

# Inclusive Leadership and Perceived Fairness of Promotion Opportunities: The Moderating Role of Leaders' Self-Regulation

MASTER THESIS



## Radboud Universiteit

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## **Thesis summary**

The dark side of inclusive leadership has received limited attention. In order to create a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of inclusive leadership, this study examined the relationship between inclusive leadership and employees' perceived fairness of promotion opportunities and explored whether leaders' self-regulation moderates this relationship. Based on the equity theory, a negative relationship was hypothesized. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that self-regulation would buffer the negative effect of inclusive leadership on perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, data was collected from 202 respondents. A regression analysis was conducted using SPSS to test the hypotheses. Contrary to expectations, the results show a positive relation between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. No moderating effect of self-regulation was found. However, leaders' self-regulation demonstrated a significant positive direct effect on perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. These results highlight the importance of fostering inclusive leadership practices and self-regulatory capacities of leaders to enhance fairness perceptions within promotion processes, which in turn can positively influence employee behaviors.

*Keywords:* inclusive leadership, self-regulation, perceived fairness of promotion opportunities.

## Introduction

Inclusive leadership is still an emerging field, key issues around how to theorize it have yet to be fully resolved (Boekhorst, 2015; Shore & Chung, 2021). Different studies show the positive effects of inclusive leadership. According to AlMulhim and Mohammed (2023) inclusive leadership can be seen as common and compulsory for company growth. Additionally, previous research found that inclusive leadership has a positive effect on employee engagement (Vakira et al., 2022). However, creating a complete understanding of inclusive leadership and the actual effects of inclusive leadership is challenging (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Previous research acknowledges that there is also a dark side to inclusive leadership which requires more attention (Korkmaz et al., 2022). For example, Xiaotao and colleagues (2018), discussed inclusive leadership as a too-much-of-a-good-thing effect (TMGT). This means that a beneficial antecedent ultimately leads to undesirable outcomes (Xiaotao et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the effects of inclusive leadership require further clarification. As the potential downsides of inclusive leadership remain underexplored, this study focuses on the negative aspects of how inclusive leadership may unintentionally lead to perceptions of unfairness. This is especially relevant in promotion decisions where tension between equality and merit may arise. This tension raises new questions about how inclusive leadership is experienced by employees, and whether it may lead to unintended negative outcomes.

There is some consistency in the literature regarding the outcomes of inclusive leadership (Xiaotao et al., 2018). While inclusive leadership is generally associated with positive outcomes, some research argues that potential downsides have been overlooked. According to Korkmaz and colleagues (2022), more research is needed about the down side of inclusive leadership, particularly the unintended negative consequences for employees. In this research, a potential negative effect of inclusive leadership on the perception of fairness of the promotion process is explored. According to Zapata and colleagues (2021), employees may still perceive outcomes as unfair, although justice rules have been followed. This can be explained by the notion that employees evaluate fairness not only based on outcomes or justice rules, but also the underlying motives behind leaders' decisions (Zapata et al., 2021). This study aims to contribute to the literature by providing deeper insight into how inclusive leadership might influence perceptions of fairness in promotion opportunities. In addition, McEnrue (1989) suggests that future research should explore the predicting variables for

perceived fairness in the promotion procedures. This would support the relevance of studying leadership style as inclusive leadership in this context.

To better understand the conditions under which inclusive leadership might negatively affect fairness perceptions, it is essential to examine underlying mechanisms, such as the leader's self-regulation. According to Whiteside and Barclay (2016), managers express fair behavior for different reasons, either cognitively or emotionally. Their findings show that self-regulation plays a crucial role in whether managers can consistently behave fairly. While their study focused on interactional justice, other types of justice such as procedural justices, which is particularly relevant in promotion decisions, required more investigation (Whiteside & Barclay, 2016). This suggests that self-regulation can influence the relation between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. Johnson and colleagues (2014) and Whiteside and Barclay (2016) both suggested investigating how self-regulation affects the perceived fairness of decision-making processes and outcomes. Addressing this gap is essential to understand why managers might fail to express fair behavior, even when they intended to do so. Therefore, this study examines self-regulation as a key variable that may moderate the relationship between inclusive leadership and fairness perceptions.

Finally, it is important to note that self-regulation is considered a personality trait (Enkavi et al., 2019). Prior research has shown that personality traits can moderate the effects of inclusive leadership on outcomes such as performance (Xiaotao et al., 2018). Following this line of reasoning, that personality traits can influence this relation, self-regulation could also explain differences in outcomes, including the perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. Therefore, this research investigates leader self-regulation as a potential moderator in the relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities.

This study aims to gain insight into the possible moderating effects of leaders' self-regulation on the association between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. Considering the above, the following research question will be examined in this study:

*“What is the moderating effect of leaders' self-regulation on the association between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities?”*

According to Lei and colleagues (2023), inclusive leaders motivate employees and make them feel they possess a special value within the organization. By fostering an environment of inclusion and appreciation for contribution regardless of status or power,

inclusive leadership promotes a culture where employees feel equally valued (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). However, inclusive leadership must carefully balance the concepts of equality and equity, as these concepts may influence how employees perceive fairness. Equality refers to providing everyone with the same resources or opportunities, regardless of individual circumstances (Minow, 2021). It assumes that fairness can be achieved by treating everyone identically. However, equity takes the unique needs of individuals into account in order to achieve fair outcomes (Minow, 2021). This distinction is crucial in workplace settings as it can influence the perception of fairness. When employees receive equal promotion opportunities because they are valued equally, those who contribute more or have greater capabilities may perceive this as unfair. As such, the tension between equality and equity raises important questions about how inclusive leadership is interpreted and experienced in promotion decisions.

Inclusive leadership aims to involve employees in decision-making, listen to their requirements, and offer equal opportunities and outcomes (McCluney & Rabelo, 2018; Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015; Hollander, 2009). According to the equity theory, individuals evaluate fairness by comparing the ratio of their inputs (such as effort, skills or performance) to the outcomes they receive (Adam, 1965). When this ratio is perceived as unbalanced, employees may feel they are being treated unfairly (Adam, 1965). Therefore, it is relevant to examine how inclusive leadership affects employees' perceived fairness of promotion opportunities, particularly when equal treatment may not align with equitable outcomes.

It is essential to consider how leader characteristics such as self-regulation moderate the relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. The fairness and consistency of promotion decisions is important (Russen et al., 2020). As the procedural elements in promotion decisions are seen as fair, it will maintain positive employee attitudes and behaviors (Wan et al., 2012). This perception of fairness can depend on how leaders are able to handle difficult decisions. Whiteside and Barclay (2016) found that leaders are not always able to behave fairly, particularly self-regulatory resources decrease during effortful tasks, as for example, making difficult decisions. When self-regulation decreases, managers' ability to regulate their behavior reduces, which negatively impacts their ability to treat employees fairly (Whiteside and Barclay, 2016). On the other hand, managers with strong self-regulation are more able to maintain fairness even in challenging situations. Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether a leaders' self-regulation influences the strength of the relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. This contributes to the literature by addressing

a gap regarding the role of personality traits, specifically, leaders' self-regulation in the relation between inclusive leadership and its outcomes.

