



## Ethical leadership, employee citizenship and work withdrawal behaviors: Examining mediating and moderating processes

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### ABSTRACT

The present study examined the mediating and moderating processes in the relationship between ethical leadership and employee citizenship behavior as well as work withdrawal behavior using a sample of 277 employees and their supervisors from the People's Republic of China. Results revealed that ethical leadership negatively relates to politics perceptions and that politics perceptions partially mediate the negative influence of ethical leadership on uncertainty. We also found that uncertainty partially mediates the politics perceptions–emotional exhaustion relationship. Further, politics perceptions interact with political skill to influence emotional exhaustion through uncertainty. Finally, emotional exhaustion fully mediates the uncertainty–citizenship behavior as well as the uncertainty–work withdrawal behavior relationships. We discuss implications of these findings for research and practice.

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### 1. Introduction

Organizational scientists have long recognized the political implications of leadership in organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2008; House, 1995; House & Aditya, 1997). Despite this recognition, leadership research is largely lacking in conceptual and empirical studies that link specific leadership behavior or style to perceptions of organizational politics or POP (Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2002; Davis & Gardner, 2004; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007) in predicting important organizational outcomes. Ammeter and colleagues (2002) succinctly captured this limitation of leadership research in their observation that “Conspicuous in its absence has been a conceptualization of leadership from a political perspective, despite appeals for such a theory and the widely acknowledged view of political processes in organizations” (p. 751). Given the recognized importance of leadership (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Barling, Christie, & Hopton, 2010) and POP (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002; Kacmar & Baron, 1999) in influencing employees' experience of work and resulting behaviors, it is important to integrate these two literatures in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the leadership process. We seek to address this important research issue by focusing on ethical leadership (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005). Brown and colleagues (2005) defined ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (p. 120).

This study has two main purposes. First, although ethical leadership has been shown to relate to a range of follower behaviors such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and deviant or work withdrawal behavior (e.g., Avey, Palanski, & Walumbwa, 2011; Brown et al., 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, &

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Kuenzi, 2012; Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009), few studies have examined the mechanisms that link ethical leadership to these important individual-level behaviors (see Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009 for an exception of a related construct of voice). This is surprising, given that leadership researchers have often lamented the lack of adequate attention to the underlying processes of leadership influence (Avolio et al., 2009). As Barling and colleagues (2010) note, “much is known about the outcomes of leadership, but less is known about how and why these effects occur” (p. 206). Our first main objective is to address this important issue by focusing on POP as a potential intervening variable in the ethical leadership process. POP which involves the individual's subjective evaluation about the extent to which the work environment is characterized as political (Ferris, Harrell-Cook, & Dulebohn, 2000; Harrell-Cook, Ferris, & Dulebohn, 1999), has been shown to relate to aversive work environments that may result in employee withdrawal behaviors and withholding of discretionary behaviors—two outcomes of interest in this study (Aryee, Chen, & Budhwar, 2004; Chang et al., 2009; Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997; Ferris et al., 2002). Because leaders define and shape the ‘reality’ in which followers work (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006), we argue that ethical leadership may be a theoretically relevant contextual variable that shapes POP and reactions in organizations (Brown & Mitchell, 2010).

Second, although POP has received increased research attention in the last two decades, the majority of studies have focused on the direct influence of POP on employee attitudes and behaviors (Chang et al., 2009). With a few exceptions (e.g., Parker, Dipboye, & Jackson, 1995; Rosen, Chang, Johnson, & Levy, 2009; Rosen, Harris, & Kacmar, 2009; Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007), less attention has been given to the processes linking POP and its demonstrated outcomes in a single study. Furthermore, Chang and colleagues (2009) argued that “despite intuitive appeal of the idea that perceived organizational politics will have an impact on individual-level outcomes associated with organizational effectiveness, research has failed to consistently demonstrate such an impact” (p. 779). For instance, a recent study by Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris, and Zivnuska (2011) found that POP was neither related to task-focused nor person-focused citizenship behavior. These inconsistent findings suggest the existence of potentially unidentified mediators and/or moderators. Our second objective is to contribute to this understanding by examining uncertainty (a state of anxiety or ambiguity at work) and emotional exhaustion (a state of physical and emotional depletion resulting from excessive job demands and continuous stress) as two underlying psychological mechanisms that sequentially mediate the relationships between POP and employee OCB (discretionary behaviors that are not part of one's prescribed job role) and work withdrawal behavior (counter-productive job behaviors such as absence from work without any tangible reason). We further explore the role of political skill as a boundary condition (i.e., moderator) in the influence of POP on emotional exhaustion through uncertainty. Political skill refers to the capacity to understand others at work, and to apply such knowledge to induce others to act in ways that promote one's personal or organizational goals (Blickle et al., 2011; Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005; Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005).

By addressing these two broad objectives, we hope to make at least two important contributions. First, we contribute to the ethical leadership literature by shedding light on how ethical leadership relates to OCB and deviant or work withdrawal behavior. Specifically, by investigating underlying mechanisms of the ethical leadership-OCB as well as the ethical leadership-deviant or work withdrawal behavior relationships, we not only address the question of *how* and *why* an ethical approach to leadership is important but more importantly, how such a leadership approach can be sustained in organizations. Second, by examining uncertainty and emotional exhaustion as sequential intervening variables in the relationship between POP and OCB as well as between POP and deviant or work withdrawal behavior, and political skill as a moderator in these relationships, we also contribute to the POP literature by showing how and when POP relates to these important individual-level outcomes. Indeed, although POP has been noted to constitute a workplace stressor (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989) which undermines employees' energy levels leading to the withholding of discretionary efforts such as citizenship behavior, prior research has either examined uncertainty or emotional exhaustion as outcomes of POP or the behaviors that lead to politics perceptions (Hochwarter, Ferris, Zinko, Arnell, & James, 2007) but not examined them as underlying strain reactions that lead to the outcomes of politics perceptions.

