

# BULLETIN OF MANAGEMENT REVIEW

VOL- 2, ISSUE- 2, 2025

[HTTPS://BULLETINOFMANAGEMENT.COM/INDEX.PHP/JOURNAL](https://bulletinofmanagement.com/index.php/journal)

Name of Publisher: INNOVATIVE EDUCATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Area of Publication: Business, Management and Accounting (miscellaneous)

Review Type: Double Blind Peer Review

## BULLETIN OF MANAGEMENT REVIEW (BMR)

ONLINE ISSN: 3006-2276

PRINT ISSN: 3006-2268

[HTTPS://THECRSSS.COM/INDEX.PHP/JOURNAL/ISSUE/ARCHIVE](https://thecrsss.com/index.php/journal/issue/archive)

### Understanding Teacher Responses to Machiavellian Leadership: The Role of Ego Depletion and Traditionality

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## Abstract

This study investigates the effect of Machiavellian leadership on Pakistani college teachers' withdrawal and helping behaviors through ego depletion, moderated by traditionality. Utilizing a three-waved, time-lagged survey design, data was collected from 530 teachers and 58 supervisors, forming 370 dyads, across 11 Pakistani colleges. The results, analyzed using the PROCESS Macro on SPSS, revealed that Machiavellian leadership increases withdrawal behaviors and decreases helping behaviors through ego depletion. Moreover, traditionality was found to amplify the negative impact of Machiavellian leadership on ego depletion and, subsequently, teacher behavior, but only at higher levels of traditionality. This research pioneers the application of ego depletion theory to Machiavellian leadership in the collegiate context, shedding new light on the psychological mechanisms and cultural factors driving adverse employee outcomes. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to promote ethical leadership and well-being in educational settings.

**Keywords:** Machiavellian leadership, traditionality, ego depletion, work withdrawal, helping behavior, Pakistan, supervisor–teacher relationship

## Introduction

Teachers regularly interact with their supervisors, such as subject leaders, program managers, and department heads, to address various matters, including curriculum planning, teaching methodologies, and student performance. These interactions are often compounded by discussions on administrative tasks, such as compliance with institutional policies, documentation, and event coordination. The behavior of supervisors during these interactions can significantly influence teachers' professional development, job satisfaction, and emotional well-being. However, existing research has primarily focused on managing teachers' behavior to achieve student learning goals (e.g., Shukla et al., 2020), often overlooking how supervisors shape teachers' emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes (Nguyen et al., 2020; Schott et al., 2020). This narrow focus risks creating workplace dynamics where hierarchical authority overshadows teachers' concerns and well-being, allowing toxic leadership styles to take root. One such style, Machiavellian leadership—characterized by manipulation and exploitation (Christie & Geis, 1970)—is increasingly being observed in academia (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009; Raza, 2021). When teachers routinely encounter this form of leadership, they may experience heightened stress, cognitive fatigue, and decreased motivation, while also struggling to maintain their teaching quality and

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student engagement. Therefore, investigating the impact of Machiavellian leadership in academic settings is crucial for developing effective strategies to mitigate its harmful effects and promote a healthier, more productive work environment.

The growing interest in Machiavellian leadership contrasts with the notable scarcity of research in this field (Liyanagamage & Fernando, 2023). While previous studies have emphasized its significant impact on subordinates' emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes (e.g., Belschak et al., 2018; Lee-Kugler et al., 2024), three critical gaps in knowledge persist, hindering a comprehensive understanding of its implications. First, research findings on the effects of Machiavellian leadership on employee behavior have been inconsistent, highlighting the need for further clarification (Frazier & Jacezko, 2021; Liyanagamage & Fernando, 2023). Additionally, the influence of Machiavellian leadership on specific behaviors, such as helping behavior (i.e., actions intended to support coworkers; Khajoei et al., 2024) and withdrawal behavior (i.e., actions aimed at distancing oneself from work; Rosse & Hulin, 1985), remains underexplored, necessitating further investigation to fully understand their implications for subordinates. Instead, research has predominantly examined distal outcomes of leader Machiavellianism—such as subordinates' corruption (Fatima & Mariam, 2021), silence (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019), and task performance (Saleem et al., 2024)—while neglecting the immediate behavioral consequences that directly follow.

Second, existing research has identified only a limited number of factors that moderate the impact of Machiavellian leadership on subordinates, such as followers' gender (Capezio et al., 2017) and collectivist work climate (Li et al., 2022). Expanding the investigation of potential moderators or boundary conditions is essential for unraveling the complex dynamics of this leadership style. Furthermore, while some studies have documented Machiavellian leadership's effects on specific job-related outcomes (e.g., Stradovnik & Stare, 2018; Uppal & Bansal, 2023), the mechanisms underlying these effects remain largely unexplored. Many studies conceptualize Machiavellian leadership as a workplace stressor, examining its impact through the resource-threat perspective (e.g., Karatepe et al., 2023; Saleem et al., 2024). This approach suggests that the effects of Machiavellian leadership may be indirect, with ego depletion—a psychological state characterized by depleted cognitive resources (Baumeister et al., 1998)—potentially serving as a psychological link between such leadership and subordinate behavior. To fully understand the influence of Machiavellian leadership on subordinates, it is imperative to

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explore both moderating and mediating factors in greater depth.

Third, although Machiavellian leadership has been studied in various industries, including the information technology sector (Lee-Kugler et al., 2024), healthcare (Gkorezis et al., 2015), and hospitality and tourism (Karatepe et al., 2023), its impact within the education sector remains underexplored. While university settings have received some attention (e.g., Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019; Raza, 2021), colleges have been largely overlooked. This gap is particularly significant given the distinctive dynamics of teacher–supervisor interactions in colleges, where smaller faculty sizes, closer supervision, and heavier administrative responsibilities may foster conditions conducive to the emergence of Machiavellian leadership. Furthermore, most studies on Machiavellian leadership have been conducted in emerging or developed countries (e.g., Belschak et al., 2018; Frazier & Jacezko, 2021), leaving a contextual void in understanding its implications in more conservative and traditional developing countries. Pakistan, with its unique cultural and societal influences on leadership dynamics (Mujtaba & Habib, 2011), offers a compelling context for focused investigation.

