After the Fall: How Perceived Self-Control Protects the Legitimacy of High-Ranking Individuals After Status Loss

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Abstract

We investigate how high-ranking organizational members can protect their legitimacy after status loss. We theorize that internal stakeholders scrutinize the behavior of high-ranking members in the aftermath of status loss to determine whether they are deserving of legitimacy and behavioral support. We argue that perceived self-control subsequent to status loss is diagnostic of legitimacy. In an online and laboratory experiment, we found that internal stakeholders expected leaders who had lost status to be depleted (Study 1), and that higher (versus lower) perceived self-control after status loss led to more positive legitimacy judgments and a greater willingness to support the high-ranking individual after status loss (Studies 1 and 2). We also found that the effect of perceived self-control on legitimacy was explained by affirming internal stakeholders’ instrumental and moral concerns (Studies 1 and 2). In another experiment (Study 3), we found that higher perceived self-control buffered high-ranking individuals from challenges to their position because internal stakeholders were more willing to support them. Finally, in a critical incident study (Study 4), we explored whether the reason for the status loss or the type of perceived self-control influenced the efficacy of the self-control strategy. We found that the reason for the status loss was not a significant factor; however, self-presentation was the most effective “type” of self-control display after status loss on legitimacy, and displaying self-control in multiple ways (e.g., task-related and self-presentation) increased the efficacy of perceived self-control. We discuss the implications of this research for legitimacy judgments, status loss, and self-control.

Key words: Status loss, Status, Legitimacy, Self-control
Introduction

High-ranking employees (e.g., managers, leaders) hold prominent positions in the organizational hierarchy. In addition to their influence (French and Raven 1959), these individuals are typically conferred status – they are respected, admired, and held in high regard (Anderson et al. 2006). The benefits of conferred status have been widely documented, ranging from greater access to valuable resources (Homans 1958), better mental and physical health (Adler et al. 2000), being helped more (Van Der Vegt et al. 2006), and enjoying more choice in romantic partners (Townsend and Levy 1990). A burgeoning area of research (Bendersky and Hays 2012; Marr and Thau 2014; Neeley 2013) highlights, however, that status can also be disputed and lost, for example when a team leader makes a costly error, when sales executive cannot close an important deal, or when a top baseball player loses a high profile salary negotiation. High status individuals are averse to the prospect of losing status (Pettit et al. 2010) because people are less likely to accept influence from status losers (Pettit et al. 2013) and those who lose status feel anxious (Neeley 2013) and perform poorly on work tasks (Marr and Thau 2014). Status losses are not uncommon; 67% of randomly approached workers in a business building reported that they have at least once in their career witnessed a manager lose status.¹

The social and psychological costs of status loss documented by past research suggest that status losses could trigger a downward spiral for high-ranking individuals’ legitimacy. Poorly performing and anxious individuals violate the expectations people hold for leaders (Ridgeway and Berger 1986), and because high-ranking individuals are prominent (Anderson et al. 2001), when they lose status their behavior will be observed by internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are interested parties within the organization who have a ‘stake’ in the organization’s outcomes (e.g., employees; Freeman and Reed 1983) and they confer legitimacy to high-ranking individuals through their judgments that the individual is “appropriate for its context” (Tost 2011, p.688), as well as through behavioral support (Elsbach and Sutton 1992). Legitimacy is critical for high-ranking organizational members to perform effectively in organizations (Tyler 1997). In most organizations today, individuals only ‘make it’ to (or stay at) the top if they are seen as appropriate for that position.

¹ See Study 4 for details on this study.
This taken-for-grantedness, or “cognitive legitimacy,” captures the absence of questions about or challenges to the individual occupying high rank (Suchman 1995). When people believe that high-ranking individuals are deserving of their positions, they are willing to support them, and thus, they will defer to their directives and requests (Selznick 1969; Tyler 1997; Weber 1978). However, status loss may be a turning point at which internal stakeholders gradually downgrade their judgments and reduce their support.

Although status loss may prompt questions about high-ranking individuals’ legitimacy, case studies suggest that not all status losers incur legitimacy penalties. For example, even after being incarcerated for obstruction of justice, Martha Stewart returned to her company with a standing ovation from her employees (2005). Similarly, although former President Bill Clinton was only the second United States president in history to be impeached by Congress (for lying to the American public about an extramarital affair), by the time he left office his job approval ratings were high, at 66 percent (2015). These vivid real-life examples are extreme, but are presented to illustrate that in some cases, internal stakeholders continue to believe in the prominent person’s legitimacy after status loss. Moreover, the fact that status losses are not uncommon, but status hierarchies are generally stable (Ridgeway and Berger 1986), suggests that not everyone who experiences status loss is subsequently seen as illegitimate. All this begs the question of when and why internal stakeholders continue (discontinue) legitimizing high-ranking individuals after status loss.

The goal of this paper is to develop and test a theoretical model that answers this question. Our model starts with the assumption that the status loss of a high-ranking individual is a salient event, which prompts internal stakeholders to scrutinize the status loser’s subsequent behavior to re-evaluate whether he or she was truly deserving of the position. We then draw on theories of legitimacy (Michener and Tausig 1971; Tost 2011; Tyler 1997; Walker et al. 1986) and self-control (see Hagger et al. 2010, for a review) to argue that high-ranking individuals who are perceived to have higher self-control (i.e., display the ability to override immediate impulses and align behavior with organizational standards; Baumeister et al. 1993) after status loss will address the concerns of internal stakeholders and protect their legitimacy. Specifically, we suggest that they will affirm stakeholders’ instrumental, relational, and moral concerns, leading to more positive legitimacy
judgments and fostering a greater willingness to support them. Further, we highlight the downstream consequences of this greater support; we predict that by bolstering internal stakeholders’ willingness to support them, high-ranking individuals who are perceived to have high self-control after status loss can prevent potential challenges to their authority. The full theoretical model is depicted in Figure 1.

We conducted four studies to test predictions which follow from our model. The first two studies included an online (Study 1) and a laboratory experiment (Study 2) examining how and why a high-ranking individual’s perceived self-control after status loss positively affects internal stakeholders’ legitimacy judgments and post-loss support for the high-ranking individual. Study 3 extended these findings by investigating the behavioral consequences of reduced internal stakeholder support after status loss. In this laboratory study, we examined how the bolstering effect of perceived self-control after status loss on internal stakeholders’ willingness to support the high-ranking individual protects high-ranking individuals from challenging behavior after status loss. Finally, in Study 4 we conducted a critical incident study to explore potential boundary conditions of these findings: We examined whether the reason for the status loss (e.g., interpersonal, performance-based) or the type of perceived self-control (e.g., performance, self-presentation) altered the positive effect of perceived self-control after status loss on generalized legitimacy judgments about the high-ranking individual after status loss. Across these studies, we used different methodologies and samples to test for the robustness of our predictions. Stimulus materials, data and syntax for all studies conducted to test our theory are available online at:

https://osf.io/qp4ey/?view_only=85aa4577814e4c8eb1b53dab6b2384e.

By examining how perceived self-control protects the legitimacy of high-ranking individuals after status loss, we contribute to organizational research in several ways. First, although past research has documented the individual costs of status loss (Bendersky and Hays 2012; Marr and Thau 2014; Neeley 2013; Pettit et al. 2013), what happens once these costs are incurred is poorly understood. This exclusive focus on the immediate consequences of status loss for the status loser is limiting because it fails to take into account the larger social and organizational context in which status losses occur. Past research also suggests uniformly negative consequences for status losers. Considering that status losses are relatively common and hierarchies are more or less stable, this picture may be incomplete.
A more realistic assumption is that status loss sets in motion a process by which internal stakeholders try to make sense of the loss, based on the status loser’s subsequent behavior. Past research’s focus on the immediate costs for those who have lost status is also practically problematic as we are unable to guide them toward behaviors that could ameliorate the downstream consequences of status loss.

Second, understanding the conditions under which status losers can maintain their legitimacy is also theoretically important for research on legitimacy. Although we know that legitimacy judgments can change, and that legitimacy is determined “in the eye of the beholder” (Zimmerman and Zeitz 2002, p.416), little empirical attention (see Huy et al. 2014 for an exception) has been devoted to investigating the process through which legitimacy judgments are changed and reestablished (Bitektine 2011; Tost 2011). We address this issue by testing a theory about how the legitimacy of high-ranking individuals is reassessed after status loss. Finally, a great deal of research has examined how people’s self-control impacts intrapersonal outcomes, such as people’s own decisions and behaviors (e.g., Baumeister et al. 1998; DeWall et al. 2011; Schmeichel et al. 2003). Here, we build on recent studies of perceived self-control (Righetti and Finkenauer 2011; Shea et al. 2013) to suggest that people’s self-control may also influence their interpersonal outcomes, such as the judgments and behaviors of others.

**Status Loss and Legitimacy of High-Ranking Individuals**

Status loss occurs when people lose respect, admiration or regard in the eyes of others (Marr and Thau 2014). The events that trigger status loss in a particular context depend on how status is constructed in that context. A group may confer status based predominantly on performance, loyalty, pedigree, or some combination of these (Berger et al. 1972; Ridgeway 1978; Willer 2009). For an event to trigger a status loss, it needs to negatively affect a dimension on which status is based. For example, in an auditing team where status is based primarily on performance expectations, a project leader who makes a significant task-related mistake will experience a decrease in respect, admiration and regard. In a law firm where earnings are the primary determinant of a partner’s status, a partner who loses a high-income-generating client will experience a decrease in status. However, internal stakeholders may not always be privy to the underlying reasons for why a high-ranking individual lost status, and are perhaps only aware that the loss occurred. For example, it may not be common
knowledge whether the lawyer lost the client for performance, interpersonal, or ethical reasons. Regardless of the underlying reason and the severity of the loss, we suggest that the status loss of a high-ranking organizational member will be salient and call into question the legitimacy of that high-ranking individual in the eyes of internal stakeholders.

We build on Tost’s (2011) conceptual review on legitimacy, which proposed that events that violate expectations act as “jolts”, triggering a re-evaluation of legitimacy judgments. The status loss of high-ranking organizational members can be conceptualized as a “jolt” because it violates default expectations (Ridgeway and Berger 1986). People’s deeply held assumption seems to be that the existing hierarchy is ‘how things should be’ (Jost and Banaji 1994; Ridgeway and Berger 1986; Weber 1978). Consequently, individuals believe that those at the top of the organization are worthy of respect, admiration and high regard, and because status is generally thought to be self-perpetuating (Magee and Galinsky 2008; Merton 1968), they expect high-ranking individuals to maintain their high status. Losing status violates this expectation, and events that violate expectations are salient, demanding attention and explanation (Fiske 1980).

As a “jolt”, status loss will prompt internal stakeholders to scrutinize the high-ranking individual’s actions, but it seems unlikely that status loss will automatically reverse people’s legitimacy judgments and support for high-ranking individuals (Polman et al. 2013). People only revise their firmly held beliefs if they are confronted with strong evidence that disconfirms the core of their belief (Hewstone et al. 1992). So, we argue that internal stakeholders are likely to scrutinize the post-loss behavior of high-ranking individuals to reassess whether they are deserving of legitimacy, and we propose that high-ranking individuals who are perceived to display self-control will protect their legitimacy in the eyes of internal stakeholders.

**Perceived Self-Control and Legitimacy**

Our focus on perceived self-control follows from recent studies on the effects of status loss for high-ranking individuals. These studies find that the mere prospect of status loss is aversive; it causes stress (Scheepers et al. 2009) and motivates people to avoid the loss (Pettit et al. 2010). Actually losing status leads to even stronger reactions. Status losers report anxiety and insecurity (Neeley 2013), and high status individuals require self-affirmation (e.g., by focusing their attention on family and friends).
to perform well after status loss (Marr and Thau 2014). Together, these findings highlight that the experience of status loss is often threatening for high-ranking individuals.

