, while faculty authority arises from disciplinary expertise, peer evaluation, and professional norms. Effective governance requires these sources of authority to interact rather than collapse into a single hierarchy. When executive visibility is rewarded more strongly than consultation, leaders may frame collective accomplishments as personal achievements and treat specialist disagreement as obstruction. The result is an epistemic as well as organizational failure: decisions become less informed because the people closest to teaching, research, and

student support learn that contrary evidence is unwelcome.

This argument does not imply that decisive leadership is inherently narcissistic. Urgent conditions sometimes require rapid action, and strong leaders may legitimately defend a course of action after consultation. The distinction lies in the pattern and purpose of conduct. Decisiveness remains compatible with reasons, review, and correction; narcissistic governance risk is indicated when authority repeatedly protects status, excludes challenge, applies rules selectively, or converts scrutiny into personal conflict. Behavioral indicators are therefore more defensible than attempts to infer a clinical personality diagnosis from organizational dissatisfaction.

2.2 Justice, psychological safety, and silence

Organizational justice concerns the fairness of outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment (Greenberg, 1990; Colquitt, 2001). In academic settings, procedural justice is particularly salient because promotion, workload, resource allocation, and disciplinary decisions often combine formal criteria with expert judgment. Consistency, explanation, impartial review, and respectful treatment communicate that the institution—not the preference of a powerful individual—governs the decision.

Fairness also shapes whether people believe it is safe to speak. Psychological safety is the expectation that questions, dissent, or admission of error will not provoke humiliation or punishment (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). It does not mean comfort or agreement; it means that interpersonal risk does not overwhelm the exchange of relevant information. When that condition weakens, employees may intentionally withhold concerns even when disclosure could benefit the organization. Such organizational silence impairs learning, masks emerging problems, and deprives governing bodies of distributed expertise (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Van Dyne et al., 2003).

Justice, safety, and silence are related but not interchangeable. A faculty member may judge an outcome unfavorable yet fair because the process was consistent and reviewable. Conversely, a favorable outcome may do little to create safety if it depends on personal access to leadership. Psychological safety concerns the anticipated interpersonal cost of participation, whereas organizational silence is a behavioral response to that anticipation. Keeping the concepts separate permits a more precise account of deterioration: opaque decisions shape expectations,

expectations change willingness to speak, and repeated withholding eventually becomes a shared norm.

Silence can reflect fear, resignation, or strategic withdrawal. Each form can deprive the university of information, but the remedies differ. Fear calls for credible protection; resignation requires evidence that participation influences decisions; strategic withdrawal requires reducing the costs and futility of consultation. Treating low complaint volume as proof of a healthy climate is therefore hazardous. In high-risk settings, few complaints may indicate that reporting channels have lost legitimacy rather than that problems are absent.

2.3 Academic freedom, well-being, and retention

Academic freedom is often framed as a legal or professional norm, but its daily exercise also depends on organizational climate. Formal protections offer limited practical value if faculty anticipate retaliation for controversial research, criticism of policy, or participation in governance. Silence can therefore operate as an informal constraint: scholars narrow their speech or inquiry without receiving an explicit prohibition (Finkin & Post, 2009; Tight, 2020).

Autonomy and voice also have personal consequences. Work intensification, administrative demands, and uncertain career structures already place strain on academic employees (Kinman, 2014; Sabagh et al., 2018). Perceived unfairness, suppressed voice, and constrained scholarly judgment add demands while removing resources that support professional identity. Persistent strain can reduce well-being and increase thoughts of leaving; turnover then creates institutional costs through lost expertise, interrupted mentoring, and weaker continuity (Hom et al., 2017; Rubenstein et al., 2018).

Internal and external threats to academic freedom should also be distinguished. External interference may arise from government, donors, public campaigns, or market pressure. Internal interference occurs when institutional actors constrain inquiry, teaching, publication, or participation through administrative decisions. The two can interact: a university facing external controversy may centralize communication or discourage contested work, thereby translating outside pressure into internal self-censorship. A governance model is valuable because it examines the organizational conditions through which formal commitments are sustained or weakened in practice.