To address the aforementioned knowledge gaps, this study investigates the impact of Machiavellian leadership on the behavioral dynamics of teachers in Pakistani colleges, with a specific focus on withdrawal and helping behaviors. By applying ego depletion (ED) theory—which posits that repeated mental efforts exhaust individuals’ self-regulatory resources (Baumeister & Vohs, 2016)—this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms by which Machiavellian leaders exert a negative influence on their subordinates. This theory has been instrumental in explaining the difficulties and challenges that often arise in leader–follower relationships. The ED theory suggests that prolonged exposure to stress and related difficulties can deplete an individual’s self-regulatory resources, impairing their ability to control impulses, modulate emotions, and regulate behavior, ultimately leading to suboptimal behavioral outcomes (Baumeister et al., 1998; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Accordingly, this study predicts that the depleting effect of Machiavellian leadership on teachers’ self-control resources will lead to adverse job-related behaviors, with ego depletion serving as a key mediator in this relationship.

Considering the importance of cultural values and individual differences in leadership research (Antonakis & Day, 2017), this study investigates a critical boundary condition for the effects of Machiavellian leadership on college teachers. Specifically, it examines how traditionality—the degree to which individuals value and respect hierarchical social roles

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(Liao et al., 2023)—shapes the relationship between leader Machiavellianism and subordinate ego depletion. The traditional cultural context of Pakistan, with its emphasis on respect for seniority, deference to authority, and collectivism (Hofstede, 2001; Lieven, 2011), serves as a distinctive backdrop for this investigation. Although prior research indicates that high traditionality can mitigate the negative effects of certain adverse leadership styles (Wu et al., 2021; Cheng et al., 2021), this study argues that Machiavellian leadership has a distinct impact on traditionalist individuals. It predicts that subordinates who exhibit a stronger adherence to Pakistan's traditional socio-cultural values and norms will experience greater ego depletion when exposed to Machiavellian leadership, resulting in increased withdrawal and diminished helping behaviors.

In sum, by integrating ED theory with cultural insights and exploring the nuanced mediating and moderating mechanisms, this study contributes to the literature in several important ways. Firstly, it expands the workplace mistreatment literature by emphasizing the relevance of Machiavellian leadership and its effects on subordinate withdrawal and helping behaviors—two critical determinants of organizational effectiveness. Secondly, while ego depletion is often studied in the context of dark leadership (e.g., Jin, 2023), this study is the first to explore its role as a mediating factor within the specific context of Machiavellian leadership, offering new insights into its influence on workplace dynamics and contributing to the broader field of self-regulation. Thirdly, this study challenges the assumption that traditional values mitigate the effects of mistreatment (e.g., Fan et al., 2024) by proposing that traditionality may actually amplify the impact of Machiavellian leadership rather than buffer it. Additionally, while previous research has explored Machiavellian leadership through various theoretical lenses, such as Social Exchange Theory (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019) and Affective Events Theory (Lee-Kugler et al., 2024), this study makes a significant advancement by being the pioneering effort to apply ED theory to this leadership style. Finally, this study's time-lagged supervisor–subordinate dyadic surveys, conducted across various Pakistani colleges, provide valuable implications not only for Pakistan but also for culturally similar countries such as India and Bangladesh.

## **Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **Machiavellian Leadership**

Rooted in Niccolò Machiavelli's 15th-century works, Machiavellian leadership is a strategic, manipulative, and often ruthless approach to achieving and maintaining power. It is a dark

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leadership style that prioritizes personal gain, self-interest, and short-term political expediency over ethics, morals, and followers' well-being (Roter, 2017). The modern conceptualization of Machiavellian leadership is largely attributed to Christie and Geis (1970), who developed the Machiavellianism Scale (Mach IV) to measure this construct. They identified it as a distinct leadership style marked by a deliberate use of manipulation, deception, and coercion to maintain control and pursue personal agendas and ambitions. Leaders who exhibit such tendencies prioritize their own interests, employing calculated, cunning, and morally-questionable tactics to achieve their goals while disregarding the welfare and interests of those they lead (Kessler et al., 2010; Boddy, 2023). This leadership style often creates a culture of fear, where subordinates are reluctant to speak out or challenge authority (Kessler et al., 2010; Roter, 2017). At the same time, Machiavellian leaders may present a charismatic and confident exterior, masking their manipulative and self-serving motives to gain trust and maintain their dominance (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2016; Roter, 2017).

Machiavellian leadership has far-reaching, detrimental effects on subordinates, leading to dark emotions (Lee-Kugler et al., 2024), heightened stress (Belschak et al., 2018), and burnout (Saleem et al., 2024), which diminish creativity (Raza, 2021) and role performance (Frazier & Jacezko, 2021). It also encourages counterproductive work behaviors (Zheng et al., 2017), unethical actions and moral disengagement (Uppal & Bansal, 2023), eroding organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; Feng et al., 2023) and relational identification (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2019). Over time, emotional exhaustion and cynicism (Stradovnik & Stare, 2018) contribute to workplace ostracism, absenteeism and turnover intentions (Karatepe et al., 2023), creating a toxic environment where corruption (Fatima & Mariam, 2021) and mistrust (Liyanagamage et al., 2023) thrive. Given these consequences, it is clear that Machiavellian leadership poses significant risks to both individual well-being and overall organizational health, making it essential for further investigation.

## **Machiavellian Leadership and Subordinate Behavior**

Teacher performance is widely regarded as the cornerstone of success in educational institutions, significantly influencing the educational quality and student achievement (e.g., Brophy, 1986). Consequently, it is essential for teachers to consistently deliver their best and avoid engaging in withdrawal behaviors. Withdrawal behavior refers to employees' deliberate efforts to avoid work and distance themselves from their organization (He et al., 2024), manifesting in tardiness, procrastination, absenteeism, disengagement, and turnover. Such

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behaviors impose considerable costs on educational institutions by not only compromising academic standards and ethical practices but also triggering a ripple effect that diminishes workplace morale and increases workload pressures on colleagues (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2018).

