

# **Self-serving Leadership and Employee Knowledge Hiding: A Dual-pathway Model**

## **Abstract**

**Purpose**—Drawing upon the cognitive-affective processing system (CAPS) framework, the current study proposes a dual-pathway model that suggests self-serving leadership has a positive influence on employee knowledge hiding. The study also examines the mediating effects of relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion, as well as the moderating effect of political skills, to provide a comprehensive understanding of these relationships.

**Design/methodology/approach**—This study employs two data collection methods, utilizing 644 paired samples from 118 teams within a company based in Shenzhen, China. Moreover, hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was used to test the hypothesized relationships.

**Findings**—First, this study supports the idea that self-serving leadership is a possible predictor of employee knowledge hiding. Second, it is found that self-serving leadership results in relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion, resulting in further employee knowledge hiding. Third, this study shows that political skills moderate the relationship between self-serving leadership and employees' relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion. Specifically, the influence of self-serving leadership on knowledge hiding via relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion is weaker (stronger) when employees have high (low) political skills.

**Originality/value** – This study makes a unique contribution to the knowledge management literature in several ways. First, it introduces self-serving leadership as a predictor of employee knowledge hiding, expanding the current understanding of this phenomenon. Second, it offers a novel conceptualization, suggesting that employees coping with self-serving leadership may experience relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion, and these factors can predict their engagement in knowledge hiding. Third, the research findings on the moderating role of political skills push the boundaries of the knowledge-hiding literature, providing new insights into the conditions under which this behavior occurs.

**Keywords:** Self-serving leadership, Relative deprivation, Emotional exhaustion, Political skills, Knowledge hiding

## 1. Introduction

Self-serving leadership, a leadership style where leaders prioritize their interests above team and organizational goals (Decoster et al., 2021; Li, 2024; Peng et al., 2019), has garnered widespread attention. In practice, there is no shortage of examples where leaders abuse their power for personal gain, such as the Tyco International scandal (Camps et al., 2012), and the financial scandal involving Microsoft executives (Decoster et al., 2021). In academia, as scholars focus on self-serving leadership, exploration of this leadership style continues to enrich. Prior studies have demonstrated various types of self-serving behaviors exhibited by leaders: 1) Leaders privately occupy company equipment, misappropriate colossal severance and employee compensation, and 2) Leaders raise their salaries while cutting the employees' income. 3) Leaders exploit their roles to accumulate personal acclaim and assets. 4) Leaders indulge in using their position to assist others (suppliers or subordinates) to receive benefits from them. 5) Leaders claim their followers' work as their own. 6) Leaders often show scant regard for their subordinates' well-being (Li, 2024; Peng et al., 2019; Rus et al., 2010; Williams, 2014). Given the research on the impacts of self-serving leadership, scholars commonly view it as destructive and have confirmed its significant adverse effects on organizations and employees. Regarding cognitive outcomes, studies have found that self-serving leadership reduces organizational members' psychological safety (Peng et al., 2019) and even induces employees' desire for retaliation (Decoster et al., 2019). Similarly, regarding emotional outcomes, self-serving leadership triggers negative emotions in employees (Camps et al., 2012), such as anger (Zhang et al., 2023). Finally, under the influence of various negative cognitions or emotions, further adverse outcomes for employees are observed, such as the inhibition of employee innovation behaviors (Liu et al., 2023), the emergence of counterproductive work behaviors (Zhang et al., 2023) and deviant behavior (Liu et al., 2022).

However, it is regrettable that self-serving leadership, a more covert form of destructive leadership (Decoster et al., 2021), has been predominantly researched regarding its apparent outcomes. Knowledge hiding is not only pervasive in organizations (Arain et al., 2024; Connelly et al., 2012; Peng, 2012) but also poses immeasurable threats (Al Hawamdeh, 2022; Cerne et al., 2014), such as causing substantial damage to organizational performance (Arain et al., 2024; Babcock,

2004) and has long-term adverse effects on organizational members (Connelly & Zweig, 2015; Scuotto et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019). On the one hand, to deeply understand the complex process of employees' knowledge-hiding behavior, previous studies have analyzed it from the perspectives of Social Information Processing Theory (Usman et al., 2024), Social Learning Theory (Usman et al., 2024), and Transactional Attribution Theory (Montani et al., 2024). These studies suggest that employees' knowledge-hiding behavior mainly stems from the observation, imitation, and processing of the information conveyed by leaders' behaviors. However, this cognitive approach neglects the role of individuals' internal cognition and emotions. On the other hand, quite intriguingly, we found that knowledge hiding, like self-serving leadership, is characterized by its concealment (Connelly & Zweig, 2015). Hence, does the covert nature of destructive leadership styles (self-serving leadership) influence similarly inconspicuous employee destructive behaviors (knowledge hiding)? This question has piqued our substantial curiosity. Analyzing whether and how self-serving leadership affects employees' knowledge hiding not only responds to the call by Arain et al. (2024) to explore the antecedents of knowledge hiding from more theoretical perspectives and influencing factors but also helps prevent the harm that knowledge hiding can cause organizations. Moreover, this study enriches understanding of the adverse outcomes of self-serving leadership, making it highly valuable for research.

This research aims to clarify the dual pathways of the transmission mechanism by utilizing the cognitive-affective processing system framework (CAPS) (Mischel and Shoda, 1995). It proposes a cognitive path of "self-serving leadership—relative deprivation—knowledge hiding" and an affective pathway of "self-serving leadership—emotional exhaustion—knowledge hiding" to investigate these two mechanisms comprehensively. On the one hand, relative deprivation has a positive impact on employees' negative outcomes, such as counterproductive work behavior (Mishra and Novakowski, 2016), turnover (Pettigrew, 2002), and destructive behavior (Dong et al., 2023; Kim & Glomb, 2014; Reh et al., 2018). Additionally, recent studies have found that relative deprivation can lead to aggressive behavior in employees (Han et al., 2024; Kassab et al., 2021). However, recent studies have only considered individuals' perceptions of the environment and organizational climate (Liu et al., 2024; Han et al., 2024), neglecting the potential relationship between leadership and deprivation. On the other hand, employees under emotional exhaustion are

unable to engage in rational thinking (Chen et al., 2020) and work engagement (Yikilmaz et al., 2024; Lam et al., 2010), resulting in decreased productivity (Leitão et al., 2021), increased absenteeism and turnover (Dyrbye et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021), and the occurrence of deviant behaviors (Thau & Mitchell, 2010). However, recent studies have neglected a deeper investigation into the impact of leadership behavior on employee behavioral outcomes after inducing emotional exhaustion (Korkmazurek & Ocak, 2024; Yikilmaz et al., 2024; Yun et al., 2024). Based on these gaps, we explored the influence of self-serving leadership on employees' relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion and its impact on employee behavioral outcomes (i.e., knowledge hiding). We believe that the negative impacts of relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion on individual states and behaviors should not be overlooked. Although both have received considerable attention from scholars, research that simultaneously ventures from cognitive and affective pathways to explore individuals' more implicit psychological activities is rare.