Retention is not only an individual employment decision. Departure intentions can alter effort and participation before anyone leaves, and actual departures can redistribute supervision, committee work, and teaching to

those who remain. Institutions may lose tacit knowledge, research partnerships, and mentoring relationships that are difficult to replace. Turnover intention is therefore treated as a downstream governance indicator summarizing how repeated experiences of power, fairness, voice, and freedom may accumulate into reduced institutional attachment.

3. Model and hypotheses

Figure 1. organizes the argument as a connected governance system. Perceived administrative narcissism is expected to



Figure 1. Conceptual governance-deterioration framework.

- H1. Perceived administrative narcissistic leadership is positively associated with perceived abuse of power.
- H2. Perceived abuse of power is negatively associated with organizational justice.
- H3. Organizational justice is positively associated with psychological safety.
- H4. Psychological safety is negatively associated with organizational silence.
- H5. Perceived administrative narcissistic leadership is positively associated with organizational silence.
- H6. Organizational silence is negatively associated with academic freedom.
- H7. Organizational justice is positively associated with academic freedom.
- H8. Academic freedom is positively associated with faculty well-being.
- H9. Organizational silence is negatively associated with faculty well-being.

increase reliance on coercive or self-protective uses of authority.

Power misuse erodes justice; justice supports psychological safety; safety reduces silence. Justice and silence then shape academic freedom, while freedom and silence influence faculty well-being. Freedom and well-being are finally associated with lower turnover intention. A direct path from narcissistic leadership to silence captures the possibility that observed defensiveness discourages voice before a specific power abuse occurs.

H10. Faculty well-being is negatively associated with turnover intention.

H11. Academic freedom is negatively associated with turnover intention.

H12. The association between perceived administrative narcissistic leadership and turnover intention is transmitted sequentially through abuse of power, organizational justice, psychological safety, organizational silence, academic freedom, and faculty well-being.

4. Method

4.1 Design and analytical status of the data

The study uses the HEGov-172K repository as a simulation-based environment for theory development and model evaluation. The analytical file contains 118,009 modeled respondent records distributed across 45 anonymized institutional profiles. It includes 40 survey indicators, eight latent variables, governance descriptors, 200 simulated interview records, and 5,000 synthetic open-text comments. Institutional profiles cover public,

private, national, and technological university categories; modeled roles include faculty members, teaching assistants, and administrators.

The records do not represent surveyed individuals, and the institutional profiles do not identify real universities. Consequently, estimates should be read as properties of the generated covariance structure and analytical

procedure. They cannot establish prevalence, temporal ordering, causal effects, or external validity. No human participants or identifiable information were involved, so participant consent and institutional ethics approval were not applicable to this modeling exercise.

Table 1. Composition of the modeled analytical file

Role	N	%
Faculty members	76,482	64.8
Teaching assistants	25,368	21.5
Administrators	16,159	13.7
Total	118,009	100.0

4.2 Constructs and generation procedure

Five reflective indicators measured each of eight constructs on a seven-point agreement scale: perceived administrative narcissistic leadership (PNL), abuse of power (AOP), organizational justice (OJ), psychological safety (PS), organizational silence (OS), academic freedom (AF), faculty well-being (FWB), and turnover intention (TI). Item content was mapped from the relevant leadership, justice, safety, voice, freedom, occupational-health, and turnover literatures.

Latent scores were generated from a multivariate distribution whose covariance structure encoded theoretically expected positive and negative relationships. Reflective item values followed the general measurement equation $X_i = \lambda_i \eta + \varepsilon_i$, where X_i is an observed indicator, λ_i its loading, η the relevant latent construct, and ε_i random measurement error. Controlled missingness below five percent was introduced for selected sensitive indicators. Distributional checks, internal-consistency estimates, factor-structure tests, and structural estimates were then used to assess whether the generated data retained the intended properties.

4.3 Analysis

The measurement stage examined standardized loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), heterotrait-monotrait ratios (HTMT), and approximate global fit. The structural stage estimated the hypothesized paths using partial least squares structural equation modeling. Standard errors, significance tests, confidence intervals, and indirect effects were evaluated with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Coefficients of determination summarized explained variance in endogenous constructs.

