

Why and when inclusive leadership backfires on leaders? A self-regulatory perspective

Abstract/Summary

The beneficial influence of inclusive leadership on followers is well-researched, but the implications of the same on the leaders are underresearched. Addressing this gap in the literature, our work proposes a conceptual model based on the theory of self-regulation wherein engaging in inclusive leadership behaviors predicts greater laissez-faire behaviors by the leaders, and this relationship is mediated by ego depletion. Further, leaders high on trait self-regulation demonstrate less laissez-faire leadership behaviors following ego-depletion than their low trait self-regulation counterparts. The managerial and practical implications of the study are discussed.

Track: Leadership and Leadership Development

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1. Introductions

Inclusive leadership refers to “words and deeds by a leader or leaders that indicate an invitation and appreciation for others' contributions” (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006, p. 927). Scholarship on the same has started to proliferate over the last few years. Extant research indicates that inclusive leadership increases positive employee outcomes, including voice (Guo, Zhu and Zhang, 2022), innovative work behavior (Javed, Khan and Quratulain, 2021), project success (Khan *et al.*, 2020), well-being (Choi, Tran and Kang, 2017), employee performance (Umrani *et al.*, 2023), organizational citizenship behavior (Srivastava and Singh, 2023) and others. However, the literature has rarely examined the ramifications of inclusive leadership on leaders themselves. Addressing this gap is important for two reasons. First, investigating the effects of inclusive leadership on leaders themselves will shed light on how inclusive leaders stand to gain or lose by being inclusive toward their subordinates. Second, depending on whether inclusive leadership is beneficial or detrimental for the leaders, suitable leadership development programs and interventions can be designed. Therefore, it is crucial to examine whether, why, and when practicing inclusive leadership affects the leaders themselves.

In this paper, we leverage the leader-centric perspective and build upon the theory of self-regulation (Lord *et al.*, 2010; Baumeister *et al.*, 2018) to highlight the process by which inclusive leadership fuels leader outcomes. Per self-regulation theory, individuals have limited resources for self-regulation i.e., the capacity to overrule undesirable urges, impulses, moods, thoughts, and tendencies (Neal, Ballard and Vancouver, 2017; Inzlicht *et al.*, 2021). When individuals perform activities that require significant self-regulation (e.g., paying attention, supporting others, switching tasks, etc.), it consumes their self-regulatory resources thereby making subsequent self-regulation difficult (Baumeister and Vohs, 2007). Inclusive leaders

pay attention to different insights and perspectives emanating from their followers, foster the uniqueness of subordinates, enhance the belongingness of employees in teams, demonstrate appreciation for the efforts put by followers toward work, and play a key role in supporting organizational efforts (Shore and Chung, 2022; Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022). Engaging in these activities is likely to expend an inclusive leader's self-regulatory resources resulting in ego depletion, followed by displaying laissez-faire leadership (Baumeister and Vohs, 2007; Baumeister *et al.*, 2018; Liao *et al.*, 2021). In other words, we suspect inclusive leadership to indirectly predict laissez-faire leadership via ego depletion. It is so because of two reasons. First, depleted individuals do not have sufficient self-regulatory resources to regulate their subsequent actions, which in turn, drives them to conserve the same (Baumeister, 2002; Chow, Hui and Lau, 2015). Laissez-faire leadership does not require leaders to spend much effort on their part (Skogstad *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, it is plausible that inclusive leaders, following ego depletion, would engage in laissez-faire leadership to conserve their remaining self-regulatory resources. Second, alternatives like initiating structure consume relatively less self-regulatory resources of a leader (Liao *et al.*, 2021), but the change in mindset required to move from inclusive leadership to other leader behaviors will entail further consumption of self-regulatory resources (Hamilton *et al.*, 2011). As a consequence, it may not be an option for an inclusive leader who is depleted. On the other hand, laissez-faire leadership demands minimal self-regulatory resources from the leader thereby making it a plausible option for depleted inclusive leaders.