Threatening experiences have a depleting effect on people’s self-control (Crocker and Park 2004; Sedikides 2012). When people’s self-control is depleted, they experience a motivational and attentional shift from activities requiring the hard work of further restraint to those characterized by gratification (Inzlicht and Schmeichel 2012). Gratifying activities require little effort and are immediately personally rewarding, interesting and enjoyable. For example, when self-control resources are depleted, people are more likely to quit tasks that require restraint such as mental challenges (Baumeister et al. 1998), and engage in activities that are immediately rewarding such as eating calorie-laden foods (Cornil and Chandon 2013). Thus, because of their depletion, it would not be surprising for high-ranking status losers to lack persistence or perform poorly on work tasks after status loss (Marr and Thau 2014). Indeed, it would require considerable willpower for high-ranking individuals to override their desire for immediate gratification to align their behavior with organizational standards (i.e., demonstrate high self-control; Baumeister et al. 1993; Thau and Mitchell 2010), for example being professional, focusing and working hard, not lashing out at coworkers who treat one poorly, being punctual, working consistently and not procrastinating. In sum, the depletion high-ranking individuals experience after status loss will challenge their ability to exercise self-control in conducting their work.

Paradoxically, this creates a situation where not only do high-rank individuals potentially experience the greatest self-control deficits after status loss (Marr and Thau, 2014), but because of the responsibilities associated with high rank (Keltner et al. 2008), they also face many activities requiring further restraint in the aftermath of status loss. For example, when a chef learns that his restaurant has fallen off a featured ‘Top 10’ list, he still needs to plan the menu, order supplies and coordinate the work of the kitchen and staff. Similarly, when an attorney at a law firm loses an important client, she still has to attend to the needs of her other (perhaps demanding) clients.

Given our conceptualization of status loss as a jolt, prompting stakeholders to scrutinize the highly ranked individual with an intensity they would not have otherwise (cf. Tost 2011), how the leader performs tasks and activities after status loss will be critical. In the theory below, we assume
that internal stakeholders recognize status loss as an event challenging self-control. Take as an example job loss, which is known to be so stressful it can induce health problems (Luo 2010), or public failures, which are acknowledged to be “rough, no matter how you slice it” (Gregoire 2014). Consequently, when a high-ranking individual is perceived to overcome their impulse for gratification after status loss and instead align their behavior with the demands of the situation, internal stakeholders will infer that they are truly deserving of their position and thus continue to support them.

A nascent area of research on perceived self-control finds that people can detect both trait and state-based self-control in others (Righetti and Finkenauer 2011). Many behavioral indicators of self-control exist (e.g., regulating emotions, self-presenting, persisting and performing, sacrificing for the group). However, probably the most context-relevant and observable behaviors that high-ranking individuals might display to increase their perceived self-control at work would be task-related (e.g., being punctual, focusing well, not procrastinating, persisting on difficult or boring tasks). Although people do not seem to have a universal preference for others whom they perceive as having high self-control (Shea et al. 2013), we expect that higher perceived self-control after status loss will be associated with greater conferred legitimacy in terms of more positive legitimacy judgments and greater support for the high-ranking individual.

Recent theorizing about how legitimacy judgments are reassessed provides insight into how perceived self-control might influence legitimacy judgments and support after status loss. Tost (2011) suggests that when individuals actively reassess people’s legitimacy, they are generally concerned about the high-rank individual’s instrumental, relational and moral characteristics. Instrumentality perceptions refer to the effectiveness, efficiency or utility of the scrutinized person. Relationally, the individual may be perceived as more or less likeable, friendly and benevolent. Finally, the trustworthiness and integrity of the person under consideration affirms the moral dimension on which legitimacy judgments are based. The three dimensions of evaluations are not mutually exclusive and individuals may be evaluated on any one or all of these dimensions—depending on which characteristics are most relevant to legitimacy in that context. Evaluations on the relevant dimensions culminate in a generalized legitimacy judgment, and this judgment of appropriateness, in turn,
promotes a willingness to support the high-ranking individual, or a “feeling of obligation to comply” (Tyler 1997).

Building on this theory, we suggest that in the aftermath of status loss, perceived self-control will positively influence legitimacy by addressing instrumental, relational and moral concerns about the high-ranking individual. Being perceived to override undesirable—even if understandable—responses to the status loss to meet organizational standards (i.e., high perceived self-control) should affirm evaluations of the effectiveness and the utility of the high-ranking individual. Because internal stakeholders are concerned about the organization’s successful operation, being evaluated as competent and effective (i.e., addressing instrumental concerns) will be critical to reinforcing judgments about the high-ranking individuals’ appropriateness for their position.

Similarly, those who appear to work hard and put the needs of others before themselves after a setback may be evaluated as more likeable and benevolent, and past research has found such relational concerns to be a primary determinant of the legitimacy judgment formation (Tyler 1997). Relational concerns such as the high-ranking individual’s warmth, likeability, friendliness and benevolence have implications for the quality of social relationship one can have with that high-ranking individual (Tyler 1997). Internal stakeholders are typically concerned about the potential for a social relationship with a high-ranking organizational member because there are benefits to being affiliated with high status others (Benjamin and Podolny 1999). Therefore, being seen as more likeable and benevolent (i.e., addressing relational concerns) will reinforce judgments about high-ranking individuals’ appropriateness for their position.

Finally, when high-ranking individuals are perceived to resist their own desire for immediate gratification after status loss to align their behavior with the demands of their position, they are also behaving in a way that indirectly or directly benefits their group (Ridgeway and Diekema 1989; Willer 2009), and this should affirm the trustworthiness and integrity of those high-ranking individuals. Indeed, recent studies have found that people are more likely to trust individuals whom they perceive to have high self-control (Righetti and Finkenauer 2011). Because of their interdependence, internal stakeholders rely on high-ranking organizational members to behave in ways that will not harm them, and thus, being evaluated as trustworthy and high in integrity will be
important for affirming the moral evaluations that underlie legitimacy judgments. Therefore, the affirmation of these instrumental, relational and moral dimensions due to higher perceived self-control after status loss should lead to more positive legitimacy judgments from internal stakeholders.

Taken together, the arguments presented above suggest that greater perceived self-control after status loss will positively influence internal stakeholders’ generalized legitimacy judgments about, and consequently their willingness to support the high-ranking individual in the aftermath of status loss. Moreover, we suggest that the effect of perceived self-control on conferred legitimacy will be explained by instrumental, relational and moral evaluations of the high-ranking individual. Thus, we predict:

HYPOTHESIS 1. After a high-ranking individual’s status loss, perceptions of higher (versus lower) self-control positively affect internal stakeholders’ (a) legitimacy judgments about and (b) willingness to support the high-ranking individual.

HYPOTHESIS 2. The positive indirect effect of higher perceived self-control after status loss on internal stakeholders’ legitimacy judgments and then willingness to support the high-ranking individual is mediated by (a) instrumental, (b) relational and (c) moral evaluations of the high-ranking individual.

It is worth noting that although there may be other traits, behaviors or tactics high-ranking individuals could use to reinforce their legitimacy, we argue that perceived self-control offers several advantages. First, perceived self-control should be effective in affirming multiple dimensions relevant to legitimacy judgments after status loss. For example, whereas other goal-directed behavior such as high quality performance after status loss might enhance perceptions of instrumentality, perceived self-control after status loss is predicted to address instrumental, relational and moral concerns. Second, although perceptions of high quality performance may also positively influence instrumental evaluations, the majority of internal stakeholders are not in a position to evaluate accurately the objective performance of high-ranking organizational members. Internal stakeholders—particularly those subordinate to the high-ranking individual—may not even see the work product of the high-ranking individual, but they can observe high-ranking individuals’ behavior in completing their work. Additionally, after status loss, the vigilance and effort required to display high self-control (Muraven
and Baumeister 2000) is likely to be more impactful to internal stakeholders than performance (which may actually be relatively easy for top performers). Finally, demonstrations of self-control may be more subtle and appear less strategic than other behaviors. For example, whereas demonstrations of self-control may indirectly signal attributions about the instrumental, relational and moral fortitude of the high-ranking individual, taking direct actions to prove one is a star performer (instrumental), great friend (relational) and trustworthy confidante (moral) may appear strategic and backfire as a result.

**Study 1**

Study 1 was designed as an initial test of our model. Our model suggests that because the experience of status loss is depleting, being perceived to overcome this depletion and align one’s behavior with organizational standards (i.e., displaying high self-control) will protect legitimacy after status loss. Accordingly, in Study 1 we first tested the assumption that internal stakeholders perceive high-ranking individuals to be depleted after status loss. Then, we tested our theory that higher perceived self-control after status loss protects the generalized legitimacy judgments (Hypothesis 1a) and willingness to support (Hypothesis 1b) high-ranking individuals who have lost status, and that instrumental, relational and moral evaluations explain this effect of higher perceived self-control on conferred legitimacy (Hypothesis 2a, 2b and 2c).

**Study 1 Method**

*Participants and Study Design.* Three-hundred and thirty-two English speaking adults, working in the United States, completed a scenario study on “Groups at Work”. All participants were voluntary members of research panel who were recruited by a market research company through internet-based advertisements to complete occasional online surveys in return for payment and prizes (see Bianchi and Brockner 2012; Blader et al. 2013, for other recent studies using online research panels). To ensure high quality responses, participants who did not meet the screening criteria (e.g., individuals who were not currently working), did not agree that they were willing to carefully read and respond to questions in the survey, or did not pass the two attention checks at the beginning of the study were thanked for their interest in the study and automatically redirected out of the survey. An additional four participants who passed these initial checks, but provided low quality responses (e.g., gibberish answers to open-ended questions) were also excluded from the sample. Therefore, the final sample
included three hundred and twenty-eight participants (97.9% working full-time, 2.1% working part-time; mean age = 42.70, SD = 10.90; 236 females). The sample included 81.2% White, 9.4% Black or African American, 5% Hispanic or Latino, 2.7% Asian, 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native participants, and 1.2% who identified their ethnicity as “other”.

To test our main prediction that higher perceived self-control after status loss leads to more positive legitimacy judgments and greater support (Hypothesis 1a and 1b), we needed to examine the legitimacy of high-ranking individuals who are perceived to have high self-control after status loss compared to those perceived to have low self-control after status loss. However, to understand whether higher perceived self-control after status loss “protects” high-ranking individuals’ legitimacy, it is also helpful to compare the legitimacy of high-ranking individuals who are perceived to have high self-control after status loss with those high-ranking individuals whose self-control could not be observed after status loss, as well as high-ranking individuals who did not experience a status loss at all. Accordingly, participants were randomly assigned to either one of the experimental conditions (high perceived self-control after status loss / low perceived self-control after status loss) or one of the control conditions (no self-control information after status loss / no self-control information after status maintained) between participants design. Participants read a workplace scenario based on their condition and answered questions about how they would respond in this situation.

Scenario. The scenario asked participants to imagine that they worked for CPG Inc., a multinational consumer packaged goods company. They read that at CPG they work as a team in developing new household goods (e.g., cleaning products). The scenario indicated that although the team comes up with ideas and prototypes for new products, the leader of the group is the one who ultimately decides which ideas should go into production. The leader of their group was described as being responsible for making work assignments and evaluating team members’ performance. All participants read that “Currently, the leader of your group is Sam, the Interim VP of global new product development.”

Status Loss Manipulation. Next, participants read that at the beginning of this week, they received a memo from the CEO. Specifically, participants in the status loss condition read:
“Sam’s title, as the Interim VP of global new product development, was being changed; Sam would be returning to his lower status director position. The memo indicated that this title change was always part of the company’s strategy but you know that it is really a demotion. Regardless of the change in Sam’s title, Sam is still the leader of your group.”

Participants in the status maintenance condition read a version of the memo where, instead of Sam eventually being demoted, Sam retains his VP title. Specifically:

“Sam will be staying as the VP of global new product development, instead of returning to his (lower status) director position. The memo indicated that Sam’s keeping this title was always part of the company’s strategy. Regardless of Sam’s title, Sam is still the leader of your group.”