Furthermore, the present study also focuses on individuals' internal cognition and emotional responses, dialectically examining the dual-pathway effect of self-serving leadership on employee knowledge hiding. Spector (2011) posited that individual differences could directly affect their participation in or inhibition of counterproductive behaviors, including knowledge hiding. Research has found that political skills can help individuals overcome stress and control their environment (Ferris et al., 2007; Chang & Pak, 2024), accurately assess and understand needs, avoid irrelevant issues (Frider et al., 2019), and thus achieve their anticipated goals (Chang & Pak, 2024). However, existing research often discusses political skills as a 'tool' for employees to exchange resources (Ahmad et al., 2023; Modem et al., 2022), neglecting individuals' internal cognitive and emotional needs. Furthermore, existing research emphasizes the individual attribute of political skills (Ferris et al., 2007; Munyon et al., 2015; Park & Chae, 2024) and continuously expands the application of new theories. However, from the perspective of the latest theoretical frameworks, such as costly signaling theory (Park & Chae, 2024), impression management theory (Chen et al., 2024), and socioanalytic theory of personality (Böhm and Blicke, 2024), it appears that the interaction between the individual attribute of political skills and environmental factors, and its moderating effect on other individual attributes like cognition and emotions, has been neglected. Thus, the question arises: Can astute political skills meet the dual demands of individual cognition and emotion? This question

urgently calls for our resolution. Therefore, this paper boldly infers that under the influence of self-serving leadership, political skills are an important moderating factor for individuals to shape positive attitudes and behaviors, originating from the satisfaction of their dual cognitive and emotional needs.

The present study makes several contributions to the existing literature on self-serving leadership and knowledge hiding. First, our study expands the understanding of self-serving leadership outcome variables. Although, self-serving leadership has attracted widespread attention from scholars. However, research on it is still in its initial stages and focuses mainly on exploring its antecedents, needing an exploration of its impact on employees. Thus, this research adds to existing research by empirically examining the role of self-serving leadership in influencing employee knowledge hiding. Second, we introduce a broader theoretical perspective in analyzing the relationship between self-serving leadership and knowledge hiding. In contrast to previous studies that focused on a single process perspective (Decoster et al., 2014; Li, 2024; Mao et al., 2019; Rus et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2023), the present study reveals a dual pathway of subordinates' cognitive and emotional responses to delve into the process mechanism based on CAPS framework. Last, this study deepens the boundary conditions of the process of employee knowledge hiding evoked by self-serving leadership. The CAPS framework posits that individual trait differences largely influence cognitive and emotional changes (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Thus, we introduce political skills as a moderating variable to provide a better understanding of the negative consequences of self-serving leadership and the antecedents influencing employee knowledge hiding. This helps us identify the boundary conditions of the mechanism by which self-serving leadership affects relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion among employees and leads to knowledge-hiding behavior.

## **2. Theory and hypotheses development**

### ***2.1 Self-serving leadership and knowledge-hiding***

Knowledge hiding refers to an individual's intentional concealment or withholding of knowledge that others have requested (Connelly et al., 2012; Serenko & Botis, 2016). It is a deliberate and hostile behavior, where hiding is purposeful, not due to a lack of relevant knowledge. Furthermore, research suggests that individuals may hide their core knowledge to maintain their

'knowledge-power' within organizations (Offergelt & Venz, 2023; Yuan et al., 2020). Knowledge hiding can significantly harm organizational development and inter-member relationships (Connelly & Zweig, 2015; Connelly et al., 2012). Previous studies have shown that both individual and organizational factors can have varying effects in promoting or inhibiting employee knowledge hiding. For example, interpersonal trust negatively impacts employee knowledge hiding (Peng, 2013), while positive leadership styles, such as servant leadership (Abdillah et al., 2022), ethical leadership (Men et al., 2018), and transformational leadership (Scuotto et al., 2021), are found to influence knowledge hiding within organizations negatively.

As leaders play an exemplary role within organizations, employee behaviors are largely influenced by their leaders' actions (Mao et al., 2019). Thus, faced with the harmful effects of self-serving leadership behavior, employees are also inclined to respond in adverse ways (Schyns & Schilling, 2013), such as engaging in knowledge hiding. First, self-serving leaders focus on fulfilling their interests at the expense of employees and the organization to advance their benefits (Zhang et al., 2023). Their position of leadership and the power they wield in the organization facilitate the satisfaction of their desires, leaving employees with minimal resources. Under this leadership style, employees' sense of psychological safety is continuously undermined (Mao et al., 2019), and driven by the need to balance their internal resource equilibrium, employees will strive to protect their resources (Decoster et al., 2021).

For employees, knowledge is an asset that requires significant time and effort to accumulate. As a vital resource that can assist in achieving their goals, it is more easily concealed than material resources. Knowledge resources remain undetected by others unless the individual chooses to reveal or demonstrate it. Hence, when employees perceive a threat to their resources from their leader's self-serving actions, knowledge hiding becomes a self-protective measure to achieve internal resource balance. Secondly, as a quintessential destructive leadership style, self-serving leaders prioritize their interests and well-being above the needs of their employees and organizational objectives (Camps et al., 2012), undermining fairness within the organization, mutual trust among members, and reciprocal norms. This may pose threats and harm to employees (Mao et al., 2019) and can easily elicit negative emotions in employees (Camps et al., 2012). A defensive mindset and negative emotions may restrict employees' cognitive and behavioral responses, leading them to

choose knowledge hiding when faced with requests for knowledge despite the potential adverse consequences of such an action. Thus, we propose the following:

*H1: Self-serving leadership is positively related to employee knowledge hiding.*

## ***2.2 Relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion as mediators***

The CAPS framework posits that an individual's behavior is influenced by the cognitive processing and emotional processing of external information, which often occur concurrently and interactively, thereby affecting the individual's responses and behavioral tendencies toward external information (Lu et al., 2024; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Building upon this theoretical framework, scholars have tested the cognitive and affective pathways through which organizational contextual factors impact employee behavior. For instance, entrepreneurial leadership influences employees' improvisational behaviors by inspiring their work spirit (cognitive pathway) and positive emotions (affective pathway) (Liu et al., 2023); information gaps affect employees' work engagement by influencing their specific curiosity (cognitive pathway) and frustration (emotional pathway) (Schweitzer et al., 2023). The CAPS framework also assists in understanding the process mechanisms by which self-serving leadership influences employee knowledge hiding. The present study discussed the mediating role of relative deprivation (cognitive pathway) and emotional exhaustion (affective pathway) between self-serving leadership and employee knowledge hiding within this framework.