Furthermore, the self-regulation theory argues that individuals differ in their susceptibility to ego depletion (Yam *et al.*, 2016; Yuan, Xu and Li, 2020). The said between-person difference is captured by trait self-regulation, which consists of an 'active self' that prioritizes long-term rewarding goals over short-term gratifying alternatives (De Ridder and Gillebaart, 2017). We contend that it can act as a moderator in the indirect linkage between

inclusive leadership and laissez-faire leadership. Studies indicate that individuals high (low) on trait self-regulation have more (less) baseline self-regulatory resources, are better (worse) at managing these resources, or both (Ent, Baumeister and Tice, 2015; Duckworth *et al.*, 2019). Existing scholarship on trait self-regulation indicates that it has many beneficial effects on individuals, in general (de Ridder *et al.*, 2012; Napolitano, Duckworth and Gross, 2024), and it plays a constructive role in protecting the self-regulatory resources of individuals, in particular (Yam *et al.*, 2016; Jiang, Zhang and Zheng, 2024; Liu and Yu, 2024). Accordingly, we reason that a leader high (low) on trait self-regulation will be less (more) susceptible to ego depletion, thereby reducing (magnifying) the indirect effect of inclusive leadership on laissez-faire leadership. In sum, we illuminate why leaders respond to their inclusive leadership behaviors in different ways by investigating trait self-regulation as a boundary condition.

Our work makes two major contributions to the extant scholarship. First, it analyzes the impact of inclusive leadership on leaders themselves. This marks a departure from the existing studies that mostly look into the relationship between inclusive leadership and follower outcomes (see: Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022, for a review). By shifting the focus of inclusive leadership from follower outcomes to leader outcomes, we underscore the prospective challenges associated with performing inclusive leadership behaviors. Specifically, investigating the consequences of inclusive leadership on leaders themselves can reveal the disadvantages of inclusive leadership (e.g., greater ego depletion, and more laissez-faire leadership). In doing so, we answer Lin et al.'s (2019) call for more leader-centric studies.

Second, our work advances existing literature on the outcomes of inclusive leader behaviors on the leaders themselves by highlighting when such behaviors are more or less detrimental to the leaders. Specifically, based on the theory of self-regulation, we contend that the positive indirect relationship between inclusive leadership and laissez-faire leadership through ego depletion is weaker (stronger) at high (low) levels of leader trait self-regulation.

Stated differently, leaders high on trait self-regulation stand to lose less self-regulatory resources while engaging in inclusive leadership behaviors, which then leads to downstream consequences like lesser ego depletion followed by the display of less laissez-faire leadership. To date, studies on inclusive leadership have mostly identified boundary conditions that accentuate or mitigate the effects of the same on the followers (e.g., Cao, Zhao and Zhao, 2023; Siyal *et al.*, 2023; Sürücü, Maslakçı and Şeşen, 2023). On the contrary, our research advances the scant literature on moderators influencing the effects of inclusive leadership on themselves.

2. Development of propositions

2.1 Self-regulation theory: A brief overview

The theory of self-regulation largely makes three key points (Inzlicht *et al.*, 2021). First, self-regulation is based on some critical resources that drive all the regulated behaviors like opting to study instead of browsing Instagram reels or performing calisthenics after waking up in the morning as opposed to aimlessly lying on the bed (Tangney, Boone and Baumeister, 2018). Second, these critical resources required for self-regulation are finite, and engaging in repeated efforts toward self-regulation depletes these resources to the point of near exhaustion, a phenomenon known as “ego depletion”, thereby making subsequent self-regulation difficult (Muraven, Tice and Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister *et al.*, 2018; Baumeister, Tice and Vohs, 2018; Baumeister and Vohs, 2007; Hagger *et al.*, 2010; Tepper, Simon and Park, 2017). For example, an individual who has returned home after putting in long hours at work may be experiencing ego depletion and as a result, find it very difficult to exercise subsequent self-regulation in the forms of, say, resisting the temptation to binge-watch the latest Netflix series or stick to his or her evening yoga regime. Third, following ego depletion, individuals start conserving the said critical resources which then leads to withdrawal from exacting roles resulting in passivity (Gailliot *et al.*, 2007; Liao *et al.*, 2021). For instance, after getting drained at work, a manager may become passive and conserve his or her self-regulatory resources by

taking an extended break and by delaying involvement in any demanding activities (e.g., conflict resolution, making hard choices, etc.).