In addition to its theoretical relevance, this research is also socially relevant. It provides insights into the potential downside of inclusive leadership by examining how it may lead to perceptions of unfairness in promotion decisions. Furthermore, it explores the moderating role of self-regulation in this relationship. There is a lack of consistency in research about inclusive leadership which can be problematic for practices (Xiaotao et al., 2018), and a more nuanced understanding is necessary. These inconsistencies in research reduce the clarity and applicability of inclusive leadership, making it difficult for leaders to implement it effectively and assess its consequences. According to Xiaotao and colleagues (2018), the potential negative consequences such as perceived unfairness of promotion opportunities as a result of inclusive leadership should be examined in order to provide a different view to utilizing inclusive leadership. This study provides leaders with a better understanding of how inclusive leadership may be perceived in practice, allowing them to apply inclusive leadership more thoughtfully. As Russen and colleagues (2020) emphasize, a fair and consistent perceived promotion process is essential for positive employee attitudes. Therefore, the findings of this study may be relevant for leaders when making promotion-related decisions.

Additionally, this research may hold social relevance as it can contribute to promoting fairness in decision-making processes by increasing awareness of the factors that may influence perceptions of fairness in promotion opportunities. Although the impact might be indirect, such insight could play a role in reducing social inequalities and reinforcing trust in institutions. The implications of this research may therefore extend beyond the organizational level and contribute to a more societal structure.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities**

Inclusive leadership has recently become a widely researched topic. While various definitions exist, Korkmaz and colleagues (2022) provide an overview, identifying four core dimensions of inclusive leadership. The first dimension is fostering employee's uniqueness, which refers to a leader's ability to support employees by valuing their uniqueness, promoting diversity and empowering them to contribute. The second dimension is strengthening belongingness within a team, this involves creating a sense of inclusion and connection within the team. Leaders focus on building respectful relationships and ensuring equity. The third dimension is showing appreciation which means acknowledging the effort and contributions of employees. The last dimension is supporting organizational efforts which includes being open to change and advancing a culture of inclusion within the organization (Korkmaz et al., 2022). Leaders who consistently demonstrate these behaviors are considered inclusive. Moreover, inclusive leadership emphasizes not only performance, but also equity, aiming to provide equal opportunities and recognition to all employees (Randel et al., 2017). Although equity is important in the definition of inclusive leadership, its influence on perceived fairness may not always align with the intention. The perception of fairness when providing the same opportunities and showing every employee appreciation can differ between individuals. What is intended as fair treatment may not be experienced as fair by every employee.

According to McEnrue (1989), perceived fairness is determined by both the decision-making procedure and the outcome, which aligns with the definition of procedural justices (Johnson et al., 2014). The equitability of a promotion process is determined by three points. Firstly, there has to be a structured system. Secondly, the employees need to receive information about the process, opportunities and the required qualifications. Thirdly, the decision has to be made based on the competences of the employees (McEnrue, 1989). If one of these criteria is missing, employees cannot control the process and may believe that the procedure is biased (Hill, 1987). Additionally, three outcomes of the process influence the perception of fairness. The first indicator refers to the number of times an employee has been promoted. The second concerns whether the employee has ever been passed over for promotion. The third addresses whether the employee has an opportunity for further career advancement in the future (McEnrue, 1989).

The equity theory can explain the relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. The equity theory considers fairness by comparing the ratio of their inputs (e.g., effort, skills) to their outcomes (e.g., salary, promotion) (Pritchard, 1969). When this ratio is perceived as unbalanced, feelings of inequity and unfairness arise. Inclusive leaders seek to ensure that every employee feels equally valued (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). However, this equality may be conflicting with equity. Employees who contribute more might expect greater outcomes such as promotions. If the opportunities of promotions are perceived as distributed equal rather than based on merit, employees may feel that the inputs are undervalued, leading to negative perception of fairness.

Additionally, according to the equity theory, individuals compare the input and outcome ratio with those of others (Adam, 1965). When these ratios are perceived as not equal, it can lead to feelings of inequity (Pritchard, 1969). This can occur between two individuals but can also happen between employees within the same organization, for example if they compare their promotion (Pritchard, 1969). Employees who contribute more effort than their colleagues may expect more outcomes such as opportunities. If these expectations are not met, they may perceive the situation as unfair. Through inclusive leadership, employees can perceive their performance as less important, which can lead to perception of unfairness.

According to McEnrue (1989), the decision has to be based on the competence of the employees in order to make a promotion process equitable. Additionally, previous research found that fairness in promotion decisions can be enhanced by making decisions based more on performance (Wan et al., 2012). Since inclusive leadership focuses on providing employees with the same opportunities and valuing every employee, the decision-making process is not only focused on performance (Randel et al., 2017), which can lead to less perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. As a result, inclusive leadership may have a negative effect on perceived fairness of promotion opportunities.

Lind and Tyler (1988) found that employees experience more procedural justice when they feel they have influence over decision-making processes. Inclusive leadership may emphasize equal opportunities over merit-based differentiation. Hence, employees feel they are less able to influence the promotion decisions. This reduced sense of influence might negatively affect the perception of fairness in promotion opportunities.

Inclusive leaders tend to give employees a sense of being valued by the organization (Lei et al., 2023). Additionally, according to Hall and colleagues (2024) an inclusive culture

promotes a feeling of value and emphasizes that every role is equally important. When employees feel special and valued, they may perceive themselves as qualified for promotion. Especially, if employees are seen as equally important, it is difficult to make an estimation of your position within the team. However, in most organizations, promotion opportunities are limited, making it impossible for an inclusive leader to promote every employee. If employees who feel valued by the organization do not see this recognition in outcomes, such as promotion, they may question the fairness of the process.

Previous research found that if there is a high level of inclusive leadership, it is difficult for supervisors to manage all the different opinions in decision-making (Pless and Maak, 2004), which in turn influences the speed of decision making negatively and the employees' perception of a supervisor's assertiveness. This affects the perception of supervisor's leader effectiveness (Ames & Flynn, 2007). An inclusive leader considers all employees during the promotion process, which takes more time. According to Ames and Flynn (2007), this influences the perception employees have about their leader, sometimes resulting in employees doubting the fairness of the promotion opportunities.

Additionally, according to Wan and colleagues (2012), decision making should be based on employees' merits and not on personal relationships. However, inclusive leadership focuses on building relationships and aims to foster belonging within the team (Korkmaz et al., 2022). Besides that, inclusive leadership emphasizes high-quality leader-employee relationships (Ye et al., 2019). While these relational aspects can enhance inclusion and equality, it can also lead to perceptions of favoritism or unfairness. Employees may question the procedural fairness of promotion decisions when relationships between leaders and team members are perceived. Thus, although inclusive leadership aims to create a sense of belonging, it might unintentionally raise concerns about fairness, especially when leader-employee relationships are seen as influencing promotion decisions.

Based on the equity theory and the results of previous studies, the following hypothesis was stated:

*Hypothesis 1: Inclusive leadership is negatively related to perceived fairness of promotion opportunities.*

### **The moderating role of leaders' self-regulation**

Previous research found that self-regulation influences the ability for managers to express fair behavior (Whiteside & Barclay, 2016). According to Eisenberg and colleagues

(2000) and Koestner and colleagues (1992), self-regulation is a personality trait. Self-regulation is the ability to control thoughts, impulses, emotions and desires (Ent et al., 2012). Additionally, it is about goal-related activities, selecting a goal, devising a plan to achieve it, executing that plan and protecting that goal or even letting go of the goal (Fujita, 2011; Gollwitzer, 1999; Ludwig et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2002; Wrosch et al., 2003). Individuals have limited resources in order to regulate themselves (Ent et al., 2012). Leaders, in particular, often face high demands, such as making difficult decisions. These demands can strain their self-regulatory capacity (Ent et al., 2012). According to Johnson and colleagues (2014), leaders with higher levels of self-regulation are better able to maintain fairness in promotions decisions.