### ***2.2.1 Relative deprivation***

Relative deprivation refers to a subjective perception of anger or dissatisfaction that arises when individuals assess themselves in comparison to relevant members or groups and perceive that they are being treated unjustly or are at a disadvantage (Mummendey et al., 1999; Pettigrew, 2015; Smith et al., 2012). Leadership styles and leader-member relationships are significant in constructing and maintaining individual feelings of relative deprivation. For instance, Wu et al. (2022) confirmed that differential treatment by leaders in a dyadic hierarchical structure can elicit feelings of relative deprivation in subordinates, leading to deviant innovative behaviors with adverse effects on organizational management efficiency. Similarly, Bolino and Turnley (2009) found that low-quality leader-member relationships can induce feelings of relative deprivation in subordinates,

ultimately diminishing their organizational citizenship behaviors and triggering a tendency to leave the organization (Karacay et al., 2022).

The extent to which employees feel relatively deprived depends on their perception of the available resources they need (Dong et al., 2023). Therefore, when leaders use their positional advantage to monopolize most resources in the organization (Williams, 2014), it may trigger a sense of relative deprivation among employees. The reasons are as follows: First, self-serving behaviors by leaders might come at the expense of the interests of organizational members (Camps et al., 2012; Peng et al., 2019), instilling a sense of pervasive unfairness within the organization. As leaders' intentions primarily drive organizational decisions, employees who invest more significant work effort may experience an intensified sense of unfair treatment and deprivation. Second, self-serving leadership may force employees to cope with unreasonable work assignments (Peng et al., 2019), preventing access to resources that support their work. This may lead to the depletion of employees' resources as they strive to meet these additional work demands, consequently feeling deprived. Third, when employees observe leaders receiving resources that are not rightfully theirs (Mao et al., 2019; Peng et al., 2019), it can prompt a comparative evaluation. In this comparison, if employees believe they are entitled to specific resources and rewards, the discrepancy can culminate in feelings of relative deprivation.

Relative deprivation is a subjective perception that has numerous negative impacts on individual behavioral outcomes (Eibner et al., 2004; Han et al., 2024; Osborne et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012) and may prompt individuals to attempt to rectify the situation (Lin, et al., 2020). This study contends that there is a positive correlation between employees' feelings of relative deprivation and knowledge hiding. On the one hand, individuals who experience relative deprivation are more likely to develop a sense of entitlement and become more selfish, refusing to contribute to the well-being of others (Liu et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2016; Pak & Babiarz, 2022). In such instances, knowledge hiding can serve as a defensive tactic for employees to protect their remaining resources, thereby avoiding further resource depletion. On the other hand, when individuals experience relative deprivation, they may develop greedy and aggressive cognitions (Liu et al., 2024; Han et al., 2024), perceiving themselves as victims of unfair treatment caused by self-serving leaders, ultimately triggering a series of negative behaviors (Dong et al., 2023; Kim & Glomb, 2014; Mishra &



Novakowski, 2016; Pettigrew, 2002; Reh et al., 2018; Yesiltas et al., 2023). Therefore, when others request knowledge, employees are more likely to withhold their knowledge to vent and retaliate for their perceived unfair treatment. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H2: Relative deprivation mediates the relationship between self-serving leadership and knowledge hiding.*

### ***2.2.2 Emotional exhaustion***

If an individual is subjected to prolonged work stress, he or she may experience a subjective feeling of psychological burnout and a state described as emotional exhaustion (Grant et al., 2014; Whitman et al., 2014). The emergence of emotional exhaustion is intimately connected with the excessive depletion of an individual's internal emotional resources (Chen et al., 2020) or role stress (Hu & King, 2017). Wright and Cropanzano (1998) contended that an initial imbalance between work resources and individual needs can lead to the development of job stress. However, if left unaddressed over time, it will trigger emotional exhaustion and potential adverse behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, studies found that leadership styles and organizational contexts can precipitate emotional exhaustion. Whitman et al. (2014) suggested that abusive supervisors can induce emotional exhaustion in employees, which in turn leads to feedback avoidance behaviors to evade managerial punishment. Chen et al. (2020) insisted that work engagement triggers employee emotional exhaustion and further leads to counterproductive behavior. Whitman et al. (2014) claimed that abusive managers lead to subordinate emotional exhaustion, which in turn triggers feedback avoidance behavior to avoid punishment from superiors. Emotional exhaustion from coping with stress can induce counterproductive work behavior (Grandey & Melloy, 2017; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998).

Research suggests that supervisor behavior, such as emotional exhaustion, affects employees' mental health (Yun et al., 2024). The more resources self-serving leaders occupy, the less remains for employees to share (Rus et al., 2010), and persistent threats to resources may lead to employee emotional exhaustion. First, self-serving leadership prioritizes personal goals and interests, resulting in unjust resource distribution within the organization. As the disparity in allocation grows, so do the feelings of unfairness and anger among employees, potentially leading to emotional exhaustion. Second, to cope with the anxiety and pressure caused by leaders' self-serving behavior, employees

often need to expend considerable time and energy on self-regulation. However, any form of self-regulatory activity, such as emotional regulation or cognitive processing, further depletes their resources and energy (Inzlight & Schmeichel, 2012). Finally, self-serving leaders tend to attribute successes to themselves, and shift blame to their subordinates (Rus et al., 2010), resulting in psychological trauma and negative emotions among those subordinates who are in a relatively disadvantaged position and unable to voice their grievances. Based on the above discussion, this study posits that employees are prone to a vicious cycle of "negative emotions—emotional depletion" under self-serving leadership, ultimately culminating in emotional exhaustion.