Measurement and structural assessment were kept conceptually distinct. Reliability estimates concern consistency among indicators, while AVE evaluates the proportion of indicator variance captured by a construct. HTMT values provide a check that construct pairs remain empirically distinguishable. These diagnostics are necessary because a structural coefficient has little substantive meaning when the measures on either side are unreliable or indistinct. Approximate fit indices were considered as descriptive evidence of internal coherence rather than as proof that the proposed model is uniquely correct.

PLS-SEM was selected because the analysis emphasizes prediction and a network of direct and indirect relationships. Bootstrapping avoids relying exclusively on normal-theory standard errors and provides a consistent procedure for evaluating mediated paths. Nevertheless, resampling modeled records cannot create external validity. The very large analytical file makes even modest deviations statistically detectable; coefficient magnitude, sign, explained variance, and theoretical coherence are consequently more informative here than significance alone. No post-hoc paths were introduced merely to improve fit.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive and measurement results

The modeled construct means ranged from 3.61 for turnover intention to 5.01 for academic freedom. Standard deviations were close to one scale point, and skewness and kurtosis were modest. These statistics describe the synthetic file only; they do not estimate attitudes in a university population.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for modeled constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
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PNL	4.31	1.12	0.18	-0.62
AOP	4.08	1.09	0.21	-0.55
OJ	4.76	1.01	-0.24	-0.44
PS	4.81	0.98	-0.31	-0.41
OS	3.92	1.05	0.27	-0.36
AF	5.01	0.93	-0.42	-0.18
FWB	4.88	0.95	-0.29	-0.25
TI	3.61	1.13	0.39	-0.21

All standardized item loadings fell between .76 and .94. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .88 to .94, composite reliability from .91 to .95, and AVE from .67 to .79. The reported HTMT ratios remained below .85. Approximate fit indices were $\chi^2/df = 2.94$, CFI = .963, TLI =

.958, RMSEA = .041, and SRMR = .038. Collectively, these results indicate that the generated measurement structure is internally coherent.

Table 3. Reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Cronbach α	Composite reliability	AVE
PNL	.91	.93	.72
AOP	.89	.92	.69
OJ	.93	.95	.78
PS	.92	.94	.76
OS	.88	.91	.67
AF	.94	.95	.79
FWB	.91	.93	.73
TI	.90	.92	.70

5.2 Structural estimates

All eleven direct hypotheses were statistically supported in the modeled data. The largest positive coefficient connected PNL with AOP ($\beta = .741$), while the largest negative coefficient connected FWB with TI ($\beta = -.681$). OJ

was strongly associated with PS ($\beta = .684$), and OS had a substantial negative relationship with AF ($\beta = -.643$). Figure 2 visualizes the complete set of reported direct paths.