Alongside meeting their core responsibilities and avoiding withdrawal, teachers should actively engage in helping behavior, defined as “any untasked duty that an employee offers to enable coworkers to fulfill their duties in the organization’s interest” (Wang & Ahoto, 2022, p. 4). This behavior fosters a collaborative environment among teachers by encouraging reciprocal support, knowledge sharing, and a desire to learn, which enhances task efficiency while boosting motivation and confidence (Choong & Ng, 2023). When teachers engage in helping behaviors, they support each other emotionally and instrumentally, promoting a sense of belonging (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019). This, in turn, enhances their collective efficacy, leading to improved teaching skills, classroom management, and the ability to handle difficult students (Choong & Ng, 2023).

Building on ED theory (Baumeister et al., 1998), this study argues that Machiavellian leadership depletes teachers’ self-regulatory resources, leading to increased work withdrawal and reduced helping behavior. Firstly, under the influence of Machiavellian leaders—who manipulate and exploit others to serve their own interests (Dahling et al., 2009)—subordinates are subjected to an emotionally and cognitively draining work environment. Navigating this toxic environment requires subordinates to exert continuous self-control to manage their supervisors’ manipulative behaviors, which steadily depletes their emotional and mental resources (Ye et al., 2022; Jin, 2023). Over time, as these resources are exhausted—particularly when employees face persistent criticism, public humiliation, or unrealistic performance demands—subordinates are likely to experience ego depletion (Mackey et al., 2020). This state of resource depletion fosters withdrawal-oriented cognitions (Chow et al., 2015), prompting subordinates to adopt maladaptive coping strategies such as reduced participation, absenteeism, and emotional detachment. These behaviors reflect attempts to conserve their limited self-regulatory resources and protect their overall well-being.

Secondly, when exposed to Machiavellian leadership, teachers who lack opportunities to replenish their self-control resources tend to adopt passive coping strategies to conserve their dwindling energy. A common approach involves disengaging from helping behaviors,

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which, although instrumental in fostering mutual learning and skill enhancement among teachers (Choong & Ng, 2023), are not formally mandated or required (He et al., 2023). Helping behaviors are typically driven by intrinsic motivation, as employees voluntarily choose to support their colleagues (Hai & Park, 2021). However, under the strain of Machiavellian leadership, teachers' capacity to engage in such discretionary acts is significantly diminished. Faced with persistent resource depletion, they prioritize self-preservation and core responsibilities over optional prosocial contributions (Spanouli & Hofmans, 2021). Consequently, Machiavellian leadership not only exhausts teachers' self-regulatory resources, fueling work withdrawal, but also erodes their willingness to engage in collaborative and altruistic behaviors. Based on this discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1. Machiavellian leadership is positively related to withdrawal behavior

Hypothesis 2. Machiavellian leadership is negatively related to helping behavior

## **The Mediating Role of Ego Depletion**

Ego depletion is a psychological concept proposing that self-control and willpower rely on a finite pool of mental resources, which can be exhausted over time (Baumeister et al., 1998). When individuals engage in activities requiring self-regulation—such as managing emotions, making decisions, or resisting temptations—they draw upon these cognitive reserves. As these resources are depleted, the capacity for self-control diminishes, making subsequent efforts at regulation increasingly challenging (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Baumeister & Vohs, 2016). Much like physical stamina, mental energy is subject to exhaustion after prolonged periods of self-regulation (Baumeister, 2001). This state of depletion often leads to adverse outcomes, including heightened impulsivity, reduced motivation, impaired decision-making, and diminished resilience (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Muraven et al., 2019). In organizational contexts, ego depletion has been linked to detrimental behaviors such as work alienation (Cui et al., 2023), interpersonal deviance (Zhang et al., 2022), and political maneuvering (Cheng et al., 2020), representing significant challenges and costs for organizations.

Grounded in ED theory (Baumeister et al., 1998), this study identifies ego depletion as a key mediating mechanism between linking Machiavellian leadership to teacher behavior. First, Machiavellian leaders, characterized by their cunning, deceptive and amoral tactics (Christie & Geis, 1970; Roter, 2017), create a toxic work environment that fosters negativity,

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distrust, and heightened emotional strain among subordinates (Stradovnik & Stare, 2018). As a result, subordinates are forced to constantly draw on their cognitive reserves to cope with these adversities and navigate the hostile workplace dynamics. Furthermore, as they struggle to resist the urge to retaliate against perceived abuse, their self-control resources become increasingly depleted (McAllister et al., 2018). Over time, the cumulative strain of enduring relational stressors, managing a toxic environment, and resisting retaliation exhausts teachers' mental and emotional reserves, culminating in a state of ego depletion. Based on this reasoning, it is hypothesized that Machiavellian leadership significantly depletes teachers' self-regulatory resources.

Second, the psychologically demanding environment fostered by Machiavellian leaders forces subordinates to maintain constant vigilance, self-control, and emotional regulation. Prolonged exposure to such an environment progressively depletes their self-regulatory resources, culminating in ego depletion (Baumeister, 2001). As their mental reserves diminish, subordinates find it increasingly challenging to resist impulses and distractions, resulting in reduced motivation and engagement (e.g., Vonasch et al., 2017; Friese et al., 2019). This state of depletion heightens their vulnerability to procrastination, task avoidance, and other withdrawal behaviors, as they struggle to suppress the impulse to escape their stressors (e.g., Liu et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). From a resource conservation perspective (Hobfoll, 1989), these withdrawal behaviors represent maladaptive coping mechanisms, allowing subordinates to momentarily disengage from the exhausting demands of Machiavellian leadership and conserve their dwindling psychological resources. Thus, ego depletion emerges as a critical mechanism, translating the taxing effects of Machiavellian leadership into withdrawal behaviors among teachers.