Following the discussion above, emotional exhaustion has numerous negative impacts on subsequent individual behavioral responses (Chen et al., 2020; Thau & Mitchell, 2010; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998; Yikilmaz et al., 2024), and we believe there is a positive correlation between emotional exhaustion and knowledge hiding. On the one hand, emotionally exhausted employees may respond by violating organizational norms and reducing work effort (Chen et al., 2020). Therefore, after experiencing emotional resource depletion caused by self-serving leadership behaviors, employees become physically and mentally exhausted, lack goals and motivation, and are uninterested in matters beyond themselves. Under these circumstances, when faced with requests for knowledge, they tend to vent their emotions through refusal to share or cooperate (Wolf et al., 2017). On the other hand, employees experiencing emotional exhaustion view their surroundings and affairs negatively, leading to irrational behavior (Chen et al., 2020) and reduced work engagement (Lam et al., 2010) to achieve a temporary respite for resource recovery. Employees under emotional exhaustion may perceive others' requests for knowledge as a further drain on their vital resources, threatening their position, and therefore, may engage in knowledge hiding to avoid additional loss of personal resources. Thus, we propose the following:

*H3: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between self-serving leadership and knowledge hiding.*

### ***2.3 Moderating role of political skills***

The CAPS framework posits that the cognitive and emotional progression of situational events is influenced by personal traits, which interact to form an individual's behavioral response (Lu et al.,

2024; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Accordingly, this paper also highlights the impact of individual differences on the relationship between self-serving leadership and knowledge hiding, particularly the critical personal trait of political skills (Park & Chae, 2024; Ferris et al., 2007; Munyon et al., 2015). Political skills encompass networking ability, social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity (Ferris et al., 2005; Modem et al., 2022), and research indicates that it has a positive effect on the relationships between individuals and organizations (Andrews et al., 2009; Ferris et al., 2007). For example, high political skills can not only effectively alleviate the adverse impact of supervisor undermining on employee psychological empowerment (Sun et al., 2022) but also reduce leaders' perceptions of employee insubordination, making them more favored by their leaders (Thompson et al., 2023). Consequently, those with high political skills are less likely to engage in counterproductive behaviors (Blickle et al., 2020; Yang & Treadway, 2018) and more inclined to assist others (De Clercq et al., 2019). Overall, employees with high political skills know how to cleverly utilize available resources and adjust their behavior to meet varying situational demands, and they are effective at interacting with others (Ferris et al., 2005). This paper hypothesizes that political skills can mitigate the negative impact of self-serving leadership on employees' feelings of relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion, thereby inhibiting their knowledge-hiding behaviors.

Self-serving leadership activates specific cognitive-affective units (Kell, 2018) within individuals, meaning that the more sensitive individuals are to the perception of self-serving behaviors by leaders, the more likely they are to experience a sense of scarcity and conflict regarding resources and attention (Decoster et al., 2021). Regarding cognition, when employees possess high political skills, 1) they can accurately judge and understand their environment, focusing on their own developmental goals (Frieder et al., 2019; Chang & Pak, 2024); 2) they use appropriate sincerity to develop high-quality social relationships with others, and they employ a reciprocal approach to secure their status and resources within the organization (Ferris et al., 2007; Modem et al., 2022; Offergelt & Venz, 2022; Park & Chae, 2024). In terms of emotion, employees with high political skills 1) can engage in positive self-evaluation (Sun et al., 2022), gaining confidence and a sense of security (Treadway et al., 2004), while effectively mitigating their sources of stress (including self-serving leadership) (Škerlavaj et al., 2018); in addition, 2) those with high political

skills understand how to identify opportunities to gauge the needs of colleagues accurately (Blickle et al., 2020; Munyon et al., 2015), resolving resource conflicts in a manner that benefits themselves and thus avoiding the repetitive grip of negative emotions.

Conversely, after encountering self-serving leadership, less politically skilled employees cannot use rational cognition to ascertain their resources, nor can they understand how to use interpersonal abilities to replenish them. Thus, they are prone to trigger feelings of relative deprivation. Additionally, when dealing with self-serving behaviors from leaders, less politically skilled employees cannot effectively engage with colleagues to offer mutual aid and gain trust, making it unlikely for them to develop a sense of personal control over the work environment (Sun et al., 2022), and they may fall into a vortex of negative emotions. Due to the lack of cognitive and emotional support over the long term, those with low political skills are unable to effectively understand the needs of others, leading instead to feelings of helplessness regarding their work and a sense of interpersonal defeat. Thus, we propose the following:

*H4: Employee political skills negatively moderate the relationship between self-serving leadership and relative deprivation.*

*H5: Employee political skills negatively moderate the relationship between self-serving leadership and emotional exhaustion.*

Building on Hypotheses 4 and 5, highly politically skilled individuals readily experience a sense of control over resources (Andrews et al., 2009; Perrewé et al., 2004) and utilize effective regulation to manage stressors and emotional tension stemming from self-serving leadership (Blickle et al., 2008; Perrewé et al., 2004). Consequently, we further surmise that highly politically skilled individuals might focus more deftly on their career development, employing their cognitive and emotional regulation abilities to display adaptive behavioral outcomes (Andrews et al., 2009; Blickle et al., 2008). They recognize that positively responding to others' requests for knowledge can be more conducive to their further control over surrounding resources than engaging in knowledge hiding rather than redirecting the genesis of negative emotions onto others. Thus, individuals with high political skills will adjust their behavior promptly (Offergelt & Venz, 2022), preventing the enactment of knowledge hiding. Conversely, less politically skilled employees cannot maintain rational cognition and stable emotional states, i.e., they lack the buffering resources

or social strategies to cope with the impacts of self-serving leadership rationally and are more likely to focus emotionally on how their interests have been damaged by self-serving leadership. This focus hinders their ability to timely utilize rational perspectives to transform into reasonable behavior when faced with requests for knowledge, thus making them more inclined to engage in knowledge-hiding. Thus, we propose the following:

*H6:* Employee political skills negatively moderate the indirect effect of self-serving leadership on employee knowledge hiding through relative deprivation.

*H7:* Employee political skills negatively moderate the indirect effect of self-serving leadership on employee knowledge hiding through emotional exhaustion.