To reinforce the manipulation, participants were asked to respond to an open-ended question asking how they thought Sam would think and feel after receiving this news from the CEO, and they answered questions about the high-ranking individuals’ self-control depletion.

Self-Control Manipulation. After the status loss manipulation, participants in the control conditions (no self-control information after status maintenance / no self-control information after status loss) did not receive any self-control information about Sam and were directed to the measures portion of the study. However, participants in the high and low perceived self-control conditions read about their observations of Sam over the past week (after the status loss). The perceived self-control manipulation was adapted from Shea, Davisson and Fitzsimons (2013) and included four statements about the leader’s work-related self-control based on Tangney and colleagues’ (2004) self-control scale. Importantly, to control for perceptions of the leader’s performance, all participants read a statement that the leader’s finished products were of high quality. A pretest of Shea’s self-control manipulation in previous work (see Shea et al. 2013) showed that participants did not perceive differences in the outcomes or competence of the managers. Specifically, participants in the high (low) perceived self-control conditions read that,

Since the memo went out, you have been watching Sam, and you have observed that Sam has been arriving early to the office every day (not been on time to work in the morning), and has been consistently on task (at times he has seemed unfocused). Sam’s peers in the organization have even commented that Sam has been difficult to “keep up with” (making impulsive decisions). Despite the (There have been) many distractions in the office, Sam has not been procrastinating (and Sam has been procrastinating). Sam has been meeting all deadlines for the team with ease, putting in full days of work consistently, and (When big deadlines for the team have approached, Sam has scrambled to get things done at the last minute; however,) you know that Sam’s finished products have still been of high quality.
After reading the scenario, participants were asked two open-ended questions—about how they evaluate their leader and how they would feel about Sam continuing to be their manager and their group’s leader.

*Measures.* Participants responded to a series of questions about their leader, including the measures of self-control depletion, instrumental, relational and moral evaluations, generalized legitimacy judgments, willingness to support the leader, and manipulation checks. All measures used seven-point scales (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *a great deal/a lot*) unless otherwise noted.

**Self-control resource depletion:** Participants indicated the extent to which they expected that their leader would feel depleted after the CEO’s memo went out (i.e., after status loss/after status maintenance). Depletion was assessed using a five-item scale of stated self-control resource depletion validated by Lanaj, Johnson and Barnes (2014) adapted so that the referent would be “Sam”. Items included “Sam would feel drained”, “It would take a lot of effort for Sam to concentrate on something”, and “Sam would feel like his/her willpower is gone” ($\alpha = .94$).

**Instrumental, relational and moral evaluations:** Consistent with the conceptualization of Tost (2011) and previous scales (Leach et al. 2007; Michener and Lawler 1975), *instrumentality* was evaluated by indicating the extent to which the leader was “competent”, “skillful”, “effective” and “masterful” ($\alpha = .91$); *relational* concerns were captured by assessing the extent to which the leader was “likeable”, “friendly”, “benevolent” and “warm” ($\alpha = .90$); and *morality* evaluations were assessed by the items “sincere”, “trustworthy”, had “high integrity” and was “generous” ($\alpha = .93$)\(^2\).

**Generalized legitimacy judgments:** Judgments about the leader’s legitimacy were measured with three items adapted from Michener and Lawler’s (1975) measure of endorsement, including: “It is legitimate for him/her to occupy a high-ranking position in your group today?”, “You support him/her being your group's leader?”, and “You would be willing to have him/her be a leader of your group in the future?” ($\alpha = .93$).

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\(^2\) A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) verified the proposed distinction between the three dimensions of evaluations, indicating that a three-factor model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 274.98$, $df = 51$, CFI = .94, SRMR = .04, CD = .997), and was better fitting than a two-factor ($\chi^2 = 449.65$, $df = 53$, CFI = .89, SRMR = .05, CD = .991; $\chi^2_{\text{diff}} = 174.67$, $df_{\text{diff}} = 2$, $p < .0001$) or one-factor model ($\chi^2 = 747.73$, $df = 54$, CFI = .81, SRMR = .07, CD = .96; $\chi^2_{\text{diff}} = 472.75$, $df_{\text{diff}} = 3$, $p < .0001$).
**Willingness to support:** We examined the extent to which participants were willing to continue to support (keep) their current leader (Chang et al. 2015; Duguid 2011) even when given an opportunity to have that leader replaced. Participants were asked, “Based on what you know about your leader, would you be willing to send a request to management to replace Sam as your leader?” The text indicated the request would only be seen by management (not Sam) and management would only make the requested change if two or more team members submitted a request. Participants then indicated whether they wanted to: 1 = submit request, 2 = submit request if at least one of your group members also submits a request, 3 = do not submit a request. Thus, lower scores indicate an unwillingness to support the leader, whereas higher scores indicate a greater willingness to support the leader.

*Manipulation checks:* To confirm the effectiveness of the manipulation of *status loss*, we asked participants “To what extent did Sam lose status in the eyes of his/her group members?”, and “How much status did Sam lose?” (α = .84). Next, to verify the manipulation of *perceived self-control*, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which the leader demonstrated self-control, self-restraint, willpower and persistence, after receiving the CEO’s memo (α = .95).

**Study 1 Results**

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables included in Study 1.

*Manipulation Checks.* To verify the effectiveness of the status loss manipulation, we conducted an ANOVA with the status loss manipulation check as the dependent variable and status loss (versus status maintenance) as the factor. In the status loss conditions, participants thought the leader had lost more status (M = 4.08, SD = 1.63) than in the status maintenance condition (M = 2.15, SD = 1.41), F(1, 327) = 82.05, p < .001, η² = .20. Next, to confirm the effectiveness of the self-control manipulation we conducted another ANOVA with the self-control manipulation check as the dependent variable and condition as the independent variable. In the status loss, high self-control condition participants perceived the leader as having more self-control (M = 6.25, SD = .87) than did those in the status loss, low self-control condition (M = 3.71, SD = 1.43, p < .001) or either of the control conditions (status maintenance: M = 4.81, SD = 1.28; status loss, no self-control information: M = 4.93, SD = 1.28; ps < .001). These results suggest that the manipulations had the intended effects.
Analysis. Our theory argues that perceptions of self-control after status loss help to buffer high-ranking individuals’ legitimacy after status loss because the experience of status loss is depleting and thus, displaying self-control in the aftermath of status loss is a strong signal of legitimacy. Implicit in this argument is that internal stakeholders perceive status loss as depleting. Therefore, we first conducted an ANOVA with self-control resource depletion as the dependent variable and status loss as the factor. As predicted, participants expected the high-ranking individual to be more depleted after losing status ($M = 4.91, SD = 1.35$) compared to when the leader did not lose status ($M = 2.69, SD = 1.29$), $F(1, 327) = 153.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .32$. This indicates that internal stakeholders do expect status loss to deplete high-ranking individuals’ self-control.

Generalized legitimacy judgments. Given that internal stakeholders believed that status loss would deplete high-ranking individuals’ self-control, we next conducted an ANOVA to examine whether being perceived to enact greater self-control after status loss would positively influence the generalized legitimacy judgments of high-ranking individuals after status loss (Hypothesis 1a). There was a significant effect of condition on legitimacy judgments, $F(3, 306) = 21.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$. We compared the means across conditions (see Figure 2) and found that high-ranking individuals who were perceived to have high self-control after status loss were judged to be more legitimate ($M = 6.01, SD = 1.11$) than those who were perceived to have low self-control after status loss ($M = 4.25, SD = 1.65$), $t(306) = 7.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .17$, as well as, those whom they did not observe (i.e., no self-control information) after status loss ($M = 4.87, SD = 1.52$) $t(306) = 5.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Moreover, high-ranking individuals who were perceived to demonstrate high self-control in the aftermath of status loss were actually judged to be more legitimate than high-ranking individuals who did not experience status loss ($M = 5.21, SD = .25$), $t(306) = 3.46$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$. These results provide initial support for Hypothesis 1a, and show that perceived self-control positively influences legitimacy judgments after status loss.

Willingness to support: We next examined the extent to which higher perceived self-control after status loss influenced greater willingness to support the high-ranking individual (Hypothesis 1b). We found a significant effect of condition on support for the leader, $F(3, 325) = 11.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$. Specifically, participants were more willing to support leaders in the high self-control after...
status loss condition ($M = 2.76, SD = .59$) than those in the low self-control after status loss condition ($M = 2.16, SD = .84$), $t(325) = 5.41, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08$, or those in the no self-control information after status loss condition ($M = 2.47, SD = .78$), $t(325) = 2.62, p = .01, \eta^2 = .02$. Moreover, participants were no less willing to support a high-ranking individual who was perceived to have high self-control after status loss than a high-ranking individual who did not lose status ($M = 2.70, SD = .64$), $t(325) = .49, p = .62$. These results provide support for Hypothesis 1b.

Mediation analyses: Finally, we examined whether the effect of perceived self-control on legitimacy judgments and willingness to support the high-ranking individual could be explained by more positive evaluations of the leader’s instrumental (Hypothesis 2a), relational (Hypothesis 2b) and moral (Hypothesis 2c) dimensions. We focused on the two experimental conditions (high versus low perceived self-control after status loss), and conducted bootstrapped multiple mediation analyses using Hayes’ (2013) statistical software to test the path from perceived self-control to legitimacy judgments and then willingness to support the leader, through instrumental, relational and moral evaluations of the leader. The model we tested, and the coefficients for each path, are illustrated in Figure 3.

The results showed a significant and positive total indirect effect (.43) through instrumental, relational and moral evaluations (95% CI = .25, 63). Specifically, we found the predicted indirect effects through instrumental and moral concerns about the leader, such that higher perceived self-control had a positive indirect effect (.14) on legitimacy judgments and then willingness to support the leader through the instrumentality of the leader (95% CI = .06, .26), and higher perceived self-control had a positive indirect effect (.08) on legitimacy judgments and then willingness to support the leader through the morality of the leader (95% CI = .01, .21). We did not find a significant indirect effect through relational concerns about the leader as the 95% confidence interval crossed zero (95% CI = -.03, .01). These results provide support for Hypothesis 2a and 2c (but not Hypothesis 2b), and suggest that after status loss, perceived self-control protects legitimacy judgments and willingness to support high-ranking individuals by reinforcing evaluations of the high-ranking individual’s instrumentality and morality.

**Study 1 Discussion**
The results of Study 1 provide support for our assumption that internal stakeholders expect high-ranking individuals to be depleted by status loss. As predicted, perceived self-control after status loss positively influenced internal stakeholder’s generalized legitimacy judgments about (Hypothesis 1a) and willingness to support the high-ranking individual (Hypothesis 1b), and instrumentality and morality evaluations explained the indirect effect of perceived self-control on legitimacy judgments and subsequent willingness to support the high-ranking individual (Hypothesis 2a and 2c). We did not find support for relational evaluations as a mediator.

Although these findings provide initial support for our theoretical model, there are several limitations. First, participants judged a situation they imagined rather than experienced. It is possible that when individuals actually experience these situations and their own outcomes at stake, they might judge high-ranking individuals who lose status more harshly and be less willing to support them. Indeed, in this study we found no difference in the legitimacy judgments reported in the no self-control information after status loss versus no self-control information after status maintained conditions, suggesting that participants were hesitant to negatively judge high-ranking individuals without additional information about their behavior afterwards.

Relatedly, to determine whether internal stakeholders expect a high-ranking individual who loses status to be depleted, participants thought about how the high-ranking individual would feel and the extent to which that person would be depleted. Although these questions were necessary to test a critical assumption in our theory, these questions may have made participants more sympathetic to the high-ranking individuals’ status loss than they would had they not been explicitly prompted to consider the high-ranking individuals’ perspective. Study 2 was designed to address these limitations.

