

RESEARCH ARTICLE

An examination of the link between interest incongruence and employee cyberloafing from an ego depletion perspective

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Abstract

Since cyberloafing has become prevalent across organizations, scholars have increasingly focused on exploring its antecedents. Based on ego depletion theory, we explore *how* and *when* interest incongruence, a particular type of person-environment misfit, influences employee cyberloafing behaviours. Using three-wave survey data of a sample from 443 Chinese employees, we found that interest incongruence is associated with ego depletion, leading to employee cyberloafing. Furthermore, our results demonstrated the moderating roles of trait self-control and moral identity internalization in the interest incongruence-ego depletion-cyberloafing link at different stages. Specifically, trait self-control mitigated the effect of interest incongruence on ego depletion and the indirect effect of interest incongruence on cyberloafing via ego depletion. Moral identity internalization mitigated the effect of ego depletion on cyberloafing and the indirect effect of interest incongruence on cyberloafing via ego depletion. These findings suggest that employee cyberloafing is not only an immoral issue but also a behaviour affected by employees' self-regulatory resources.

KEYWORDS

cyberloafing, ego depletion, interest incongruence, moral identity internalization, trait self-control

Qingxiong Weng and Lixin Chen contributed equally to this paper.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary organizations, Internet-based information and communication technologies (ICT) are increasingly prevalent (Cheng et al., 2020). Despite the advantages of Internet usage within organizations, such as increasing access to information, improving global communication and reducing production costs (She & Li, 2023), it also opens the door to employees' cyberloafing behaviours (Cheng et al., 2020). *Cyberloafing* refers to employees using their organizations' Internet access during work hours for non-work-related purposes (Lim, 2002). Some commonly performed cyberloafing behaviours include online shopping, playing games and browsing Facebook or Twitter (Yang et al., 2022). Prior research has indicated that over 80% of employees spend their work time sending non-work-related emails or using the Internet for entertainment (Lim & Teo, 2005). Other than productivity losses, employee cyberloafing could pose various threats to organizations, such as bandwidth loss, network congestion and potential legal liabilities (Lim, 2002). Therefore, it is unsurprising that a growing body of studies have explored different antecedents of employee cyberloafing, such as workplace loneliness (Yang et al., 2022) and leadership (Peng et al., 2023). Although previous studies have significantly advanced our understanding of employee cyberloafing, they have primarily focused on individual and organizational factors, respectively (Lim & Teo, 2024). The person-environment (P-E) (mis)fit theory suggests that the person and the environment collectively predict individual outcomes more accurately than either entity alone (Van Vianen, 2018). Consequently, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the antecedents of cyberloafing from a P-E (mis)fit perspective.

Specifically, P-E (mis)fit is generally defined as the (in)compatibility or (mis)match between a person's attributes or characteristics and those of an environment (Van Vianen, 2018). In terms of the attributes or characteristics, we focus on vocational interest. Vocational interests refer to trait-like preferences for specific work activities and environments (Holland, 1997), which serve as motivational factors that drive individual behaviours regarding direction, vigour and endurance (Su, 2020). In addition to characterizing individuals, vocational interests can also characterize their occupational environments (Wee et al., 2021). The characteristic interests of a specific occupational environment emerge in part because employees with similar interests gravitate towards and remain in environments that provide opportunities to engage in activities that they prefer and are well suited for (Holland, 1997; Su, 2020). It is essential to note that factors other than interests (e.g., short-term family needs, pay and labour market conditions) may influence individuals' occupational choices (Chen et al., 2024). Furthermore, Nye and Hoff (2023) have posited that applicants may artificially inflate their interest scores in high-stakes selection settings to enhance their likelihood of receiving a job offer. Consequently, the incongruence between individual interests and occupational environment is prevalent in organizations (Li, Yang, et al., 2022). Previous literature has found that interest incongruence was positively associated with negative emotions and unethical behaviours, such as job dissatisfaction (Wiegand et al., 2021), absenteeism (Li, Flores, et al., 2022) and counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs, Iliescu et al., 2015). Therefore, this study focuses on interest incongruence and investigates its effects on cyberloafing.

To better understand why interest incongruence influences employee cyberloafing behaviour, this study draws upon ego depletion theory (Baumeister et al., 1998, 2007) and identifies ego depletion as an underlying mechanism. Ego depletion theory postulates that all acts of self-regulation draw resources from a common and finite pool, and a prior act of self-regulation would result in a state of reduced self-regulatory resources known as ego depletion. Employees whose interests differ from those of their occupational environments and who need to complete work tasks end up concentrating on uninteresting tasks and suppressing negative emotions caused by interest incongruence (Iliescu et al., 2015). From this perspective, interest incongruence reflects a depleting context that requires intense self-regulation and a significant investment of self-regulatory resources, which results in ego depletion. In addition, ego depletion theory posits that the depletion of self-regulatory resources dampens employees' ability to exercise self-control in subsequent activities (Baumeister et al., 1998). Therefore, the lack of regulatory resources would affect the likelihood that employees would be able to resist the temptation to cyberloaf (Yang et al., 2022).

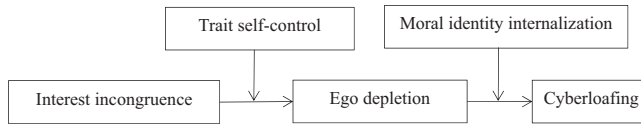


FIGURE 1 Hypothesized model.

Furthermore, given the potential positive effect of interest incongruence on employee cyberloafing via ego depletion, it is essential to understand how to prevent employees with interest incongruence from engaging in cyberloafing. Trait self-control reflects the individual's baseline personal self-regulatory resources pool (Tangney et al., 2004). When experiencing interest incongruence, employees with high trait self-control are less vulnerable to ego depletion (Imhoff et al., 2014) because they have adequate self-regulatory resources to control their behaviours (Yuan et al., 2020). In addition, we focused on moral identity internalization, which refers to the extent to which individuals view morality as central to their self-concept (Aquino & Reed II, 2002). For employees with higher levels of moral identity internalization, the display of ethical workplace behaviour will be more frequent and, consequently, more internalized and automatic. As such, they will use fewer self-regulatory resources to behave ethically (Gino et al., 2011) and engage in less cyberloafing.