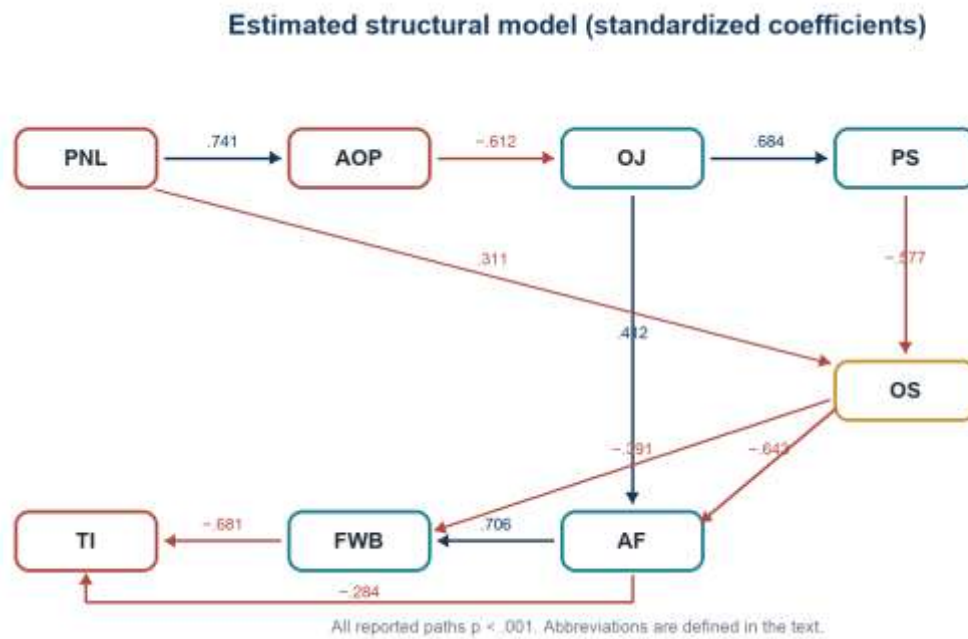


Figure 2. Estimated structural model with standardized coefficients.

Table 4. Structural path estimates

Hyp.	Path	β	t	p	Decision
H ₁	PNL → AOP	.741	42.17	< .001	Supported
H ₂	AOP → OJ	-.612	35.08	< .001	Supported
H ₃	OJ → PS	.684	38.51	< .001	Supported
H ₄	PS → OS	-.577	31.72	< .001	Supported
H ₅	PNL → OS	.311	16.90	< .001	Supported
H ₆	OS → AF	-.643	36.04	< .001	Supported
H ₇	OJ → AF	.412	24.17	< .001	Supported
H ₈	AF → FWB	.706	41.93	< .001	Supported
H ₉	OS → FWB	-.391	22.35	< .001	Supported
H ₁₀	FWB → TI	-.681	40.62	< .001	Supported
H ₁₁	AF → TI	-.284	14.82	< .001	Supported

Table 5. Explained variance in endogenous constructs

Construct	R ²	Interpretation
AOP	.55	Moderate
OJ	.47	Moderate
PS	.52	Moderate
OS	.49	Moderate
AF	.61	Substantial

FWB	.67	High
TI	.58	Moderate-high

5.3 Indirect pathway and sector profiles

Bootstrapped indirect estimates were significant at $p < .001$. The signs are consistent with a deterioration process: leadership risk raises power misuse and silence, which lowers fairness, safety, freedom, and well-being and

ultimately increases exit intention. Figure 3 presents the adjacent links in the sequential chain. The full chain should be interpreted as the model's theoretical mechanism, not as a causal sequence verified through temporal data.

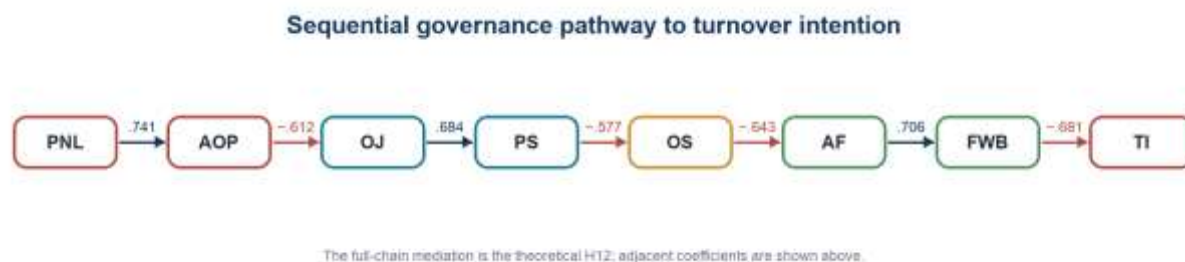


Figure 3. Sequential governance pathway from perceived leadership risk to turnover intention.

Table 6. Reported indirect effects

Indirect path	β	p
PNL $\rightarrow$ AOP $\rightarrow$ OJ	-.453	< .001
PNL $\rightarrow$ OJ $\rightarrow$ PS	-.418	< .001
PNL $\rightarrow$ PS $\rightarrow$ OS	.394	< .001
PNL $\rightarrow$ OS $\rightarrow$ AF	-.442	< .001
PNL $\rightarrow$ AF $\rightarrow$ FWB	-.312	< .001
PNL $\rightarrow$ FWB $\rightarrow$ TI	.287	< .001

The source analysis also reports that the PNL-to-silence relationship was comparatively stronger in public profiles, whereas the protective role of academic freedom was comparatively stronger in private profiles; the broad model was described as stable across all four sectors.