In addition, when teachers' self-regulatory resources are depleted, their emotional well-being and ability to engage in empathetic and supportive behaviors are significantly compromised. Research underscores this idea, demonstrating that ego depletion leads to a range of adverse outcomes, including heightened selfishness (Jin et al., 2021), increased antisocial tendencies (McClanahan & van der Linden, 2021), reduced coworker-directed citizenship behaviors (Troughakos et al., 2015), and diminished prosocial behavior due to lower feelings of guilt (Xu et al., 2012). These findings highlight how ego depletion disrupts emotional functioning, fostering a shift toward self-interest at the expense of collective well-being. Consequently, ego-depleted teachers are less motivated and empathetic in offering help,

prioritizing self-preservation over altruism. Machiavellian leadership thus sets in motion a harmful cycle, depleting self-regulatory capacity, triggering ego depletion, and ultimately reducing both work engagement and helping behaviors. Based on these principles of ED theory, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3. Ego depletion mediates the positive Machiavellian leadership–withdrawal behavior relationship

Hypothesis 4. Ego depletion mediates the negative Machiavellian leadership–helping behavior relationship

### **The Moderating Role of Traditionality**

Traditionality reflects the extent to which individuals embrace and uphold long-standing cultural norms, values, and beliefs (Wu et al., 2018). This deeply ingrained orientation significantly shapes their thought patterns, behaviors, and overall way of life (Sun et al., 2022). It underscores the importance of preserving cultural continuity and is often characterized by a strong respect for established practices, rituals, and hierarchical structures (Yang et al., 1991). In many cultures, traditionality is closely tied to religion, familial roles, and community values, ensuring that the collective wisdom and practices of previous generations are preserved and transmitted (Triandis, 1995). In Pakistan, traditionality holds particular significance, as it is deeply rooted in Islamic values, cultural practices, and societal norms that have been maintained across generations. Core traditional Pakistani values include respect for authority and hierarchy, consensus-building, protection and patronage, integrity and moral conduct, honor and dignity, and adherence to Islamic principles (Hofstede, 2001; Lieven, 2011; Rumi, 2018). Traditionality acts as a guiding force in shaping social behavior, reinforcing these values in both personal and organizational contexts. Consequently, employees with high traditionality are likely to exhibit distinctive work attitudes and behaviors, impacting both their in-role and extra-role performance (e.g., Cheng et al., 2021; Men et al., 2022; Zheng & Ahmed, 2024).

Given that cultural values profoundly influence how individuals perceive and interpret situations (Hofstede, 2001), this study posits that traditionality—a core cultural value—intensifies the impact of Machiavellian leadership on the ego depletion of Pakistani teachers. When supervisors employ Machiavellian tactics such as emotional control, deception and manipulation (Roter, 2017), traditionalist teachers experience heightened discomfort and inner conflict due to the stark misalignment between their deeply ingrained Islamic ethical

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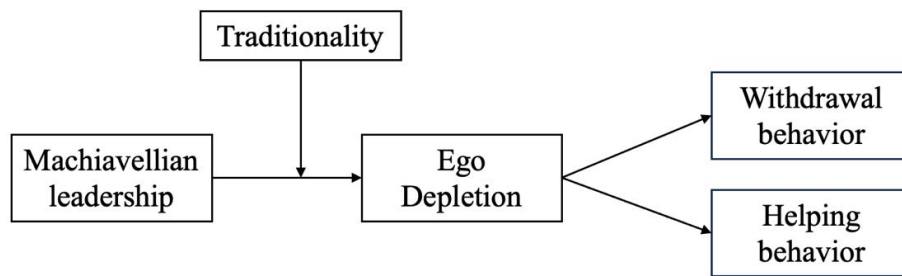
principles—centered on honesty, justice, and responsibility—and traditional Pakistani values such as respect for authority, collectivism, and harmony (Rumi, 2018). This conflict compels traditionalist teachers to exert significant emotional regulation and cognitive effort to reconcile their values with the exploitative and self-serving nature of Machiavellian leadership, depleting their self-regulatory resources and accelerating ego depletion. In contrast, teachers with weaker attachment and adherence to traditional Pakistani values may view such tactics as a routine aspect of organizational politics, pragmatically adjusting their behaviors and perspectives to align with the leader's self-serving approach. Consequently, they experience less emotional distress and conserve their self-control resources, thereby mitigating ego depletion. Based on ED theory (Baumeister et al., 1998) and cross-cultural research (Hofstede, 2001), this study argues that traditionality significantly shapes the extent to which Machiavellian leadership depletes Pakistani teachers' ego resources, leading to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Traditionality moderates the positive Machiavellian leadership–ego depletion relationship, such that the relationship is stronger when teachers are more (vs less) traditional

Collectively, the aforementioned hypotheses 3, 4 and 5 converge to establish a moderated-mediation framework, wherein traditionality influences the mediating effect of ego depletion in the Machiavellian leadership–teacher behavior relationship. Specifically, the model suggests that college teachers' responses to Machiavellian leadership vary based on their level of traditionality. Those with strong commitment to traditional Pakistani values experience greater ego depletion, resulting in increased withdrawal and reduced helping behavior. In contrast, teachers with weaker commitment to traditional values are more indifferent to such leadership, experiencing lesser ego depletion, which allows them to maintain work engagement and motivation, and continue exhibiting prosocial behavior despite the challenging leadership environment. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are derived:

Hypothesis 6: Traditionality moderates the indirect effect of Machiavellian leadership on teachers' withdrawal behavior through ego depletion, such that the effect is stronger when teachers are more (vs. less) traditional

Hypothesis 7: Traditionality moderates the indirect effect of Machiavellian leadership on helping behavior through ego depletion, such that the effect is stronger when teachers are more (vs. less) traditional



**Figure 1: Research Model**

## Methods

### Participants and Procedure

This study was conducted in 11 Pakistani colleges—7 private and 4 public—across two major cities, selected from an initial pool of 16 institutions. Colleges were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: type (private/public), medium to large size, and strong academic reputation. This approach aimed to enhance the validity and generalizability of the findings by ensuring a diverse sample that reflects various institutional contexts, providing a comprehensive understanding of teacher perceptions and behaviors. To ensure a representative sample, teachers were required to have at least six months of tenure, be full-time employees, and not hold any supervisory positions within their institutions.