Overall, we aim to contribute to the literature in three ways. First, we seek to contribute to the emerging literature on cyberloafing by introducing interest incongruence as a significant predictor. This research appears to be among the first to explore the antecedents of employee cyberloafing from a person-environment misfit perspective (Cheng et al., 2020). Second, prior studies have primarily taken an attitude/affect-based perspective (i.e., lower organizational commitment and satisfaction; Nye et al., 2021) to investigate how interest incongruence results in negative behaviours. Based on ego depletion theory, our study helps unpack the 'black box' through which interest incongruence affects employees' cyberloafing from a resource-based perspective. Third, examining these boundary conditions can shed light on when interest incongruence leads to stronger impacts on employees' cyberloafing via the ego depletion mechanism. This study also echoes the call to investigate the effect of individual self-control (i.e., individual characteristics) on reducing cyberloafing (She & Li, 2023). Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Interest incongruence

The most prominent and frequently investigated theoretical framework for interest is Holland's *RIASEC* model (1997). Holland (1997, p. 8) labelled six types of interests as 'personality types', namely *R* (Realistic), *I* (Investigative), *A* (Artistic), *S* (Social), *E* (Enterprising) and *C* (Conventional). Specifically, individuals with Realistic interests tend to prefer manual tasks, working with tools or in the outdoors. Investigative individuals are drawn to intellectual and scholarly activities. Artistic individuals enjoy creative, unsystematic and unconventional activities. Social individuals are interested in helping, teaching or interacting with others. Enterprising individuals prefer persuading, influencing and directing others. Finally, conventional individuals prefer well-ordered and routine activities. The interrelatedness of the six interest types follows a hexagonal structure (Li, Flores, et al., 2022), where each angle represents one interest type (in the *R-I-A-S-E-C* ordering). In this hexagonal structure, the distance between two angles is inversely proportional to the similarity between the respective interest types (Holland, 1997). For example, adjacent interest types (e.g., *R-I*, *I-A*, *A-S*, *S-E*, *E-C*, *C-R*) are more related. The alternative interest types (e.g., *R-A*, *I-S*, *A-E*, *S-C*, *E-R*, *C-I*) exhibit an intermediate relationship. The opposite interest types (e.g., *R-S*, *I-E*, *A-C*)

demonstrate small relations. A person is not exclusively assigned to one of the six RIASEC interest types (Stoll & Trautwein, 2017). Instead, each exhibits interest in all six RIASEC types, although varying degrees (Holland, 1997), reflected in an interest profile.

Holland (1997) also postulated six types of work environments corresponding to individual RIASEC interest dimensions. These environment types are characterized by the special demands and opportunities that are dominant in a particular occupation and by the individuals who typically work in this occupational environment (Stoll & Trautwein, 2017). For example, the realistic environment is characterized 'by the dominance of environmental demands and opportunities that entail the explicit, ordered, or systematic manipulation of objects, tools, machines, and animals, and by a population dominated by realistic types' (Holland, 1997, p. 36). Holland (1997) has suggested that individuals are attracted to specific occupational environments compatible with their vocational interests. For example, individuals with higher levels of social interest are more likely to choose inherently social occupations (e.g., teaching). The congruence between individual interests and the extent to which working environments support those interests has been found to positively affect their job satisfaction (Wiegand et al., 2021) and performance (Nye et al., 2018). Interest incongruence is generally considered the opposite end of the congruence continuum (Li, Flores, et al., 2022). In particular, Holland et al. (1994, p. 22) highlighted that the most dominant interest type in individual and environmental interest profiles is the 'most important, most descriptive, and most reliable'. Moreover, Li, Yang, et al. (2022) posited that the relative importance of an interest type within an interest profile determines the effectiveness of a specific interest type on individual behaviours. Therefore, interest incongruence represents the lack of fit between individual and environment profiles' most dominant interest types.

Interest incongruence and ego depletion

Previous studies of the self-regulatory process (Baumeister et al., 2007; Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996) have identified three ingredients that embody individuals' self-regulation: the standard, which is the desired or ideal goal state; monitoring, which involves comparing one's current experienced state with the standard; and operation, which involves making changes and adjustments to reduce the unwanted discrepancy. The self-regulation process would be repeated until the size of the unwanted discrepancy between the desired state and the experienced state is monitored and minimized to an acceptable level (Inzlicht et al., 2021). However, individuals possess a limited pool of psychological resources to perform self-regulation, which would be depleted by prior self-regulatory tasks (Hagger et al., 2010). The present study proposed that interest incongruence would cause employees to exercise more self-regulation and consequently experience ego depletion.

Firstly, Lian et al. (2017) pointed out that it is only under the circumstances in which the individuals' experienced and desired states are sufficiently incompatible that they engage in effortful self-regulation. If employees lack self-regulation motivation, they will exert less effort and experience less ego depletion (Wehrt et al., 2020). The conceptualization of employee vocational interest falls under the broad definition of individual need (Chen et al., 2024; Nye et al., 2021), which is defined as 'individuals' psychological, biological, learned, and socialized requirements for certain types of work, activity, and interaction' (Wiegand, 2018, p. 11). Thus, scholars (Nye et al., 2021; Wiegand, 2018) have categorized interest incongruence as a specific form of needs–supplies misfit. Interests supplied by job activities or occupational environments either fall short of, meet or exceed employees' needs (Nye et al., 2018). When interest supplies fail to meet employees' interest needs, employees may feel forced to work in uninteresting or unpleasant ways, experience autonomy frustration and interact with others who share dissimilar interests in their work (Chen et al., 2024). An excess of a particular interest has also been found to impede the attainment of job satisfaction from other interests and overall satisfaction (Wiegand et al., 2021). Ryan and Deci (2000) pointed out that the desire for autonomy, social connection and competence are the most basic and powerful human motives. Therefore, the frustration of basic psychological needs caused by interest incongruence would elicit employees' self-regulation motivation (Mills & Allen, 2020).

Based on prior research (Iliescu et al., 2015), we use the example of a customer relations officer with a strong *Realistic* interest to clarify the self-regulation process in the case of interest incongruence. Specifically, the job of a customer relations officer requires frequent interaction with coworkers or customers and the completion of clerical and administrative tasks, all of which are performed indoors. The experienced state then would be compared to the desired state, which is typical for a strong *Realistic* interest: working outdoors with tools and machines and preferring little interaction with people (Holland, 1997). As a result, the employee would detect the discrepancies and exert a self-regulation process to reduce discrepancies.

Secondly, the discrepancy between experienced and desired states can be minimized 'by targeting the experienced states (i.e., by influencing the environment) or by targeting the desired state (i.e., by modifying the standard)' (Iliescu et al., 2015, p. 23). Given that interests are relatively stable individual traits (Wee et al., 2021) that are difficult to change, employees who experience interest incongruence would deplete their self-regulatory resources by trying to change their jobs or their immediate environments to fit their interests (Iliescu et al., 2015). Moreover, Sánchez-Cardona et al. (2020) stated that situations or jobs that do not match employees' interests will likely lead to low motivation and boredom. Self-regulation would be necessary for employees experiencing interest incongruence to reduce boredom and shift their attention away from distractions to stay on tedious tasks (Wolff & Martarelli, 2020). Finally, prior scholars have posited that the experience of interest incongruence would trigger negative emotions (e.g., the affective experience of frustration and lower job satisfaction; Iliescu et al., 2015; Wiegand et al., 2021). According to ego depletion theory, regulating negative emotions requires individuals to overcome the innate tendency to display emotions in response to external environmental stimuli (Hagger et al., 2010). Such emotion regulation usually depletes self-regulatory resources (Deng et al., 2016) and is a common cause of ego depletion (Bruyneel et al., 2009).

Thirdly, several studies (Lian et al., 2017; Wehrt et al., 2020) have also stated that external environmental factors (i.e., disturbance) might also urge individuals to engage in self-regulation, resulting in ego depletion. For employees who experience interest incongruence, initiating changes to their jobs or immediate environments to fit their vocational interests might involve challenging the status quo, which may not always be welcomed by their supervisor or coworkers and may even draw pushback from others (Iliescu et al., 2015). Therefore, when confronted with interest incongruence, employees need to monitor available opportunities to initiate changes, assess whether it is safe to adjust their environments (Wang et al., 2022). In sum, we proposed that:

Hypothesis 1. Interest incongruence is positively associated with ego depletion.