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to constructively replicate the findings of Study 1, in a higher-involvement laboratory study in which participants were actually in the position of internal stakeholders (i.e., the high-ranking individual was their leader) and were not specifically prompted to consider the feelings of the high-ranking individual. Study 2 also used a different manipulation of self-control by focusing on one example of task-based self-control (i.e., persistence).

Study 2 Method
Participants and Study Design. Two hundred and nineteen undergraduate college students (121 females) at a university in the United States completed a study on “Project Teams in Organizations” for course credit. The sample included 60.3% White, 26.0% Asian, 5% Black or African American, and 5% Hispanic or Latino participants. As in Study 1, participants were assigned to either one of the experimental conditions (high perceived self-control after status loss / low perceived self-control after status loss) or a control condition. Because we did not find significant differences between the control conditions used in Study 1, in Study 2 we used only one control condition (no self-control information after status maintained).

Procedure. Participants were told that they would complete the study in the role of associates at a management consulting company where they work in project-based teams to help client organizations improve their performance, typically by analyzing existing organizational problems and constructing plans for improvement. They read that, as an associate, on any given day they are required to complete individual analytical tasks, team member evaluations and team decision-making tasks. Accordingly, participants learned that for the study, they had been randomly assigned to work in teams of three or four associates with a team leader, and they would complete (1) a team member evaluation, and then would go to a different room to complete (2) a decision-making task with their project team. They were informed that the leader of their project team was responsible for assigning work to each group member and submitting the final group decision at the end of the exercise. Finally, to ensure they would feel they had a stake in the team’s outcomes they learned that the best performing team would receive a bonus at the end of the study. In reality, there was no group decision-making task. The purpose of this deception was that participants would complete the evaluation of their leader believing that this high-ranking individual was their leader (i.e., to ensure they would evaluate the high-ranking individual as an internal stakeholder) and so that they would expect to interact with their leader.

For the team evaluation task, participants were told that they would provide an initial evaluation of their leader. They read that their leader in the study today had been a leader in a previous consulting study, which included a similar team decision-making task and an independent task for their client. Participants were told that they would have the opportunity to view a summary
report based on their leader’s participation in this previous study. To ensure participants would be honest about their judgments, they were told that their evaluation would be kept anonymous and confidential.

The summary report included: (a) a leader profile including the leader’s demographic information (age, student/work status, education), as well as scores on a “Leadership Assessment Test” and “Problem Solving Test”; (b) a statement that the leader had been assigned to be the leader of the group at the beginning of the first task based on their test scores; (c) a summary of the team’s decision-making results from the alleged “previous study” and a statement that the team had successfully completed both tasks would receive a bonus. All of the aforementioned information in the summary report was consistent across study conditions.

Status Loss Manipulation. The only difference in the summary report between conditions was the manipulation of status loss. Specifically, the report indicated that before and after the team decision-making task, team members were given 100 “status points” to allocate among their team members, and that the leader received a copy of his/her evaluation before completing the independent task for the client. Participants then viewed a “scanned copy of the leader’s results” which included a bar graph of the leader’s status points (versus the other team members’ total points) before the team decision-making task, and a bar graph of the leader’s status points (versus the other team members’ total status points) after the team decision-making task. In the status maintenance condition, the graphs illustrated that the leader received almost exactly the same number of status points before (72) and after (73) the team decision-making task. However, in the status loss condition, the graphs illustrated that the leader had more status points before (72) than after (31) the team decision-making task (i.e., the leader lost 57.5% of his/her status points). Learning that their leader had lost such a significant amount of status in the other group after leading a decision-making task (the very same type of task the leader would be completing with the participant) would constitute a decrease in the amount of respect, admiration and regard the leader had in the eyes of the participant.

3 The number of status points for the leader was increased by one point (and the other team members were decreased by one point) so that the leader appeared to have maintained his/her status, but at the same time the graphs would not be identical (which might trigger participant suspicion).
Self-Control Manipulation. Observing a coworker persist (or not) in a difficult task is likely germane to much of organizational life, and persistence is often used as an indicator of self-control (Hagger et al. 2010). Therefore, in Study 2 we used a display of persistence to manipulate perceived self-control. Participants read that after receiving their team member evaluations, each team member was sent to a separate room to complete the final team task independently. Participants read the following task instructions, adapted from instructions given in past assessments of self-control (Baumeister et al. 1998; Muraven et al. 1998):

“You have up to 15 minutes to work on the following analytical problems for your client. If you either finish, or have tried as hard as you can and give up trying to solve the problems, you can surf the internet for the remaining time.”

Participants then viewed a “scanned copy of the leader’s results” which included handwritten comments from the experimenter that said either “Participant exerted a great deal of effort on task and attempted all questions” (high self-control) or “Participant exerted little effort, quit task and did not attempt all questions” (low self-control).

Measures. The participant then evaluated instrumental ($\alpha = .95$), relational ($\alpha = .94$) and moral ($\alpha = .93$) concerns about the leader and judged the leader’s legitimacy ($\alpha = .97$) using the same scales as in Study 1. The assessment of willingness to support the leader was the same as in Study 1, except it was adapted slightly such that participants were then informed that they could send a request to “the experimenter” to replace their leader for the team task.

Manipulation, suspicion and quality checks: First, to verify the manipulation of status loss, we asked participants “To what extent did the leader lose status on their team in the previous study?” and “How much status did the leader lose in the previous study?” (1 = not at all to 7 = a great deal/ a lot; $\alpha = .84$). Second, to verify the manipulation of perceived self-control, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which the leader demonstrated self-control, self-restraint, willpower and persistence in the independent analytical task (1 = not at all to 7 = a great deal/ a lot; $\alpha = .95$). Participants were also asked an open-ended question about whether they had any other comments that would help us understand their evaluation of the target participant, which was coded for suspicion (e.g., doubt that their leader was a real participant) and English proficiency (the participant pool
included individuals for whom English is not a first language, but all materials were in English and participants needed to read and comprehend the materials to understand the study context and evaluate their leader). No participants indicated suspicion; however, because only 8% of participants provided any comments, we were not able to accurately assess English proficiency from this open-ended variable. Therefore, in our analyses we excluded 24 participants (11% of sample) who did not consider English to be a first language, leaving us a final sample of 195 participants. We also re-ran the analyses including these participants and the exclusion of these cases produced substantially similar results.

Study 2 Results

Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables included in Study 2.

Manipulation Checks. We conducted ANOVAs to determine the effectiveness of the status loss and self-control manipulations. In the status loss condition, participants thought the leader had lost more status ($M = 4.80, SD = 1.47$) than in the status maintenance conditions ($M = 2.07, SD = 1.23$), $F(1, 193) = 198.54, p < .001, \eta^2 = .51$. Next, those in the high perceived self-control condition viewed the leader as having more self-control ($M = 5.15, SD = .82$) than in the low perceived self-control condition ($M = 2.37, SD = .97, p < .001$) and the control (no self-control information) condition ($M = 4.84, SD = .82, p = .05$). These results suggest that the manipulations had the intended effects.

Generalized Legitimacy Judgments. Our main prediction was that high perceived self-control after status loss would positively affect the legitimacy of the high-ranking individual (Hypothesis 1a). Accordingly, we first conducted an ANOVA to examine the effect of the condition on legitimacy judgments. There was a significant effect of condition on legitimacy judgments, $F(2, 192) = 139.98, p < .001, \eta^2 = .59$. Further examination of this effect (see Figure 4) showed that leaders who were perceived to have higher self-control after status loss were judged to be more legitimate ($M = 4.63, SD = 1.15$) than those who were perceived to have lower self-control after status loss ($M = 2.52, SD = 1.08$), $t(192) = 10.11, p < .001 \eta^2 = .35$. However, those who were perceived to have high self-control

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4 All significant comparisons and indirect effects presented in the results section remained significant $ps < .05$. 
after status loss were still judged to have lower legitimacy than leaders who did not experience status loss ($M = 5.44, SD = .88$), $t(192) = -4.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$.

**Willingness to Support.** We next examined the effect of condition on participants’ willingness to support their leader (Hypothesis 1b). There was a significant effect of condition on willingness to support the leader, $F(2, 192) = 53.71, p < .001, \eta^2 = .36$. Participants were more willing to support leaders who were perceived to have higher self-control after status loss ($M = 2.57, SD = .63$) than those who were perceived to have lower self-control after status loss ($M = 1.64, SD = .67$), $t(192) = 7.18, p < .001$. Moreover, there was no significant difference in the extent to which participants were willing to support leaders who were perceived to have high self-control after status loss compared to those who did not experience status loss ($M = 2.75, SD = .59$), $t(192) = 1.64, p = .10$. This suggests that although internal stakeholders may judge leaders who have not experienced status loss as more appropriate than those who lose status and display high self-control, being perceived to have higher self-control after status loss protects the legitimacy of high-ranking individuals sufficiently that their group members are still willing to support them as the leader. These results are displayed in Figure 4.

**Mediation Analyses.** Next, we examined the extent to which instrumental, relational and moral evaluations explain the relationship between the leader’s higher perceived self-control after status loss and internal stakeholder’s legitimacy judgments and willingness to support the leader (Hypothesis 2a, 2b and 2c). As in Study 1, we compared the experimental conditions (high perceived self-control after status loss versus low perceived self-control after status loss) and used bootstrapped mediation analysis (Hayes, 2013) to test for an indirect effect of perceived self-control on legitimacy judgments and then willingness to support the leader through instrumental, relational and moral evaluations. Figure 5 illustrates the model tested and the coefficients for each path.

The results showed a significant and positive total indirect effect (.72) through the mediators (95% CI = .48, 1.01). Examining the specific indirect effects, we found the hypothesized effects through instrumental and moral concerns about the leader, such that higher perceived self-control had a positive indirect effect (.19) on legitimacy judgments and then willingness to support the leader through the instrumentality of the leader (95% CI = .06, .42), and higher perceived self-control had a positive indirect effect (.12) on legitimacy judgments and then willingness to support the leader.
through the morality of the leader (95% CI = .04, .29). Unexpectedly, we also found a small but significant negative indirect effect (-.03) of perceived self-control on willingness to support the leader through relational concerns about the leader (95% CI = -.13, -.004).

**Study 2 Discussion**

The results of this study constructively replicated the results of Study 1 and provide additional support for our theory that being perceived to display self-control in the aftermath of status loss protects a high-ranking individual’s legitimacy. Specifically, high perceived self-control positively influenced generalized legitimacy judgments (Hypothesis 1a) and willingness to support the high-ranking individual after status loss (Hypothesis 1b). Moreover, the effect of perceived self-control on legitimacy judgments and then willingness to support was explained by internal stakeholders’ instrumental (Hypothesis 2a) and moral evaluations (Hypothesis 2c) about the leader. Interestingly, opposite to our prediction in Hypothesis 2b, and previous work showing that relational concerns positively predict legitimacy judgments (Tyler 1997), our findings also suggest that being perceived to be more friendly and likeable (i.e., higher relational evaluations) in the aftermath of status loss may actually led to less support for the high-ranking individual. Importantly, the results of this study were found in a controlled setting where participants were internal stakeholders, whose outcomes would be affected by the decision to deem legitimate and support the high-ranking individual.

**Study 3**

Studies 1 and 2 provided support for the first part of our theoretical model and suggested that higher perceived self-control after status loss positively influences legitimacy judgments and willingness to support the high-ranking individual after status loss by reinforcing evaluations of the high-ranking individual’s instrumentality and morality. In Study 3, we no longer examine instrumental, relational and moral evaluations as mediators, but extend the findings of these studies in two important ways.