Because subgroup coefficients and formal invariance statistics were not supplied, Figure 4 deliberately presents these results qualitatively rather than manufacturing numerical differences.



Figure 4. Qualitative summary of reported multi-group patterns.

5.4 Integrated interpretation of the modeled results

The results are most informative when read as a system rather than a list of supported hypotheses. The PNL-to-AOP coefficient indicates that the modeled leadership construct is strongly connected to perceptions of coercive or inconsistent authority. The subsequent negative AOP-to-OJ path locates the institutional consequence in fairness: once power is experienced as arbitrary or self-serving, confidence in the rules declines. Justice then has two roles. It supports psychological safety, which reduces silence, and it contributes directly to academic freedom. Fair procedure therefore operates both through voice climate and through confidence that independent judgment will be respected.

The two predictors of academic freedom are also substantively revealing. Organizational silence has a larger absolute association with freedom than justice in the reported model. This suggests that formal fairness is not sufficient when employees have learned to withhold concerns. Conversely, stronger justice may preserve some confidence in freedom even when other climate risks exist. Academic freedom and silence then converge on well-being, linking the governance environment with individual experience. Finally, the comparatively strong FWB-to-TI path suggests that departure intention reflects accumulated strain rather than a single isolated decision.

Explained-variance values are moderate to high across the endogenous constructs, but they should not be mistaken for prospective predictive performance. Because the data-generating process encoded the theoretical covariance structure, R^2 values primarily show that the specified relationships were retained through indicator generation and estimation. In a field sample, institutional context, employment security, discipline, career stage, labor-market alternatives, and national regulation would add substantial explanatory variation.

6. Discussion

6.1 Leadership pathology as a governance exposure

The model's most important proposition is that narcissistic administrative conduct should be evaluated as a governance exposure, not only as a personality characteristic. Institutions cannot reliably diagnose leaders' personalities, nor should governance depend on informal clinical labels. They can, however, observe decision concentration, inconsistent rule application, retaliation, credit appropriation, weak appeals, and

intolerance of scrutiny. Framing the issue in behavioral and procedural terms makes intervention possible without turning organizational disagreement into amateur diagnosis.

The strong modeled link between PNL and AOP illustrates how a leader-centered risk may enter institutional processes. Formal discretion is unavoidable in universities, but discretion becomes dangerous when checks are weak. Transparent criteria, recorded reasons, independent review, and distributed decision rights reduce the capacity of any leader's self-protective motives to shape careers or resources.

6.2 Fairness and safety as linked safeguards

Justice and psychological safety occupy the middle of the model because they translate formal arrangements into lived expectations. A grievance policy does little if decisions appear predetermined; an invitation to speak does little if previous dissenters were penalized. Faculty infer safety from patterns of treatment. Consistent procedures, respectful explanation, and meaningful appeal communicate that institutional rules will continue to operate when disagreement becomes uncomfortable.

The negative PS-to-OS relationship also emphasizes that voice systems require more than channels. Surveys, town halls, ombuds offices, and hotlines can collect information, but employees will use them only when confidentiality is credible, retaliation is monitored, and visible responses demonstrate that speaking can matter. Silence should therefore be treated as a governance indicator: persistent nonparticipation may signal risk even when formal complaint counts are low.

6.3 Academic freedom as an organizational outcome

The results position academic freedom between governance climate and faculty outcomes. This placement complements legal and normative accounts by showing how freedom can be weakened through ordinary organizational signals. A scholar who anticipates punitive workload assignments, stalled promotion, or reputational damage may self-censor without any written restriction. Monitoring academic freedom should accordingly include perceptions of retaliation, topic avoidance, and governance participation, not only formal policy compliance.

Academic freedom's modeled links with well-being and turnover further suggest that it functions as a job resource. For many academics, independent inquiry and reasoned disagreement are central to professional identity. When that autonomy contracts, the harm is not

limited to an abstract principle; it can diminish meaning, energy, attachment, and willingness to remain.