Cyberloafing

As early as four decades ago, the ABA Banking Journal (1983) presented a comprehensive list describing various types of loafers in the workplace, including telephone chatters, restroom-minded people and long lunchers. With the advent of technology and the availability of the Internet, traditional workplace loafing has evolved into a new form, namely, cyberloafing (Lim, 2002). Koslowsky (2009) has suggested that employee withdrawal in the modern workplace should be conceptualized as encompassing these forms of loafing as minor withdrawal behaviours in addition to the three main types of withdrawal behaviours (i.e., lateness, absence and turnover). This study focused on cyberloafing rather than the broader construct of withdrawal for the following reasons. First, based on two prior approaches to exploring the antecedents of withdrawal,¹ Koslowsky (2009)

¹There are two distinct approaches to investigating the antecedents of withdrawal. The first approach proposes that these types of withdrawal are all examples of avoidance attempts and that studies should focus on the broader construct of withdrawal by using a global measure that does not consider the unique antecedents of withdrawal types (Rosse & Hulin, 1985). The second approach posits that each withdrawal manifestation is unique and may have distinct antecedents, and thus, the individual measure of withdrawal types is the preferred approach (Blau, 1998).

proposed a compromise view by ‘focusing on specific correlates of each of the withdrawal behaviors, but at the same time recognizing that it is not possible to look at any one behavior without understanding how it relates to the others’ (p. 283). Koslowsky (2009) put forth a potential sequence of withdrawal behaviours whereby minor withdrawal (e.g., cyberloafing) may predict more severe forms of withdrawal (e.g., lateness, absence and turnover). Prior studies have demonstrated that interest incongruence was positively related to severe withdrawal behaviours, such as absenteeism (Li, Flores, et al., 2022) and turnover (Holland, 1997), ignoring the effect of interest incongruence on minor withdrawal actions. However, clarifying the relationship between interest incongruence and minor withdrawal behaviours can help managers intercept employees' withdrawal at a relatively early stage.

Second, unlike other loafers, cyberloafers can now not only maintain the guise of working hard on their tasks in the real world (Wagner et al., 2012) but also travel through cyberspace by sending personal messages and browsing websites (Lim & Teo, 2024). Cyberloafing does not require employees to be physically absent from their desks or offices and is, therefore, less visible than other traditional forms of loafing (Cheng et al., 2020). However, cyberloafers may inadvertently spend much time surfing the web by simply moving from one site to another with the click of a mouse (Lim, 2002). In doing so, cyberloafers may visit unsafe sites that could expose their organizations to legal liabilities and the threats of malware and computer viruses (Spector, 2023). Therefore, scholars (Wagner et al., 2012) pointed out that cyberloafers pose a more severe threat to their organizations than other types of loafers.

Ego depletion and employee cyberloafing

We argue that ego depletion positively affects employee cyberloafing for several reasons. First, self-regulatory resources are needed in the work setting to block out distractions and align individual behaviour with task goals and organizational norms (Johnson et al., 2014). There are abundant stimuli on the Internet that could provide employees with immediate pleasure. In contrast, work tasks are mundane and require considerable self-regulatory resources from employees. Therefore, depleted individuals who lack self-regulatory resources may lack the personal willpower to avoid task-irrelevant stimuli, which increases their tendency to cyberloaf (Wagner et al., 2012).

Second, depleted employees tend to have a lower future-oriented style and are more sensitive to immediate benefits (Guo et al., 2023). Thus, when the negative consequences of cyberloafing implemented by depleted employees are in the future (i.e., negative performance evaluation; Zhong et al., 2022), while the benefits are immediate (i.e., relaxation; She & Li, 2023), such employees are more likely to choose immediate returns rather than consider long-term costs. Much research has shown that ego-depleted employees are more vulnerable to the temptation to seek immediate gratification (e.g., through unhealthy eating and drinking; Sayre et al., 2020).

Third, a lack of self-regulatory resources may activate individuals' resource-conservation instincts and reduce their willingness to perform well on subsequent tasks (Hu et al., 2022). Due to its convenience and covert nature (Cheng et al., 2020), cyberloafing has been identified as a defensive way to prevent resource loss. When engaging in cyberloafing, such as surfing sports websites and online communication, employees temporarily detach themselves from job demands, experience relaxation to some extent and even recharge their energy levels before proceeding with work tasks (Lim & Teo, 2024). Thus, the draining of limited self-regulatory resources might arouse depleted employees' instincts to protect remaining resources by engaging in cyberloafing. Thus, we proposed:

Hypothesis 2. Ego depletion is positively associated with employee cyberloafing.

The mediating role of ego depletion

Ego depletion theory (Baumeister et al., 2007) argues that any regulatory or volitional act could deplete the self's finite self-regulatory resources and deplete the self. When faced with interest

incongruence and pressure to get work done, employees might engage in active self-regulatory processes to minimize the discrepancies between personal interests and job demands (Iliescu et al., 2015), which would deplete their resources and ultimately lead to ego depletion. In addition, ego depletion theory posits that individuals have a limited pool of self-regulatory resources, such that prior exertions of self-control on a task would reduce the resources available for subsequent self-control activities. Cyberloafing has been identified as a workplace temptation (Peng et al., 2023) that requires employees to exert self-control to remain focused on work tasks (Wagner et al., 2012). Therefore, when employees' self-regulatory resources are depleted due to interest incongruence, they may have an impaired ability to resist the temptation of the Internet and consequently engage in cyberloafing. Thus, we hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3. Ego depletion mediates the positive relationship between interest incongruence and employee cyberloafing.

The moderating effects of trait self-control and moral identity internalization

Previous studies have examined the functionality of different forms of control mechanisms (organizational and individual) in reducing cyberloafing behaviour (Lim & Teo, 2024; Wang et al., 2013). However, some researchers have warned about the potential side effects of organizational control mechanisms (Lim & Teo, 2024). For example, Jiang et al. (2020) found that Internet monitoring may signal a lack of trust in the organization, decreasing employee loyalty and intrinsic work motivation. In light of this, scholars have called for a focus on the effect of individual self-control (i.e., individual characteristics) on reducing cyberloafing (Rahimnia & Mazidi, 2015; She & Li, 2023).

The moderating effects of trait self-control

Ego depletion theory (Baumeister et al., 2007) proposes that individuals differ in their susceptibility to self-regulatory resource depletion. This individual difference is captured by trait self-control (Yuan et al., 2020), a dispositional construct that refers to an individual's general ability to engage in self-regulation across domains and contexts (Tangney et al., 2004). When faced with interest incongruence, employees high in trait self-control employ different self-regulatory techniques (Tangney et al., 2004) to regulate their goal-directed behaviour more effectively (Diestel et al., 2015). Furthermore, employees with high trait self-control have more self-regulatory resources to regulate the negative emotions triggered by interest incongruence (McAllister et al., 2018). These employees are less likely to engage in affective rumination and are more effective in managing negative emotions. Therefore, after engaging in self-regulatory activities to cope with interest incongruence, employees high in trait self-control would consume only a tiny portion of their self-regulatory resources and are less likely to reach a point of depletion (Yuan et al., 2020).