2.2 The positive relationship between inclusive leadership and ego depletion

An inclusive leader shows appreciation for the work done by the followers, nurtures employees' uniqueness, supports organizational efforts, and enhances the belongingness of employees in teams (Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022). Despite the advantages of inclusive leadership on followers, we contend that practicing inclusive leadership behaviors comes at a cost to the leaders themselves. As noted earlier, the resources required for self-regulation are limited, and engaging in activities that need self-regulation will deplete those resources leading to a state of ego depletion (Inzlicht *et al.*, 2021). We posit three reasons why demonstrating inclusive leadership behaviors will warrant self-regulation on the part of the leaders and they may experience ego depletion.

First, practicing inclusive leadership behaviors will require overriding of own biases (Al-Atwi and Al-Hassani, 2021), and that entails significant self-regulation on the part of the leader (Johnson, Lin and Lee, 2018; Solomon, Hall and Muir, 2022). For example, a leader may have a liking to work with followers or employees who share similar backgrounds, work styles, or viewpoints. However, practicing inclusive leadership requires the leader to set aside these preferences and work with followers who share little or no similarities with the leader. Thus, the leader needs to self-regulate to override the bias towards similar employees and instead embrace employees who are different from him or her. Another instance could be that a leader might tend to allocate more resources, high-value projects, or career development opportunities to employees who he or she feels more connected. However, inclusive leadership would require the leader to suppress this inclination and ensure that resources, high-value projects, or career development opportunities are fairly distributed among the employees. It will entail self-

regulation by the leader to overcome such an inclination. Prior research on self-regulation found that suppressing biases consumes self-regulatory resources thereby leading to the depletion of the same (Lord *et al.*, 2010; Johnson, Lin and Lee, 2018). Hence, when leaders try to be inclusive toward their followers by suppressing their biases, it could lead to ego depletion.

Second, an inclusive leader helps and supports employees thereby enabling them to maximize their contribution at work (Randel *et al.*, 2018) and it can exhaust the leader's self-regulatory resources. At work, a leader has to choose between competing goals i.e., meeting in-role demands versus helping and supporting followers (as part of inclusive leadership). Prior research suggests that while facing competing goals, an individual cannot pursue those goals simultaneously because self-regulatory resources are limited (DeShon *et al.*, 2004; Schmidt and DeShon, 2007). So, the leader may switch from the task at hand to helping and supporting the followers, and this will entail driving out competing goals from the mind (cognitive suppression), understanding the problem by standing in the shoes of the followers (behavioral flexibility), and suppression of negative emotions to showcase patience (emotion regulation), all of which can drain self-regulatory resources (Lanaj, Johnson and Wang, 2016; Gabriel *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, switching from the task at hand to helping and supporting the followers may also require a change in mindset, which consumes self-regulatory resources (Hamilton *et al.*, 2011). Besides, leaders mostly help and support their followers following a request by the latter, and this diminishes the leaders' autonomy because of felt obligation on his or her part (Bolino and Grant, 2016; Gabriel *et al.*, 2018). In such circumstances, leaders may feel depleted, because greater self-regulation is required for activities that are not self-directed (Muraven, Gagné and Rosman, 2008). In sum, when leaders exhibit inclusive leadership by helping and supporting their followers, they may lose significant self-regulatory resources culminating in ego depletion.

Third, leaders practicing inclusivity face significant cognitive and emotional demands that can drain their self-regulatory resources, thereby precipitating ego depletion. Inclusive leaders try their best to ensure diverse viewpoints and concerns of their followers are heard (Randel *et al.*, 2018). This will likely require paying significant attention to the followers' perspectives, at times managing and balancing contradicting opinions and thoughts, and trying to find an optimal solution based on wide-ranging views. All these activities are cognitively demanding and consume substantial self-regulatory resources which may trigger ego depletion (Hagger, Wood, *et al.*, 2010; Fang and Zhang, 2021). In addition, inclusive leaders are strongly committed to the development and well-being of their followers (Al-Atwi and Al-Hassani, 2021). As a result, an inclusive leader guides the followers in a personalized manner and addresses their emotional needs (Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022). However, the leader may be facing challenges on the personal front (e.g., health issues, ailments, or death of a loved one, etc.) or the professional front (e.g., struggling to handle multiple duties and responsibilities, conflict with the immediate boss, etc.). Such issues can generate negative affect (Spector and Fox, 2005; Zhang, Crant and Weng, 2019; Bhattacharjee and Sarkar, 2024), but to perform inclusive leadership behaviors, the leader may suppress this affect, which can sap self-regulatory resources (Beal *et al.*, 2005; Lin and Johnson, 2015). It can lead to ego depletion. We propose:

Proposition-1: Inclusive leadership is positively associated with ego depletion.