6.4 Institutional resilience and retention

A university that suppresses uncomfortable information may appear orderly while becoming less capable of adaptation. Weak voice delays detection of ethical, operational, and academic problems. Reduced freedom narrows intellectual experimentation. Faculty strain and exit then remove expertise precisely when organizational learning is most needed. Governance resilience therefore depends on the capacity to receive criticism, correct decisions, and preserve professional commitment under pressure.

The model also warns against treating wellness programs as substitutes for governance reform. Counseling and workload support may help individuals, but they cannot repair arbitrary decisions or unsafe voice climates. Well-being interventions should be paired with procedural and leadership accountability because the modeled pathway locates strain partly in institutional conditions.

6.5 Theoretical contributions

The study makes three theoretical contributions. First, it moves narcissistic leadership from a leader-centered account to a governance account. The object of explanation is not simply whether a difficult leader lowers morale; it is how institutional arrangements translate, amplify, or constrain self-protective conduct. This shift directs attention toward observable safeguards such as distributed authority, documented reasons, reviewability, and protected dissent.

Second, the framework connects organizational justice and psychological safety to academic freedom. Higher-education research often treats freedom as a constitutional, legal, or professional entitlement, while organizational-behavior research examines fairness and voice inside workplaces. The integrated model shows why both perspectives are required. Formal freedom is exercised through daily organizational relationships, and those relationships are shaped by expectations about fairness and interpersonal risk.

Third, the model links governance legitimacy to institutional sustainability through well-being and retention. Faculty departure is usually explained using workload, compensation, career opportunity, or personal circumstances. Those factors remain important, but the proposed pathway shows how governance itself can become a job demand and how academic freedom can function as a professional resource. The contribution is therefore a multilevel proposition: patterns of authority

affect organizational climate, climate affects professional experience, and accumulated experience affects institutional attachment.

6.6 Institutional and international boundary conditions

The pathway is unlikely to operate identically in every higher-education system. The distribution of authority varies across institutions with elected rectors, appointed presidents, strong senates, unionized faculties, civil-service employment, or market-oriented contracts. Employment security may reduce the immediate risk of dismissal while leaving workload, promotion, research access, and committee influence exposed to administrative discretion. Conversely, strong external regulation may constrain arbitrary action but also centralize compliance pressures that narrow local participation.

Academic disciplines may also experience the model differently. Laboratories and clinical units often depend on concentrated resources and complex safety requirements; professional schools may face accreditation and industry pressure; humanities fields may depend more heavily on interpretive autonomy and public expression. Career stage, contract status, gender, nationality, and minority position can change both exposure to power and the perceived cost of speaking. Aggregated institutional estimates may therefore conceal unequal governance experiences.

These boundary conditions reinforce the need for comparative field research. The model should be tested for measurement equivalence before coefficients are compared across countries, sectors, or demographic groups. Qualitative inquiry is equally important because the same formal practice can carry different meanings across contexts. Centralized approval may be viewed as routine coordination in one institution and as retaliatory control in another. A context-sensitive approach preserves the framework's core mechanisms while avoiding the assumption that one governance design fits every university.

7. Governance implications

The framework supports a coordinated portfolio of safeguards rather than a single leadership-development intervention. First, governing boards and senates can define observable conduct standards for administrators, incorporate 360-degree feedback, document high-discretion decisions, and review patterns rather than isolated complaints. Second, promotion, workload, appointment, and resource processes can be audited for

consistency, explanation, appeal access, and disparate treatment.

Third, institutions can protect voice through confidential reporting, independent ombuds functions, nonretaliation monitoring, and published response protocols. Fourth, academic-freedom reviews can examine both policy and climate: whether scholars avoid subjects, speech, or governance participation because of anticipated consequences. Fifth, faculty well-being dashboards can combine workload, autonomy, justice, safety, silence, and turnover indicators rather than reporting wellness as a purely personal condition.

These mechanisms should remain proportionate and evidence based. Governance controls can themselves become bureaucratic burdens if they produce measurement without correction. A compact review cycle is preferable: identify a risk signal, validate it with multiple sources, assign an accountable owner, publish an action, and evaluate whether the signal changes. Confidentiality, due process, and protection against malicious allegations must apply to both complainants and respondents.