This can be explained by the self-regulation theory. Self-regulation is a continuous process by which individuals create, attain and maintain goals (Bolino et al., 2012). According to Gollwitzer (1990), self-regulation consists of four phases that explain how individuals establish and maintain goals. In the first phase (predecisional phase) individuals consider their goals. In the second phase (preactional phase), individuals develop strategies to achieve the goal. The third phase (actional phase) involves taking action and adjusting effort based on goal importance. Finally, in the post actional phase, the goals will be evaluated and individuals can decide to continue to strive for the original goal or disengage from it (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Gollwitzer, 1990; Lord et al., 2010).

Inclusive leaders emphasize equity and same opportunities for every employee (Randel et al., 2017). Therefore, most inclusive leaders start the pre decisional phase with the goal to treat everyone fairly. However, the phases after, will differ for each leader and depend on the leader's level of self-regulation. Leaders with high self-regulation can maintain fairness in promotion decisions despite challenges (Whiteside & Barclay, 2016). They plan fairness strategies, act fairly, and evaluate their decision to minimize bias, which reduces the negative impact of inclusive leadership on fairness perceptions. In contrast, leaders with low self-regulation may struggle to follow through on fairness goals when facing other demands, leading to inconsistencies in their decisions. This may result in perceived unfairness by employees.

Furthermore, if inclusive leaders have higher levels of self-regulation, they are better able to control their impulse and to consider the social consequences of their actions (Ent et al., 2012). Inclusive leaders aim to ensure equal opportunities and provide a voice for all employees, which requires thoughtful and unbiased decision making. Since self-regulation enables individuals to manage cognitive biases and emotional responses (Ent et al., 2012),

leaders with strong self-regulation are likely to make objective and fair decisions. Hence, self-regulation plays a role in the decision-making process related to fairness (Whiteside & Barclay, 2016). As a result, inclusive leaders with higher self-regulation are better able to uphold fairness in promotion opportunities.

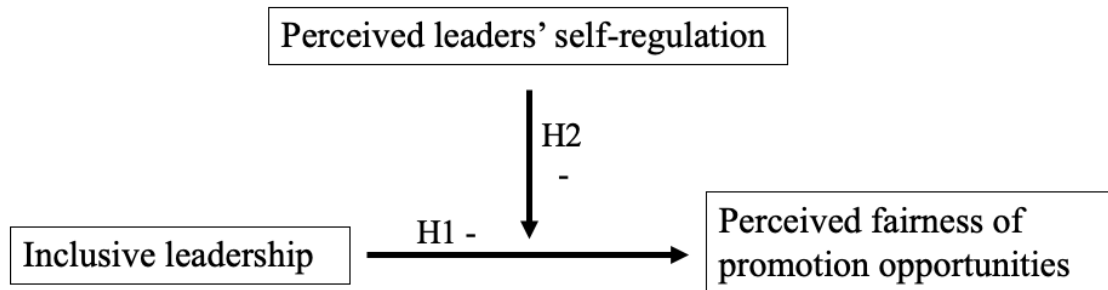
Previous research suggests that individuals tend to spend their resources on tasks that benefit themselves rather than those that offer no direct incentives (Muraven & Slessareva, 2003). Additionally, when people have power, the self-regulatory resources are used to focus on tasks they consider important (Ent et al., 2012). Since leaders do not directly benefit from the promotion decisions, those with lower self-regulation may engage less in the decision-making process which can affect fairness. In line with this argument, Yeow and Martin (2013) found that self-regulation influences both the effectiveness and trustworthiness of leaders. When leaders are considered less trustworthy by employees, their honesty may be questioned, which can impact the perceived fairness during the promotion process. Thus, self-regulation may moderate the relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness, such that self-regulation can be a buffer for the negative effects of inclusive leadership.

According to Johnson and colleagues (2014), procedural justice behavior, such as fairness in decision-making, can drain self-regulatory resources. Leaders with lower levels of self-regulation may struggle to maintain fairness when making promotion decisions, which can lead to more negative perceptions among employees, due to inconsistencies or perceived bias. Since fairness behavior partly relies on self-regulatory resources, leaders with higher self-regulation can better manage depletion (Johnson et al., 2014). As a result, their fair decision-making will be more consistent overtime, ensuring sustained perception of fairness. This suggests that self-regulation can reduce the negative impact of inclusive leadership on perceived fairness. When leaders have a high level of self-regulation, they are better able to apply fair procedures consistently, which prevent perceptions of unfairness in the promotion process.

Based on theoretical argumentation and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*Hypothesis 2: Leaders' self-regulation moderates the relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. The relationship is less negative when leaders' self-regulation is high.*

**Figure 1**  
*Conceptual model*



## **Methodology**

### **Research design and procedures**

This research aims to determine the influence of inclusive leadership on the perceived fairness of promotion opportunities and how the perceived leaders' self-regulation influences this relationship. A quantitative research method is used, as this is considered the most appropriate approach to examine the relationship between variables (Hair et al., 2018). In this study, the variables are measured using structured survey items, which enables statistical analysis to test the hypotheses (Hair et al., 2018). Given that the objective of this research is to test hypotheses and examine patterns across participants, a quantitative approach is considered suitable. A cross-sectional design is applied, meaning data of this study was collected at a single point in time (Straits & Singleton, 2017). This study adopts a post-positivist paradigm, which emphasizes objectivity while also acknowledging that absolute truth is restricted and all theories are open to revision. The paradigm seeks generalizable results and focuses on falsifying hypotheses rather than verifying (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The data for this study is collected through an online questionnaire. The questionnaire used in this study included several topics, with only the items relevant to this research described in the method section. Qualtrics was used in order to collect the data. Distribution took place within the network of four students of the Master of Strategic Human Resources Leadership at Radboud University. The questionnaire was shared through various online platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram and LinkedIn. The questionnaire was available in English and Dutch and was open for responses from April 22 to May 8, 2025.

The original questionnaire was developed in English and translated in Dutch by the students. Two students independently translated the questionnaire while, simultaneously, the other two students performed a separate translation. The two versions were then compared and discussed within the group to determine the most accurate and appropriate Dutch translation, ensuring conceptual and linguistic equivalence with the original version. To ensure anonymity, privacy and informed consent, participants were informed that completion would take approximately 15 minutes. Confidentiality and anonymity of responses were guaranteed. Additionally, participants were made aware that they could discontinue participation at any point of the questionnaire without providing a reason. After completing the questionnaire, participants were thanked and the email address of the researchers were

mentioned, to give the opportunity to ask questions afterwards. The consent form and questionnaire are included in Appendix A and B.

### **Research ethics**

To ensure that this research meets ethical requirements, several measures were taken. There are five general principles for ethical standards, laying the foundation for the ethical principles of this research (American Psychological Association, 2002).