2.2 The positive relationship between ego depletion and laissez-faire leadership

Self-regulation theory posits that individuals struggle to self-regulate following ego depletion because they are left with scant self-regulatory resources (Baumeister and Vohs, 2007). Consequently, they conserve their remaining resources by becoming passive, and that entails withdrawal from acts that require significant self-regulation (e.g., suppressing destructive impulses, subduing biases, supporting others, etc.) (Carnevale and Fujita, 2016;

Baumeister *et al.*, 2024). Existing findings support the above argument. For instance, depleted employees were less likely to engage in voice (Lin and Johnson, 2015; Xia, Schyns and Zhang, 2020; Zhou and Sun, 2025) and struggled to suppress destructive urges leading to more cyberloafing (Yang *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, depleted leaders reject employee voice instead of processing it (Li *et al.*, 2019), report lower levels of performance at work (Haesevoets *et al.*, 2022), and are less willing to support others (Trougakos *et al.*, 2015). Prior meta-analyses also indicate that ego depletion is associated with greater fatigue and poor task performance (Hagger, Wood, *et al.*, 2010; Dang, 2018). Given the above evidence, we expect ego depletion to be succeeded by passivity.

In particular, we contend ego depletion significantly increases laissez-faire leadership-a passive leadership style wherein the leader abdicates from his or her responsibilities and largely refrains from actively engaging with the followers (Skogstad *et al.*, 2007; Fosse *et al.*, 2024). Laissez-faire leadership behaviors are characterized by inaction or absence of effort by the leader (Hinkin and Schriesheim, 2008; Khan, Patel and Barnes, 2024) and are often considered to be non-leadership (Vullings *et al.*, 2020). Consistent with self-regulation theory, the depleted leader will take steps to conserve self-regulatory resources by avoiding activities that warrant their further consumption, leading to increased passivity (Baumeister *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, demonstrating laissez-faire leadership behaviors could be a reasonable route for depleted leaders because giving up responsibilities and not actively engaging with followers is likely to conserve, rather than drain, their scant self-regulatory resources. In light of this discussion, we propose:

Proposition-2: Ego depletion is positively associated with laissez-faire leadership.

2.3 The mediating role of ego depletion between inclusive leadership and laissez-faire leadership

Studies suggest that activities like suppressing self-interests, setting apt goals and achieving them, monitoring and assessing one's progress, switching between tasks, paying attention, controlling impulses, helping others, making choices, working towards long-term benefits, suppressing biases, thoughts, and emotions, and many others warrant self-regulation, thereby consuming the critical resources for the same (Lord *et al.*, 2010; Joosten *et al.*, 2014; Carnevale and Fujita, 2016; Lian *et al.*, 2017). Essentially, all regulated or controlled activities require the consumption of self-regulatory resources but these resources are finite (Baumeister *et al.*, 2024), and as a result, repeated self-regulation attempts bring about ego depletion (Muraven, Tice and Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister, 2002). Building upon self-regulation theory, we have previously argued that practicing inclusive leadership behaviors can sap the self-regulatory resources of leaders. This is because it entails overriding their own biases, choosing between helping followers and attending to in-role demands, navigating and managing divergent viewpoints of followers, and suppressing negative affect- all of which contribute to ego depletion. Consistent with self-regulation theory, leaders following ego depletion will act in a manner that will conserve, rather than consume, self-regulatory resources (Lord *et al.*, 2010; Liao *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, enacting laissez-faire leadership can be a way for depleted leaders to protect their remaining self-regulatory resources as abdicating from duties and responsibilities as a leader is unlikely to further consume these resources. Taken together, we expect ego depletion to mediate the relationship between inclusive leadership and laissez-faire leadership behaviors. Prior works support our argument. For example, transformational leadership behaviors exhaust the resources of leaders leading to higher leader turnover intentions (Lin, Scott and Matta, 2019). Similarly, servant leadership behaviors indirectly

increase laissez-faire leadership behaviors through the increase in leaders' ego depletion (Liao *et al.*, 2021). We propose:

Proposition-3: The positive relationship between inclusive leadership and laissez-faire leadership is mediated by ego depletion.

