**Nutrition, Self-Leadership and Compassion**

Alexia Mary Tzortzaki, Heidi Seage, Ruth Fairchild

The Great Resignation, the #MeToo social activism movement, the global economic crisis, the digitization of work and more importantly the destruction of our natural habitat has brought compassionate, authentic leadership approaches to the forefront of discussions on the changing shape of sustainable business models (Bracchio, 2020). The new entrants in the economy both as workforce and as consumers are the approximately 75 million Generation Z-ers. This demographic cohort stands up for its values, is passionate about causes, seeks relationships based on trust and transparency, chooses to work in ethical, servant environments, prefers diversity and choses flexible, hybrid working arrangements and demands a higher than average paid time off (Gabrielova and Buchko, 2021). Organisations are therefore faced with a twofold challenge. The first one is how to retain loyal customers and the second, how to keep their human capital engaged. Doing business is no longer simply about profitability but it is about maintaining the delicate equilibrium of long-term win-win sustainable outcomes.

Within this backdrop, for digital age leaders to remain resilient they need to possess highly developed soft skills, including compassion. Building on the HEART-led model of compassionate leadership development (Tzortzaki, 2022), this study aims to examine how the physiology of a leader, especially their dietary behaviours predict the extent to which they engage in kind, non-judgmental thoughts towards themselves and towards others. A preliminary literature review has revealed a gap in the link between self-compassionate, compassionate, and pro-social behaviours in leaders and their lifestyle behaviours. There have been some studies on health leadership (Hoert et al., 2018) however these have focused on how emotional turmoil and stress have a negative effect on maintaining healthy dietary choices. The reverse relationship, the protective function of healthy eating against stress and negative affect (Schultchen, 2019) has not however been examined academically in the context of leadership.

Specifically, in this body of work we will explore whether mindful eating behaviours of leaders are associated with self-compassion. Self-compassion has been defined as the ability to be kind, caring and non-judgmental towards oneself, especially when facing one’s own suffering, inadequacies, or failures and accepting these as a common human condition. Self-compassion requires self-awareness and mindfulness (Neff, 2003). Mindful eating practices promote awareness of the physiological and psychological influences on eating behaviours. Engaging with mindful eating has been shown to improve an individual's ability to self-regulate behaviour and is associated with emotional stability (Mantzios et al., 2015; Egan, H. and Mantzios, 2018). Mindful eating training can improve nutrition as it has been shown to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables, and reduce incidence of binge eating and snacking (Miller, 2017).

As analysed in the HEART-led model, mindfulness, compassion, and self-compassion are foundational blocks for effective leadership in the post-pandemic era. For compassion to have a positive effect it requires decision making on the best course of action in supporting another, so inevitably clarity of thought and emotional stability are both important (Salazar, 2022). Along this line of thought, we aim to explore whether mindful eating can support compassionate leadership. At a secondary level, we also plan to explore the mechanisms of a leader’s self-compassion in relation to their own dietary behaviours, since self-compassion has been shown to predict positive relationships with food, and could potentially be an antecedent of mindful eating (Schonefeld and Webb, 2013). Ultimately, we intend examining what might be the ideal self-compassionate leadership diet and whether this body of work can make an impact in the field of leadership development by introducing a relevant training intervention.

To achieve these aims the methodology will initially involve the design of a questionnaire measuring self-reported blood sugar management, mindful eating and self-care in leaders. It will explore how these behaviours relate to compassionate leadership. This will be used in future as a tool for quantitative research and in order to test the following two propositions:

1. *Leaders that self-report that they can manage their blood sugar effectively tend to be more proficient at emotional and cognitive self-regulation. In this study blood sugar management is viewed as a likely proxy for intuitive and mindful eating behaviours.*
2. *These dietary behaviours may reflect an individual's ability to be self-compassionate. Self-compassion influences the extent to which leaders can engage in compassionate leadership behaviours, therefore, healthy dietary behaviours may positively influence compassionate leadership behaviours.*

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