The first principle states that the respondents should not be harmed and welfare and rights should be guarded when participating in this research. In order to attain that goal, the rights and privacy were explicitly addressed at the beginning of the questionnaire. The second is fidelity and responsibility, which requires researchers to act responsible and fulfill their ethical obligations. In this study, all collected data remains confidential and is not shared with anybody except the researchers and their supervisor. Additionally, the data will be deleted after ten years. The third principle is integrity. This dictates that the results should be accurate, honest and truthful. The results were reported truthfully, including data that did not align with the hypotheses. The fourth principle is fairness and justice. The study was open to all individuals in the Netherlands. Moreover, participation was voluntary and respondents could withdraw at any moment. The last principle refers to the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. At the start of the questionnaire participants were presented with a consent form, providing them additional information about confidentiality.

### **Sample**

This survey was conducted in April and May 2025 among employed individuals in the Netherlands. The respondents were initially recruited through convenience sampling followed by snowball sampling in order to expand the reach of the study. The questionnaire was distributed within the professional and personal networks of four students who were simultaneously conducting research on inclusive leadership. Although this method is most time-efficient, it can negatively affect the generalizability of the results (Bornstein et al., 2013). The sample consists of employees in the Netherlands. Employees in this research had to be working at the company for at least 3 months to ensure that they could provide informed responses regarding inclusive leadership, the self-regulation of the leader and the perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. Additionally, individuals were required to have a direct supervisor, as the questionnaire focused on perceptions of leadership behavior.

A total of 545 responses were collected through the survey. After cleaning and filtering for relevant responses, 202 participants remained for analysis. The age of the respondents ranged from 17 to 71 years, with an average age of 42.5 years (SD=15.246). In the final sample 85 respondents identified as men and 117 as women. Participants represented a wide range of sectors. The most frequently reported sector was government and non-profit (48%). Additionally, 31.7% of the respondents worked in the commercial services and 13.9% in industry and technology. The final group, representing 6.4% of respondents, worked in the primary and other sectors.

## **Measurement instruments**

### *Inclusive leadership*

Inclusive leadership is the independent variable in this study and was measured by a framework of Korkmaz and colleagues (2022). The items are based on the four dimensions of their inclusive leadership framework. Firstly, how leaders foster an employee's uniqueness, secondly, how they strengthen belongingness within a team. Thirdly, how leaders show appreciation and finally to what extent leaders show organizational effort. The scale used in this study consists of 20 items, derived from the original 34-item version. To reduce the time burden on respondents, two items from each sub-dimension were selected based on the highest factor loadings identified in the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in previous research (Korkmaz, 2024, Chapter 3). The items were for example “My supervisor gives attention to learning and development opportunities for each one of us”, “My supervisor encourages collaboration within the team.”, “my supervisor praises the efforts of all team members” and “My supervisor is attentive to new opportunities to improve work processes within the organization”. The response scale for ‘inclusive leadership’ is based on the five-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”.

A Cronbach’s Alpha of .945 was obtained, indicating strong internal consistency (Hair et al., 2018). The analysis further showed that deleting any individual item would not result in a higher reliability coefficient.

### *Perceived fairness of promotion opportunities*

Previous research from Russen and colleagues (2020), explored the perceived fairness in the promotion process. To measure this, procedural and distributive justice is used. Russen and colleagues (2020) used eighth items from Elkins and colleagues (2003). According to

Elkins and colleagues (2003), distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of outcome distributions. Moreover, distributive justice is about individuals believing that others receive favorable treatment based on non-merit-based factors instead of performance. Procedural justice is about the fairness of the process used to make decisions. Additionally, it considers whether the promotion process follows consistent, unbiased and transparent procedure (Elkins et al., 2003). Perceived fairness is experienced as the process is structured, the information about the process is available and the decisions should be based on the competences of employees (McEnrue 1989). This is in line with the definition of procedural and distributive justice. Therefore, in this research, perceived fairness of promotion opportunities was measured using an 8-item scale which consists of two dimensions, (1) procedural justices and (2) distributive justice. Which is in line with the measurements in previous research (Russen et al., 2020; Elkins et al., 2003). The study by Elkins and colleagues (2003), was conducted in the context of airline pilots, while Russen and colleagues (2020) focused on the hotel industry. To align the items with this study, minor modifications were made. The items were adapted to a more general workplace context and to emphasize the role of leaders within the promotion process. The items to measure the first dimension were included “Overall, I believe that the promotion process my leader adopts in this organization is fair.” and “I am satisfied with the process the leader used to promote employees.”. Dimension two was measured by for example the following items “Overall, I feel that the result of the promotion process in this scenario was unfair” and “Overall I am satisfied with the promotion decision made by the leader”. The response scale for perceived fairness of promotion opportunities provides five response options: “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “neutral”, “agree” and “strongly agree”. This five-point Likert scale was used to maintain consistency across all items in the questionnaire.

The scale showed good reliability ( $\alpha=.935$ ) (Hair et al., 2018). Item 4 was retained, as removal would have only increased Cronbach’s Alpha by .001. Hair and colleagues (2018) argued that deleting an item is only considered when it will lead to more than a trivial improvement. As 0.01 increase was used as an example for a trivial improvement, additional to the theoretical considerations, it was chosen to not to delete the item.

### *Perceived leaders’ self-regulation*

To measure perceived self-regulation, this study used the self-regulation scale (SRS) developed by Schwarzer and colleagues (1999). This scale consisted of 16 items. Based on item analysis and CFA, Diehl and colleagues (2006) recommended the removal of six items.

Following this, Yeow and Martin (2013), used the self-regulation scale with 10-items. This 10-item scale includes all elements of cognitive, emotional and behavioral self-regulation (Yeow & Martin, 2013). Therefore, in this research the 10-item version was adopted. The data was collected from employees evaluating their leaders, therefore the items were rephrased to reflect perceptions of leader behavior instead of self-assessment. For example, the original item “If I am distracted from an activity, I don’t have any problem coming back to the topic quickly.” was adapted to “If my leader is distracted from an activity, my leader doesn't have any problem coming back to the topic quickly.”. The responses are rated on a 5-point scale from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”. The scale anchor is adjusted to a Likert format, to stay within the format of the other scales.

The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach’s Alpha of .876, indicating a high level of internal consistency (Hair et al., 2018). No items were removed, as their exclusion did not result in an increase in reliability.

### *Control variables*

In order to check for spurious relationships and to ensure generalizability, control variables were included in the regression analysis (Bernerth et al., 2018). In this study gender, age and sector were used as control variables. The equity theory suggests that individuals who perceive their inputs as fairly rewarded are more satisfied (Okpara, 2006). Research from Okpara (2006) found that male managers were more satisfied with the promotion policies than female managers. Therefore, gender was included as a control variable. Gender is measured as follows: (1) man, (2) women, (3) non-binary, (4) rather not tell.

Harrington and Lee (2014) found that older employees were less likely to perceive performance appraisal as fair. To account for potential age-related differences in perception of fairness, age was included as a control variable and measured through an open question.

Finally, the sector was included as a control variable, as development and promotion structures can vary across different sectors (van Engen & Kroon, 2024). These differences in organizational structure and career progression may influence how employees perceive fairness in promotion opportunities. In this study, four sectors were distinguished: (1) government and non-profit, (2) commercial services, (3) industry and technology, (4) primary and other sectors.