2.4 The moderating role of trait self-regulation between inclusive leadership, ego depletion, and laissez-faire leadership

The previous hypotheses indicate the effects of inclusive leadership behaviors on ego depletion and laissez-faire leadership behaviors. As noted in the introduction, a fundamental tenet of self-regulation theory is that susceptibility to ego depletion varies among individuals, and this stable individual difference is captured by trait self-regulation (Leduc-Cummings *et al.*, 2022). Studies indicate that individuals high (low) on trait self-control have more (less) self-regulatory resources, are better (worse) at managing these resources, or both (Ent, Baumeister and Tice, 2015; Duckworth *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, we expect the strength of the indirect effect of inclusive leadership on laissez-faire leadership to be contingent upon the levels of trait self-regulation. Specifically, leaders with high (low) levels of trait self-regulation are likely to be less (more) vulnerable to the draining effects of inclusive leadership behaviors.

We provide two reasons for the above contention. First, prior scholarship suggests that individuals with high (low) trait self-regulation have more (less) baseline self-regulatory resources (Ent, Baumeister and Tice, 2015; Fehr *et al.*, 2017). From this standpoint, high (low) levels of trait self-regulation are likely to buffer (intensify) the depleting effects of inclusive leadership behaviors on leaders themselves. Second, individuals with high trait self-regulation effortlessly deploy four situational strategies for managing self-regulatory resources, namely, situation modification, attention deployment (comprising of distraction and concentration), cognitive reappraisal, and response modulation (Duckworth, Gendler and Gross, 2016;

Nielsen, Gwozdz and De Ridder, 2019; Milyavskaya, Saunders and Inzlicht, 2021; Milosevic *et al.*, no date). We discuss these strategies one by one.

Situation modification refers to changing the present circumstances to our advantage (Duckworth, Gendler and Gross, 2016). For example, inclusive leaders with high trait self-regulation might recognize that meetings can turn heated, which in turn, drains them. In response, they might modify the situation by opting for a round-robin meeting or setting clear rules for voicing opinions beforehand. By developing such a conducive environment, inclusive leaders with high trait self-regulation create a situation that is less demanding on them thereby reducing ego depletion and laissez-faire leadership. *Attentional deployment* directs the focus to situations that facilitate self-regulation instead of impeding it and comprises two strategies: *distraction* and *concentration* (Nielsen, Gwozdz and De Ridder, 2019; Milosevic *et al.*, no date). Concerning *distraction*, an individual directs his or her focus from a depleting stimulus to a neutral or positive one (Milyavskaya, Saunders and Inzlicht, 2021). For instance, an inclusive leader high on trait self-regulation, instead of dwelling on which employee he or she likes to work with and expending significant self-regulatory resources to suppress this bias, distracts himself or herself with objective criteria like performance appraisal ratings or project requirements to allocate high-value projects or career development opportunities to the employees. Therefore, less self-regulatory resources are dissipated that manifest in less ego depletion followed by less laissez-faire leadership. Regarding *concentration*, individuals direct their attention to long-term goals and block intrusive or depleting thoughts (Duckworth, Gendler and Gross, 2016). For example, when faced with conflicting viewpoints, inclusive leaders with high levels of trait self-regulation can focus on overarching goals or finding a common ground that can benefit the organization in the long run while blocking the investment of their attention on every minute detail. In this way, they can integrate diverse opinions in a simplified manner leading to the expenditure of less self-regulatory resources that translate into

less ego depletion and less laissez-faire leadership. *Cognitive reappraisal* refers to changing the way one thinks of a challenging situation to minimize its negative impact (Nielsen, Gwozdz and De Ridder, 2019; Milosevic *et al.*, no date). For instance, an inclusive leader might be conflicted between helping the followers and attending to in-role demands. A leader who is high on trait self-regulation, instead of thinking that he or she has landed in a soup and deploying self-regulatory resources to suppress the resulting negative thoughts, will reframe it as an opportunity to learn and grow as a leader. Thus, an inclusive leader high on trait self-regulation can reduce the consumption of self-regulatory resources by reframing a tough situation resulting in less ego depletion followed by less laissez-faire leadership. *Response modulation* refers to the deployment of brute willpower to suppress thoughts, emotions, moods, urges, etc. that deplete self-regulatory resources (Duckworth, Gendler and Gross, 2016; Milyavskaya, Saunders and Inzlicht, 2021). As noted earlier, individuals high on trait self-regulation have greater baseline self-regulatory resources (Fehr *et al.*, 2017), which in turn, enables them to effortlessly exercise willpower to quench any depleting urges or impulses or thoughts that arise in the ‘heat of the moment’ (Duckworth, Gendler and Gross, 2016; Gillebaart and Schneider, 2024; Napolitano, Duckworth and Gross, 2024). It culminates in less ego depletion and less laissez-faire leadership.