First, it is worth considering how displays of self-control after status loss affect legitimacy relative to displays of self-control in the absence of status loss. In the absence of status loss, because high-ranking individuals already have legitimacy in the eyes of the organization’s internal stakeholders, there is no need for them to explicitly provide evidence of their legitimacy on instrumental, relational or moral dimensions (Ridgeway 1978; Tost 2011). Indeed, there is some
evidence that provision of such evidence when an individual holds a high level of legitimacy can actually backfire. For example, Ashforth and Gibbs (1990) suggested that when organizations actively pursue positive legitimacy judgments in the absence of concerns about their legitimacy, their attempts may be viewed as “protesting too much” and ultimately decrease their legitimacy. It seems plausible that this organizational phenomenon might also occur at the level of legitimacy judgments about individuals, such that individuals who try to prove their legitimacy—in the absence of judgments about their legitimacy—are viewed as overacting or trying too hard (Tsay and Banaji 2011), and internal stakeholders may become less willing to support them as a result. Therefore, in Study 3 we investigate the possibility that higher perceived self-control may help a high-ranking individual who has lost status, but hurt a high-ranking individual who has not lost status.

Second, in Studies 1 and 2 we measured generalized legitimacy judgments and the willingness to support the high-ranking individual to continue being a leader for a subsequent task. In Study 3, we examined whether the (un)willingness to support high-ranking individuals would lead to more overt forms of challenging behaviors—e.g., refusing to defer to the direction of leaders and even publicly contesting them (Walker et al. 1986). Understanding when and how a high-ranking individual’s status loss leads to such challenging behavior from internal stakeholders is important because this will determine whether the high-ranking individual can continue to be effective and retain a position in the aftermath of status loss (Huy et al. 2014). We predict:

**HYPOTHESIS 3 (H3).** Perceived self-control will attenuate the indirect effect of a high-ranking individual’s status loss on internal stakeholders’ challenging behavior, such that when a high-ranking individual is perceived to have higher (versus lower) self-control, the positive effect of status loss (versus status maintenance) on challenging behavior will be weaker.

**Study 3 Methods**

*Participants and Study Design.* One hundred and five individuals (58 females, mean age 27.96 years, SD = 9.28) who spoke English as a first language completed a group study at a university-affiliated behavioral laboratory in the United Kingdom. This sample included 20% White British, American or European, 30% Asian, and 28% African participants. Sixty-five percent of participants were students.
and 53% of participants were employed part or full-time. Because we were interested in examining the downstream consequences of status loss (versus status maintenance) when the high-ranking individual is perceived to have higher (versus lower) perceived self-control, participants were randomly assigned to a full factorial 2 (status loss versus status maintenance) × 2 (high perceived self-control versus low perceived self-control) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Participants arrived at the laboratory in groups of three and were taken to separate rooms and seated in front of a computer. They read that they were taking part in the second study in a research series on information availability and leadership over time. They read that they would complete a group task at the computer with one other new participant and one participant who had completed the first study in the research series. The participant who completed the first study “last week” would be the leader in the group task (in reality there was no group and the comments and responses of the other two participants were pre-programmed). To ensure that participants felt they had a stake in the group’s success, participants were told that if their group completed the task successfully, each group member would receive a £1 bonus.

As in Study 2, participants received a summary of the “first study” which included: (1) a profile of the leader; (2) a statement indicating that their leader had been assigned to be the leader of the group in the previous study based on their test scores; (3) a summary of each of the three group tasks the leader had completed as part of the alleged “previous study” (Task 1 was a computer-mediated group problem solving task, Task 2 was a face-to-face group problem-solving task and Task 3 was an independent problem solving task for the group) and a statement that if the group successfully completed all three tasks (including the independent problem solving task), the group would receive a £2 bonus. All of the aforementioned information in the report was consistent across study conditions.

Status Loss Manipulation. As in Study 2, the status loss of the leader was manipulated in the summary report and this was the only difference in the report between conditions. The report indicated that after Task 2 (i.e., just before the leader completed the independent group task), group members had the opportunity to either keep or demote their group leader. In the summary chart of Task 2, the report indicated whether the target participant was demoted (“Yes” indicated status loss,
“No” indicated status maintenance. The information that the leader had been previously demoted (versus kept as leader) by their past group members would constitute a decrease in their status in the eyes of the participant.

This manipulation of status loss was pretested using a separate sample of 50 participants (15 females, mean age 32.86 years, SD = 11.25) recruited online via Mechanical Turk and randomly assigned to read either the status loss or status maintenance version of the summary report. Participants then assessed the leader’s status (the extent to which the leader was respected/highly regarded/deferred to by others; 1 = not at all to 7 = very much; α = .90), and status loss by indicating (“To what extent did the group leader’s status in the group decrease after Task 2?”, and “How much status did the group leader lose after Task 2?”; 1 = not at all/none to 7 = very much/a lot; α = .97).

We found that participants in the status loss condition rated the leader as having lower status (M = 2.88, SD = 1.30), and experiencing more status loss (M = 5.98, SD = 1.25) than the maintenance condition (M = 5.37, SD = .81), $F(1,48) = 67.45$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .58$ and (M = 1.90, SD = 1.34), $F(1,48) = 122.45$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .72$, respectively. These results verified the effectiveness of the status loss manipulation.

Self-Control Manipulation. Consistent with our manipulation of self-control in Study 2 as task persistence, in this study we manipulated perceived self-control by showing a video of “the leader” working persistently (or not) on the independent problem-solving task (i.e., Task 3). The task had ostensibly occurred after the leader was either demoted or kept as the group leader, and participants read that the leader had been instructed that “If you either finish, or have tried as hard as you can and give up trying to solve the problems, you can read the magazines to your left for the remaining time.” Participants then watched a three-minute video showing “the leader” (hands and table only) either ignoring the magazines and working persistently for three minutes (high perceived self-control condition), or attempting the first page of problems for one minute, then pushing them aside and flipping through the magazines (low perceived self-control condition).

Afterward, participants logged on to the interactive part of the group study (to increase the believability of the group context, they waited four minutes for “their other group members” to log on) and sent an introductory message to their group members and received pre-programmed
introductory messages from each of their two group members (“Hi everyone! It looks like I’m the leader today. I’m a university student and I work part-time.” And “Hi! My name is Alex. I speak four languages and I have a master’s degree in biology. On weekends I play guitar in a band.”).

Participants read the “The Furniture Factory” task (Johnson and Johnson 2009) and were instructed to take a few minutes to think about the best way to approach this task as a group. Participants reported their willingness to support their group leader in completing this group task and then had the opportunity to support or challenge the leader’s directives. Participants were debriefed, thanked and compensated (£10).

Measures. The measures used in this study (willingness to support, challenging behavior, manipulation and suspicion checks) are described below.

Willingness to support: As highlighted in the introduction to this study, one of the ways that internal stakeholders support high-ranking individuals is by deferring to their directives. Accordingly, we assessed participants’ willingness to support the high-ranking individual in the group task by having participants rate the extent to which they intended to adopt six deferral behaviors during the task. These items were adapted from Moskowitz (1994) and included: “Do not express disagreement when I think it”, “Give in”, “Do not say what I want to directly”, “Do not state my own views”, “Avoid taking the lead or being responsible”, “Do not say what is on my mind” (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). The six items were averaged together (α = .84).

Challenging behavior: Challenging behavior was operationalized as the extent to which participants’ suggestions in the group task contradicted the leader’s directives (Tyler 1997).

Specifically, after participants read the group task, the leader sent three directives for how the group should go about completing the task, including: (1) “Each of you should come up with arguments about the pros and cons of each option and try to persuade me”, (2) “Each of you should rank the options and I will decide from those rankings how we should rank the final submission”, (3) “We

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5 The original Moskowitz (1994) scale included 12 items. Three items were initially dropped from the scale because they were not applicable to this computer-mediated context (e.g., “speak softly”). A principal component factor analysis revealed that three of the remaining nine items had high (> .4) cross-loadings on two factors. These items were removed leaving a six-item scale with only one factor (Eigenvalue > 1) and all six items loaded highly > .58 on that factor. The reliability of the resulting scale was good (α = .84).
should rank option B first and rank option D fifth”. After reading these directives, participants had the opportunity to suggest up to three of their own initiatives which would be sent to their group members.

The extent to which participant’s engaged in challenging behavior was determined by two independent raters who evaluated the initiatives the participants proposed after reading the leader’s initiatives. The raters evaluated the extent to which the participant made suggestions that challenged the authority of the leader (1 = not at all to 7 = very much). Participants who did not suggest initiatives, or who made suggestions that were consistent with the leader’s initiatives (e.g., “Everyone submits their suggestions for the rankings and explains why each choice is in a particular position and then the leader can discuss it with the others in the group and come to a final decision.”, “none”), would score low on the challenging behavior scale of the raters (1-2), whereas, participants who suggested initiatives that contradicted the leader’s initiatives (e.g., “Group leader should come up with a suggestion to a ranking to be commented on by GM2 and GM3”, “we should all get involved in the decision making”) were rated as high on the challenging behavior scale used by the raters (6-7).

To verify that there was sufficient agreement between the coders, we calculated interrater agreement scores ($r_{wg}$; James et al. 1993; LeBreton and Senter 2008) and found that there was good agreement (mean $r_{wg} = .80$, median $r_{wg} = .93$). Thus, we averaged the raters’ evaluations ($\alpha = .76$).

Manipulation, suspicion and quality checks: Participants responded to two items about the leader’s perceived self-control (the extent to which the leader demonstrated persistence and appeared to invest a great deal of effort in the video; 1 = not at all to 7 = very much; $\alpha = .97$). As in Study 2, participants’ open-ended comments were also coded for suspicion (this study was restricted to native English speakers, and no participants demonstrated a lack of English proficiency), and one participant who indicated suspicion was removed from the sample. All analyses were conducted on the remaining 105 participants. Exclusion of this case did not change the results$^6$.

Study 3 Results

Table 3 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables included in Study 3.

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$^6$ All significant comparisons and indirect effects presented in the results section remained significant $p < .05$. 

Manipulation Checks. Confirming our manipulations, in the high self-control condition the participants perceived the leader to have higher self-control \((M = 4.75, SD = 1.48)\) than in the low self-control condition \((M = 1.78, SD = 1.17)\), \(F(1,102) = 127.84, p = .001, \eta^2 = .56\).

Willingness to Support. We first examined how the leader’s status loss influenced internal stakeholders’ willingness to support the leader depending on whether or not they perceived the leader to display self-control. We found a significant interaction between status loss and perceived self-control on willingness to support the leader, \(F(1,100) = 4.00, p = .05, \eta^2 = .04\).

We examined the pattern of this interaction (see Figure 6). When the leader was perceived to have low self-control, status loss had a marginally significant negative effect on participants’ willingness to support the leader \((M = 2.14, SD = 1.00)\), relative to if the leader had maintained status \((M = 2.63, SD = 1.15)\), \(t(100) = 1.84, p = .07, \eta^2 = .03\). By contrast, when the leader was perceived to display high self-control, status loss \((M = 2.24, SD = 1.01)\) had a non-significant positive effect on willingness to support the leader, relative to if the leader had maintained status \((M = 1.97, SD = .69)\), \(t(100) = 1.01, p = .32\). These results suggest that the effect of high-ranking individuals’ status loss on internal stakeholders’ willingness to support them depends on whether or not the high-ranking individual is perceived to display self-control; when the leader was perceived to have low self-control, status loss weakened internal stakeholders’ willingness to support the leader, but when the leader was perceived to have high self-control, status loss did not affect their willingness to support the leader.

Also, and consistent with the ‘backfire’ effect mentioned in the introduction of this study, a comparison of the status maintenance conditions highlights that higher perceived self-control may not always be beneficial; in the absence of status loss, participants were actually less willing to support a high-ranking individual who displayed high self-control than one who displayed low self-control, \(t(100) = -2.42, p = .02, \eta^2 = .06\).