## **Data analysis**

The data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29. First, the data was checked for outliers and missing values were removed, in order to clean the dataset. Before the CFA could be conducted, the assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, linearity and homoscedasticity were checked. The normality is checked through examining the probability plot. Multicollinearity was tested by the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). In addition, the standardized residual value plot was examined in order to examine homoscedasticity and linearity. Moreover, a reliability analysis was conducted to ensure the reliability of the study.

A regression analysis was conducted in order to test the hypothesis. In the first model, the effect of the control variables was tested. This model was implemented to ensure that the variance in perceived fairness of promotion opportunities was not solely explained by the control variables. In the second model, hypothesis 1 was tested by including inclusive leadership to the model. In the third model, the main effect of self-regulation on perceived fairness of promotion opportunities was examined. In the final model, the interaction variable of inclusive leadership and self-regulation was added to test hypothesis 2. In line with Pallant (2013), the significance level for this study was set at  $p < .05$ , reflecting a 95% confidence interval.

## Results

### Preliminary analysis

Before conducting the analysis, the dataset was cleaned by excluding respondents who did not complete all survey items relevant to this research. Following this, dummy variables were created for gender and sector. The sector variable was constructed using a simplified version of the CBS sector classification (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, z.d.), four sector categories were created. The first dummy variable represents the government and non-profit sector, which includes healthcare and welfare, education, culture and sciences, and justice, security and public administration. The second dummy represents the commercial services sector, comprising trade and services, ICT, media and communication and tourism, recreation and hospitality. The third dummy represents the industry and technology sector including technology, manufacturing, construction and transport and logistics. The fourth category includes agriculture, nature and fisheries as well as the respondents who selected “others”.

Skewness and kurtosis values were examined and all values fell within the acceptable range of -1 and 1, indicating normal distribution (Hair et al., 2018). Detailed results can be found in Appendix C. Additionally, all assumptions for regression analysis were met. The histogram of the standardized residuals indicated a normal distribution and the normal P-P plot of the standardized residuals showed a linear relationship. The scatterplot of residuals indicated homoscedasticity. Multicollinearity was not a concern, as all Tolerance values were above the acceptable threshold and all VIF values ranged between 1.161 and 4.640 which is between the acceptable range of <5.0 (Hair et al., 2018). An overview of the assumption checks can be found in Appendix D.

After preparing the dataset, descriptive statistics were computed for the model variables: inclusive leadership, perceived fairness of promotion opportunities and self-regulation as shown in Table 1. Additionally, the table includes descriptive information for the control variables age, gender and sector. The table reports the means (M), standard deviations (SD), and Pearson correlation coefficients (r). Relevant and significant correlations related to this research are discussed in the following section.

As shown in Table 1, inclusive leadership is positively associated with leaders' self-regulation as perceived by the employees ( $r=0.543, p<.01$ ), as well as with the perceived fairness of promotion opportunities ( $r=0.318, p<.01$ ). This suggests that when leaders act

more inclusively, they are also seen as more self-regulated and as offering fairer opportunities for promotion. Additionally, self-regulation is positively correlated with perceived fairness of promotion opportunities ( $r=0.374, p<.01$ ). Indicating that leaders who demonstrate more self-regulation are perceived as fairer in promotion decisions.

With regard to the control variables, inclusive leadership is positively related to age ( $r=0.189, p<.01$ ). Age is also positively associated with leaders' self-regulation ( $r=.147, p<.05$ ). This implies that older employees tend to evaluate their leaders as more inclusive leaders and more self-regulated. Additionally, the sector government and non-profit positively correlated with self-regulation ( $r=.171, p<.05$ ). This indicates that employees in the government and non-profit sector perceive higher levels of self-regulation in their leader compared to employees in other sectors.

Besides that, the control variables are also correlated with one another. There is a positive correlation between gender and the government and non-profit sector ( $r=.277, p<.01$ ), indicating women are more represented in this sector. In contrast, gender is negatively correlated with the industry and technology sector ( $r=-.238, p<.01$ ), suggesting women are underrepresented in the industry and technology sector compared to men. Furthermore, the commercial services sector is negatively correlated with age ( $r=-.299, p<.01$ ), meaning younger employees are more likely to be employed in the commercial service sector than older employees. The different sector dummies are also significantly correlated with one another, which is expected given that these are mutually exclusive categorical variables.

**Table 1***Means and standard deviations, Pearson's correlation and Cronbach's alpha*

	Mean ( <i>M</i> )	Standard Deviation ( <i>std</i> )	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Inclusive leadership	3.898	0.728	.945 <sup>a</sup>						
2. Self-regulation	3.683	0.704	.543**	.876 <sup>a</sup>					
3. Perceived fairness of promotion opportunities	3.470	0.852	.318**	.374**	.935 <sup>a</sup>				
4. Age	42.50	15.246	.189**	.147*	.087				
5. Gender	0.579	0.495	-.031	.037	-.114	-.097			
6. Sector government and non-profit	.480	.501	.103	.171*	-.056	.181*	.277**		
7. Sector commercial services	.317	.466	-.111	-.137	.056	-.299**	-.088	-.655**	
8. Sector industry and technology	.139	.346	.032	-.011	-.003	.029	-.238**	-.386**	-.273**

*Note.*  $N=202$ . Gender was dummy coded as 0=male, 1=female.

\*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed). \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed) <sup>a</sup> = Cronbach's alpha

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To examine the validity of the measurement model, a CFA was conducted. Four different models were tested, and their fit was compared using multiple indices, as reported in Table 2.

Model 1 was a single-factor model, all items were loaded in one common factor. This model demonstrated the poorest fit, as shown in Table 2.

In Model 2a and Model 2b, the factor structure was divided into two factors. In Model 2a the items from inclusive leadership and self-regulation were grouped into one factor, while the items of perceived fairness of promotion opportunities formed the second factor. Model 2b grouped the items of self-regulation and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities in one factor, and inclusive leadership items into another. These models served as a two-factor solution to test whether a two-dimensional structure provided a better fit than the single-factor model. Although Models 2a and 2b showed improved fit compared to Model 1, the overall fit remained unacceptable.

Model 3 represented the theoretical expected model, in which all items were distributed across three different factors corresponding to the three variables defined in this study. As shown in Table 2, the results indicated an acceptable, though not optimal fit to the data. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI=.880) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI=.870), are slightly below the recommended threshold of 0.90. However, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA=.0668) and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR=.0602) fell within adaptable ranges. These findings suggest that the model adequately represents the underlying constructs, although there may be room for improvement (Hair et al., 2018). The scales used in this study were adapted from previously validated instruments and demonstrated a good internal consistency, as indicated by all Cronbach's Alpha values above .876 (Hair et al., 2018). No modifications to the scales were made.

**Table 2**

*CFA*

Model	Description	X <sup>2</sup> (df)	X <sup>2</sup> /df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA
1	All items loading on 1 factor	2789(660)	4.226	0.564	0.536	0.127	0.126
2a	Two-factor model (IL and self-regulation combined, fairness separate)	1687(656)	2.572	0.789	0.774	0.0840	0.0882
2b	Two-factor model (IL separate, self-regulation and fairness combined)	1925(693)	2.778	0.749	0.731	0.118	0.0938
3	Three-factor model	1237(651)	1.900	0.880	0.870	0.0602	0.0668

## Hypothesis testing

All hypotheses were tested using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29. The control variables age, gender and sector were entered in the first step of the regression analysis. As shown in Table 3, model 1, the control variables did not have a significant effect on perceived fairness of promotion opportunities ( $F(5)=.976$   $p=.433$ ).