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### **3. Method**

#### ***3.1 Sample and procedure***

The data was collected from a large family-owned high-tech company in Shenzhen, China, primarily for the following three reasons: (1) The enterprise's work is knowledge-intensive, with daily tasks involving a significant amount of knowledge information, making knowledge hiding more easily perceived and reflected in the survey results (Lin et al., 2020); (2) The industry demands a high level of knowledge from employees, with knowledge skills often regarded as vital human capital (Koay & Lim, 2022); (3) The company's size and work model typically requires close collaboration among members. Collectively, these factors provide a conducive opportunity to gather relevant variables. One of the researchers contacted the company's human resources director to introduce the research project. With the assistance of this director, we distributed surveys randomly to the employees. To ensure broad coverage of the survey and the reliability of the results, we collected data from grassroots employees at the same level. In this company, grassroots employees are directly involved in knowledge work and collaboration, enabling us to gather information from those most directly affected by leadership styles, thus eliminating confounding variables like

broader resource and information access that higher management might possess (Syed et al., 2021), and providing a clearer perspective on how grassroots employees deal with knowledge hiding under the influence of self-serving leadership.

To reduce the common method bias, we collected the data at two different times, separated by one month. In the first round (Time 1), we asked respondents to report on their supervisors' self-serving leadership, political skills, and demographic information. In the second round (Time 2), we collected data on employees' relative deprivation, emotional exhaustion, knowledge hiding, and leader-member exchange (LMX). Participants who completed both survey rounds could receive a small gift worth 30 RMB. A total of 780 questionnaires were distributed across 140 teams. After discarding improperly filled, incomplete, or failed matching questionnaires, we obtained 644 valid questionnaires involving 118 teams, yielding an effective response rate of 81.7%. The sample demographics were as follows: the majority were female, accounting for 57.76%; in terms of education, most had a bachelor's degree or higher, accounting for 46.58%; age was concentrated in the 26-35 range, comprising 52% of the sample; and most respondents had a tenure of 3-5 years with the organization, representing 39.1%.

### ***3.2 Measures***

*Self-serving leadership:* We employed a 4-item scale developed by Camps et al. (2012), such as "The leader/team head does not consider team members and only looks out for him/herself," etc. (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.94$ ).

*Relative deprivation:* We used a 5-item scale developed by Callan et al. (2011), which includes items like "I feel deprived when I think about what I have compared to what other people like me have." (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.88$ ).

*Emotional exhaustion:* This study adopted the Maslach and Jackson (1981) scale comprising 5 items (Chen et al., 2020), such as "I feel emotionally drained from my work." (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.95$ ).

*Employee political skills:* We adopted a 6-item scale developed by Ahearn et al. (2004), including "I find it easy to envision myself in the position of others." (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.87$ ).

*Knowledge hiding:* We utilized a 12-item scale developed by Connelly et al. (2012), with items like "Pretend I do not know what he/she is talking about." (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.98$ ).

*Control variables:* Integrating previous research on self-serving leadership (Decoster et al., 2014) and knowledge hiding (Connelly et al., 2012; Lin et al., 2020), this study controlled for demographic variables, including gender, age, education, and tenure. Additionally, given that relationship quality may affect individuals' emotional and behavioral responses to knowledge requests (Liu et al., 2017; Xia et al., 2022), we also controlled for leader-member exchange, measured using a 7-item scale developed by Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995), with sample items like "I usually know how satisfied my leader is with what I do," (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.92$ ).

Self-serving leadership, relative deprivation, emotional exhaustion, employee political skills, knowledge hiding, and LMX were all measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

### ***3.3 Data aggregation***

We collected data on self-serving leadership, relative deprivation, emotional exhaustion, political skills, and knowledge hiding to test whether the variables could be aggregated. We used several indices, including rwg (James et al., 1984), ICC 1, and ICC 2 (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). Concretely, self-serving leadership ICC(1)= 0.37; ICC(2)= 0.77; mean rwg= 0.87), relative deprivation (ICC(1)= 0.26), emotional exhaustion (ICC(1)= 0.29), knowledge hiding (ICC(1)= 0.12). Then, we aggregated self-serving leaders to the team level.

## **4. Results**

### ***4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis***

We conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) by utilizing AMOS v.22 to establish discriminant validity of self-serving leadership, relative deprivation, emotional exhaustion, political skills, knowledge hiding and LMX (in Table 1). The six-factor model in Table 1 demonstrates the best fit and is significantly better than the five-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2=1400.37$ ,  $\Delta df= 5$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), four-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2= 3276.67$ ,  $\Delta df= 9$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), three-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2= 5882.60$ ,  $\Delta df= 12$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), two-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2= 8800.45$ ,  $\Delta df= 14$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and one-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2=$

9594.51,  $\Delta df = 15$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), proving the distinctiveness of the current model in our study.

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#### ***4.2 Descriptive statistics***

Table 2 lists the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for gender, age, education, tenure, LMX, relative deprivation, emotional exhaustion, political skills, knowledge hiding, and self-serving leadership. The results (in Table 2) showed that a) Relative deprivation was positively related to knowledge hiding ( $r = 0.53$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); b) Emotional exhaustion was positively related to knowledge hiding ( $r = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); c) Political skills showed a positive correlation with relative deprivation ( $r = 0.10$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), knowledge hiding ( $r = 0.23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and no significant correlation with emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.07$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

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#### ***4.3 Hypothesis testing***

We conducted HLM to test the hypotheses (Table 3). H1 predicted that self-serving leadership was negatively associated with employee knowledge hiding. The results showed (in Table 3) that self-serving leadership has a salient positive effect on knowledge hiding (M5,  $\gamma = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, H1 was supported.

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TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE  
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H2 and H3 predicted a mediating role of relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion between self-serving leadership and knowledge hiding. The results showed (in Table 3) that self-serving leadership positively influenced employee relative deprivation (M1,  $\gamma = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and emotional exhaustion (M3,  $\gamma = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). More detailed, after controlling for gender, age,



education, and tenure, LMX, and adding the dual mediating variables, both relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion have a significant positive effect on employee knowledge hiding (M6,  $\gamma = 0.11$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\gamma = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, the effect of self-serving leadership on employee knowledge hiding (M6,  $\gamma = -0.05$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) remains significant.