Existing empirical evidence too supports our arguments. For example, leaders high on trait self-regulation are better at meeting the expectations of their followers (Rosing, Boer and Buengeler, 2024) while leaders low on trait self-regulation are vulnerable to the depleting effects of surface acting (Yam *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, leaders high on trait self-regulation can route their empathy and humility to manifest positive consequences (Sosik *et al.*, 2019). Taken together, based on the self-regulation theory and extant empirical evidence, we propose:

Proposition-4: The positive indirect relationship between inclusive leadership and laissez-faire leadership through ego depletion will be weakened (strengthened) at high (low) levels of trait self-regulation.

3. Discussion

In recent times, scholarship on inclusive leadership has begun to accumulate. However, it largely studies the beneficial effects of inclusive leadership on follower outcomes (Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022). We, on the other hand, set out to investigate what are the consequences of inclusive leadership behaviors on leaders themselves. In line with self-regulation theory, we argued that ego depletion mediated the positive linkage between inclusive leadership and laissez-faire leadership. Furthermore, consistent with the argument that not all individuals are equally susceptible to the depletion of self-regulatory resources, we contended that leaders with high trait self-regulation experienced lesser ego depletion and demonstrated lesser laissez-faire leadership. The theoretical and practical implications are discussed below.

3.1 Theoretical implications

This research makes three contributions to the extant literature. First, it advances the inclusive leadership scholarship by developing and testing a theoretical model that looks at its impact on the leaders themselves. Organizations empower and encourage leaders to play a key role in fostering inclusivity in the workplace (Shore and Chung, 2022). However, this can boomerang because inclusive leadership is detrimental to the leaders themselves. Previous works on inclusive leadership have mostly emphasized the positive effects of inclusive leadership on follower outcomes (see: Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022, for a review). However, our study reveals the deleterious effects of inclusive leadership on the leaders themselves. Therefore, practicing inclusivity toward followers can come at a cost to the

leaders, suggesting that inclusive leadership need not always be a “positive” influence but it could have a “dark” side too.

Second, our work highlights the mechanism by which inclusive leadership affects the leaders themselves. This presents a departure from previous research that has investigated mechanisms between inclusive leadership and follower outcomes (e.g., Sürücü, Maslakçı and Şeşen, 2023; Yasin *et al.*, 2023). Building upon the theory of self-regulation (Baumeister *et al.*, 2018), we argued that practicing inclusive leadership entails the consumption of substantial self-regulatory resources in leaders that lead to ego depletion. Following ego depletion, the leaders demonstrate laissez-faire leadership to conserve their remaining self-regulatory resources. This suggests that engaging in inclusive leadership is so demanding that leaders end up abdicating their duties and responsibilities. Since ego depletion explains *why* inclusive leadership turns into laissez-faire leadership, it implies that shifting to laissez-faire leadership is more of an unintentional response of an inclusive leader rather than a deliberate one. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to argue of a link between inclusive leadership and laissez-faire leadership via ego depletion. As a secondary contribution, our work also expands the antecedents of laissez-faire leadership. Laissez-faire leadership is known to be a destructive leadership style (Robert and Vandenberghe, 2021) that has negative implications for followers (Klasmeier *et al.*, 2022; Desgourdes *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, any significant link between inclusive leadership and laissez-faire leadership can have important downstream consequences for the employees.