7.1 From principles to an operating cycle

Implementation can follow an annual governance-assurance cycle. During the diagnostic phase, institutions can combine confidential climate measures with process evidence such as appeal times, workload variation, committee participation, leadership turnover, and exit themes. No single indicator should trigger a conclusion. Triangulation is essential because dissatisfied employees may report negative perceptions, while administrative records may omit informal pressure and unreported silence.

The review phase should be independent of the office being assessed. A board committee, senate body, ombuds function, or external reviewer can examine whether criteria were communicated, reasons documented, conflicts declared, and appeals genuinely available. Findings should distinguish isolated error from recurring pattern and should allow the affected leader or unit to respond. Corrective action may include process redesign, coaching, redistributed decision rights, monitoring, or formal accountability, depending on severity and recurrence.

The learning phase closes the loop. Institutions should report aggregated findings, actions, owners, and review dates without exposing confidential participants. Repeated measurement can test whether justice, safety, voice, freedom, and well-being improve after intervention. The purpose is not to generate a permanent

scorecard of personalities; it is to determine whether governance mechanisms are functioning and whether employees can raise evidence before problems become crises.

7.2 Measurement cautions

Governance dashboards must be designed cautiously. Labeling a leader narcissistic on the basis of a short survey can stigmatize individuals and encourage political misuse. Measures should refer to observable conduct, use multiple items and sources, protect respondent confidentiality, and be interpreted by qualified reviewers. Scores should initiate inquiry rather than serve as automatic verdicts.

Institutions should also examine variation rather than relying only on university-wide averages. A generally positive climate can conceal a high-risk faculty, department, or employment category. At the same time, very small groups create confidentiality and statistical-stability problems. Reporting rules should set minimum cell sizes, suppress identifiable comments, and contextualize changes with response rates and organizational events. Responsible measurement is itself part of procedural justice.

8. Limitations and research agenda

The study's decisive limitation is that its data are modeled. Large sample size and strong fit do not compensate for the absence of real participants. The coefficients partly reflect the assumptions used to generate the latent covariance structure, and statistical significance is unsurprising with 118,009 records. The analysis cannot establish that the proposed sequence occurs in actual institutions, that it unfolds in the stated temporal order, or that observed relationships would generalize across countries and sectors.

The reflective measurement specification also warrants empirical scrutiny. Some constructs may be multidimensional, formative, or context dependent. Common-method bias, response fear, and institutional clustering would matter in a field survey. Cross-sector comparison additionally requires measurement-invariance tests and publication of subgroup estimates; qualitative claims alone are insufficient.

Future research should preregister the model and test it with multi-institutional, longitudinal data. Independent sources could combine faculty surveys, administrative records, grievance outcomes, workload patterns, exit data, and policy audits. Multilevel models should distinguish individual perceptions from department and institution climates. Interviews can examine how silence

develops and whether formal academic-freedom protections remain usable in practice. Experimental vignette studies could test reactions to fair and arbitrary decisions without attributing clinical traits to named leaders.

9. Conclusion

Administrative narcissism matters to higher education when it becomes embedded in the use of power. The modeled evidence describes a coherent pathway in which self-protective leadership conduct is associated with power misuse, lower justice and psychological safety, greater silence, constrained academic freedom, reduced well-being, and stronger turnover intention. These findings are a theoretical demonstration, not a diagnosis of real universities. Their practical value lies in identifying testable mechanisms and institutional safeguards.

Universities strengthen resilience when authority remains answerable to transparent procedure, dissent can occur without retaliation, and academic freedom is experienced as an operational reality. Leadership selection is important, but governance quality cannot depend on selecting flawless individuals. Durable systems make power reviewable, protect voice, correct error, and preserve the conditions under which scholars can contribute and remain.

Declarations

Data statement: The analysis is based on the modeled HEGov-172K governance repository; no claim is made that the records represent real respondents or institutions.

Ethics statement: No human participants, personal identifiers, or identifiable institutions were involved in the modeled-data analysis.

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