Challenging Behavior. Next, to investigate whether participants’ (un)willingness to support a high ranking individual would lead to more overt forms of challenging behavior, we conducted bootstrapped moderated mediation (Hayes 2013) with 5000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals. Status loss was entered as the independent variable, self-control as the proposed moderator, willingness to support as the proposed mediator, and challenging behavior as the outcome variable.
There was no direct main effect of status loss on challenging behavior, $b = -.01$, $se = .28$, $p = .97$; however, as detailed above, there was a significant interaction between status loss and perceived self-control on willingness to support the leader. Moreover, we observed a negative effect of willingness to support the leader on internal stakeholders’ challenging behavior, $b = -.33$, $se = .14$, $p = .02$. Therefore, we examined the conditional indirect effects of status loss on challenging behavior through willingness to support at high (1) and low (0) levels of perceived self-control. This conditional indirect effect is depicted in Figure 7.

As predicted by Hypothesis 3, when the high-ranking individual’s self-control was perceived to be low, we found a positive and significant indirect effect (.16) of status loss on internal stakeholders’ challenging behavior through stakeholders’ reduced willingness to support the leader (95% CI = .002, .46). However, when the high-ranking individual’s self-control was perceived to be high, there was no significant indirect effect (-.09) of status loss on challenging behavior because internal stakeholders remained willing to support the leader (95% CI = -.34, .04). The difference between these two indirect effects (-.25) was significant (95% CI = -.65, -.02).

**Study 3 Discussion**

The results of Study 3 provide evidence of the downstream consequences of a high-ranking individual’s perceived self-control after status loss. Specifically, when a high-ranking individual’s perceived self-control is low, status loss elicits challenges to the high-ranking individual’s position because internal stakeholders are less willing to support them. Being perceived to have high self-control after status loss prevented such behavioral challenges to the high-ranking individual’s position by reinforcing stakeholder’s willingness to support the high-ranking individual.

Overall, our findings from the first three studies suggest that perceived self-control after status loss positively influences legitimacy judgments (Studies 1 and 2), and internal stakeholders’ willingness to support the high-ranking individual after status loss (Studies 1, 2 and 3), and by reinforcing their willingness to support the high-ranking individual, perceived self-control also prevents internal stakeholders from challenging the high-ranking individual’s authority (Study 3). The results also suggest that the effect of perceived self-control after status loss on the high-ranking
individual’s conferred legitimacy (legitimacy judgments and willingness to support) is explained by bolstering evaluations of the high-ranking individual’s instrumentality and morality (Studies 1 and 2).

Worthy of consideration is that in our first studies we controlled both the reason for the status loss and the type of self-control being displayed. Specifically, although there may be many different reasons for status loss to occur, including task-related (e.g., significant mistake in a project), interpersonal (e.g., poor treatment of a colleague), or ethical (e.g., cheating) reasons, we took the broad position that any status loss will call into question the legitimacy of the high-ranking individual, and in our studies we assumed that the reason for the status loss was unknown to the internal stakeholder. We deemed this assumption realistic—that although internal stakeholders may often speculate about why a high-ranking individual loses status, not everyone (or maybe only a few) may be privy to the true reason why a high-ranking individual loses status. Similarly, in our first studies, we focused specifically on task-related demonstrations of self-control (e.g., persistence) because these are ubiquitous displays of self-control in the work context. However, there are other potentially observable manifestations of self-control—such as focusing on others rather than the self (Seeley and Gardner 2003), regulating one’s emotions (Baumeister et al. 1998), or conveying a desired image of oneself (self-presentation; Vohs et al. 2005)—that may be more or less effective in mitigating the negative effect of status loss on legitimacy. Therefore, we designed Study 4 as a critical incident study to explore whether and how different (a) reasons for the status loss or (b) types of self-control may influence the efficacy of the self-control strategy after status loss.

Study 4

Given the complexity of the status loss phenomenon in organizations, in Study 4 we sought to obtain a more nuanced understanding of our model by employing a very different methodology in a field setting. Thus, extending the results of these previous studies, Study 4 explored how different (a) reasons for the status loss and (b) types of self-control perceived by internal stakeholders might influence the effectiveness of self-control following status loss. In this study we do not present strict hypotheses, but instead consider these to be exploratory tests to inform future research.

Study 4 Method
Participants and Study Design. One hundred and eighty-five working adults (working in diverse occupations in research, engineering, IT, accounting and finance) were recruited via a mobile laboratory set up in the lobby of an R&D complex in Singapore to complete a survey about their work experiences. Participants who walked through the building’s main lobby were randomly approached to participate in a short study in exchange for the equivalent of three US dollars. The study was conducted on laptop computers in groups of a maximum ten people. The sample was 54.2% female and included 91% Asian, 4.2% White, .6 % Hispanic or Latino, .6% Black or African American participants, and 3% identified as “other”.

The study used a 1 factor (high perceived self-control after status loss versus low perceived self-control after status loss) between-participants design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions and were then asked to recall and describe (1) a time when a high-ranking individual in their organization lost status, and (2) a specific incident after the status loss when the high-ranking individual displayed high (versus low) self-control. Participants then answered questions about their perceptions of the high-ranking individual after the status loss.

Procedure. A screening question was used to determine whether participants had ever observed a high-ranking individual (e.g., managers, leaders, prominent group members) in an organization, in which they were a group member, lose status (i.e., lose an amount of respect, regard or admiration in the eyes of other organizational members). Participants who answered “No” were immediately redirected to the end of the survey. Those who answered “Yes” were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions.

Reason for status loss. Participants were first asked to describe the status loss of the high-ranking individual, including the reason why the individual lost status.

Perceived self-control. Next, participants in the high / low self-control condition were asked to “think about and describe a situation that occurred after this status loss when this individual behaved in a way that demonstrated…a great deal of self-control (i.e., persistence, willpower, self-restraint). / …self-control failure (i.e., inability to persist, lack of willpower, no self-restraint).”

7 Of the 293 individuals who were asked whether they had observed the status loss of a high-ranking individual, 197 (67%) indicated “Yes”, and 96 (33%) indicated “No”. 
Measures. Participants then reflected on what they thought about the way the high-ranking individual reacted, and answered questions about their perceptions of the high-ranking individuals’ self-control, as well as their instrumental, relational and moral evaluations and legitimacy judgments about the high-ranking individual, using the measures below. All measures used seven-point scales (1 = not at all to 7 = a lot) unless otherwise noted.

Instrumental, relational and moral evaluations: Because of the setting in which participants were completing this survey (i.e., randomly approached in a business building) we used shortened scales for internal stakeholders’ evaluations of the high-ranking individual. Instrumental evaluations were assessed by the items “competent” and “capable” (α = .94), relational evaluations were assessed by the items “likeable” and “friendly” (α = .88), and morality evaluations were assessed by the items “sincere”, “trustworthy”, and “had high integrity” (α = .93).

Generalized legitimacy judgments: Judgments about the leader’s legitimacy were measured using the same scale as in Studies 1 and 2, adapted to refer to a “high-ranking individual in your organization” rather than “your leader” (α = .93).

Manipulation and quality checks: We verified the effectiveness of the perceived self-control recall manipulation in two ways. First, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which they thought the high-ranking individual demonstrated self-restraint, willpower and persistence, in the situation they described (α = .84). Second, two independent coders rated the extent to which participants’ descriptions of the high-ranking individuals’ self-control depicted perceived self-control on an 11-point scale (-5 = extremely low self-control, 0 = neither high nor low self-control, +5 = extremely high self-control). The intrarater agreement was high (mean r_{wg} = .87 and median r_{wg} = .95) and so these ratings were averaged. We also coded the responses for quality and English proficiency. Nineteen responses that were either unclear or did not provide sufficient detail to be coded (e.g., “I have never face such a situation”, “lose respect”) were removed from the sample, leaving a final sample of 166 participants.

Study 4 Results

Manipulation Checks. Confirming the effectiveness of the manipulation, participants perceived the high-ranking individual to have demonstrated greater self-control in the high self-control condition
(M = 4.61, SD = 1.35) than in the low self-control condition (M = 3.56, SD = 1.38), F(1, 164) = 24.93, p = .001, η² = .13. We also found that descriptions of self-control in the high perceived self-control condition depicted greater self-control (M = 1.26, SD = 2.78) than the descriptions from the low perceived self-control condition (M = -2.67, SD = 1.95), F(1, 164) = 110.41, p = .001, η² = .40.

Coding. After verifying the manipulation, our first task was to code participants’ responses regarding (a) the reason for the status loss, and (b) the type of self-control being observed. We followed a text analysis protocol (Duriau et al. 2007; Weber 1990) that involved (1) defining coding categories based on the literature, (2) coding a subsample and revising the categories, (3) coding the full sample and (4) having a second independent coder recode the sample to verify the reliability of the coding.

First, we identified likely categories from the literature and created definitions for each category to code the responses. For the reasons for status loss, the initial categories identified were task-related reasons (e.g., task-related mistakes, making bad work decisions, requiring help with work, micro-managing group members), interpersonal reasons (e.g., treating people unfairly, displaying favoritism, being overbearing, poor communication with members), and ethical reasons (e.g., corruption, falsification, power misuse). For the types of self-control, the initial categories we created were task-related self-control (e.g., perseverance, persistence, drive, worked hard, vs. quit, unmotivated; see Hagger et al. 2010), other vs. self-focused self-control (e.g., apologizing to others, holding back and allowing the group to contribute vs. ignoring group members or others; Baumeister and Exline 1999), and emotion-related self-control (e.g., positivity, enthusiasm, humility vs. anger, losing temper, being overly emotional; Tice and Bratslavsky 2000).

Second, one of the authors coded a subsample of the responses and created several additional categories based on this initial coding. For the reasons for status loss, the new categories included were organizational change (e.g., reporting structure changed, organizational focus changed, company merged) and unknown (e.g., I don’t know the reason, I don’t know the details). For the types of self-
control, the new category added was self-presentation-related self-control\(^8\) (e.g., professionalism, communication, calm, strong vs. defiant, insistent, doubting self, aggressive).

Third, the full sample was coded based on these categories. Responses received a coding of either “1” or “0” for each category. The categories were not treated as mutually exclusive, such that responses could be associated with more than one category. For example, some reasons for status loss included task-related and interpersonal factors (e.g., “The leader was not capable enough to help in resolving issue that the team member is encountering. The leader does not show fairness in dealing with issue and was not strong enough to speak up on behalf of the team member”). Similarly, the display of self-control may have included different types of self-control, such as self-control related to the task, interpersonal behavior and self-presentation (“Tried to lead and finish a project with his team. Try to solve any internal conflicts or disharmony within the group that resulted from his situation. Deal with the rumors and suspicions from colleagues calmly and confidently.”).

Fourth, to verify that the coding was reliable, we had a research assistant, blind to the study’s hypotheses, independently code the full sample of responses using the above categories and definitions. We calculated agreement using Cohen’s \(\kappa\) and found that there was moderate to high agreement for each category; values of \(\kappa\) ranged from .57 to .90, \(p < .0005\). These results suggest that the coding was reliable.

**Analyses.** Table 5 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables included in Study 4. An initial examination of the coded data revealed that the most common reasons for status loss were interpersonal (30.7%), task-related (27.1%), unknown (25.3%) or ethical (23.5%), and a smaller number were the result of organizational changes (12.1%). It also indicated that the type of self-control observed was most often task-related (54.8%), followed by self-presentation (33.1%), other-focused behavior (28.9%) and emotional control (12.65%). Examples of responses that were included in each category are provided in Tables 6 and 7.

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\(^8\) Previous research has conceptualized self-presentation—behaviors designed to make a desired impression on others—as a behavioral indicator of self-control (Vohs, Baumeister and Ciarocco 2005), such that the act of self-presentation requires self-control resources, and being depleted leads to less desirable or effective self-presentation (e.g., talking too much, overly or insufficiently intimate disclosures, or egotistical arrogance).
Hypothesis testing: Before examining the potential moderating effects of (a) reasons for status loss and (b) type of perceived self-control, we sought to constructively replicate the main findings of our previous studies. To examine the main effect of perceived self-control on legitimacy, we conducted an ANOVA. As expected, participants who observed high-ranking individuals with high perceived self-control after status loss judged the individuals to be more legitimate ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.64$) than when they perceived them to have low self-control ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.63$), $F(1, 164) = 7.91$, $p = .006$, $η^2 = .05$. Then, to examine instrumental, relational and moral evaluations as potential mediators of this effect, we conducted bootstrapped mediation analyses, which showed that both instrumental (Indirect effect = .23, 95% CI = .06, .45) and moral (Indirect effect = .28, 95% CI = .05, .57) evaluations, but not relational evaluations (Indirect effect = .03, 95% CI = -.04, .15), mediated the relationship between perceived self-control and generalized legitimacy judgments after status loss. These results replicate the findings of Studies 1 and 2 and provide additional support for Hypotheses 1a, 2a and 2c.