To develop our arguments, we draw on affective events theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) as an overarching theoretical framework. According to AET, features of work environment or events (e.g., political activities) influence behaviors (e.g., OCB and work withdrawal behavior) through affective states (e.g., uncertainty) that these work events create. Work events are things that employees experience every day at work and leaders are a major source of these work events (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2003; Valle & Perrewé, 2000). The theory also suggests emotions as important mediating mechanisms through which work events and affective states influence judgment-driven behaviors such as OCB and work withdrawal. AET further posits that rather than being passive recipients, individuals (e.g., their political skill) can also influence work environment or events. Thus, AET is an important theoretical framework for conceptualizing the influence of ethical leadership on POP, and boundary conditions as well as underlying psychological processes through which POP relates to employee citizenship and work withdrawal behaviors. We focus on employee citizenship behavior because it is important for effective functioning of organizations (Hoffman, Blair, Meriac, & Woehr, 2007; Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009) and work withdrawal because it can be very costly to the organization in terms of both human and financial resources (Cascio, 1991).

Our underlying argument in the present paper is that ethical leadership is a proximal antecedent of POP, and that the influence of POP on employee citizenship behavior as well as work withdrawal behavior is sequentially through uncertainty and emotional exhaustion. With the exception of Rosen, Chang, and colleagues (2009), Rosen, Harris, and colleagues (2009) who investigated the role of frustration and job satisfaction, and Chang and colleagues (2009) who examined the role of psychological strain and morale, we are not aware of any prior research that has simultaneously investigated the role of political skill, uncertainty, and emotional exhaustion in explaining the influence of POP on employee behaviors.

## 2. Theory and hypothesis development

### 2.1. Ethical Leadership, Politics Perceptions (POP), and employee uncertainty

Although POP can be viewed as functional or dysfunctional (Cropanzano et al., 1997), it is generally viewed as a dysfunctional aspect of a work environment. This is because it is associated with conflict and gamesmanship meant to further one's self interests without regard for the well-being of others or the employing organization (Ferris et al., 1989; Kacmar & Baron, 1999). Examples of dysfunctional political activities or behaviors that may lead to POP include backstabbing co-workers or spreading rumors to get ahead, ingratiating oneself by agreeing with those in power, or showing favoritism. Thus, POP represents an individual's subjective appraisals of the pervasiveness within one's work unit of such self-serving activities that are strategically designed to maximize short or long-term self-interests (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Ferris et al., 1989; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). POP has been found to have adverse and substantive influences on employees' attitudes and behaviors (Ferris et al., 1989, 2002; Gandz & Murray, 1980; Kacmar & Baron, 1999). For instance, POP has been identified as a source of physical and psychological strain (Cropanzano et al., 1997). It has also been associated with negative individual-level outcomes such as decreased morale, increased interpersonal conflict, reduced commitment, OCB, task performance, and work withdrawal behavior (Aryee et al., 2004; Chang et al., 2009; Cropanzano et al., 1997; Miler, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008; Rosen, Harris, et al., 2009; Rosen et al., 2006) (Fig. 1).

Although other contextual variables have been identified as important determinants of politics perceptions in organizations (Ferris et al., 1989; Kacmar & Baron, 1999), given the dominant role of leadership in shaping and setting the tone of the work environment (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006), it constitutes an important situational factor that may influence POP (Davis & Gardner, 2004; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). However, despite the theoretical relevance of ethical leadership to POP, we are aware of only one study that has investigated the relationship between ethical leadership and POP. Kacmar and colleagues (2011) found that ethical leadership negatively related to POP ( $r = -.41$ ) suggesting that POP might serve as an important mechanism in the ethical leadership process, a possibility they did not explore or test in their study.

According to Treviño and colleagues (e.g., Brown et al., 2005; Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003; Treviño, Hartman, & Brown, 2000), ethical leadership comprises two related dimensions which are necessary and required for one to be seen as an ethical leader: moral manager and moral person. *Moral manager* refers to the extent to which a leader uses the tools of their position to model appropriate behaviors in the workplace. Moral managers set and communicate standards and use rewards and punishment to ensure standards are followed. *Moral person* refers to the extent that a leader demonstrates honesty and trustworthiness and a concern for other people. A moral person is seen as approachable and therefore employees come to them with concerns and problems because they treat employees with respect and care, and consider their input in making decisions (Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Kalshoven et al., 2011). These are the features that distinguish ethical leadership from other related leadership constructs such as authentic leadership. For example, whereas ethical leaders emphasize moral management (more transactional) and "other" awareness, authentic leaders emphasize authenticity and self-awareness (Brown & Treviño, 2006, pp. 598–599). In addition, although authentic leadership has a moral component (i.e., internalized moral perspective), it also involves leader behavior that foster greater self-awareness, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of the leaders working with followers to promote self-development (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008)—contents that are unrelated to the ethical leadership construct (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Researchers studying ethical leadership have used social learning theory (SLT) to explain the influence of ethical leaders (Brown et al., 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Kalshoven et al., 2011; Mayer et al., 2009, 2012; Walumbwa, Morrison, & Christensen, 2012; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2011). A key argument of the social learning perspective is that leaders influence their followers by way of modeling appropriate standards so that employees learn what to do and what not to do by observing their leaders' behavior (Brown et al., 2005). In particular, because of leaders' authority role and the power to reward and punish, employees pay close attention to and mimic leaders' behavior by engaging in activities that are rewarded

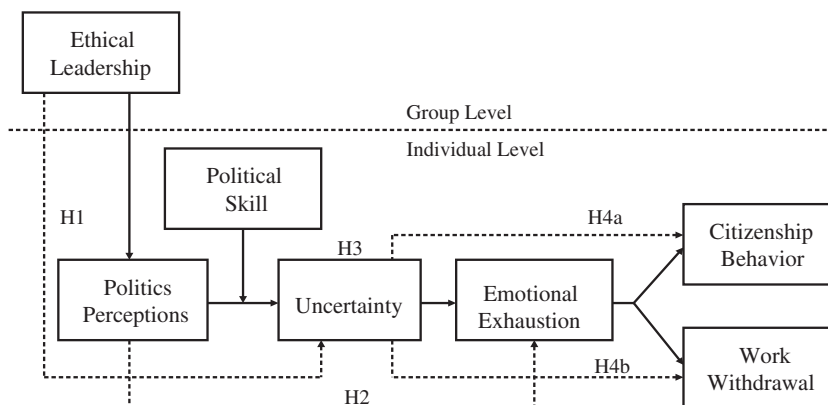


Fig. 1. Hypothesized relationships.

and avoiding those that are punished in the organization. Importantly, these rewards do not need to be direct but can also be learned vicariously by observing how others in the organization are disciplined for noncompliance and rewarded for doing what is 'right' (Brown et al., 2005).