*Hypothesis 1:* The first hypothesis proposed that inclusive leadership has a negative effect on perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. This hypothesis was tested in Model 2. The regression model was significant ( $F(6)=4.514$ ,  $p<.005$ ,  $R^2=.122$ ). However, contrary to the hypothesis, a positive significant relationship was found between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities ( $\beta=320$ ,  $p<.001$ ), meaning hypothesis 1 is not

supported. The findings suggest that inclusive leadership is positively correlated with perceived fairness of promotion opportunities.

*Hypothesis 2:* The second hypothesis examined the moderating effect of self-regulation on the relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. Firstly, in Model 3, the direct effect of self-regulation on perceived fairness of promotion opportunities is examined. The analysis showed a positive significant relation ( $\beta=.309, p<.001$ ). However, there is no significant relationship found between the interaction term and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities ( $\beta=-.009, p=.892$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is not supported, as no significant moderating effect was found based on this data (Table 3, Model 4).

**Table 3**

*Hierarchical regression output*

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	3.303	.332		2.044	.415		1.497	.424		1.510	.436	
Gender (1=Women)	-.173	.129	-.100	-.157	.123	-.091	-.173	.119	-.100	-.171	.120	-.099
Sector government and non-profit	-.010	-.130	-.006	-.108	.243	-.064	-.191	.236	-.113	-.195	.238	-.115
Sector commercial services	.126	.267	.069	.075	.255	.041	.045	.246	.024	.042	.247	.023
Sector industry and technology	-.031	.289	-.013	-.121	.276	-.049	-.162	.266	-.066	-.164	.267	-.067
Age	.006	.004	.099	.002	.004	.043	.002	.004	.032	.002	.004	.033
Inclusive Leadership				.374**	.080	.320**	.185*	.091	.158*	.181	.096	.155
				*		*						
Self-regulation							.374**	.094	.309**	.375*	.095	.310*
							*		*	**		**
Interaction IL and Self-regulation										-.015	.108	-.009
Total R <sup>2</sup>		.024			.122			.188			.188	
F		.976			4.514*			6.413*			5.585	
					**			**			***	
$\Delta R^2$					.098**			.066**			.000	
					*			*				

Note. \*  $p<.05$ , \*\*  $p<.01$ , \*\*\*  $p<.001$

## **Discussion**

This study examines to what extent inclusive leadership leads to less perceived fairness in the promotion process. Additionally, the moderating role of leaders' self-regulation was examined. The results showed a positive effect of inclusive leadership to perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. Contrary to expectation, employees with an inclusive leader experience more fairness during the promotion process than employees without an inclusive leader. Additionally, self-regulation does not influence that relationship. To test these hypotheses, survey data were collected from 202 respondents and analyzed using SPSS.

### **Inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities**

A negative association between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities was expected. Inclusive leadership emphasizes valuing all employees, which can result in promotion decisions being seen as less performance based (Randel et al., 2017). As a result, employees may feel they have less influence over the outcome, leading to lower perceptions of fairness (Lind and Tyler, 1988). Moreover, the equity theory states that fairness is judged by comparing the ratio of inputs (e.g., effort, skills) to outcomes (e.g. promotion opportunities) (Pitchard, 1969). If employees are given the same opportunities, despite differences in their input, this ratio may feel unbalanced, leading to perceptions of inequity.

However, the finding of this research is not in line with the expectations. The results showed that inclusive leadership is positively related to perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. One possible explanation for this unexpected result is that inclusive leadership creates a culture in which employees feel valued and engaged (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Edmondson, 2003). This sense of recognition and inclusion may enhance employees' trust in their leader (Downey et al., 2014), and by extension in the fairness of decision-making, including decisions related to promotions.

Additionally, another possible explanation of this finding can be that inclusive leadership may be associated with an inclusive organizational climate (Ashikali et al., 2021). Such an environment can enhance employees' overall trust in how decisions are made within the organization (Downey et al., 2014). Korkmaz and colleagues (2022), state that inclusive leaders aim to promote equity and recognition. As a result, employees might perceive

promotion decisions as fair, even in the absence of full information about the process or direct evidence.

Lastly, inclusive leadership contributes to a sense of belonging within the team (Korkmaz et al., 2022). When employees feel that their individual contributions and skills are acknowledged and valued, they may be less inclined to engage in social comparison, thereby weakening the mechanism proposed by equity theory. This could explain why the equity theory did not emerge in this study. Nishii and Leroy (2022) found that inclusive leadership can mitigate social comparison dynamics. Inclusive leadership requires developing high-quality relationships with all team members, which neutralize perceived status differences within the team which might otherwise trigger negative social comparisons. Inclusive leadership creates an environment in which employees feel seen and valued on their own terms and therefore social comparison is diminished (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). As a result, employees are more likely to feel fairly treated which enhances their overall sense of perceived fairness.

### **Inclusive leadership, self-regulation and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities**

According to the self-regulation theory, it was hypothesized that self-regulation moderates the relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. As self-regulation helps the leader to be more consistent over time and control impulses, it was expected that self-regulation would buffer the potential negative effect of inclusive leadership on perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. However, this hypothesis was not supported by the data as the relationship was found to be insignificant.

Instead, the results showed that inclusive leadership and self-regulation both influence perceived fairness of promotion opportunities but self-regulation does not influence the relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. One possible explanation for the absence of a moderation effect is that inclusive leadership may already require a high degree of self-regulation. Inclusive leadership includes behaviors such as treating employees fairly, valuing uniqueness and fostering belonging (Korkmaz et al., 2022). These behaviors require a certain level of self-regulation as self-regulation is the ability to control behavior (Ent et al., 2012). Therefore, it may be that inclusive leaders already have strong self-regulatory abilities, leaving limited room for self-regulation to further moderate this relationship.

Another possible explanation is that inclusive leadership and self-regulation influence fairness perceptions through different mechanisms. Inclusive leadership may influence fairness by fostering relational trust and ensuring that employees feel seen, heard and valued (Korkmaz et al., 2022). In contrast, self-regulation contributes to fairness through consistent and emotionally controlled behavior (Whiteside & Barclay, 2016). Furthermore, self-regulation may act as an independent predictor of perceived fairness of promotion opportunities rather than functioning as a moderator.

Nevertheless, a possible explanation for the positive relationship between self-regulation and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities is that highly self-regulated leaders are less likely to react impulsively and are more likely to engage in consistent, thoughtful behavior (Ent et al., 2012). Moreover, leaders with more self-regulation are better able to effectively manage the daily challenges that accompany work (Bouckennooghe et al., 2014). These behaviors may enhance employees' perception of fairness in the promotion processes (Johnson et al., 2014). These findings are in line with research from Whiteside and Barclay (2016), who found that self-regulation influences the ability to behave fairly during the promotion process.

### **Theoretical contribution**

This research makes two main theoretical contributions. Firstly, it contributes to the existing literature on inclusive leadership by examining the potential down side of inclusive leadership, as previous research has suggested (Korkmaz et al., 2022). The potential negative effect of inclusive leadership was explained by the equity theory (Pritchard, 1969). However, the results of this research showed a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. Understanding this is useful as it challenges the assumptions derived from the equity theory and reinforces the perspective that inclusive leadership continues to foster fair perceptions, even in a competitive promotion context. This finding is meaningful because it suggests that fairness perceptions are not only shaped by input-output comparisons, as proposed by the equity theory (Pritchard, 1969). Relational dynamics may also influence how fairness is experienced, for example how inclusive leadership shows employees' appreciation. Therefore, this research highlights the need to broaden fairness theories and integrate other factors beyond the traditional input-output considerations.