We used the parametric Bootstrap method (as recommended by Preacher and Selig, 2012), which is based on 20,000 repetitions in a Monte Carlo simulation, to further verify the indirect effects of relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion. The results showed that the indirect effect via relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion between self-serving leadership and employee knowledge hiding were 0.05 and 0.03, respectively, with 95% confidence intervals of [0.02, 0.07] and [0.01, 0.05], respectively, both excluding 0, manifesting the significant indirect effects. Hence, H2 and H3 were supported.

H4 predicted a moderating effect of employee political skills on the relationship between self-serving leadership and relative deprivation. The results showed (in Table 3) that the interaction term between self-serving leadership and employee political skills has a positive and significant effect on relative deprivation (M2,  $\gamma = -0.13$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Figure 2 depicts the moderating effect of political skills on the relationship between self-serving leadership and relative deprivation. The simple slope analysis indicated that the positive effect of self-serving leadership on relative deprivation was weaker when employee political skills were higher ( $\gamma = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, the positive effect of self-serving leadership on relative deprivation was stronger when employee political skills were lower ( $\gamma = 0.51$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, H4 was supported.

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FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE  
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H5 predicted a moderating effect of employee political skills on the relationship between self-serving leadership and emotional exhaustion. The results showed (in Table 3) that the interaction term between self-serving leadership and employee political skills has a strikingly positive effect on emotional exhaustion (M4,  $\gamma = -0.18$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Figure 3 illustrates the moderating effect of political skills on the relationship between self-serving leadership and emotional exhaustion. The

simple slope analysis indicated that the positive effect of self-serving leadership on emotional exhaustion was weaker when employee political skills were higher ( $\gamma = 0.20, p < 0.001$ ). In comparison, the positive effect of self-serving leadership on emotional exhaustion was relatively stronger when employee political skills were lower ( $\gamma = 0.51, p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, H 5 was supported.

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FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE  
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To examine H6 and H7, which predicted the mediating role of relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion between self-serving leadership and knowledge hiding moderated by employee political skills, we conducted Bootstrap based on 20,000 repetitions in a Monte Carlo simulation using R. As listed in Table 4, the indirect effect of relative deprivation between self-serving leadership and employee knowledge hiding was significant when the level of employee political skills was higher ( $\beta = 0.03, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.01, 0.05]$ ). The above indirect effect was significant when political skills were low ( $\beta = 0.05, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.02, 0.09]$ ). Moreover, at different levels of political skills, the difference in the indirect effect of relative deprivation also reached a significant level ( $\beta = -0.02, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.05, -0.002]$ ); these results substantially proved that political skills moderating the mediating role of relative deprivation between self-serving leadership and knowledge hiding. Therefore, H 6 was supported.

The estimates in Table 4 also further demonstrate that political skills moderated the mediating role of emotional exhaustion between self-serving leadership and knowledge hiding. Specifically, the indirect effect of emotional exhaustion between self-serving leadership and employee knowledge hiding was significant when the level of employee political skills was higher ( $\beta = 0.01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.001, 0.03]$ ); and the above indirect effect was significant when the level of political skills was low ( $\beta = 0.04, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.01, 0.06]$ ). Furthermore, at different levels of political skills, the difference in the indirect effect of emotional exhaustion also reached a significant level ( $\beta = -0.03, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.05, -0.002]$ ). Thus, H7 was supported.

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TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

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## **5. Discussion**

In the light of the CAPS framework, we examined the impact, process mechanism, and boundary conditions of self-serving leadership on knowledge hiding: We found that self-serving leadership harms organizations, indicating that self-serving leadership has a significant positive effect on employee knowledge hiding. Self-serving leadership can promote employee knowledge hiding through changes in cognition and emotion. Specifically, 1) self-serving leadership positively influences employee knowledge hiding via the mediating role of relative deprivation in the cognitive pathway, and 2) self-serving leadership positively influences employee knowledge hiding via the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the affective pathway. This study suggests that individual differences exist in employees' behavioral reactions when confronted with self-serving leadership. Employee political skills moderate the indirect impact of self-serving leadership on employee knowledge hiding via the two pathways. When an employee's political skills were high, this effect was weakened. On the other hand, this effect was stronger when an employee's political skills were low.

### ***5.1 Theoretical implications***

This study supports the CAPS framework's perspective that cognitive and affective pathways influence individual behavior. The research demonstrates that self-serving leadership significantly affects employees' knowledge-hiding behavior through two pathways: relative deprivation (cognitive pathway) and emotional exhaustion (affective pathway), consistent with the core assumptions of the CAPS framework. Consequently, this study validates the fundamental beliefs of the CAPS framework and extends its application scope through specific management contexts (self-serving leadership and employee knowledge-hiding behavior). This paper applies the CAPS framework to organizational behavior, particularly in the interaction between leadership behavior and employees' hidden behaviors. This enriches the content of the CAPS framework and provides new possibilities for its application in various research fields. The main theoretical contributions of

this study are as follows:

First, this study explores the impact of self-serving leadership on employee knowledge hiding, thereby expanding the research on the outcome variables of self-serving leadership. By focusing on employees' cognition and emotion, this study delves into the reasons behind the formation of knowledge hiding under the influence of self-serving leadership. Moreover, this study fills the gap in the existing literature regarding the effects of self-serving leadership on employees and responds to the academic call to strengthen the research on the outcomes and mechanisms of self-serving leadership (Decoster et al., 2019). While previous studies have explored the antecedents of self-serving leadership (Babalola et al., 2023; Barelds et al., 2018; Sanders et al., 2015; Wisse & Rus, 2012), research on its impact on employees needs attention. This study, based on the CAPS framework, reveals the impact of self-serving leadership on employee knowledge hiding and the mediating roles of employee cognition and emotion in this relationship, thus broadening the scope of the outcomes of self-serving leadership.

Second, this study clarifies the two pathways through which self-serving leadership affects employee knowledge hiding via employee cognition and emotion, thereby enriching the CAPS framework. The study identifies two distinct pathways, i.e., the cognitive pathway characterized by "self-serving leadership—relative deprivation—knowledge hiding" and the emotional pathway characterized by "self-serving leadership—emotional exhaustion—knowledge hiding." Compared to previous research that explored the outcomes of self-serving leadership in organizations through a single mechanism (Li, 2024; Mao et al., 2019), and in response to calls from scholars to explore the cognitive and emotional antecedents of knowledge hiding and diversify theoretical approaches (Anand et al., 2021; He et al., 2021), this study proposes dual pathways of cognitive and emotional responses based on the CAPS framework. This approach not only breaks the constraints of previous single-mechanism studies but also deepens the understanding of the motivations and psychological changes behind employee behaviors, further expanding the flexibility and applicability of the CAPS framework.