The human resources departments of the participating colleges facilitated sample selection by providing lists of teachers and their direct supervisors. From these lists, 4–7 supervisors (e.g., department chairs, program managers, or cluster heads) and 6–15 teachers per supervisor were randomly selected, yielding 58 supervisors and 530 teachers (average 9.13 teachers per supervisor). To minimize response bias, anonymity was ensured through unique identification numbers, and voluntary participation was emphasized. Questionnaires were personally administered and collected within a controlled 2-hour timeframe to reduce distractions. Clear instructions encouraged thoughtful responses, mitigating acquiescence bias. Additionally, data were collected from dual sources over three waves, spaced two weeks apart, to control common method and temporal biases, ensuring a more comprehensive and balanced response set.

In the first wave (T1), teachers provided demographic information and reported their perceptions of Machiavellian leadership and traditionality, yielding 422 usable questionnaires. In the second wave (T2), teachers assessed their own levels of ego depletion, resulting in 393 usable questionnaires and an effective response rate of 74.1% for the first two waves. Finally,

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in the third wave (T3), target supervisors evaluated the withdrawal and helping behaviors of the teachers they supervised, providing 370 usable questionnaires and a response rate of 94%. After matching the two sets of questionnaires, a sample of 370 complete leader–follower dyads was obtained. The teacher sample was mostly composed of males (63.5%), master’s degree holders (94.1%), ages 30-39 (34.6%), tenure of 2-5 years (39.5%), and was distributed across private (41.6%) and public (58.4%) colleges.

## **Measures**

Machiavellian leadership was measured using a modified version of Dahling et al.’s (2009) scale. Originally a self-report measure of Machiavellian personality, the scale was adapted to capture subordinates’ perceptions of their supervisors. Eight items were retained for their relevance in assessing supervisors’ ethics, values, and management styles in the context of college teachers, while the rest were excluded as subordinates cannot accurately evaluate their supervisors’ assumptions, beliefs, and aspirations. Sample items include: “My supervisor only interacts with others to gain information that benefits him/her”, and “My supervisor would sabotage others’ efforts if it helps him/her achieve his/her goals”. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .89.

Ego depletion was assessed using a modified version of the scale developed by Twenge et al. (2004) and validated by Johnson et al. (2014). The original 5-item scale was adapted by removing one item due to poor factor loading. Sample items include: “My mental energy is running low” and “I feel like my willpower is gone.” Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The revised scale demonstrated acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .86.

Withdrawal behavior was measured using Lehman and Simpson’s (1992) scale, which originally includes various items assessing both psychological and physical work withdrawal. Since the scale was to be completed by supervisors, only five items related to teachers’ physical, more observable withdrawal behaviors were retained. The items were modified to align with the context of teachers and the teaching profession. Sample items include: “Left the classroom or college for non-educational purposes during work hours”, and “Used instructional time or college resources for personal matters”. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .89.

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Helping behavior was assessed using a four-item scale adapted from Van der Vegt et al.'s (2003) study which were taken up from MacKenzie et al.'s (1991) scale. Sample items include: "This teacher is always ready to help or to lend a helping hand to those around him/her" and "This teacher helps other faculty members with heavy work loads". The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .77.

Traditionality was assessed using a five-item scale by Farh et al. (1997). The scale was originally developed based on Chinese socio-cultural values. Senior faculty members of Social Sciences department at a local university were consulted to determine if this scale fits the Pakistani context. And it was found that this scale, despite based on Chinese values matches the Pakistani context. Sample items include: "The best way to avoid mistakes is to follow the instructions of senior persons" and "When people are in dispute, they should ask the most senior person to decide who is right." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .84.

To enhance the validity and rigor of this research, several control variables were incorporated to account for potential confounding influences. First, given that personality dispositions can influence individuals' sensitivity and responses to interpersonal stressors (Leger et al., 2016), the effects of trait neuroticism were controlled for. Neuroticism among teachers was assessed at T2 using the Mini-IPIP's four-item neuroticism subscale (Donnellan et al., 2006). Second, consistent with established practices in leadership research, this study controlled for subordinates' demographic characteristics—namely age, gender, education, and tenure. Lastly, institutional type (private versus public) was included as a control variable to address potential differences in organizational culture.

## Results

### Preliminary Analysis

*Table 1: Measurement Model Comparison*

Model		$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	SRMR	IFI	CFI	RMSEA
Five-factor model	ML, ED, T, WB, HB	966.48	289	3.34	.06	.90	.90	.07
Four-factor model	ML, ED, T, (WB + HB)	1475.84	293	5.04	.14	.80	.80	.10
Three-factor model	ML+ ED, T, (WB + HB)	2260.71	296	7.64	.19	.67	.67	.13

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model											
Three-factor model	(ML + T), ED, WB + HB	2241.56	296	7.57	.19						.13
						.67	.67				
Two-factor model	(ML + ED + T), (WB + HB)	2899.06	298	9.73	.21	.56	.56				.15
One-factor model	ML + T + ED + WB + HB	4370.71	299	14.65	.21	.31	.31				.13

Note: N = 370, ML = Machiavellian leadership, ED = ego depletion, T = traditionality, WB = withdrawal behavior, HB = helping behavior

First, confirmatory factor analyses were run to assess the discrimination of each construct. The results (see Table 1) indicate that the hypothesized five-factor model exhibited the best fit ( $\chi^2(289) = 966.48$ , IFI = .90, CFI = .90, SRMR = .06, RMSEA = .07) and superior discriminant validity. This was further supported by a decrease in fit as the number of factors decreased, confirming that the baseline model is the most suitable representation of the data.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics And Correlation Matrix**

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
Age	—										
Gender	-										
Education	.00	—									
Tenure	.01	.10	—								
Institute type	-		.11	—							
Neuroticism	.02	-.07	*	—							
Machiavellian leadership	.03	.14*		-	—						
Traditionality	.03	*	.06	.05	—						
	-		-	-	-	—					
	.02	.04	.09	.05	.04	—					
					-		—				
			-		.13	-		—			
	.03	-.07	.03	.01	*	.05	—				
	.08	.05	.03	.11	.03	-	.18**	—			