Secondly, it contributes to the literature by examining the role of leaders' self-regulation in the relationship between inclusive leadership and fairness perceptions. There was no moderation effect of self-regulation found, however a direct effect of self-regulation on perceived fairness of promotion opportunities is found. This supports previous research which found that leaders with higher levels of self-regulation are better able to maintain fairness (Johnson et al., 2014). This finding refines the theoretical understanding by demonstrating that fairness perceptions are shaped by leadership behavior as well as by personality traits of leaders such as self-regulation. This shows the importance of the personality of leaders. Hence, this study suggests that future models of fairness should account for individual differences such as personality traits.

Together, these contributions help to refine the theoretical understanding of how leaders influence employee perceptions of fairness in decision-making processes such as promotion.

### **Practical contribution**

In addition to theoretical implications, this study also provides several practical implications for organizations. The finding that inclusive leadership is positively associated with perceived fairness of promotion opportunities suggests that leadership development programs should place greater emphasis on inclusive leadership behavior. Specifically, training should focus on how leaders can foster an employee's uniqueness, strengthen a sense of belonging within the team, express appreciation, and show organizational effort.

Furthermore, this study found that leaders' self-regulation is directly associated with perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. As a result, organizations should consider assessing self-regulation competencies during the hiring or promotion processes for leadership positions. In addition, training programs such as mindfulness-based interventions could help leaders develop stronger self-regulatory skills. These initiatives are crucial, as previous research has shown that perceived fairness in promotion decisions can lead to more positive employee behaviors (Wan et al., 2010).

Beyond the theoretical and practical contributions, this study also holds societal relevance. This study provides support for the positive impact for inclusive leadership on perceived fairness in promotion opportunities. These findings suggest that inclusive leaders contribute to more justice and fairness in the workplace. If organizations adopt a more inclusive leadership style, it may indirectly contribute to reducing perceptions of unfairness

and enhance trust in institutions. In addition, the direct effect of self-regulation highlights the importance of leadership qualities and to be consistent as a leader. Which is important for fairness but also for strengthening the social legitimacy of leadership. The findings of this research extend beyond the workplace and align with broader societal goals related to fairness and institutional trust.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

The first limitation of this study is the use of a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to make causal inferences. While the findings show a significant relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities, the direction of this relationship remains unclear. It may be possible that fairness perceptions also influence how employees perceive behavior of their leader. To establish causality, future research should adopt a longitudinal design, which can determine causality (Hair et al., 2018).

A second limitation of this study is that self-regulation is measured through employee perceptions. Employees evaluated their leaders' self-regulation based on observed behavior, which may not accurately reflect the leaders' actual self-regulatory traits. These perceptions can be influenced by other factors such as personal biases or limited observations which are unrelated to the actual self-regulation. To improve measurement accuracy, future research should consider using a multi-source approach, for example, combining employee ratings with leader self-assessments in order to reduce bias. Future studies might use the self-regulation scale developed by Yeow and Martin (2013) as it includes all elements of self-regulation. For the employee ratings, the adapted version of this scale, which is used in this study can be used, given its high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha=.876; Hair et al., 2018). This approach could improve the validity of the measurement and provide a more complete understanding of the influence of self-regulation.

Thirdly, the study was conducted within a Dutch culture, which is characterized by relatively low power distance culture. In this setting, inclusive leadership may be more easily recognized and strongly associated with perceptions of fairness, as these cultures emphasize equality (Gelens et al., 2013). Previous research suggests that high power distance cultures are more accepting of interpersonal inequalities, while low power distance cultures expect more equality (Gelens et al., 2013). This means that leadership behaviors, including promotion decisions, may be interpreted differently depending on the culture. Therefore, the findings of this study are not applicable to other cultural settings. Future research should

examine the relation between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness across cultures with varying levels of power distance. Gelens and colleagues (2013) emphasize the need for more research on the influence of power distance on employees' justice perceptions. Additionally, Orekoya (2023), found that power distance moderates the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate. This suggests that power distance influences the effects of inclusive leadership, and is therefore also a potential moderator in the relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness in promotion opportunities. Therefore, future research should consider the role of power distance when investigating the effects of inclusive leadership.

The fourth limitation of this study contains the measurement of perceived fairness of promotion opportunities. The respondents might be influenced through their personal experience of the promotion opportunities. In particular, employees who were recently denied a promotion or who feel dissatisfied about their promotion opportunities may evaluate the fairness and supervisor more negatively, regardless of the actual behavior. This could have introduced bias into the results of this research and may have distorted the true picture. Future research could consider multi-source data to reduce this potential bias. For example, use questionnaires could be combined with organizational data on actual promotion outcomes to control for individual differences in perception.

The fifth and final limitation of this study contains the sample size of this study. Although the initial dataset included 545 respondents, the final usable sample was reduced to 202 participants. A limited sample size can reduce statistical power, limit variability in the data and increase the risk of type II errors, potentially failing to detect effects that are actually present (Hair et al., 2018). Additionally, moderation effects involve more complex interactions and smaller effect sizes than direct effects, making it more difficult to detect a moderation effect statistically (Hair et al., 2018). This may help explain why no significant effect was found for hypothesis two. Future research should aim for a higher number of participants to enhance statistical reliability and ensure sufficient power in order to not overlook meaningful effects.

## **Conclusion**

This study was centered around the research question: *“What is the moderating effect of leaders' self-regulation on the association between inclusive leadership and perceived fairness of promotion opportunities?”* In conclusion, inclusive leadership significantly influences how employees perceive fairness in promotion opportunities: the more the leader

is perceived as an inclusive leader, the more fairly employees view the promotion opportunities. The leaders' self-regulation does not moderate this relationship however, this personality trait remains relevant in shaping perceptions of fairness. These findings emphasize the importance for organizations to promote inclusive leadership practices while also considering the individual traits of a leader. By investing in leadership development that fosters inclusive behavior and self-regulatory abilities, organizations may enhance the perceived fairness of their promotion systems. These findings highlight the need for further research into the role of leadership styles and leader's personality traits such as self-regulation, and how these shape employees' perceptions of fairness across different cultural contexts.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Consent form**

Before you continue filling out the questionnaire, we kindly ask you to carefully read the following information:

- Your responses will be processed anonymously and with strict confidentiality. This means that in the students' research reports, it will not be possible to identify which answers were given by individual participants.
- Your answers will be securely and anonymously stored in a protected location at the university, and they cannot be traced back to you personally.
- Your responses will only be used for academic, educational, and research purposes.
- You may stop participating in the study at any time.
- By continuing, you give your consent for the data to be used for the purposes described above and for it to be stored for up to 10 years after the study is completed (until **16-06-2035**).

Click “yes” below if you would like to participate in the study. This means that you have had sufficient opportunity to consider whether you want to take part in the research and that you understand there are no consequences attached to your participation.

## Appendix B

### Questionnaire

All items were answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”.