Extant studies using dual-task experimental paradigms have demonstrated that trait self-control buffers the ego depletion effect (Imhoff et al., 2014). In a field study, Yuan et al. (2020) found that trait self-control mitigates the negative effect of self-regulatory resource depletion induced by abusive supervision and ultimately reduces emotional exhaustion. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that those employees who are higher in trait self-control than those who are lower in trait self-control will be less vulnerable to ego depletion when experiencing interest incongruence. Therefore, we proposed:

Hypothesis 4(a). Trait self-control moderates the association between interest incongruence and ego depletion such that the association is significantly weaker for employees with high (vs. low) trait self-control.

Ego depletion theory (Baumeister et al., 2007) posits that all acts of self-regulation draw resources from a common and finite pool. In the context of interest incongruence, employees with a larger baseline resource pool (i.e., high trait self-control) experience less ego depletion and can retain more resources to continue performing subsequent self-control tasks, reducing the likelihood of cyberloafing. Thus, we proposed:

Hypothesis 4(b). Trait self-control moderates the indirect effect of interest incongruence on employees' cyberloafing through ego depletion, such that the indirect effect is significantly weaker for employees with high (vs. low) trait self-control.

The moderating effects of moral identity internalization

Ego depletion theory posits that depleted employees lack the self-regulatory resources to inhibit unethical behaviours and the resources necessary to engage in 'effortful choice and active initiative' (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007, p. 2). While engaging in unethical behaviours with a relatively high social consensus (i.e., behaviours that everyone generally agrees are unethical) requires significant active initiative and deliberate and reasoned cognitive processes to avoid either formal or social sanctions, engaging in unethical behaviours with a lower social consensus (i.e., behaviours that involve more disagreement about their unethicality) requires minimal mental resources (Yam et al., 2014). Therefore, scholars have suggested that employees experiencing ego depletion are more likely to engage in unethical behaviours with a lower social consensus (e.g., gossip and withdrawal behaviours; Hughes et al., 2023) and often refrain from engaging in unethical behaviours with a relatively higher social consensus (e.g., workplace sexual harassment; Yam et al., 2014). Concerning cyberloafing, there is a disparity in whether individuals view this behaviour as counterproductive or acceptable (Tandon et al., 2022). For example, some individuals view using the Internet for personal purposes during work as detrimental and believe that employees should never engage in it. Others, however, view cyberloafing as relieving work-related stress and maintaining work-life balance (Lim & Teo, 2024). Therefore, cyberloafing is an issue with comparatively low social consensus. When employees are depleted, the moral ambiguity of cyberloafing increases the likelihood that they will prioritize immediate gratification over long-term gains rather than considering the ethical implications of their actions.

The higher the employees' moral identity internalization, the more critical the moral traits in their self-concept and the higher their sensitivity to ethical factors and moral issues (Aquino et al., 2009). As such, employees' moral self-schema is generally available and easily activated to process morally relevant information, which leads to more moral behaviours (Vadera & Pathki, 2021). Consequently, for employees with high moral identity internalization, their strong internalized moral standards make the enactment of moral behaviours more internalized (Yan et al., 2023) and less reliant on self-regulatory resources (Xu & Ma, 2015). Thus, employees with high moral identity internalization can perceive the immoral components of unethical behaviours with low social consensus, which reduces cyberloafing behaviours even in a state of ego depletion. However, employees with low moral identity internalization are less sensitive to moral issues and do not strictly follow moral rules (Aquino et al., 2009). Their ethical behaviours are more likely to rely on self-regulatory resources (Zhang et al., 2023) and thus suffer more from ego depletion (Joosten et al., 2014). Consequently, employees with low moral identity engage in more cyberloafing because they have depleted self-regulatory resources or do not perceive any immoral component of this behaviour. Thus, we proposed:

Hypothesis 5(a). Moral identity internalization moderates the relationship between ego depletion and employee cyberloafing such that the relationship is significantly weaker for employees with high moral identity internalization.

Dealing with interest incongruence could lead to ego depletion, leaving fewer resources to restrain employees from engaging in cyberloafing. However, if depleted employees are high in moral identity

internalization, they will internalize morality as their implicit standards of behaviour and, therefore, refuse to engage in cyberloafing. Thus, we hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 5(b). Moral identity internalization moderates the indirect effect of interest incongruence on employee cyberloafing via ego depletion, such that the indirect effect is significantly weaker for employees with high (vs. low) moral identity internalization.

METHOD

Sample and procedure

To qualify for the present study (Li et al., 2024; She & Li, 2023), the target participants were full-time Chinese workers who were able to access the Internet at work via various electronic devices (e.g., desktop computers, laptops and personal mobile phones). We posted links to our questionnaires on online alumni communities (i.e., virtual chat groups) via QQ and WeChat, two multipurpose messaging applications in China. To encourage broader participation, we informed all target participants of the academic purpose of our research, the anonymity of their responses and the compensation after they completed the questionnaires. In addition, to avoid common method bias, we collected survey data in three waves, each two weeks apart.² In each wave, we sent an online survey questionnaire link to participants via QQ and WeChat. At Time 1 (T1), participants were asked to report their occupation and demographic information and to rate their interests and trait self-control. Two weeks later (T2), participants completed measures of ego depletion and moral identity internalization. At Time 3 (T3), two weeks after T2, participants completed the cyberloafing scale. A unique identification number was used to match participants' responses at the three-time points.

At T1, 592 participants returned online questionnaires. At T2, 536 participants completed the survey, with a response rate of 90.54%. At T3, we collected 478 questionnaires, with a response rate of 89.18%. After matching the three-wave data and cleaning the uncompleted questionnaires with missing data, the final valid sample size was 443. Of the 443 participants, 58.5% are male, with a mean age of 28.86 years ($SD = 4.891$) and 3.709 years ($SD = 3.258$) of organizational tenure. Furthermore, 67.3% had a bachelor's degree or higher. The occupational distribution of the final sample is heterogeneous: 118 different occupations and 93 different Holland interest profiles.

Measures

All measures (except demographic variables) were scaled using a 5-point Likert-type response scale.

Interest

The 60-item measure from Rounds et al. (2010) was adopted and confirmed as suitable for the Chinese context by Li, Flores, et al. (2022) and Li, Yang, et al. (2022). Participants were asked to rate the degree

² Although ego depletion was initially measured as a temporary state in laboratory settings (Joosten et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2012), organizational scholars (Deng et al., 2016; Yam et al., 2016) have proposed that it captures a relatively enduring state. Some scholars (Li et al., 2023) have proposed that a two-week interval between each wave is sufficient for ego depletion to change and function. Podsakoff et al. (2012) also suggested that the optimal temporal interval for data collection should be neither too long nor too short. Therefore, this study used a three-wave survey design to collect data, each wave occurring two weeks apart.

to which they enjoyed certain work activities. Sample items were 'assemble electronic parts' (R), 'develop a new medicine' (I), 'draw pictures' (A), 'perform rehabilitation therapy' (S), 'start your own business' (E) and 'proofread records or forms' (C). The Cronbach's alpha (α) values for six interest types were .918 (R), .911 (I), .913 (A), .896 (S), .897 (E) and .925 (C), respectively.