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				*		.06					
Ego depletion	-		-	.13		-					
	.00	-.02	.02	*	.02	.07	.18**	.58**	-		
J. Withdrawal			-	.11	.11	-	-				
behavior	.09	-.00	.09	*	*	.03	.36**	.16**	.14**	-	
I. Helping	-			-	-		-	-	-	-	-
behavior	.10	.03	.00	.09	.07	.04	.14**	.53**	.56**	.29**	
Mean	2.3	1.3	1.9	2.1	1.5	4.0					2.2
	7	7	8	7	8	0	3.39	3.74	3.81	2.68	9
Standard deviation	1.0										.54
	0	.48	.24	.82	.49	.67	.76	.63	.61	.80	
Cronbach's alpha	-	-	-	-	-	.82	.89	.84	.86	.89	.77
Composite reliability	-	-	-	-	-	-	.90	.84	.87	.88	.78
Average variance	-	-	-	-	-	-					.47
extracted							.53	.52	.62	.61	

Note: N = 370, , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

In addition, descriptive statistics were calculated to assess the data composition and examine correlations between variables (see Table 2). The results indicate that Machiavellian leadership was positively correlated with ego depletion ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ) and negatively correlated with both withdrawal behavior ( $r = -.38, p < .01$ ) and helping behavior ( $r = -.14, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, ego depletion was positively associated with withdrawal behavior ( $r = .14, p < .01$ ) and negatively with helping behavior ( $r = -.56, p < .01$ ). Additionally, the composite reliability (CR) of all variables exceeded .60, and their average variance extracted (AVE) values—except for helping behavior—surpassed the minimum threshold of .50. The square roots of these AVE values were greater than their correlations with any other variable, supporting discriminant validity. Although the AVE for helping behavior was slightly below .50, it was still considered acceptable since its CR exceeded .60 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Overall, the intercorrelations provided a foundation for hypothesis testing, while the AVE and CR values established the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs.

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## Hypothesis Testing

*Table 3: Direct And Indirect Relation Hypotheses Testing Results*

	Ego depletion			Withdrawal behavior			Helping behavior		
	Coeff	SE	95% CI	Coeff.	SE	95% CI	Coeff.	SE	95% CI
Constant	3.41	.40	2.62, 4.20	3.54	.52	2.50, 4.58	4.62	.32	3.98, 5.27
Age	-.01	.03	-.06, .05	.08*	.03	.01, .15	-.05*	.02	-.09, -.01
Gender	.01	.06	-.12, .13	-.02	.07	-.18, .13	.02	.04	-.07, .11
Education	-.09	.13	-.35, .15	-.39*	.15	-.70, -.08	-.01	.09	-.20, .17
Tenure	.09*	.03	.02, .17	.10*	.04	.01, .19	-.01	.02	-.07, .04
Institute type	.06	.06	-.06, .18	.10	.07	-.04, .25	-.06	.04	-.16, .02
Neuroticism	-.04	.04	-.14, .04	-.03	.05	-.14, .07	-.01	.03	-.07, .05
ML	.14**	.04	.06, .22	-.42**	.05	-.52, -.32	-.03	.03	-.09, .02
ED	—	—	—	.24**	.06	.12, .36	-.50**	.03	-.58, -.42

## Model Summary

R	.23**	—	—	.45**	—	—	.58**	—	—
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R <sup>2</sup>	.05**	—	—	.20**	—	—	.34**	—	—
F	3.00**	—	—	11.93**	—	—	23.88**	—	—

<i>Indirect effect</i>	Effect	BootSE	BootCI	Effect	BootSE	BootCI
ML (via ED)	.03	.01	.01, .06	-.07	.02	-.11, -.02

Note: N = 370, ML = Machiavellian leadership, ED = ego depletion, T = traditionality \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

The direct and indirect relationships proposed in the hypotheses were tested using Model 4 of Hayes' (2013) PROCESS Macro (v. 4.2) in SPSS. The results (see Table 3) indicated that, contrary to expectations, Machiavellian leadership was not only negatively related to withdrawal behavior (coeff. =  $-.42$ ,  $p < .01$ , CI  $[-.52, -.32]$ ) but also had no significant relationship with helping behavior (coeff. =  $-.03$ ,  $p > .05$ , CI  $[-.09, .02]$ ). Thus, both Hypotheses 1 and 2 were not supported. The mediating role of ego depletion was examined using a bias-corrected bootstrap procedure with 5,000 samples, a robust method recommended by MacKinnon et al. (2007) for accurately estimating the standard error of indirect effects. The findings revealed that the indirect effects of Machiavellian leadership on withdrawal behavior and helping behavior through ego depletion were significant (coeff. =  $.03$  and  $-.07$ , respectively), with their 95% bootstrap confidence intervals ( $.01, .06$  and  $-.11, -.02$ , respectively) not including zero. Hence, Hypotheses 3 and 4 were supported.

**Table 4: Moderation And Moderated Mediation Hypotheses Testing Results**

	Ego depletion			Model
	Coeff.	SE	95% CI	Summary
Constant	3.86	.66	2.56, 5.16	
Age	-.03	.02	-.08, .01	
Gender	-.05	.05	-.16, .04	R = .61**
Education	-.11	.10	-.32, .09	R <sup>2</sup> = .37**
Tenure	-.04	.03	-.01, .10	F = 24.11**
Institute type	-.01	.05	-.09, .11	
Neuroticism	-.02	.03	-.10, .04	

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Machiavellian leadership	-.51*	.16	-.84, -.18	
Traditionality	.04	.14	-.24, .33	
ML × T	.15**	.04	.06, .23	
<i>Conditional direct effect of ML on ED at different levels of T</i>	Effect	SE	95% CI	
-1 SD (low)	-.04	.04	-.14, .04	—
+1 SD (high)	.14**	.04	.06, .22	
<i>Conditional indirect effect of ML on WB via ED at different levels of T</i>	Effect	BootS E	BootCI	
-1 SD (low)	-.01	.01	-.04, .02	—
+1 SD (high)	.03	.01	.01, .06	
<i>Conditional indirect effect of ML on HB via ED at different levels of T</i>	Effect	BootS E	BootCI	
-1 SD (low)	.02	.03	-.04, .08	—
+1 SD (high)	-.07	.01	-.11, -.03	