Third, our study has implications for trait self-regulation research. Using self-regulation theory, we proposed that inclusive leadership is less detrimental for those leaders who are high on trait self-regulation. This is so because individuals with high trait self-regulation have more baseline self-regulatory resources and are better at managing these resources

through different strategies (e.g., cognitive reappraisal, situation modification, etc.), or both (Ent, Baumeister and Tice, 2015). As a result, the indirect effect of inclusive leadership on laissez-faire leadership through ego depletion is likely to be buffered. On the other hand, individuals with low trait self-regulation have less self-regulatory resources and are worse at managing these resources, or both (Fehr *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, the indirect effect of inclusive leadership on laissez-faire leadership through ego depletion is likely to be magnified. Taken together, practicing inclusive leadership is not universally detrimental for leaders. Also, our contention is consistent with prior studies that emphasized the role of trait self-regulation in protecting the self-regulatory resources of an individual. For example, trait self-regulation buffered the negative impact of abusive supervision on employees' safety behaviors (Yuan, Xu and Li, 2020), or leaders with high trait self-regulation experienced lesser depletion due to surface acting (Yam *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, our study throws light on how a stable individual difference molds leadership behaviors following ego depletion.

3.2 Practical implications

This work provides a few implications for practice. The propositions indicate that inclusive leadership positively predicts laissez-faire leadership through ego depletion. Therefore, it is sensible to mitigate or reduce ego depletion in inclusive leaders to prevent the emergence of laissez-faire leadership. To this end, extant research has found that psychological detachment from work can help individuals protect their self-regulatory resources and reduce ego depletion (Gombert, Rivkin and Schmidt, 2020). Therefore, organizations can provide options such as practicing mindfulness (Shaabani *et al.*, 2020), taking breaks during work (Troughakos *et al.*, 2008) or from work (Fritz and Sonnentag, 2006), socializing with others (Sonnentag, 2001), or any combination of these activities (Chong *et al.*, 2020) to help the leaders dissociate psychologically from work. Furthermore,

individuals exhibit better self-regulation and less ego depletion when they engage in activities that benefit themselves (Muraven and Slessareva, 2003). So, organizations can turn practicing inclusive leadership into a beneficial activity for the leaders by awarding them higher performance ratings. Inducing positive affect through surprises can mitigate ego depletion and enhance self-regulation (Tice *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, providing a compliment or spot bonus to leaders practicing inclusivity can reduce the detrimental consequences of ego depletion on these leaders. As alluded to earlier, inclusive leadership is not equally depleting to all leaders. Specifically, leaders low on trait self-regulation are particularly susceptible to ego depletion. One can identify these leaders by using the scale used for trait self-regulation in our study. Thereafter, they can be trained in techniques like cognitive reappraisal (Kim, Lee and Son, 2023) and situation modification (Duckworth, Gendler and Gross, 2016) as they help to reduce demands on self-regulatory resources.

3.3 Limitations of the study and avenues for future research

Similar to any study, our work too has limitations. First, without empirical data, the propositions in our work cannot be tested. Thus, future research can collect data from leaders and their subordinates to test our propositions. Second, engaging in laissez-faire is an unintentional response of a depleted inclusive leader because ego depletion acts as a mediator. However, future research could examine whether shifting from inclusive leadership to a laissez-faire one could be deliberate. For instance, a study based on moral licensing theory has argued and found that leaders engage in positive behaviors to acquire moral credits, which are then used by them to justify their wrongs (see: Lin, Ma and Johnson, 2016). From this perspective, a leader might practice inclusive leadership to gather moral credits to justify engaging in laissez-faire leadership later. Taking it a step further, future scholars could pit ego depletion against moral credits to understand which of the two mechanisms better explains the link between inclusive leadership and laissez-

faire leadership better. Second, concerning moderators, prior works have shown that individuals high on conscientiousness are better at self-regulation (Hoyle, 2006; Costantini, Sarauilli and Perugini, 2020). Therefore, future studies could examine whether inclusive leaders high on conscientiousness are more resilient against ego depletion and demonstrate lesser laissez-faire leadership. Finally, one cannot infer causality with a conceptual work like ours, and thus our model needs to be tested with experimental or longitudinal designs.

6. Conclusion

The key proposition of our study is that inclusive leaders low on trait self-regulation experience more ego depletion and demonstrate more laissez-faire leadership. Thus, although existing literature indicates that inclusive leadership is beneficial for followers, it is not so for the leaders. The managerial interventions discussed in our work can help inclusive leaders with low trait self-regulation to cope with ego depletion in a better way. We hope that future scholarship will continue to examine the impact of inclusive leadership on leaders themselves, thereby enriching the current inclusive leadership research.

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