Interest incongruence

The concept of interest incongruence involves the comparison of interest profiles between individuals and environments. The interest incongruence index is a means of quantifying this comparison. Particularly, calculating interest incongruence involves examining the dissimilarity of the dominant interest type between an individual and his/her occupational environment. Here, the degree of dissimilarity is generally based on the distance of the dominant interest types between an individual and the environment in Holland's (1997) hexagonal model. Specifically, to calculate the incongruence index, we first identified every participant's interest profile by ranking the interest scores on each RIASEC type in magnitude. For the interest profile of a participant, the interest scale in which he/she scored the highest was ranked as his/her dominant. Secondly, for environmental interest profiles, the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) provides RIASEC ratings for each occupational environment (Nye et al., 2021), which has been considered an objective source of environment interest scores in prior empirical studies (Nye et al., 2018) that leads to the lowest level of common method bias (Wiegand, 2018). Prior studies have pointed out that the O*NET occupational data could also be applied to the Chinese context (Li, Flores, et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2008). Therefore, based on the participant's declared occupation and O*NET occupational database, we obtained the RIASEC profiles of environments and identified the dominant interest types of an environment. Thirdly, following prior research (Iliescu et al., 2015; Li, Flores, et al., 2022), the incongruence index is four if the two dominant interest types are opposite, three if alternate, two if adjacent and one if identical.

Ego depletion

We adapted Lin and Johnson's (2015) five-item scale to assess ego depletion. Respondents were instructed to recall and report how they felt during the past two weeks. A sample item is 'My mental energy is running low' ($\alpha = .917$).

Trait self-control

The thirteen-item scale from Tangney et al. (2004) was applied to measure trait self-control. A sample item is 'I refuse things that are bad for me'. ($\alpha = .960$).

Moral identity internalization

Moral identity internalization was measured using a Chinese-validated version (Zhang et al., 2023) of the moral identity internalization scale (Aquino & Reed II, 2002). Participants were initially shown nine moral characteristics (e.g., caring, honest and kind) and then asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following five statements. A sample item is 'I strongly desire to have these characteristics'. ($\alpha = .806$).

Cyberloafing

Participants were asked to rate their cyberloafing behaviours in the past two weeks with an abridged five-item version of Lim's (2002) eleven-item cyberloafing scale (Zoghbi Manrique de Lara et al., 2006). A sample item is 'I use the Internet to surf the net, and so I can escape a little' ($\alpha = .899$).

Control variables

Lim and Chen (2012) found that males were more likely to engage in cyberloafing. Andreassen et al. (2014) demonstrated that cyberloafing was more prevalent among non-managerial or less-educated employees. Mercado et al. (2017) found that organizational tenure negatively influenced employees' intentions to engage in cyberloafing. Therefore, this study controlled for these variables: gender, educational level, employment position and tenure.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

Harman's one-factor test showed that the first factor explained only 25.583% of the total variance, showing little threat of common method bias. The descriptive statistics and correlation of our variables are presented in Table 1.

Construct validity

The results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the four-factor model ($\chi^2 = 280.274$, $df = 113$, $\chi^2/df = 2.480$, $IFI = .972$, $TLI = .966$, $CFI = .972$, $RMSEA = .058$) fits the data better than other alternative models, suggesting that the four study variables in our model had satisfactory discriminant validity.

Hypothesis testing

As shown in Table 2, interest incongruence significantly and positively predicted ego depletion ($\beta = .410$, $p < .001$, M_2), confirming Hypothesis 1. Model 6 supported Hypothesis 2 by showing the significantly positive effect of ego depletion on employee cyberloafing ($\beta = .367$, $p < .001$). The effect of interest incongruence on employee cyberloafing was not significant ($\beta = .092$, *ns.*, M_7) when ego depletion was entered into the regression analysis ($\beta = .342$, $p < .001$, M_7). The bootstrapping analysis results suggested that the indirect effect of interest incongruence on employee cyberloafing was significant and positive [coefficient = .140, $SE = .028$, 95% $CI = (.089, .198)$], confirming Hypothesis 3.

The interaction terms of interest incongruence and trait self-control significantly predicted ego depletion ($\beta = -.185$, $p < .001$, M_4). The result of the simple slope test (in Figure 2) suggested that the relationship between interest incongruence and ego depletion was weakened when employees were high in trait self-control ($\beta_{\text{simple}} = .266$, $p < .001$) as opposed to low in trait self-control ($\beta_{\text{simple}} = .550$, $p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 4(a) was supported. The indirect effects of interest incongruence via ego depletion on employee cyberloafing differed significantly [difference between conditional indirect effects = $-.089$, $SE = .025$, 95% $CI = (-.141, -.042)$] when trait self-control was at high [coefficient = .086, $SE = .024$, 95% $CI = (.044, .137)$] versus low levels [coefficient = .174, $SE = .033$, 95% $CI = (.111, .243)$], supporting Hypothesis 4(b).

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations and correlations.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender	1.420	.493	–										
2. Education	2.770	.603	.125**	–									
3. Position	1.730	.826	-.006	.156***	–								
4. Organizational tenure	3.709	3.258	.316***	-.036	.153***	–							
5. Interest incongruence	2.390	.929	-.002	.006	.025	-.109*	–						
6. C index	7.917	3.644	.002	.024	.026	-.060	.764***	–					
7. Profile correlation	.017	.473	-.030	.020	-.052	.024	-.421***	-.442***	–				
8. Profile deviance	8.131	.948	-.006	-.051	-.005	.017	.064	.058	-.347***	–			
9. Trait self-control	3.775	.770	-.096*	-.145**	.037	-.100*	-.011	.011	.015	-.043	–		
10. Ego depletion	2.901	1.137	-.066	-.086	.052	-.054	.338***	.202***	-.177***	.010	-.112*	–	
11. Moral identity internalization	3.940	.525	-.056	-.052	.139**	-.068	.051	.003	-.018	-.013	.297**	-.084	–
12. Cyberloafing	3.252	.992	-.041	-.061	-.015	-.021	.215***	.122**	-.130**	-.024	-.396**	.421***	-.110*

Note: C index, profile correlation, and profile deviance are three other interest incongruence indices used in the ‘Supplementary Explanation’ section. Gender: male = 1, female = 2; educational level: high school diploma or less = 1, junior college degree = 2, bachelor’s degree = 3 and graduate degree = 4; employment position: non-managerial employees = 1, entry-level managers = 2, mid-level managers = 3 and senior-level managers = 4; Tenure was in years.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 2 Hierarchical regression analysis.