Drawing on social learning theory (SLT; Bandura, 1977, 1986) and Brown and colleagues' (2005) conceptualization of ethical leadership, we expect ethical leadership to have a negative relationship with POP. Ethical leaders demonstrate normatively appropriate behavior (e.g., honesty, openness, and trustworthiness) such as communicating clear standards and stressing the importance of a two-way communication which involves expressing their own opinions while also highlighting the importance of listening to and getting along with others (Brown et al., 2005; Mayer et al., 2012). Ethical leaders treat employees with respect and care, consider employees in making decisions, and allow employees to voice (Brown et al., 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Detert & Burris, 2007; Kalshoven et al., 2011; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2011, 2012). Ethical leadership is also concerned with prescribing how individuals "ought" or "should" behave in the workplace (Brown & Mitchell, 2010, p. 583), and demonstrate that they care about the welfare of their employees by providing guidance and communicate to them that their best interests are the leader's primary concern (Brown et al., 2005). From a social learning perspective, we expect ethical leaders who emphasize the importance of doing good, caring for the welfare of employees while allowing employee voice and listening to their concerns and ideas, to become targets of emulation in terms of organizationally appropriate behaviors that promote the general good. As discussed by Brown and colleagues (2005), employees pay close attention and mimic behaviors that are rewarded and punished because they inform them about the benefits of the modeled behavior and the costs of inappropriate behavior. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that ethical leadership will negatively influence employees' self serving behaviors and the resulting POP (Kacmar et al., 2011).

Similarly, in highly political work environments, rewards are tied to relationships, power, and other less objective factors (Chang et al., 2009; Cropanzano et al., 1997). Employees in such work environments may be perceived to engage in political behaviors such as ingratiation, take credit for the work of others, are members of powerful coalitions, and have connections with those in power (Chang et al., 2009; Ferris et al., 1989). These political activities and practices are likely to result in a high degree of uncertainty (Rosen et al., 2006), because "the unwritten rules of success change as the power of those playing the political game varies" (Hall, Hochwarter, Ferris, & Bowen, 2004, p. 244). Moreover, because political environments are associated with high levels of self-serving behaviors, this is likely to undermine interpersonal trust—a key determinant of uncertainty (Kramer, 2001). Thus, we expect POP to positively relate to uncertainty. However, the contribution of the present study lies not in testing how politics perceptions relate to uncertainty, but rather in exploring whether politics perceptions provide one mechanism for explaining the influence of ethical leadership behavior on uncertainty. But, because ethical leaders are more likely to encourage frequent, consistent, and clear communications (Brown et al., 2005) thereby reducing ambiguity and uncertainty in the work unit, we hypothesize partial rather than complete mediation. We propose the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** Politics perceptions partially mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and uncertainty.

## 2.2. Uncertainty and emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is defined as feelings of being emotionally and physically spent by one's work (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Employees who are emotionally exhausted feel fatigued, used up, frustrated, worn out, and are often disinterested in what is going on at work. Emotional exhaustion has garnered increased research attention because it has been linked to a variety of personal outcomes such as physical and mental disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, and organizational outcomes such as negative work attitudes and behaviors (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

Prior research has directly linked POP to employee emotional states (Chang et al., 2009; Ferris, Frink, Gilmore, & Kacmar, 1994; Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999; Miler et al., 2008; Rosen, Harris, et al., 2009; Valle & Perrewé, 2000). However, because uncertainty is one of the key determinants of people's reactions toward transgressions, it may affect people's cognitions, perceptions, feelings, and behaviors (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002). According to AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), events at work (e.g., uncertainty) are likely to elicit intense emotional reactions from employees, because the nature of work is a very powerful predictor of emotional exhaustion (Maslach, 1978). Although not the focus of their study, Hochwarter and colleagues (2007) reported a positive correlation between uncertainty and emotional exhaustion. Similarly, based on AET, we expect uncertainty to be positively related to employee emotional exhaustion. Uncertainty in the work environment is likely to result in a high degree of frustration, lack of confidence, low trust and irritability. Such strain manifestations may deplete employees' emotional and physical resources leading to emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Therefore, we suggest that uncertainty may act as an important mediator of the relationship between POP and emotional exhaustion. However, because previous research has shown POP to influence employee attitudes and behaviors (Chang et al., 2009; Ferris et al., 1994; Miler et al., 2008; Rosen, Harris, et al., 2009), we posit uncertainty to partially mediate this relationship. We propose the following:

**Hypothesis 2.** Uncertainty partially mediates the relationship between politics perceptions and emotional exhaustion.

## 2.3. Politics perceptions, political skill, uncertainty, and emotional exhaustion

According to Perrewé et al. (2004), political skill refers to "the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (p. 142). It therefore

represents a comprehensive pattern of social competencies, with cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations that may have both direct effects on outcomes and moderating effects on predictor-outcome relations (Ferris et al., 2007). Because of the fundamental role of political skill in shaping work effectiveness and in successfully dealing with the political realities of organizational life (Ferris et al., 2007), political skill may constitute a coping strategy for neutralizing the uncertainty that emanates from a politically-charged work environment. For instance, because politically skilled individuals are competent at developing and using diverse networks of people, are very adaptable, and have the capacity to effectively exercise influence over others at work (Ferris et al., 2007), individuals high in political skill are more likely to effectively manage or deal with a politically-charged work environment and thus may experience less uncertainty. Conversely, those low in political skill are less likely to be able to adequately deal with a politically-charged work environment and thus, may experience high uncertainty. This view is consistent with the idea that political skill can be a neutralizer of job or work-related job stressors such as POP (Perrewé et al., 2004). Indeed, research suggests that individuals possessing high social competency (e.g., political skill) are more likely to meet the demands of most environments by adjusting their actions to the proper level (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987). Therefore, we suggest that uncertainty may serve as a potential mechanism linking the interaction influence of POP and political skill on emotional exhaustion. However, because political behavior has been directly linked with both decreased uncertainty and emotional exhaustion (Hochwarter et al., 2007), and the fact that there may be other potentially relevant processes that may also account for this influence (i.e., follower attitudes), we propose partial rather than full mediation.

**Hypothesis 3.** Uncertainty partially mediates the influence of the interaction term of politics perceptions and political skill on emotional exhaustion.