*Inclusive leadership (Korkmaz et al., 2022)*

1. My supervisor supports each one of us both at personal and work level.
2. My supervisor encourages each one of us to approach them for support.
3. My supervisor fosters unique contributions of each one of us.
4. My supervisor makes sure that each one of us is invited to express different viewpoints.
5. My supervisor gives each one of us personal authority to make decisions on how to accomplish tasks on our own.
6. My supervisor empowers each one of us to make work-related decisions.
7. My supervisor gives attention to learning and development opportunities for each one of us.
8. My supervisor helps each one of us to further develop ourselves.
9. My supervisor encourages honesty as a virtue within the team.
10. My supervisor makes sure that nobody is left out in the team.
11. My supervisor encourages collaboration within the team.
12. My supervisor facilitates a strong team spirit.
13. My supervisor fosters participative decision making within the team.
14. My supervisor makes decisions together with the team when it is possible.
15. My supervisor praises the efforts of all team members.
16. My supervisor shows appreciation for the effort made by individuals.
17. My supervisor acts constructively to reluctance towards changes happening within the organization.
18. My supervisor is attentive to new opportunities to improve work processes within the organization.
19. My supervisor communicates how inclusion contributes to organizational outcomes.
20. My supervisor communicates dedication to establishing an organization which represents diversity in society.

*Perceived fairness of promotion opportunities (Elkins et al., 2003)*

1. Overall, I believe that the promotion process in this organization is fair.
2. I feel that the process used to promote employees in the organization is fair.
3. I am satisfied with the process used to promote employees.
4. Overall, I feel dissatisfied with the way that the organization promotes employees.
5. I am dissatisfied with the organization's decision to promote employees.
6. I feel that the decision to promote employees in this organization is fair.
7. Overall, I feel that the results of the promotion process were unfair.
8. Overall, I am satisfied with the promotion decisions.

*Self-regulation (Schwarzer et al., 1999)*

1. My leader can concentrate on one activity for a long time, if necessary.
2. If my leader is distracted from an activity, my leader doesn't have any problem coming back to the topic quickly.
3. If an activity arouses the feelings of my leader too much, he/she can calm themselves down so that he/she can continue with the activity soon.
4. If an activity requires a problem-oriented attitude, my leader can control his/her feelings.
5. It is difficult for my leader to suppress thoughts that interfere with what he/she needs to do.
6. My leader can control his/her thoughts from distracting them from the task at hand.
7. When my leader worries about something, my leader cannot concentrate on an activity.
8. After an interruption, my leader doesn't have any problem resuming his/her concentrated style of working.
9. My leader usually has a whole bunch of thoughts and feelings that interfere with his/her ability to work in a focused way.
10. My leader stays focused on the goal and doesn't allow anything to distract him/her from the plan of action.

## Appendix C

### Skewness and Kurtosis

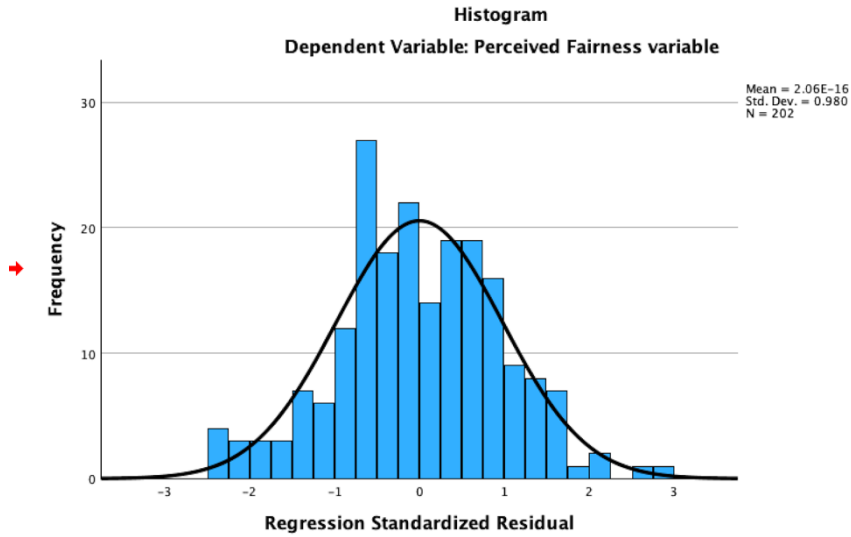
#### *Skewness and Kurtosis*

	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
Inclusive leadership	-0.790	.171	.770	.341
Self-regulation	-.251	.171	-.456	.341
Perceived Fairness of promotion opportunities	-0.174	.171	-.134	.341

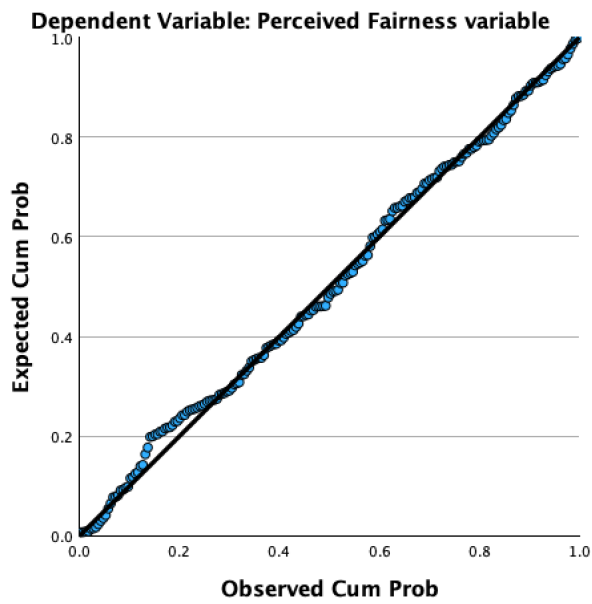
# Appendix D

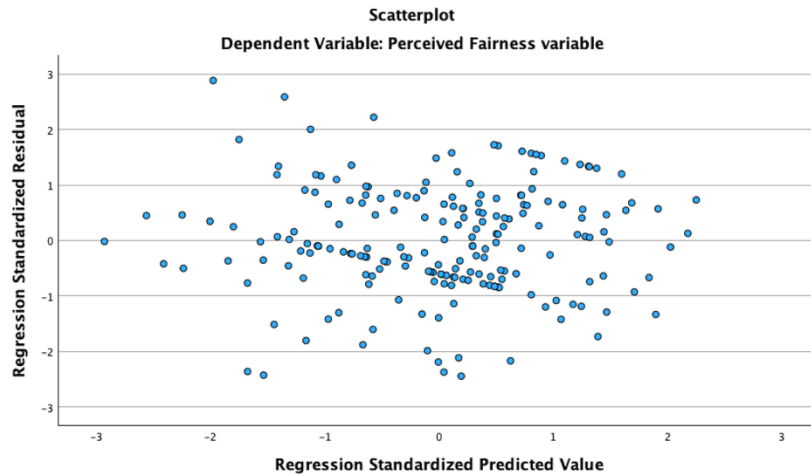
## Assumptions

Charts



**Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual**





### Multicollinearity

	Tolerance	VIF
Inclusive Leadership	.631	1.585
Self-regulation	.687	1.456
Interaction variable	.861	1.161
Gender (1 = Women)	.861	1.161
Age	.825	1.213
Sector1	.216	4.640
Sector2	.230	4.350
Sector3	.357	2.804