Reason for status loss: Next, we explored the potential moderating effects of the (a) reasons for status loss and (b) types of self-control. We conducted a series of bootstrapped moderated mediation analyses where each of the reasons for status loss (task-related, interpersonal, ethical, organizational change, unknown) were entered individually$^9$ and examined as moderators of the direct or indirect relationship between perceived self-control $\rightarrow$ legitimacy. We did not find a significant interaction between any of the reasons for status loss and perceived self-control on legitimacy judgments (all $ps > .05$)$^{10}$. Although appropriate caution should be exercised when interpreting these exploratory results, the results suggest that the reason for the high-ranking individuals’ status loss

$^9$ We also reran our analyses entering all the moderators into the analysis simultaneously, and this did not yield any significant interactions (all $ps > .10$).

$^{10}$ There was a marginally significant interaction of perceived self-control and interpersonal reason for status loss on legitimacy judgments, $b = -.59$, se = .34, $p = .08$ (but no significant interactions of perceived self-control and interpersonal reasons for status loss on instrumental, relational or moral evaluations). Examining the nature of the interaction on legitimacy judgments shows that when the reason for the status loss is interpersonal, perceived self-control no longer has a significant direct effect on legitimacy judgments (reason not interpersonal: $b = .35$, se = .19, $p = .07$; reason interpersonal: $b = -.24$, se = .28, $p = .39$). This suggests that perceived self-control may be somewhat less effective in positively influencing legitimacy when the reason for the status loss is due to interpersonal behavior.
does not affect the extent to which perceived self-control after status loss buffers legitimacy judgments about the high-ranking individual.

*Type of self-control:* Next, we investigated whether the type of self-control perceived after status loss influenced its efficacy. We conducted a series of bootstrapped moderated mediations where each of the types of self-control (task-related, other versus self-focused, self-presentation, emotion-related) were entered individually\(^{11}\) and examined as potential moderators of the effect of perceived self-control on legitimacy. Our findings showed significant interaction between self-presentation and perceived self-control on instrumental and moral evaluations (\(b = 1.07, se = .51, p = .04, b = 1.02, se = .52, p = .05\), respectively), such that when the high-ranking individual was perceived to demonstrate self-control in the way they presented themselves after status loss, perceived self-control positively affected legitimacy judgments through instrumental (Indirect effect = .50, 95% CI = .19, .91) and moral (Indirect effect = .64, 95% CI = .22, 1.18) evaluations; however, when they were not perceived to control their self-presentation, perceived self-control did not affect legitimacy judgments through instrumentality and morality (95% CI = -.12, .34 and 95% CI = -.15, .45, respectively). In all other cases, the type of self-control did not influence the extent to which perceived self-control affected legitimacy judgments\(^{12}\). These results suggest that for perceived self-control to affect legitimacy judgments positively, the high-ranking individual must be perceived to be attempting to present themselves in a desirable manner. However, it is worth noting that the majority of responses (82%) that described self-presentation related self-control also perceived the high-ranking individual as displaying another type of self-control. Therefore, it seems possible that other types of perceived self-control are more effective when coupled with self-presentation, or that self-control displayed in multiple domains is most effective.

*Multiple types of self-control:* Accordingly, we also examined whether being perceived to display self-control in multiple ways (e.g., task-related and self-presentation self-control) might

\(^{11}\) We also reran our analyses by entering all the moderators into the analysis simultaneously and this produced the same results.

\(^{12}\) We also tested a series of moderated mediation models to explore whether the type of perceived self-control that would be most effective would depend on the reason for the status loss. For example, it is possible that matching the type of self-control with the reason for the status loss would yield the strongest effects. We did not find any significant results to support this perspective (all possible interactions \(p > .10\).

influence the efficacy of the self-control strategy over and above the amount (or magnitude) of self-control perceived. We calculated the sum of all types of self-control perceived by the participant (“types of self-control”) from 1 = one type of self-control to 4 = four types of self-control. We then specified a moderated mediation model where the magnitude of perceived self-control (i.e., from -5 (low self-control) to +5 (high self-control) as rated by the coders) was the independent variable, instrumental, relational and moral evaluations were the mediators, legitimacy judgment was the dependent variable, and types of self-control was the moderator.

We found a significant interaction between type and amount of perceived self-control on instrumental evaluations ($b = .13, se = .05, p = .01$), and a marginally significant interaction between type and magnitude of perceived self-control on morality evaluations ($b = .10, se = .05, p = .07$), about the high-ranking individual. Specifically, when the high-ranking individual was perceived to enact more types of self-control, perceived self-control had a more positive effect on legitimacy judgments through instrumentality (Indirect effect = .10, 95% CI = .06, .15) and morality (Indirect effect = .11, 95% CI = .06, .18) than when they were perceived to demonstrate fewer types of self-control (Indirect effect = .04, 95% CI = -.001, .08 and 95% CI = Indirect effect = .06, 95% CI = .01, .13, respectively). These results suggest that when the internal stakeholder perceives the high-ranking individual to display self-control in multiple ways, higher perceived self-control will be more effective in buffering their judgments of the high-ranking individual’s legitimacy.

**Study 4 Discussion**

The results of this critical incident study replicate the findings of the previous studies, but also provide insight into when perceived self-control after status loss will be most effective in protecting high-ranking individuals’ legitimacy. We did not find evidence to suggest that the reason for the status loss influenced the efficacy of perceived self-control after status loss. However, we did find that the type (or types) of self-control were relevant. When internal stakeholders perceived high-ranking individuals to be presenting a desired image of themselves (i.e., self-presentation) in the aftermath of status loss, perceived self-control was more effective in influencing high-ranking individuals’ legitimacy. Moreover, being perceived to display multiple types of self-control (e.g., task-related and self-presentation related) interacted with the amount of self-control perceived to result in more
positive legitimacy judgments. Together these results highlight that there may be some situations in which perceived self-control is more or less effective in reinforcing legitimacy after status loss. However, given the exploratory nature of this study, additional research into moderators may be a fruitful area for future research.

**General Discussion**

A growing area of research on status loss highlights the negative psychological, performance and social consequences that high-ranking individuals are likely to experience after losing status (Marr and Thau 2014; Neeley 2013; Pettit et al. 2013). Because the outcomes of status loss are inconsistent with our expectations for high-ranking individuals (i.e., being anxious, making mistakes, lacking influence), status loss should trigger the downfall of those at the top of the organizational hierarchy. Considering this, it is puzzling that we know that hierarchies are generally stable (Ridgeway and Berger 1986), particularly at the top (Merton 1968).

We addressed this puzzle by suggesting that the status loss of high-ranking organizational members will not always lead internal stakeholders to delegitimize them. Instead, the status loss of high-ranking individuals is salient and prompts internal stakeholders to scrutinize their post-loss behavior to reevaluate whether they are truly appropriate for their position. To the extent that high-ranking individuals are perceived to display high self-control, they will reinforce evaluations of their instrumentality and morality, protecting their legitimacy. However, if high-ranking individuals display low self-control after status loss, they will be viewed as inappropriate for their position; internal stakeholders will become unwilling to support them and as a result, they will face more challenges to their authority than if they had not lost status.

Three experiments and one critical incident study investigated how, why and when a high-ranking individual’s perceived self-control after status loss influences internal stakeholders’ conferred legitimacy (i.e., judgments and support). Studies 1 and 2 showed that higher (versus lower) perceived self-control after status loss positively affects internal stakeholders’ legitimacy judgments and willingness to support the high-ranking individual by reinforcing evaluations of the high-ranking individual’s instrumentality and morality. Study 3 extended these results and showed that when a high-ranking individual was perceived to display low self-control, status loss weakened internal
stakeholders’ willingness to support the high-ranking individual, which in turn prompted internal stakeholders to challenge the high-ranking individual’s authority (more than if he/she had not lost status). However, when the high-ranking individual was perceived to display high self-control, status loss reinforced internal stakeholders’ willingness to support the high-ranking individual and thus prevented challenges to the high-ranking individual’s authority. Finally, Study 4 was an exploratory study to provide a richer understanding of the phenomenon. Here, we found that the reason for the status loss did not influence the efficacy of perceived self-control. However, perceived self-control was most effective in positively influencing legitimacy when perceived self-control was related to self-presentation (i.e., presenting oneself in a desirable manner for the context) and when internal stakeholders perceived the high-ranking individual to display multiple types of self-control (e.g., both task-related and self-presentation at the same time).

In sum, our studies show that a high-ranking individual’s perceived self-control after status loss plays a critical role in protecting their legitimacy. The internal and external validity of these results is strengthened by constructively replicating the main findings across different samples (working adults and college students), different cultural contexts (United States, United Kingdom, Singapore) and using different methodologies (experiments and a critical incident study). These divergent samples and methods allowed us to better understand a complex phenomenon—assessing responses to different instances of status loss and different types of perceived self-control.

**Theoretical Implications**

The current findings have several implications for theory and future research. First, the nascent literature on status loss has focused primarily on the negative and immediate outcomes of status loss. Although this is an important first step, the theory and studies presented here take a more nuanced view and highlight that status loss will not always have negative consequences for high-ranking individuals. Indeed, our results suggest that high-ranking individuals who are perceived to override their impulses and demonstrate self-control after status loss protect themselves from losing their legitimacy. However, because enacting self-control will be challenging, not all high-ranking individuals will be perceived as displaying self-control after status loss. Consequently, status loss will trigger the downfall of some high-ranking individuals, but likely not those who show restraint.
Second, the question of how legitimacy judgments are changed and reestablished has received little empirical attention (Bitektine 2011; Tost 2011). Drawing on Tost’s (2011) theory of “jolts”, we contribute to the literature on legitimacy by empirically examining how legitimacy judgments are reassessed after status loss. In doing so, we provide support for the idea that the type of concerns that drive generalized legitimacy judgments critically depend on the context (Tost 2011). In contrast to previous research citing relational concerns as a primary driver of legitimacy judgments (Tyler 1997), across four studies we found that after status loss, instrumental and moral (but not relational) evaluations were the main determinants of legitimacy. It is possible that although internal stakeholders are typically concerned about the potential for a social relationship with a high-ranking organizational member because there are benefits from being affiliated with high status others (Benjamin and Podolny 1999), when a high-ranking individual has lost status, having a social relationship with them will be less desirable, and therefore, it will be a less salient concern in reassessing legitimacy.

Finally, we contribute to an emerging body of work on the social consequences of self-control. Much of the work on self-control has focused on the intra-individual outcomes associated with lower self-control (see Hagger et al. 2010), such as performing worse on cognitive tasks (Schmeichel et al. 2003), self-presenting less effectively (Vohs et al. 2005), and behaving more unethically (Gino et al. 2011). However, recent research suggests that an individual’s trait or state-based self-control can be perceived by others, and as a result, self-control may have interpersonal consequences (Righetti and Finkenauer 2011; Shea et al. 2013). We build on these findings and show that when high-ranking organizational members are perceived to have high self-control after losing status, it positively influences the legitimacy judgments others in the organization make about them.