#### 2.4. Emotional exhaustion, organizational citizenship behavior, and work withdrawal

Organ (1997) defined OCB as “a class of discretionary behaviors that contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance” (p. 91). We define work withdrawal as counter-productive behaviors employees use to minimize the time spent on their specific work tasks while maintaining their current organization and work-role memberships (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990). Examples of such counter-productive job behaviors include absence from work without any tangible reason, coming to work late, making excuses to get out of work, taking longer breaks, or calling in sick when one is not actually sick (Wang & Walumbwa, 2007).

According to AET, emotions are important determinants of judgment-driven behaviors such as OCB and work withdrawal. This view is further supported by conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) which suggests that emotionally exhausted people are likely to engage in avoidant and withdrawal behaviors as a means to replace or protect threatened resources (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). Following AET, we expect emotional exhaustion to act as a potential mediator in the relationship between uncertainty and employee OCB and work withdrawal. However, because considerable research has shown that emotional exhaustion is associated with individual-level outcomes such as reduced OCB and withdrawal behaviors (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003; Kiffin-Petersen, Jordan, & Soutar, 2010; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998), we expect emotional exhaustion to partially mediate the emotional exhaustion-employee OCB as well as emotional exhaustion-work withdrawal relationships. This leads to our final set of hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 4a.** Emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between uncertainty and organizational citizenship behavior.

**Hypothesis 4b.** Emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between uncertainty and work withdrawal.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants and procedure

We tested our hypotheses using data collected from employees and their immediate supervisors in a telecommunication company in a Southern province of the People's Republic of China (PRC). A survey coordinator (a senior human resources officer) in the participating organization compiled a list of respondents and their supervisors from across the departments in that organization. We randomly selected 60 supervisors with 3–9 subordinates or direct reports on the list. One of the authors then held briefing sessions with our potential respondents during which the said author explained the objective of the survey, procedures for completing the questionnaires, and assured them of the confidentiality of their responses. Respondents were given a maximum of thirty minutes to complete and return the questionnaires to the said author with a vast majority of them completing their questionnaires in an average of fifteen minutes. Subordinates were also requested to provide the names of their supervisors for cross-checking purposes and to ensure we accurately matched their responses to the supervisor ratings. Two weeks after administering the subordinate questionnaires, supervisors of respondents were invited to another session where the said author again explained the objectives of the survey and requested supervisors to rate the OCB of their focal subordinates. Completed supervisor questionnaires were directly returned to the author. We used a coding scheme to ensure matched supervisor-subordinate data.

We distributed a total of 350 subordinate and 60 supervisor questionnaires. Complete data were obtained from 277 subordinates or direct reports (79% response rate) and 55 supervisors (92% response rate) nested in 55 work groups. On average, each supervisor rated 5 direct reports, ranging from 3 to 9 per supervisor. Direct reports reported an average age of 27.7 years (*s. d.* = 6.9). In terms of sex composition, 44% of the respondents were females. Direct reports reported an average organizational tenure of 4.1 years (*s. d.* = 3.9), and had obtained an average of 12.9 (*s. d.* = 3.4) years of education. Supervisors reported an average age of 34.6 years (*s. d.* = 8.0), 64% were male, an average of 13.0 (*s. d.* = 3.4) years of education, and an average organizational tenure of 7.0 years (*s. d.* = 3.8).

### 3.2. Measures

Questionnaires were administered in Chinese but were originally constructed in English. We followed Brislin's (1980) translation-back translation procedure to translate the English version into Chinese. A professional translator was requested to translate the original version into Chinese which was then back translated into English by a bilingual academic who was blind to the objectives of the study and had not seen the original survey. This translator was also asked to comment on any ambiguously worded item. This process did not suggest noteworthy changes in any of the items used in this study. We then pilot tested the Chinese version using 50 employees of the participating organization but who were not included in the final sample. Based on feedback from the pilot test, we reworded a few items to ensure clarity. Unless otherwise indicated, response options ranged from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 7 ("Strongly agree").

#### 3.2.1. Ethical leadership

We measured ethical leadership behavior with the 10-item Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) developed by Brown et al. (2005). Sample items are "Makes fair and balanced decisions," "Sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics," "Listens to what employees have to say," and "Disciplines employees who violate ethical standards." The scale's alpha reliability in this study is .93 and is consistent with previous research (e.g., Brown et al., 2005; Mayer et al., 2009, 2012; Schaubroeck et al., 2012; Walumbwa et al., 2011).

Because our interest in this study is on the influence of ethical leadership in fostering a specific work environment and how it (work environment) impacts individuals' perceptions and experience of that environment, we treated ethical leadership as a group level variable and averaged within each work group, employees' evaluations of their immediate supervisor's ethical leadership behavior. This conceptualization of ethical leadership at the group level is consistent with past research (e.g., Detert, Treviño, Burris, & Andiappan, 2007; Mayer et al., 2009, 2012; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2011, 2012), and also consistent with the idea that employees working with the same leader are likely to experience similar leadership behaviors (Kirkman, Chen, Farh, Chen, & Lowe, 2009; Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010).

To empirically justify aggregating individual scores to the group, we calculated within-group agreement ( $r_{wg}$ ; James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984), the intraclass correlations (ICC[1]), and the reliability of the means (ICC[2]) (Bliese, 2000). The average  $r_{wg}$  was .71 (ranging from .37 to 1.00), exceeding the suggested cutoff value of .70 (Klein et al., 2000). The ICC(1) and ICC(2) were .25 and .66, respectively, with the analysis of variance (ANOVAs) indicating that the group effect was significant ( $p < .01$ ). Although the ICC2 value is within acceptable limit (Glick, 1985), it is relatively low (Bliese, Halverson, & Schriesheim, 2002). This may have been due to the group size variations (ranging from 3 to 9) because ICC2 value is a function of ICC1 and group size (Bliese, 1998, 2000). However, because the ANOVA, ICC1, internal consistency, and  $r_{wg}$  are all above acceptable cut offs, aggregation is justified (Bliese, 1998). Therefore, based on theory and empirical evidence, we proceeded with aggregation of ethical leadership. The mean of ethical leadership at the group level was 5.23 (*s. d.* = .83).