Note: N = 370, ML = Machiavellian leadership, ED = ego depletion, T = traditionality, \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Moderation and moderated mediation effects were tested using Model 7 of the PROCESS Macro. In line with Aiken and West's (1991) recommendations, both Machiavellian leadership and traditionality were mean-centered prior to analysis to reduce multicollinearity and ensure precise estimates of the moderation effects. The results (see Table 4) showed a significant interaction between Machiavellian leadership and traditionality on ego depletion ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI [.06, .23]). Further investigation of the moderating effect at one standard deviation above and below the mean of ego depletion (see Table 4) revealed that Machiavellian leadership had a significant impact on ego depletion when traditionality was high ( $\beta = .14$ , 95% CI [.06, .22]), but this effect became insignificant when traditionality was low ( $\beta = -.04$ , 95% CI [-.14, .04]). These findings support Hypothesis 5.

The moderated mediation effect was tested using Edwards and Lambert's (2007) bootstrapping procedures. As shown in Table 4, the indirect effect of Machiavellian leadership on withdrawal behavior through ego depletion was significant when traditionality was high ( $\beta = .03$ , bootCI [.01, .06]), but not when traditionality was low ( $\beta = -.01$ , 95% CI [-

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.04, .02]). Similarly, the indirect effect of Machiavellian leadership on helping behavior via ego depletion was significant at higher level of traditionality ( $\beta = -.07$ , bootCI  $[-.11, -.03]$ ) but not at low level ( $\beta = .02$ , bootCI  $[-.04, .08]$ ). These findings support Hypothesis 6 and rejected Hypothesis 7, indicating that the moderated mediation model is only partially supported.

## Discussion

This study tested a mediated-moderation model of Machiavellian leadership's effects on Pakistani college teachers' behaviors, with ego depletion mediating and traditionality moderating. The findings, based on 370 teacher–supervisor dyads, yielded unexpected results. While Machiavellian leadership indirectly increased withdrawal behavior and decreased helping behavior through ego depletion, surprising direct effects emerged: Machiavellian leadership actually reduced work withdrawal behavior and had no significant impact on helping behavior.

The effects of Machiavellian leadership on teachers' behaviors can be better understood by considering the role of time. Long-term exposure to a Machiavellian supervisor gradually erodes teachers' self-regulatory resources, culminating in ego depletion that fosters work withdrawal and reduced helping behavior. However, In the short term, the situation may vary, particularly in countries like Pakistan, where job security is fragile and economic conditions are challenging. In such environments, teachers may feel compelled to work harder, knowing that the supervisor is ruthless and that failing to demonstrate sufficient effort could jeopardize their valuable resources (e.g., positive performance evaluations and favorable work assignments), as suggested by Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). Power Dependence theory (Emerson, 1962) also suggests that teachers, who rely on their supervisors for career advancement, may refrain from withdrawal behavior due to their dependence on supervisors to maintain their career trajectory. As for the insignificant effect on helping behavior, Status Quo Bias explains that people resist change, maintaining existing patterns (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988). Teachers already inclined to help will likely continue, while those who do not may remain unchanged, as short-term exposure to Machiavellian leadership is insufficient to alter behavior.

Moreover, traditionality—characterized by a strong attachment to Pakistani values and norms—emerged as a critical boundary condition for the impact of Machiavellian leadership. The results indicated that higher levels of traditionality amplified both the direct

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effect of Machiavellian leadership on teachers' ego depletion and its indirect effect on their work-related behavior. In contrast, lower levels of traditionality neutralized or nullified these effects, rendering Machiavellian leadership's influence on ego depletion and teacher behavior insignificant. This suggests that while high traditionality intensifies the negative impact of Machiavellian leadership, low traditionality acts as a buffer against it. This finding is supported by several prior investigations (e.g., Asim et al., 2024, Li et al., 2024), which have shown that cultural differences can modify the relationship between supervisory mistreatment and its adverse outcomes, suggesting that cultural background plays a significant role in shaping individual resilience and vulnerability. However, this study diverges from past research suggesting that high traditionality buffers the impact of supervisory mistreatment on job outcomes (e.g., Liu et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2021), instead revealing an exacerbating effect. Overall, this result aligns with cross-cultural leadership theories (e.g., Brodbeck et al., 2007) that emphasizes the importance of considering cultural values and norms in leadership research. Together, the findings provide new perspectives on leadership, culture, and employee outcomes in Pakistani educational settings, informing evidence-based strategies for institutional enhancement.

## **Theoretical Implications**

This study highlights the critical, yet underexplored, role of Machiavellian leadership in the education sector, where academic staff are driven by intrinsic motivations, such as purpose, autonomy, and self-efficacy (Hoyle & John, 1995; Ford et al., 2017). This unique context creates a vulnerable environment, where Machiavellian leaders can exploit these values for personal gain, fostering a climate of mistrust and fear (Boddy, 2023). Despite the importance of productive work behaviors for educational institutions' success (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019) and the significant costs of counterproductive behaviors (Na-Nan et al., 2020), the impact of Machiavellian leadership on these behaviors remains poorly understood. Addressing these research gaps and responding to Liyanagamage and Fernando's (2023) call for further investigation, this study provides the first empirical evidence of Machiavellian leadership's effects on college teachers' behaviors. It reveals a counterintuitive direct effect of Machiavellian leadership, showing that it reduces work withdrawal behavior and has no significant impact on helping behavior. This finding challenges the widely held belief and existing research suggesting that Machiavellian leadership directly impedes desirable work-related behaviors.