**Organizational Implications**

Our findings also have practical implications for organizations. At one point or another, most prominent individuals will experience a situation in which they lose an amount of respect, admiration or regard in the eyes of others in their organization (i.e., status loss). Our research demonstrates that status loss itself will not immediately cause their downfall, and instead, how high-ranking individuals behave in the aftermath of status loss will determine how internal stakeholders respond. Specifically,
high-ranking individuals who are perceived to overcome their impulses and align themselves with the demands of their role (i.e., display high perceived self-control) can avoid the additional negative social consequences from status loss.

Also, by examining how perceived self-control influences legitimacy through instrumental, relational and moral evaluations, we also provide insight into other ways that high-ranking individuals might be able to maintain legitimacy after status loss. We focused on perceived self-control for several reasons, including that it is behavioral and can be observed in many different ways (e.g., persistence, emotional control), making it more probable that internal stakeholders would be able to detect it. However, future research might examine how personality traits that influence self-control behavior (e.g., conscientiousness; Ameriks et al. 2004; Duckworth et al. 2013) may increase people’s propensity to display self-control after status loss. We also focused on perceived self-control because it could affect multiple dimensions of stakeholder concerns, whereas other related strategies might only influence one dimension of legitimacy judgments (e.g., knowledge of high quality performance alone was not sufficient to influence legitimacy in Study 1). Our finding that perceived self-control influences legitimacy through instrumental and moral (and not relational) evaluations provides insight into other characteristics and behaviors that would be likely to help (i.e., providing evidence of one’s competence and trustworthiness) versus hurt (i.e., providing evidence of one’s warmth and likeability) high-ranking individuals’ legitimacy after status loss.

Future Directions

Our findings generate several unanswered research questions on status loss and legitimization processes in organizations. First, the status loss of high-ranking individuals in organizations a complex phenomenon and there are likely factors that influence the downstream consequences of status loss, or the efficacy of perceived self-control in preventing these consequences, that are empirically untested in this research. We explored two potential moderators (i.e., reason for the status loss, type of self-control) in our critical incident field study (Study 4); however, the most influential moderator (self-presentation) was not a type of self-control we directly tested in our experimental studies. Future research might consider whether self-presentation alone is sufficient to influence legitimacy, or whether its effectiveness depends on being coupled with other types of self-control.
Also, there is a great deal of complexity in status loss at work that could be important unexamined moderators in future research. For example, in our experimental studies the status loss of the high-ranking individual was manipulated in such a way that participants did not interact with the high-ranking individual before the status loss and they were not involved in the status loss itself. It is possible that interacting with the leader before the status loss, or being involved in the status loss event, might influence the process through which legitimacy is reassessed. Also potentially useful for future research are the rich descriptions of status loss and self-control behavior in the aftermath of status loss. These data are available\textsuperscript{13} and can be used to create contextually rich status loss materials for future research.

Relatedly, there may be important boundary conditions to these effects. For example, our studies examined status loss as a dichotomous variable (status loss versus status maintenance). However, in reality, people can lose different amounts of status and the magnitude of the status loss is likely to have implications for the consequences of that loss and the extent to which the behavior of the high-ranking individual can address internal stakeholders’ concerns afterwards. Indeed, there may be some status losses that are too great to recover from, regardless of how exemplary the behavior of the high-ranking individual is in the aftermath. Finding out what these unredeemable status losses are is both a practically and theoretically interesting avenue for future research.

Another direction concerns whether or not the high-ranking individual’s behavior after status loss can be strategic. We argue that perceived self-control after status loss will protect high-ranking individuals’ legitimacy because those who can enact superior self-control after status loss signal their competence (instrumentality) and trustworthiness (morality). However, it is worth considering whether displays of self-control can be strategic (e.g., pretending to persist on a task) or need to be authentic to increase perceived self-control.

Finally, these studies raise questions about when the status loss of a high-ranking individual might lead to hierarchical instability. Our findings suggest that if a high-ranking individual is perceived to have low self-control after status loss, internal stakeholders may ultimately challenge

\textsuperscript{13} https://osf.io/qp4ey/?view_only=85aa4577814e4c8eb1b53dbbb66b2384e
that individual’s authority. Research on legitimacy highlights that without the support of internal stakeholders, high-ranking individuals will become ineffective in the short-term, and in turn unable to hold their position in the long-term. When prominent individuals lose their position, this not only creates opportunities for lower-ranked individuals to try to move up, but because high-ranking members often represent the organization and are a reflection of its processes, if a high-ranking member (e.g., a CEO) is deemed to be illegitimate by internal stakeholders, this may prompt reconsideration of whether other high-ranking members (e.g., the executive team, middle managers) are also truly deserving or their positions. Thus, future research might explore if/when the status loss of a high-ranking individual will trigger broader instability in the hierarchy.

**Conclusion**

We investigated when and how the status loss of a high-ranking organizational member triggers a reduction in their legitimacy and elicits challenging behaviors from internal stakeholders. We argued that the status loss of high-ranking individuals prompts internal stakeholders to scrutinize them and re-evaluate whether they were truly deserving of their high rank. When high-ranking individuals are perceived to display high self-control after status loss, they protect their legitimacy. When high-ranking individuals are perceived to display low self-control after status loss, they trigger doubts about their legitimacy and challenges to their position instead. The reason for the status loss did not affect the efficacy of perceived self-control in influencing legitimacy; however, the type(s) of perceived self-control was important. We hope this research inspires more work on status loss and the social consequences of self-control.
References


Righetti, F., C. Finkenauer. 2011. If you are able to control yourself, i will trust you: The role of perceived self-control in interpersonal trust. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100(5) 874–886.


Van Der Vegt, G.S., J.S. Bunderson, A. Oosterhof. 2006. Expertness diversity and interpersonal helping in teams: Why those who need the most help end up getting the least. *Academy of Management Journal* 49(5) 877–893.


Figure 1 Conceptual Model of the Effect of Perceived Self-Control After Status Loss on Legitimacy Judgments and Legitimizing Behavior

- **Status Loss of High-Ranking Individual**
- **Perceived Self-Control (after status loss)**
- **Instrumental Evaluations**
- **Relational Evaluations**
- **Moral Evaluations**
- **Generalized Legitimacy Judgment**
- **Willingness to Support**
- **Deferral (versus challenging) Behavior**

Internal stakeholders question legitimacy and observe post-loss behaviour. Internal stakeholders reassess judgments. Internal stakeholders determine stakeholders’ legitimizing support.
Figure 2  
**Effect of Perceived Self-Control on Legitimacy Judgments and Willingness to Support (Study 1).**

![Bar chart showing the effect of perceived self-control on legitimacy judgments and willingness to support.]

- **Legitimacy Judgments**
  - No Status Loss
  - Status Loss, No Information
  - Status Loss, Low Self-Control
  - Status Loss, High Self-Control

- **Willingness to Support**
  - No Status Loss
  - Status Loss, No Information
  - Status Loss, Low Self-Control
  - Status Loss, High Self-Control

Figure 3  
**Indirect Effect of Perceived Self-Control on Legitimacy Judgments and Willingness to Support Through Instrumental, Relational and Moral Evaluations (Study 1).**

![Diagram illustrating the indirect effect of perceived self-control on legitimacy judgments and willingness to support.]

- Higher perceived self-control after status loss: 1.48***
- Instrumental evaluations: .40***
- Relational evaluations: .07
- Generalized legitimacy judgment: .20*
- Moral evaluations: .43**
- Willingness to support: .23***

*Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported.*** $p \leq .001$; **$p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$; *$p \leq .10$. 
Figure 4  Effect of Perceived Self-Control on Legitimacy Judgments and Willingness to Support (Study 2).

![Figure 4](image)

Figure 5  Indirect Effect of Perceived Self-Control on Legitimacy Judgments and Willingness to Support Through Instrumental, Relational and Moral Evaluations (Study 2).

![Figure 5](image)

*Note.* Unstandardized coefficients are reported. *** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$; $+ p \leq .10$. 
Figure 6  Interactive Effect of Status Loss and Perceived Self-Control on Willingness to Support the Leader (Study 3).

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are reported. *** p ≤ .001; ** p ≤ .01; * p ≤ .05; + p ≤ .10.
Table 1  Study 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>SD</th>
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<th>2</th>
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** p ≤ .01; * p ≤ .05.
Table 2  Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

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** p ≤ .01; * p ≤ .05.
Table 3  
Study 3: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

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**p ≤ .01; * p ≤ .05.

Table 4  
Study 3: Indirect Effect of Status Loss and Perceived Self-Control on Challenging Behavior

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<td>b</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status loss x Self-control</td>
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<td>.01, 1.53</td>
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<tr>
<td>Willingness to support</td>
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</table>

| F    | 2.16* | 2.63* |
| R²   | .06   | .05   |

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. *** p ≤ .001; ** p ≤ .01; * p ≤ .05; + p ≤ .10.
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<td>.13*</td>
<td>.15*</td>
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<td>.09</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>-.13</td>
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<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
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<td>.47</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.01</td>
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<td>.09</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
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Table 5 Cont. Study 4: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

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<td>.05</td>
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<td>-.13</td>
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<td>.15*</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
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** p ≤ .01; * p ≤ .05.
Table 6  
Study 4: Examples of Participant Responses for Reason for Status

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<th>Response</th>
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<td>Unknown</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>113</td>
<td>I don't know exactly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>157</td>
<td>I not sure of the reason in details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>158</td>
<td>I don't know. Email was sent to us to let staffs know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-Related</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>The person lost status because of several bad decisions he made that had a somewhat negative impact in the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Made a major decision which caused loss to the business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>146</td>
<td>wrong decision making, lack of proper assessment of situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>142</td>
<td>became power hungry and treated subordinates like shit and earned the wrath of employees. many left the organization too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>their behavior during work, like treating people unfairly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>162</td>
<td>show favoritism and did not appreciate the team's hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>129</td>
<td>Inappropriate relationship with junior members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
<td>dishonesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Did something illegal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Change</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>He was transferred to another department</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Restructuring of the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Research director who as reporting to the DVP was made to report to the DVP through another person.</td>
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Table 7  **Study 4: Examples of Participant Responses for Types of Self-Control**

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<th>Type of Self-Control</th>
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<th>Response</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Task-Related</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, the status loss was temporary due to the organizational change in the focus. Immediately he was able to embrace himself to focus on the new area and he was able to persist and demonstrated that he is capable of delivering result even in a changing ambiguous situation. [High Self-Control]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>they quit working on the boring project, and show a lack of willpower. [Low Self-Control]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
<td>no more passion to continue with the work, skipping some meetings, demonstrate a lack of will power, [Low Self-Control]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td>they went out of the way to remedy the issues and seek to solve underlying problems [High Self-Control]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other vs. Self-Focus</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Held back and allowed the members to contribute more during a meeting [High Self-Control]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td></td>
<td>The time spend interacting with the co-workers are not there. Moreover, he or she should listen to the needs of co-worker as well other than assisting in company's development. Co-workers needs are also needed to be address. And the success of the company also plays a huge role. [Low Self-Control]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>disorganize and not honest and cannot manage the group well. do not conduct meeting and share experiences with the team member. [Low Self-Control]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion-Related</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
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| 131            | they lost their temper and yelled at other colleagues  
[Low Self-Control] |  |
| 78             | The leader continued to complete his project till the end with full effort and did not react negatively even though he knew that he was demoted  
[High Self-Control] |  |
| 33             | Very emotional, and shocked to hear the news. Team members were in tears and shocked  
[Low Self-Control] |  |
| 116            | Demonstrated humility by accepting responsibility and took necessary actions to ensure a similar situation won't happen again.  
[High Self-Control] |  |
|               | Self-Presentation |  |
| 136            | Reacted very weirdly as if nothing happened and was joking about it.  
[Low Self-Control] |  |
| 21             | Professionalism was important to his value regardless of how many people quit the job.  
[High Self-Control] |  |
| 184            | The person did not lash out at the other members of the society despite knowing of the bad things they had to say about him.  
[High Self-Control] |  |
| 7              | Confusion in response to status loss / Trying to emphasise their status in eyes of other workers.  
[Low Self-Control] |  |