Third, this study further reveals the boundary conditions of the impact of self-serving leadership on knowledge hiding. Specifically, we explore how employees' political skills influence

their knowledge management behaviors after experiencing self-serving leadership and explain the crucial role of this skill in helping employees adapt to the organizational environment and cope with self-serving leaders. This contributes to the theoretical framework of understanding how self-serving leadership results in varying knowledge management behaviors among employees. This study summarizes the research on political skills, identifying their core characteristics and demonstrating that under this personal trait, individuals can adeptly manage self-serving leadership and effectively mobilize surrounding resources to avoid falling into a 'crisis.' This research provides theoretical insights into the facilitative role of political skills in organizational settings.

## ***5.2 Practical implications***

The results of this study show that self-serving leadership significantly affects employees' knowledge-hiding behavior through two pathways: relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, the study found that political skills moderate this impact. These findings validate the applicability of CAPS theory. Based on the research findings and conclusions, this study proposes a series of specific management practice recommendations aimed at helping managers better understand and apply relevant theories to improve organizational management effectiveness. The following are the management practice implications proposed based on this study:

Firstly, enterprises should fully recognize the adverse impacts of self-serving leadership on organizations and actively take measures to enhance management capabilities. Regarding policy formulation and leadership appointments, organizations should ensure that leaders feel secure about their work to avoid their lack of control and security due to environmental uncertainties (Babalola et al., 2023). For example, training programs can be conducted to help leaders improve their leadership skills and encourage their participation in organizational decision-making and communication. Then, organizations should pay attention to leaders' emotional and cognitive health. For instance, mindfulness training and stress relief counseling can be provided to prevent leaders from developing self-centered cognitions due to anxiety or stress. Meanwhile, it is crucial to make leaders understand the dangers of self-serving leadership and discourage them from engaging in self-serving management. For example, conducting integrity education for leaders, highlighting

real-life cases of punishment due to corruption, can help them understand the significant negative impacts of self-serving behaviors on themselves, their subordinates, and the organization, enhancing their awareness of integrity and fairness.

Secondly, organizations and managers should pay closer attention to changes in subordinates' cognitive and emotional states and take measures to help subordinates manage stress and emotions. We suggest that organizations must establish reasonable distribution systems and better organizational support systems to reduce employees' relative deprivation caused by concerns about resource scarcity or unequal distribution. Reducing relative deprivation helps lower the likelihood of employee knowledge hiding and improves work initiative and participation. Besides, organizations can conduct stress tests to understand the stress levels and sources of different employees and then provide targeted support, training, or work resources to help employees accurately identify their work roles and better adapt to the work environment, thus reducing the risk of excessive stress and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, given the positive correlation between emotional exhaustion and knowledge hiding, organizations can provide mental health services to employees to help them effectively manage their stress and emotions, reducing the incidence of knowledge hiding.

Thirdly, organizations should reasonably cultivate employees' political skills to enhance their ability to cope with workplace stress and reduce knowledge-hiding behaviors. The results of this study show that individuals with high political skills can reduce workplace knowledge-hiding behaviors by alleviating relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion. Therefore, organizations can help employees cope with workplace stress by enhancing their political skills (Modem et al., 2022). We suggest organizations prioritize hiring interpersonally sensitive and goal-oriented employees during the recruitment and selection process. Then, since political skills are malleable (Chang & Pak, 2024; Ferris et al., 2007; Sun et al., 2022), organizations can provide relevant skill enhancement programs for current employees to help them improve their personal information processing levels. Moreover, organizations should foster a culture of knowledge sharing and take measures to encourage effective interpersonal interactions among employees, ensuring they benefit from learning relevant skills and securing their career development within the organization.

### ***5.3 Limitations and future research directions***

Despite the contributions, our study is not free from limitations. First, given that we used a questionnaire survey with two data collection methods, common method bias poses a potential threat, indicating some potential impact on the accuracy of our study. The main reason for this should be that all variables are employee-reported, which invariably leads to results influenced by social acceptability bias, causing partial concealment and retention of the accurate picture. Future studies may consider using alternative methods to obtain sample data and further test the findings of this study, such as using self-rated and other-rated paired data and employing an experimental design approach.

Moreover, due to the lack of hierarchical diversity in the sample, the credibility and representativeness of the data may have been affected. Future research could explore these relationships across a broader range of levels, for instance, by collecting data from employees of different ranks, positions, managerial discretion, and access to resources to test whether our findings can be elevated or generalized within the organizational hierarchy.

Second, this study focuses on the impact of individual characteristics, namely political skills, on the role of self-serving leadership and employee knowledge hiding. However, employee behavior is influenced not only by individual differences but also by situational factors such as organizational competition climate, motivational climate, job characteristics, etc. Organizational competition, for example, may trigger employees' deviant behavior caused by self-serving leadership.

Moreover, on the one hand, although existing research often discusses political skills as a holistic construct, and this study follows that pattern, we also advocate for future research to deepen the discussion on this study by focusing on the different dimensions of political skills. For instance, exploring whether interpersonal influence is more effective than networking ability in exerting a moderating role within our model would be valuable. On the other hand, we suggest that future research examine other personal traits, such as psychological entitlement, justice sensitivity, and perceived overqualification, to see if they can mitigate the impact of self-serving leadership. Employees with higher psychological entitlement may react negatively to self-serving leadership.

As a result, future research could focus on the impact of individual factors, situational factors, and the interaction of individual and situational factors on employee knowledge to understand this relationship better.

Third, our study is conducted in a Chinese context with a sample of Chinese employees, which will influence the cross-cultural applicability of our findings. Particularly in different cultural contexts, the tolerance level of employees for self-serving leadership may vary, making it possible for employees from diverse cultural backgrounds to have varying behavioral responses. In Western contexts, for instance, employees may have more negative cognitive and affective reactions to self-serving leadership, making them more likely to adopt negative behaviors. Consequently, future research may want to adopt a cross-cultural research design to further test the reliability and generalizability of our findings by sampling employees from various cultures and organizational contexts.