Variable	Ego depletion			Cyberloafing					
	M ₁	M ₂	M ₃	M ₄	M ₅	M ₆	M ₇	M ₈	M ₉
Gender	-.082	-.113	-.126	-.151	-.078	-.030	-.039	-.033	-.037
Education	-.181*	-.174*	-.214*	-.213*	-.090	-.028	-.031	-.039	-.070
Position	.105	.083	.097	.104	-.017	-.044	-.046	-.028	.016
Organizational tenure	-.020	-.005	-.010	-.012	.005	.004	.006	.001	.001
Interest incongruence		.410***	.406***	.408***	.232***		.092		
Trait self-control			-.200**	-.195**					
Interest incongruence × Trait self-control				-.185***					
Ego depletion					.367***		.342***	.360***	.276***
Moral identity internalization								-.139	-.065
Ego depletion × moral identity internalization									-.242***
R ²	.018	.128	.146	.172	.052	.179	.185	.184	.230
ΔR ²		.111	.018	.026			.134	.005	.046
F	1.972	12.862	12.403	12.864	4.753	19.036	16.531	16.388	18.612

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

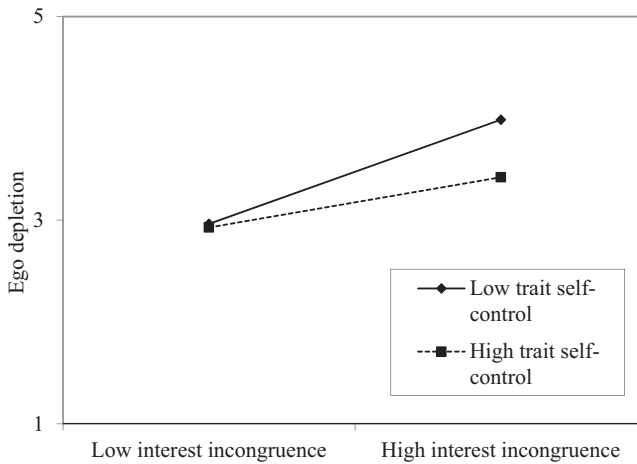


FIGURE 2 Moderating effect of trait self-control on the relationship between interest incongruence and ego depletion.

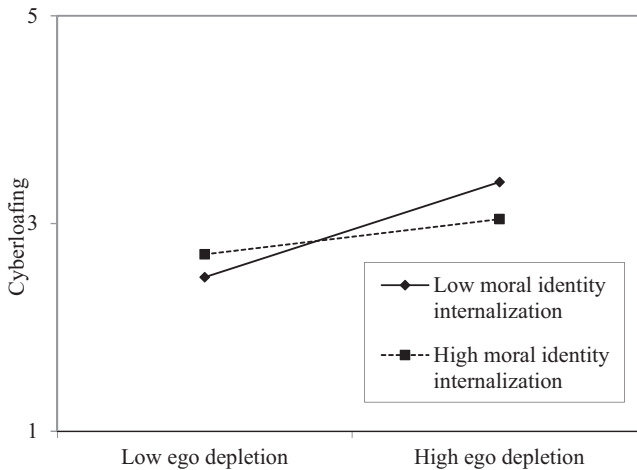


FIGURE 3 Moderating effect of moral identity internalization on the relationship between ego depletion and cyberloafing.

The interaction between ego depletion and moral identity internalization was significant ($\beta = -.242$, $p < .001$, M_0) for cyberloafing. The result of the simple slope test (in Figure 3) confirmed that the positive effect of ego depletion on cyberloafing was more salient for employees with lower levels ($\beta_{\text{simple}} = .403$, $p < .001$) (rather than higher levels, $\beta_{\text{simple}} = -.149$, $p < .05$) of moral identity internalization. Thus, Hypothesis 5(a) was supported. The conditional influence of interest incongruence on cyberloafing via ego depletion was more significant for those lower in moral identity internalization [coefficient = .191, SE = .032, 95% CI = (.131, .256)] than for those higher in moral identity internalization [coefficient = -.014, SE = .045, 95% CI = (-.100, .078)]. Moreover, the moderated mediation index was $-.171$, and the bootstrapping interval excluded zero [95% CI (-.261, -.081)]. Thus, Hypothesis 5(b) was supported.

TABLE 3 Bootstrap results of moderated mediation effects.

Condition	Indirect effects	SE	95% LLCI	95% ULCI
Low trait self-control—low moral identity internalization	.238	.038	.164	.314
Low trait self-control—high moral identity internalization	-.018	.056	-.120	.100
High trait self-control—low moral identity internalization	.117	.030	.062	.178
High trait self-control—high moral identity internalization	-.009	.028	-.061	.050

Table 3 shows the strongest indirect effect of interest incongruence was observed for employees with low trait self-control and low moral identity internalization.³

Supplementary explanation

Some scholars pointed out that the high-point-oriented approaches may hardly capture all useful information related to incongruence (Xu & Li, 2020), and the omission of other interests in the overall interest profiles may compromise the accuracy of the interest (in)congruence index (Bai & Liao, 2019). Therefore, our supplementary analyses' focus was to comparatively test different operationalization approaches of interest (in)congruence using their relative predictions for ego depletion and cyberloafing as criteria.

In addition to the first-letter-oriented approach, we also compared individuals' first three interest letters and their environmental RIASEC profiles (also called the C index; Brown & Gore Jr., 1994). Specifically, we assigned a value ranging from 0 to 3 to represent the degree of incongruence based on their relative positions on Holland's hexagon model (3 = opposite on hexagon, 2 = alternative, 1 = adjacent and 0 = identical), and a weight of 3, 2 and 1 for the first, second and third-letter comparison, respectively. We then calculate the C index by summing the three resultant values. In addition, based on the individual and environmental interest profiles, we operationalize interest incongruence using two profile-based approaches (profile deviance and profile correlation; Xu & Li, 2020). Profile deviance quantifies interest incongruence by calculating the square root of the aggregate squared difference between individual and environmental RIASEC scores (Su et al., 2015). Based on the participants' declared occupational titles, we could identify their own occupational RIASEC scores in the O*NET database (Xu & Li, 2020). Profile correlation quantifies interest congruence by using the correlation between individuals' RIASEC scores and those of their environments (Su et al., 2015). The higher-profile correlations showed greater interest congruence, whereas the lower-profile correlations showed poorer interest congruence (Bai & Liao, 2019).

The results presented in Table 4 demonstrated that the first-letter incongruence index significantly improved the prediction of employees' ego depletion beyond that provided by the C index ($\Delta R^2 = .078, p < .001, M_2$), profile correlation ($\Delta R^2 = .083, p < .001, M_4$) and profile deviance ($\Delta R^2 = .111, p < .001, M_6$), showing that the first-letter incongruence index is a better predictor of ego depletion than any of the three competing (in)congruence indices. Similarly, the results in Table 4 demonstrated that the first-letter incongruence index significantly enhanced the prediction of employees' cyberloafing beyond that provided by the C index ($\Delta R^2 = .036, p < .001, M_8$), profile correlation ($\Delta R^2 = .032, p < .001, M_{10}$) and profile deviance ($\Delta R^2 = .047, p < .001, M_{12}$), suggesting that the

³Further details on the data analysis, both without the control variables and with the combinations of control variables, are available upon request.

TABLE 4 Hierarchical regressions of ego depletion and cyberloafing on four interest (in)congruence indices.