#### 3.2.2. Politics perceptions

We used a 6-item scale reported by Hochwarter and colleagues (2003) to measure POP. Sample items are "People in this work group spend too much time pleasing those who can help them" and "There is a lot of self-serving behavior that go on in this work group." The scale's alpha reliability in this study is .92 and is consistent with previous research (e.g., Aryee et al., 2004; Chang et al., 2009; Cropanzano et al., 1997; Hochwarter, Kacmar, Perrewé, & Johnson, 2003; Hochwarter et al., 2007).

#### 3.2.3. Political skill

A 6-item version of Ferris and colleagues' (1999) 18-item scale was used to measure political skill. Sample items are "I find it easy to picture myself in the position of others," "I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me," and "I am good at getting others to respond positively to me." The scale's alpha reliability in this study is .85 and is consistent with previous studies that have shown this version of the scale to have adequate psychometric properties (Perrewé et al., 2004; Zellars, Perrewé, Rossi, Tepper, & Ferris, 2008).

#### 3.2.4. Uncertainty

A 4-item scale by Hochwarter and colleagues (2007) was used to measure uncertainty. Sample items are "I get mixed messages from different people concerning what I am supposed to do at work" and "There is a great deal of ambiguity in my job." The scale's alpha reliability in this study is .71. Hochwarter and colleagues (2007) reported an alpha of .86 for Study 1 and .89 for Study 2.

### 3.2.5. Emotional exhaustion

We used a 5-item version of the emotional exhaustion subscale of Maslach and Jackson's (1981) burnout scale to measure emotional exhaustion. Response options ranged from 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Daily") with scale items framed as statements of job-related feelings. Sample items are "I feel burned out from my work" and "I feel emotionally drained from work." The scale's alpha reliability is .90 and is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Wright & Cropanzano, 1998; Zellars, Perrewé, & Hochwarter, 2000).

### 3.2.6. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)

We used a 16-item scale reported by Lee and Allen (2002) to measure citizenship behaviors directed at the organization (OCBO) and citizenship behaviors aimed at helping individuals (OCBI). Examples of OCBO behaviors include attending extra organizational functions and offering ideas to improve the functioning of the organization, whereas those of OCBI behaviors include helping fellow employees who are absent or assisting other employees with their workload. Based on a 5-point response format (1 = "Never" to 5 = "Very often") supervisors rated the frequency with which the focal direct report "... helps others who have been absent," "... adjusts his/her work schedule to accommodate other employees' request for time off," "... attends functions that are not required but that help the organization's image," and "... offers ideas to improve the functioning of the organization." Following Law, Wong, and Mobley's (1998; see also Walumbwa, Hartnell, et al., 2010; Walumbwa, Wang, Wang, Schaubroeck, & Avolio, 2010) recommendation, we combined the two dimensions as we were interested in overall discretionary behaviors. The scale's alpha reliability is .96 and is consistent with previous research (Walumbwa, Hartnell, et al., 2010; Walumbwa, Wang, et al., 2010).

### 3.2.7. Work withdrawal

We used a 12-item scale by Hanisch and Hulin (1990) to measure work withdrawal. Respondents indicated the frequency with which they had engaged in that behavior in the past three weeks ranging from 1 ("Never") to 5 ("More than once per week"). Sample items are "Being late for work," "Making excuses to go somewhere to get out of work," "Ignoring tasks that will not help your performance review or pay raise," and "Taking frequent or long coffee or lunch breaks." The scale's alpha reliability is .89 and is consistent with previous cross-cultural research (e.g., Walumbwa & Lawler, 2003; Wang & Walumbwa, 2007).

### 3.2.8. Control variables

Prior research has identified followers' age, education, and sex as related to employees' attitudes and behaviors as well as leader effectiveness (e.g., Elsesser & Lever, 2011; Riordan, Griffith, & Weatherly, 2003). As a result, their omission when examining the influence of leadership on follower attitudes and behaviors could potentially bias the results. Therefore, following prior leadership research (e.g., Berson, Shamir, Avolio, & Popper, 2001; Schaubroeck, Lam, & Cha, 2007; Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011; Walumbwa, Wang, et al., 2010), we controlled for follower demographics of age, education, and sex to enhance the internal validity of our study.

## 3.3. Analytic strategy

Given the multilevel nature of our data, we used HLM 6.04 to test our hypotheses with random coefficient modeling (RCM; also termed hierarchical linear modeling, or HLM; see Bliese (2002)). Using RCM allowed us to account for the non-independence in our OCB data because each supervisor evaluated multiple employees. Following the analytical procedures outlined by Bliese (2002), we analyzed ethical leadership at the group level of analysis (Level 2) and POP, uncertainty, emotional exhaustion, OCB, and work withdrawal at the individual level of analysis (Level 1).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Confirmatory factor analyses

Because all of our data with exception of supervisor-rated OCB came from the same source (employees), we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to examine whether these captured distinct constructs, using LISREL 8.72 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2001). Table 1 presents the CFA results. As shown, the hypothesized 7-factor model fit the data well ( $\chi^2_{56, n=277} = 87.38$ ; RMSEA = 0.05; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.97), and is better than all the alternative models, providing evidence of the construct distinctiveness of

**Table 1**  
Comparison of measurement models.

Models and Structure	$\chi^2$	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	TLI	CFI	RMR	RMSEA
1: Hypothesized 7-factor model	87.38	56	–	.97	.98	.05	.05
2: 6-factor model : Politics perceptions and uncertainty merged	197.88	62	110.50	.90	.93	.14	.09
3: 6-factor model : Emotional and work withdrawal merged	307.62	62	220.24	.82	.88	.09	.11
4: 5-factor model : Politics perceptions, uncertainty, and emotional exhaustion merged	515.30	67	427.92	.70	.78	.23	.16
5: 2-factor model : Ethical leadership, Politics perceptions, political skill, uncertainty, emotional exhaustion, and work withdrawal merged	1171.55	76	656.25	.35	.45	.26	.21

Note. TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; RMR = Root Mean Square Residual. All chi-square difference significant at  $p < .001$ ;  $\Delta\chi^2$  is in relation to model 1.

ethical leadership, POP, political skill, uncertainty, emotional exhaustion, OCB, and work withdrawal. In addition, we compared the 7-factor measurement model against an alternative model in which all the measures collected from employees (ethical leadership, POP, political skill, emotional exhaustion, and work withdrawal) were loaded onto a single factor and supervisor-rated OCB freely estimated. The two-factor model fit the data significantly worse ( $\chi^2_{76, n=277} = 1171.55$ ; CFI = 0.45; TLI = 0.35; RMSEA = 0.21). These results suggest that same-source variance was not a problem in this study further providing support for our measures' discriminant validity.