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Secondly, this research introduces a new perspective by incorporating ego depletion as a key mediator, uncovering the underlying mechanisms driving the consequences of Machiavellian leadership. Specifically, aligned with ED theory (Baumeister et al., 1998), this study found that prolonged experience of supervisor machiavellianism drains teachers' limited self-control resources, causing ego depletion, which leads to withdrawal and decreased proactive helping behaviors. Ego depletion thus emerged as a more immediate and direct psychological response to workplace mistreatment, distinguishing it from burnout, which takes time to develop (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003). These findings echo previous research (Mackey et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2022; Jin, 2023), suggesting that the indirect harm caused by Machiavellian leadership is comparable to that caused by other dark leadership styles. Therefore, this study advances leadership research by revealing how Machiavellian leadership parallels other destructive leadership styles in adversely affecting subordinates' personal and professional outcomes, while highlighting the pivotal role of ego depletion in this process.

Lastly, this research identifies traditionality as a crucial boundary condition that shapes the impact of Machiavellian leadership on teachers' behaviors. The findings showed that Machiavellian leadership has a disproportionately negative impact on teachers who strongly hold traditional Pakistani values, perceiving it as a violation of their social norms and cultural identity. This perception accelerated ego depletion, leading to increased withdrawal and decreased helping behaviors. This study offers a nuanced understanding of how traditionality influences the relationship between Machiavellian leadership and subordinate behavior, thereby contributing to ED theory (Baumeister et al., 1998) and emphasizing the importance of considering cultural and individual differences in educational leadership. It makes a significant contribution to cross-cultural psychology research (Berry, 2002) by providing new insights into how cultural backgrounds shape individuals' emotional and psychological responses in the face of relational adversity, thereby advancing prevailing theories and shedding new light on the intricate dynamics of cultural influence.

## **Practical Implications**

Given the pivotal role of ego depletion in linking Machiavellian leadership with dysfunctional teacher behavior, educational institutions must take proactive measures to safeguard their teachers against this depletion. Providing stress management resources, such as counseling services, mindfulness programs, and workshops on coping strategies, is crucial for helping teachers mitigate the mental and emotional toll of ego depletion. Moreover,

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fostering a community that promotes peer support, mutual respect, camaraderie, and collective growth can help teachers feel less isolated and more empowered to manage ego depletion. Recognizing and rewarding teachers' efforts is also vital, as it boosts morale and motivation, and replenishes the emotional and mental resources depleted by Machiavellian leadership. By implementing these strategies, teachers can effectively manage and release stress, preventing its escalation into more severe and detrimental outcomes.

Also, considering the disproportionate harm caused by Machiavellian leadership to teachers with high traditionality, educational institutions must recognize and address such cultural differences to foster a more nurturing and welcoming environment. To achieve this, institutions should implement culturally sensitive leadership training programs that equip leaders with the skills needed to effectively navigate and manage the diverse cultural dynamics within their faculty. Leaders also need to be trained to identify the unique vulnerabilities of individuals with high traditionality and to adopt practices that minimize relational harm. Additionally, institutions should enforce policies that promote cultural competence among all staff members, creating an environment where cultural diversity is respected and valued. This culturally intelligent approach will support individual teachers and enhance the institution's ability to succeed in an increasingly diverse and globalized educational landscape.

The implications of this study extend beyond the educational sector, with broader societal ramifications. The prevalence of Machiavellian leadership in academic institutions can perpetuate a culture of toxicity, affecting not only teachers' well-being but also students' educational experiences and societal development. As future leaders and citizens, students might adopt similar leadership styles, perpetuating a cycle of toxicity. Moreover, the impact on teachers' mental health can have long-term consequences, affecting their families and communities. By promoting ethical leadership and addressing ego depletion, educational institutions can contribute to a more empathetic and responsible society. This, in turn, can foster positive societal change, promoting a culture of integrity, respect, and well-being that extends beyond the classroom.

## **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This study has certain limitations, indicating avenues for further research. Firstly, despite employing a multisource and time-lagged research design, common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) may still have influenced the findings. Specifically, the same participants

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provided data for both Machiavellian leadership and traditionality within the same time wave. To enhance causal inferences, future studies could utilize alternative methods, such as mixed-methods or experimental approaches, to mitigate common method bias and yield more robust findings.

Secondly, this study exclusively examined Machiavellian leadership, omitting other dark leadership styles (e.g., corrupt, derailed, tyrannical; Mackey et al., 2021) that may also influence teacher-based outcomes. Future research should investigate and compare the effects of various dark supervisory styles on teachers' behavior to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Moreover, this study did not account for potential influences of other workplace mistreatments, such as student misbehavior (Chang & Taxer, 2021). It remains uncertain whether Machiavellian leadership has the same effects on teacher outcomes when combined with these additional stressors. As educators often encounter multiple forms of workplace mistreatment simultaneously (Gu et al., 2024), future studies should control for these variables to isolate the distinct impact of Machiavellian leadership and determine its effects beyond these factors.

Thirdly, as this study selectively examined ego depletion as a mediator in the Machiavellian leadership–teacher behavior relationship through the lens of ED theory, further exploration is needed to uncover additional mediators and alternative theoretical frameworks that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms. For instance, Machiavellian leadership may foster perceptions of organizational injustice, leading teachers to withdraw and disengage from helping behaviors; a dynamic supported by Organizational Justice theory (Greenberg, 1987). Hence, future research should adopt a multi-theoretical approach, integrating complementary frameworks to examine the mediating effects of various variables that may intervene in the relationship between Machiavellian leadership and teachers' behavioral responses.

Lastly, this study probed the dark side of leadership, revealing how Machiavellian leadership subtly erodes ego, fuels work withdrawal, and suppresses helping behavior. Building on this foundation, future research should explore additional, lesser-known employee outcomes, such as political behavior (Cheng et al., 2020), destructive voice (Mackey et al., 2020), and service sabotage (Ye et al., 2022). Furthermore, as educational institutions are typically organized into units (e.g., grade-level clusters, subject departments, and research circles), investigating group-level outcomes is also essential. Future studies

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should explore how Machiavellian leadership affects dynamics such as collective efficacy, group identification, and group performance (Priesemuth et al., 2014). By addressing both diverse individual and group-level effects, future research can offer a comprehensive understanding of Machiavellian leadership's impact within the educational sector.

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