Variable	Ego depletion						Cyberloafing					
	M ₁	M ₂	M ₃	M ₄	M ₅	M ₆	M ₇	M ₈	M ₉	M ₁₀	M ₁₁	M ₁₂
Gender	-.093	-.115	-.102	-.116	-.082	-.113	-.066	-.079	-.074	-.081	-.060	-.078
Education	-.185*	-.169	-.168*	-.171*	-.180	-.175*	-.097	-.087	-.086	-.088	-.096	-.094
Position	.095	.083	.089	.080	.105	.083	-.010	-.017	-.016	-.020	-.005	-.018
Organizational tenure	-.015	-.004	-.017	-.005	-.020	-.005	-.001	.005	-.002	.005	-.004	.005
C.index	.062***	-.041					.034**	-.027				
Profile correlation			-.412***	-.093					-.273**	-.101		
Profile deviance					.008	-.019					-.028	-.043
First-letter incongruence		.534***		.390***		.411***		.314***		.210***		.235***
R ²	.057	.135	.047	.129	.018	.129	.020	.056	.022	.053	.006	.053
ΔR ²		.078		.083		.111		.036		.032		.047
F	5.317***	11.387***	4.301***	10.810***	1.578	10.717***	1.800	4.289***	1.959	4.105***	.506	4.087***

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

first-letter interest incongruence index is a better predictor of employee cyberloafing. Indeed, some scholars insisted that the first letter of the individual/environmental interest profile, representing the most prominent interest (Holland, 1997), is generally stable and has more explanatory power for career decisions than the second and third letters (Li, Yang, et al., 2022). Prior empirical evidence also supported that the first-letter interest incongruence index was positively and significantly related to employees' negative attitudes and work behaviours (e.g., frustration, absenteeism and CWB; Iliescu et al., 2015; Li, Flores, et al., 2022).

We also employed polynomial regressions and response surface modelling to examine the effects of interest incongruence. Integrating response surface methodology with polynomial regressions allows a comprehensive examination of the relationships between two predictors (i.e., personal and occupational interests) and outcome variables. The regression equation is presented below (for the sake of simplicity, the control variables have been omitted from the following presentation):

$$Z = b_0 + b_1E + b_2P + b_3E^2 + b_4(E \times P) + b_5P^2 + e$$

where Z represents ego depletion or cyberloafing; E and P represent scores for a given environment and personal RIASEC interest, respectively; e is the residual error term.

This study postulated that interest incongruence would positively affect ego depletion and cyberloafing. Therefore, higher incongruence between personal and environmental interests would be associated with higher ego depletion and cyberloafing. To test this incongruence effect, we first examined whether the three second-ordered polynomial terms (E^2 , P^2 and $E \times P$) were jointly significant and whether the curvature of the incongruence line ($E = -P$) was significantly positive. Because polynomial regressions and response surface modelling require larger samples to achieve statistical power to detect higher-order effects (Wiegand, 2018; Wiegand et al., 2021), we were only able to confirm that employees experienced higher levels of ego depletion when their artistic interests were incongruent with their environmental artistic interests. Specifically, for artistic interest, the three second-order terms were jointly significant ($\Delta R^2 = .019$, $p < .05$), suggesting a nonlinear relationship between environmental and personal artistic interest and employees' ego depletion. We also found a significant and positive curvature along the incongruence line (.29, $p < .001$), while the surface along the congruence line ($E = P$) was relatively flat (.11, ns). These results confirmed that employees experienced higher levels of ego depletion when their artistic interests were incongruent with environmental artistic interests. Figure 4 presents a graphical representation of the response surface plot.

To further test whether the first-letter incongruence index might have higher validity for predicting employees' ego depletion than operationalizing incongruence via polynomial regression, we incorporated the first-letter incongruence index into the polynomial regressions after adding the polynomial terms. We found that the first-letter incongruence index explained more variation ($\Delta R^2 > 0$) between interest incongruence and employee ego depletion (or cyberloafing) than the polynomial regression and response surface methodology. Further details of the data analysis are available upon request.

DISCUSSION

Spector et al. (2006) posited that employee withdrawal represents a dimension of CWB. Thus, cyberloafing, a minor form of withdrawal, has also been regarded as a form of CWB (Cheng et al., 2020; She & Li, 2023). Although Iliescu et al. (2015) have demonstrated that interest incongruence was positively related to CWB, their CWB scale does not include employees' cyberloafing behaviour. It may be argued that Iliescu et al.'s (2015) research allows for the straightforward formulation of the hypothesized association between interest incongruence and cyberloafing. Nevertheless, this may not be the case, as empirical research (Andel et al., 2022; Hensel & Kacprzak, 2020) has indicated that certain factors exert disparate effects on employees' cyberloafing than other types of CWB. Given that different types of employees' CWB are related differently to specific antecedents and consequences, Spector et al. (2006)

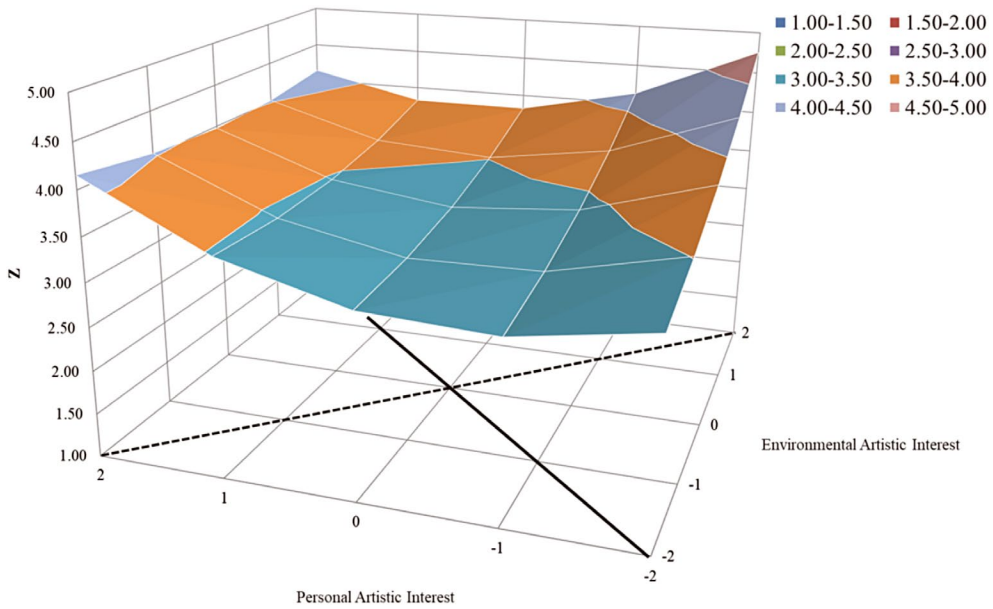


FIGURE 4 Effect of artistic interest incongruence on ego depletion.

have emphasized the advantage of investigating specific types of CWB. By examining differential forms of CWB, related studies may facilitate the implementation of more precise interventions to resolve CWB. In particular, based on the ego depletion theory, Yam et al. (2014) proposed that engaging in some types of CWB may sometimes require more self-regulatory resources than refraining from these behaviours. Additionally, some empirical evidence indicates that only specific types of CWB have been demonstrated to result from self-regulatory resource depletion (Hughes et al., 2023; Liang et al., 2022). Employing ego depletion theory as a theoretical framework, we, therefore, focused on cyberloafing rather than the broader construct of CWB and investigated the effect of interest incongruence on cyberloafing. The empirical results supported our model, confirming that interest incongruence was a significant predictor for employee cyberloafing and that the relationship was mediated by ego depletion. Furthermore, we demonstrated the moderating effects of trait self-control and moral identity internalization.