#### 4.2. Hypothesis tests

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics, internal consistency reliabilities, and zero-order correlations of the study variables. Below, we report RCM results.

We tested our hypotheses using the cross-level mediation procedures outlined by Mathieu and Taylor (2006), which are in line with Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation test. We controlled for employee age, sex, and education in all analyses, and report Snijders and Bosker's (1999) pseudo- $R^2$  ( $\sim R^2$ ) for the models, a statistic that is based on proportional reduction of Level 1 and Level 2 errors due to predictors in the model. However, before testing our hypotheses, we first examined the degree of between group variance in employee OCB and work withdrawal. Results of null models revealed that 63.8% of the variance in employee OCB and 37.2% of the variance in work withdrawal resides between groups ( $p < .01$ ).

Hypothesis 1 posited that POP would partially mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and uncertainty. In addition to employee age, sex, and education, we also controlled for political skill in testing this hypothesis. Table 3 summarizes our RCM results.

As shown in Table 3, group level ethical leadership is negative and significantly related to POP ( $\hat{\gamma} = -.36, p < .05$ , Model 1), with this cross-level influence accounting for a  $\sim R^2$  of .07. Similarly, results show that ethical leadership is negative and significantly related to uncertainty ( $\hat{\gamma} = -.40, p < .001$ , Model 2). Results shown in Table 3 also suggest that POP is positive and significantly related to uncertainty ( $\hat{\gamma} = .22, p < .01$ , Model 3). Providing support for the partial mediation suggested in Hypothesis 1, results show that ethical leadership is still significantly related to uncertainty but the coefficient slightly reduced in magnitude ( $\hat{\gamma} = -.38, p < .001$ , Model 3). Following the procedure developed by Selig and Preacher (2008) to test the significance of indirect influence based on un-standardized coefficients and their standard errors, we found that 95% bootstrapping confidence interval for the mediator lie between .01 and .17. Because zero is not in the 95% confidence intervals, we conclude that the indirect influence we report above is indeed significantly different from zero ( $p < .05$ , two-tailed). Next, following the procedure outlined by Snijders and Bosker's (1999), we determined that the initial and final models of uncertainty yielded  $\sim R^2$ s of .22 and .25, respectively, indicating that POP accounted for 3% of uncertainty variance above and beyond that accounted for by ethical leadership and the controls.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that uncertainty would partially mediate the relationship between POP and emotional exhaustion. Once again, we controlled for age, sex, education, and political skill in our analyses. Results are shown in Table 3 (Models 5–6). Our results show that POP is positive and significantly related to emotional exhaustion ( $\hat{\gamma} = .34, p < .001$ , Model 5). We also found that uncertainty is positive and significantly related to emotional exhaustion ( $\hat{\gamma} = .29, p < .01$ , Model 6). However, POP is still significantly related to emotional exhaustion but reduced in magnitude ( $\hat{\gamma} = .26, p < .001$ , Model 6), suggesting that uncertainty partially mediates the relationship between POP and emotional exhaustion. Using bootstrapped procedure, we found that 95% bootstrapping confidence interval for the mediator lie between .03 and .18, suggesting that the indirect influence we report above is indeed significantly different from zero ( $p < .05$ , two-tailed). We determined that the initial and final models of uncertainty yielded  $\sim R^2$ s of .14 and .17, respectively, suggesting that uncertainty accounted for 3% of emotional exhaustion variance above and beyond that accounted for by ethical leadership, POP, and the controls.

Hypothesis 3 posited that uncertainty would partially mediate the influence of the interaction term of POP and political skill on emotional exhaustion. Table 3 shows the results. To test this hypothesis, we added the interaction term of POP and political skill to Model 3 to test the moderating influence of political skill on the relationship between POP and uncertainty. As shown in Table 3,

**Table 2**  
Means, standard deviations, and correlations.

Variables	Mean	s. d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Employee age	27.67	6.89										
2. Employee sex	.56	.50	.30**									
3. Employee education	12.89	3.43	.22**	.06								
4. Ethical leadership	5.31	1.24	-.11	-.05	-.17**	.93						
5. Politics perceptions	3.09	1.52	.23**	.02	.24**	-.20**	.92					
6. Political skill	5.26	1.01	.11*	.05	-.03	.39**	-.04	.85				
7. Uncertainty	2.38	1.13	.03	-.11	.10	-.18**	.30**	-.11	.71			
8. Emotional exhaustion	3.24	1.37	.00	.02	.17*	-.22**	.34**	-.01	.33**	.90		
9. Citizenship behavior	5.14	.97	.02**	.05	.30**	.11	-.01	.15*	-.14*	-.18**	.96	
10. Work withdrawal	2.17	1.00	.18**	-.06	.11	-.28**	.27**	-.18**	.36**	.51**	-.17**	.85

Note.  $N = 277$ ; The reliability coefficients are in diagonal. Ethical leadership assigned back to individual level.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$  (two tailed).



**Table 3**  
Hierarchical linear modeling results.

Dependent variable	POP		Uncertainty		Emotional exhaustion		Citizenship behavior		Work withdrawal	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Controls										
Employee age	-.00	.00	.00	.00	-.01	-.01	.01	.01	-.01	-.01
Employee sex	-.14	-.30**	-.27*	-.34**	-.05	-.12	-.09	-.07	-.09	.06
Employee education	-.02	.00	.01	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	.01	.00
Political skill	-.12	.01	.05	.01	.05	.04	.08*	.09**	-.18**	-.19**
Group-level variable										
Ethical leadership	-.36*	-.38***	-.40***	-.37**	-.39***	-.39***	.08	.08	-.41***	-.41**
Individual-level variables										
Politics perceptions			.22**	.26***	.34***	.26**	-.01	.02	.14***	.08
Uncertainty						.29***	-.07	-.04	.15*	.07
Emotional exhaustion								-.10*		.25***
Moderator										
Politics perceptions * Political skill				-.18*	-.12	-.09	.05	.05	-.12*	-.12*
~R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.22	.25	.35	.14	.17	.01	.02	.20	.26

Note. N = 277 (Individual-level) and 55 (Group-level). \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).

although the interaction influence is significantly related to uncertainty ( $\hat{\gamma} = -.18, p < .05$ , Model 4), the interaction is not significantly related to emotional exhaustion ( $\hat{\gamma} = -.12$ , ns, Model 6), failing to meet Baron and Kenny's (1986) traditional criteria. However, Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger (1998) and Shrout and Bolger (2002) have recently suggested that if there is a significant relationship between independent (the interaction term) and the mediator variable, and a significant relationship between mediator and dependent variable, then even if the independent variable is not related to the dependent variable, an indirect influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable is implied (see Kenny et al., 1998, p. 260). Therefore, we proceeded to test the indirect influence assuming that there is a potential distal relationship between the interaction term of POP and political skill and emotional exhaustion; hence, the main influence may be weak or non-significant even though an indirect influence may exist (Kenny et al., 1998; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Testing this indirect influence requires a significant relationship between the interaction term of POP and political skill and uncertainty and a significant relationship between uncertainty and emotional exhaustion (Kenny et al., 1998). As shown above, the interaction influence was significantly related to uncertainty ( $\hat{\gamma} = -.18, p < .05$ , Model 4). Similarly, Table 3 also shows that the influence of uncertainty on emotional exhaustion is significant ( $\hat{\gamma} = .29, p < .001$ , Model 6). We therefore concluded that uncertainty completely mediated the influence of the interaction term of POP and political skill on emotional exhaustion.

Finally, Hypotheses 4a and 4b suggested that emotional exhaustion would partially mediate the relationship between uncertainty and OCB (H4a) as well as the relationship between uncertainty and work withdrawal (H4b). We controlled for age, sex, education, ethical leadership, POP, and political skill in our analyses. Results are shown in Table 3. As shown in Table 3 (Model 6), uncertainty is positively related to emotional exhaustion. However, our results show that uncertainty is not significantly related to OCB ( $\hat{\gamma} = -.07$ , ns, Model 7). Following Kenny et al. (1998) and Shrout and Bolger (2002), we continued to test the indirect influence of uncertainty on OCB. Table 3 shows that the influence of emotional exhaustion on OCB is significant ( $\hat{\gamma} = -.10, p < .05$ , Model 8). These results suggest that emotional exhaustion completely mediated the influence of uncertainty on OCB. The initial and final models of OCB yielded  $\sim R^2$ s of .01 and .02, respectively, indicating that emotional exhaustion accounted for 1% of OCB variance above and beyond that accounted for by ethical leadership, uncertainty, POP and the controls.

Table 3 also shows that uncertainty is significantly related to work withdrawal ( $\hat{\gamma} = .15, p < .05$ , Model 9). In support of Hypothesis 4b, results show that emotional exhaustion is significantly related to work withdrawal ( $\hat{\gamma} = .25, p < .001$ , Model 10), and that the relationship between uncertainty and work withdrawal is not significant when both uncertainty and emotional exhaustion are included in the same equation ( $\hat{\gamma} = .07$ , ns, Model 10). These results suggest that emotional exhaustion fully mediates the relationship between uncertainty and work withdrawal. Using bootstrapped procedure, we found that 95% bootstrapping confidence interval lie between .01 and .07, suggesting that the indirect influence we report above is indeed significantly different from zero ( $p < .05$ , two-tailed). The initial and final models of uncertainty yielded initial and final  $\sim R^2$ s of .20 and .26, respectively, indicating that emotional exhaustion accounted for 6% of the variance in work withdrawal above and beyond that accounted for by ethical leadership, POP, uncertainty, and the controls.

## 5. Discussion

This study was a response to calls to investigate the role of politics perceptions in the leadership process (Ammeter et al., 2002; Davis & Gardner, 2004; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007), focusing on ethical leadership as a theoretically relevant leadership construct (Brown et al., 2005). In doing so, we also examined a boundary condition and underlying psychological mechanisms that link POP to employee OCB and work withdrawal. First, we found that POP partially mediated the ethical leadership-uncertainty relationship. Second, we found that the relationship between POP and emotional exhaustion was partially mediated by uncertainty. Third, uncertainty fully mediated the influence of the interaction term of POP and political skill on emotional exhaustion. Finally, we found uncertainty to

have an indirect influence on both employee OCB and work withdrawal, with this relationship fully mediated through emotional exhaustion. The implications of our findings, the limitations of our research, and future research directions are discussed below.

### 5.1. Theoretical and practical implications

Our study makes several contributions to both ethical leadership (leadership in general) and organizational politics literatures in several important ways. First, previous research has suggested that organizational politics (Bolman & Deal, 2008; House, 1995; House & Aditya, 1997) may play an important role in the leadership process. Drawing on AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), our results complement this work by demonstrating perhaps for the first time, that ethical leadership is an important predictor of POP. Ethical leaders may do this by using their position to reward 'organizationally desired' behavior, leading by example (i.e., self-discipline and demonstrating high moral standards, fairness, and trustworthiness), setting clear expectations, and listening to employees' concerns and inputs (Brown et al., 2005). Second, we contribute to the ethical leadership literature by examining the mediating mechanisms through which ethical leadership ultimately influences employee OCB and work withdrawal. Our findings complement previous research (Avey et al., 2011; Piccolo, Greenbaum, den Hartog, & Folger, 2010; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2011) by revealing how and when ethical leadership may be related to employee citizenship behavior and work withdrawal behavior. However, because this might be the first study to have shown politics perceptions as a proximal mediator in the ethical leadership process, it is clear that more research is needed to extend our current findings to other contexts. Third, previous research linking politics perceptions and individual-level outcomes is equivocal. Our study contributes to this literature by examining the boundary conditions and psychological mechanisms through which POP influences employee OCB and work withdrawal (Brouer, Harris, & Kacmar, 2011; Chang et al., 2009). Consistent with this study, Rosen, Chang, and colleagues (2009) and Rosen, Harris, and colleagues (2009) used AET framework (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) to describe the mechanisms that relate POP to emotional reactions, job satisfaction, and distal outcomes. Our research complements this study by introducing uncertainty as a proximal mediator to POP, which, in turn, influences emotional exhaustion, and consequently employee OCB and work withdrawal. More importantly, we introduce employee political skill as a situational variable that interacts with POP to influence emotional exhaustion through uncertainty. Finally, it is important to note that we did not find a direct relationship between uncertainty and OCB. Although we do not know why this was the case, it is intuitively plausible that the mechanisms linking uncertainty and positive work outcomes such as OCB may be more complex and indirect than the mechanisms linking uncertainty and work withdrawal. Future research may wish to further investigate how and why uncertainty relates to employee work outcomes.