Theoretical implications

First, our research contributes to the growing body of literature on cyberloafing. Our findings indicate that interest incongruence is an important antecedent of cyberloafing, which responds to calls for further research on employees' cyberloafing and its antecedents (Lim & Teo, 2024). Scholars have posited that different subtypes of P-E (mis)fit represent distinct constructs that exert unique influences on individual outcomes as they tap into different aspects of the environment (Edwards & Billsberry, 2010). Although existing studies have examined the role of overqualification (Cheng et al., 2020) on cyberloafing, they are limited in their narrow focus on the job components of P-E misfit. The present study focused on the broadest level of environments (i.e., vocations; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Furthermore, in contrast to prior studies that have focused on cyberloafing as a coping mechanism for employees experiencing overqualification to alleviate boredom (Andel et al., 2022) and reduce exacerbated feelings of inequity (Cheng et al., 2020), this study regards cyberloafing as a form of self-regulatory failure (Yang et al., 2022).

Second, our investigation builds upon previous theorizing about interest incongruence by offering a novel perspective on its detrimental consequences. The prior theories of interest incongruence posit that employees' perceived incompatibility/discrepancy gives rise to dissimilarity, which then leads to negative emotions and attitudes (e.g., lower organizational commitment and job satisfaction; Li, Flores et al., 2022; Wiegand et al., 2021). The present study posits that interest incongruence not only signals to employees the dissimilarity (Li, Flores, et al., 2022; Li, Yang, et al., 2022) but also triggers a challenging situation in which they may experience significant tension in self-regulation (Iliescu et al., 2015). The resource-based perspective highlights the adverse consequences of interest incongruence and complements the prior attitude/affect-based perspective. Our study suggests that interest incongruence could cause the depletion of self-regulatory resources, leading to cyberloafing.

Third, our results point to the promising perspective that interest incongruence and ego depletion do not always increase engagement in cyberloafing. Specifically, our results demonstrated the moderating role of trait self-control. The ability to self-regulate can vary as a trait (trait self-control) and state (ego depletion; McAllister et al., 2018). However, Lian et al. (2017) pointed out that extant research has 'overly focused on one component of self-regulation—resource depletion perspectives—while neglecting other components that play equally important roles in the self-control processes' (p. 703). Our findings support the protective account of trait self-control (Imhoff et al., 2014), which states that self-control moderates the ego depletion effect.

Finally, our findings demonstrated the moderating effect of moral identity internalization, which responds to the calls for exploring the role of automaticity in moral judgements (Baur et al., 2020) and is consistent with previous research showing that moral identity internalization could attenuate the negative effect of ego depletion on employee ethical behaviours (i.e., Joosten et al., 2014).

Practical implications

Given that the empirical results indicated that interest incongruence led to increased employee cyberloafing, interviewers must design targeted recruitment that maximizes compatibility between individual interests and the environment. The interest measure could also be used in the selection process to help organizations assess the likelihood of applicants experiencing interest incongruence and thus make more informed selection decisions. In addition, for employees experiencing interest incongruence, avenues for recovering from self-regulatory resource depletion are important to thwart cyberloafing. Organizations could implement several job crafting interventions to help employees incorporate personal interests into job tasks (Kuijpers et al., 2020), such as cultivating an autonomy-supportive atmosphere in job design. By doing so, when employees encounter interest incongruence and initiate changes to reduce the discrepancy, they are less likely to experience frustration. Furthermore, organizations also should provide emotion management training to enhance employees' ability to regulate negative emotions.

Finally, managers could reduce cyberloafing by enhancing employees' trait self-control and moral identity internalization. Hiring employees with high trait self-control could help attenuate the negative relationship between interest incongruence and cyberloafing. Despite the stability of trait self-control, intervention studies (Finkel et al., 2009) also suggested that an individual's ability to exercise self-control may improve after repeated training or practice in self-control activities, 'just as a muscle increases in strength with training' (Hagger et al., 2010, p. 501). Therefore, organizations could provide employees with multiple training modules on self-regulatory skills to strengthen their self-control or coping tactics to mitigate negative emotions and fatigue that weaken their self-control. Organizations also should take steps to improve employees' moral identity internalization. Specifically, moral identity internalization or moral-related constructs should be included in the hiring criterion, and applicants with high moral identity internalization should be hired as often as possible (Zhang et al., 2023). Several studies have also argued that environmental stimulation could activate moral identity internalization (Xu & Ma, 2015). Thus, making moral identity schemas

easily accessible through situational interventions (Joosten et al., 2014), such as cultivating a moral climate and providing regular moral education, might increase the likelihood of employees behaving ethically.

Limitations and directions for future research

First, although the moderating effects of moral identity internalization were significant (see Figure 3), the range restriction of cyberloafing raised concerns about the internal validity of our findings. McCabe et al. (2018) have emphasized that range restriction on predictor variables significantly reduces the power to detect moderating effects. Specifically, if employees underreport their cyberloafing, the range restriction in our criterion would attenuate our results, suggesting that our current findings may be conservative. Due to social desirability bias, Cheng et al. (2020) posited that respondents are unlikely to provide completely honest responses regarding their cyberloafing. Future research could use alternative methods to assess cyberloafing (e.g., through monitoring software) to increase internal validity.

Second, to further examine the effects of interest incongruence, future studies would be strengthened by including a larger sample size and a more specific occupational sample, which would allow for more accurate polynomial regressions and response surface modelling. Furthermore, Deng et al. (2016) demonstrated that ego depletion mediated the negative effect of value incongruence on job performance. Future research should examine the effects of other types of P-E misfit and determine whether interest incongruence provides incremental validity over other types of P-E misfit on employee ego depletion and cyberloafing.

Third, other plausible variables may also play moderating roles in the interest incongruence-ego depletion-cyberloafing. In addition to moral identity internalization, future research should examine the moderating effects of other morality-related constructs on the relationship between ego depletion and employees' cyberloafing. For example, Cheng et al. (2020) found that when confronted with ego depletion, employees with high levels of moral disengagement were more likely to engage in political acts to maximize their self-interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Qingxiong Weng: Conceptualization; methodology; formal analysis; visualization; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; funding acquisition; resources; supervision; data curation; project administration; validation. **Lixin Chen:** Conceptualization; methodology; writing – review and editing; writing – original draft; visualization; project administration; investigation; software; validation. **Anastasiia Popelnukha:** Conceptualization; writing – review and editing; visualization; methodology; resources; software. **Xiujuan Wang:** Writing – review and editing; methodology; conceptualization; software.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000(5).

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from all patients (employees) for being included in the study. No animal studies were carried out by the authors for this study.

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