Our findings have implications for fostering a work environment that motivates employees to engage in discretionary behaviors that contribute to organizational effectiveness. First and in view of the documented negative influence of politics perceptions on employee work outcomes, our finding that ethical leadership negatively related to employees' perceptions of politics suggests that organizations should consider training leaders in ethical leadership behaviors to deal with unwanted self-serving behaviors in the workplace. The grounding of ethical leadership in social learning theory suggests that training interventions may take the form of senior level managerial employees' role-modeling ethical leadership behaviors through a mentoring relationship with junior level managerial employees (Brown et al., 2005). Such a training intervention and its trickle-down effects will foster an ethical climate which will militate against the non-sanctioned means of pursuing self-interest and the resulting perceptions of politics.

Second, our finding of the moderating influence of political skill in the POP-uncertainty relationship underscores the role of individual differences in the ability to cope with stress. For individuals high in political skill relative to those low in political skill, this skill or competency serves as a resource to mitigate the stress engendered by POP and therefore are able to conserve resources to devote to performing OCB and reduced levels of withdrawal behavior. Given that exhausted employees cannot constitute a source of competitive advantage, organizations may be advised to consider training their employees in political skill as an intervention strategy to equip them with the coping skills needed to ameliorate the consequences of stress. Although political skill may be inborn, Ferris, Davidson, and colleagues (2005), Ferris, Treadway, and colleagues (2005) argue that it is a trainable skill. Consequently, organizations may need to train employees in the competencies that will enable them to mitigate the deleterious effects of stress both on their well-being and work behaviors. Ferris, Davidson, and colleagues (2005, p. 35), Ferris, Treadway, and colleagues (2005, p. 35) suggest drama-based training and executive coaching as potentially effective techniques for developing political skill.

### 5.2. Limitations and conclusions

Our findings should be interpreted against a backdrop of the limitations of our study. First, with the exception of supervisor-rated OCB, data on the other study variables were obtained from the same source (e.g., employees) giving rise to concerns about possible common source bias. We attempted to address this limitation by aggregating individual ratings of ethical leadership to create a more 'objective' measure of the independent variable. Although the ratings are still subjective, the fact that they are based on several employees' perceptions and that there is acceptable agreement suggests this is a more 'objective' measure. We also conducted a CFA to assess the distinctiveness of our self-report measures and results clearly showed the constructs were distinct. Moreover, our correlations also showed differential relationships among the self-report measures despite their common measurement source. However, given the inherent limitation of the current design which prevented us from making causal claims, future research that adopts a longitudinal design may help ascertain the causal basis of the relationships we reported.

Second, although we drew on AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) as an overarching theoretical framework to link our constructs, there might be other unmeasured variables that could help extend our current findings. For example, future research may consider employee attitudes such as organizational commitment or psychological well-being as potential mediators. Lee and Ashforth (1996)

reported a meta-analytic corrected correlation ( $r$ ) of  $-.43$  between organizational commitment and burnout, suggesting that organizational commitment could serve as a potential mediator in the emotional exhaustion–OCB and emotional exhaustion–work withdrawal relationships. Future research may also consider including potential moderators that may enhance or inhibit the strength of the relationship between emotional exhaustion and OCB as well as between emotional exhaustion and work withdrawal. Such moderators could include contextual variables such as organization structure and task interdependence, individual differences such as employee personality or demographic variables such as age and gender. Finally, future research may also consider additional criterion variables such as job performance which may result from uncertainty (Colquitt, LePine, Piccolo, Zapata, & Rich, 2012) or actual turnover and employee incivility, which have been found to result from emotional exhaustion (e.g., van Jaarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

Third, because our findings are based on a sample from the People's Republic of China and a single organization, albeit a large one, they may not generalize to other cultural contexts. For example, although the general tenets of ethical leadership may be universal, consistent with other types of leadership such as transformational leadership (Kirkman et al., 2009; Walumbwa, Lawler, & Avolio, 2007), specific aspects of ethical leadership may be emphasized differently across cultures (Resick, Hanges, Dickson, & Mitchelson, 2006). Specifically, Resick and colleagues (2006) found the four aspects of ethical leadership (i.e., Character/Integrity, Altruism, Collective Motivation, and Encouragement) as measured by the Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (GLOBE) project are universally endorsed as important for effective leadership. However, they also reported that cultures varied significantly in the degree of endorsement for each dimension. We therefore call for future research to replicate our current findings by conducting cross-cultural research in two or more countries with distinct cultural orientations before any meaningful generalizations can be made. Such research should also identify both differences and similarities in the core attributes of ethical leadership across and within countries. Additionally, as more and more organizations operate in a global environment, future research might extend our findings not only by using samples from other national cultures but also explore the role of cultural and individual differences within specific countries. Power distance, for example, may be particularly relevant to ethical leadership because it not only describes how authority (i.e., supervisors) is perceived, but also how decision-making authority functions and affects their direct report's thinking (Dorfman, 2004; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). With its rapid industrialization and the increased diversity in values (Xie, Schaubroeck, & Lam, 2008), China, in particular, provides a rich ground for testing the extent to which contextual and individual difference variables may affect the emergence and functioning of ethical leadership.

In conclusion, our study adds to knowledge of an important emerging construct, ethical leadership. Specifically, our findings highlight the importance of ethical leadership for reducing organizational politics perceptions, which, in turn, was positively related to uncertainty and emotional exhaustion. However, individuals high in political skill are able to mitigate the influence of politics perceptions on their experience of uncertainty but not for those low in political skill. Furthermore, our findings provide evidence that uncertainty influenced employee OCB and work withdrawal through emotional exhaustion. We hope this study will stimulate additional research to further explore the dynamics between leadership and politics perceptions, and how and when they relate to important organizational and individual outcomes.

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