## **6. Conclusion**

We tested a dual-pathway model that self-serving leadership positively influenced employee knowledge hiding and examined the moderating effect of political skills through relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion. The findings showed that self-serving leadership may predict employee knowledge-hiding behavior. More specifically, the mediating roles of relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion ensue from self-serving leadership, resulting in further employee knowledge-hiding behavior. Our study expands the knowledge management literature by introducing self-serving leadership as a predictor of employee knowledge-hiding behavior. This will help practitioners regulate this behavior.

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**Table 1** Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Model	$\chi^2$	$df$	$\chi^2/df$	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Six-factor model	897.76	39 0	2.30		0.9 7	0.9 6	0.05
Five-factor model	2298.13	39 5	5.82	1400.37** * (5)	0.8 7	0.8 6	0.09
Four-factor model	4174.43	39 9	10.4 6	3276.67** * (9)	0.7 5	0.7 3	0.12
Three-factor model	6780.36	40 2	16.8 7	5882.60** * (12)	0.5 8	0.5 4	0.16
Two-factor model	9698.21	40 4	24.0 1	8800.45** * (14)	0.3 8	0.3 4	0.19
One-factor model	10492.2 7	40 5	25.9 1	9594.51** * (15)	0.3 3	0.2 8	0.20

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; Five-factor model: Combining relative deprivation and emotional exhaustion into a factor; Four-factor model: Combining relative deprivation, emotional exhaustion and knowledge hiding into a factor; Three-factor model: Combining relative deprivation, emotional exhaustion and knowledge hiding into a factor, and combining self-serving leadership and political skill into a factor; Two-factor model: Combining relative deprivation, emotional exhaustion and knowledge hiding into a factor, and combining self-serving leadership political skill, and LMX into a factor; One-factor model: Combining all constructs into a factor.

**Table 2** Results of descriptive statistical analysis

	<i>M</i>	<i>S<sub>D</sub></i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Level 1										
1. Sex	0	0								
	.58	.49								
2. Age	2	0	-							
	.24	.84	0.04							
3. Education level	2	0	-	0.						
	.40	.73	0.03	06						
4. Tenure	2	1	0.	0.	0.					
	.26	.05	06	09*	06					
5. LM X	3	0	-	-	0.	-				
	.66	.78	0.04	0.03	001	0.003				
6. Relative deprivation	3	0	0.	-	0.	-	-			
	.86	.81	02	0.02	05	0.02	0.10*			
7. Emotional exhaustion	3	1	0.	0.	0.	-	-	0.		
	.83	.00	02	05	003	0.03	0.08	42**		
8. Political skill	2	0	0.	-	-	-	-	0.	0.	
	.79	.86	06	0.02	0.06	0.05	0.06	10*	07	
9. Knowledge hiding	3	0	0.	0.	-	-	-	0.	0.	0.
	.90	.53	02	004	0.05	0.07	0.09*	53**	45**	23**
Level 2										
1. Self-serving leadership	3	0								
	.88	.80								

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Sex: Male (0), female (1); Age:  $\leq 25$  years (1), 26-35 years (2), 36-45 years (3),  $\geq 46$  years (4); Education level: High school (1), Junior college (2), bachelor degree (3), graduate degree (4); Tenure:  $\leq 2$  years (1), 3-5 years (2), 6-10 years (3),  $\geq 11$  years (4).

**Table 3** Results of Multilevel Analyses

Variables	Relative deprivation		Emotional exhaustion		Knowledge hiding	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Intercept	3.86*** (0.04)	3.84*** (0.04)	3.84*** (0.05)	3.82*** (0.05)	3.90*** (0.03)	3.95*** (0.02)
<b>Level-1 predictors</b>						
Gender	0.06 (0.06)	0.06 (0.05)	0.09 (0.08)	0.10 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.03)
Age	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.06 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)
Education level	0.03 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)
Tenure	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.06* (0.03)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)
LMX	-0.09** (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.09 (0.05)	-0.08 (0.04)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)
Relative deprivation						0.11*** (0.03)
Emotional exhaustion						0.08** (0.02)
Political skill		0.16** (0.05)		0.16* (0.06)		
<b>Level-2 predictors</b>						
Self-serving leadership	0.41*** (0.05)	0.40*** (0.05)	0.34*** (0.07)	0.35*** (0.07)	0.08* (0.04)	-0.05* (0.02)
<b>Interactive effect</b>						
Self-serving leadership×Political skill		-0.13* (0.06)		-0.18* (0.08)		
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.17	0.27	0.08	0.20	0.04	0.69

**Table 4** Results of Moderated Mediation Analyses

Effect	High political skill	Low political skill	Differences
Self-serving leadership → Relative deprivation	0.29* [0.15, 0.43]	0.51* [0.37, 0.65]	-0.22* [-0.42, - 0.02]
Self-serving leadership → Emotional exhaustion	0.20* [0.002, 0.39]	0.51* [0.31, 0.70]	-0.31* [-0.58, - 0.04]
Direct effect	-0.06* [-0.10, - 0.03]	-0.02 [-0.05, 0.02]	-0.04 [-0.10, - 0.003]
Indirect effect	MV=Relative deprivation	0.03* [0.01, 0.05]	-0.02* [-0.05, - 0.002]
	MV=Emotional exhaustion	0.01* [0.001, 0.03]	-0.03* [-0.05, - 0.002]
Total effect	-0.02 [-0.06, 0.02]	0.07* [0.02, 0.12]	-0.09* [-0.16, - 0.03]



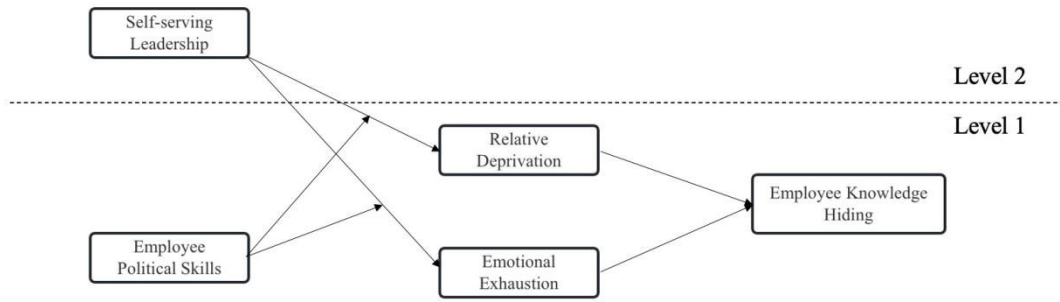
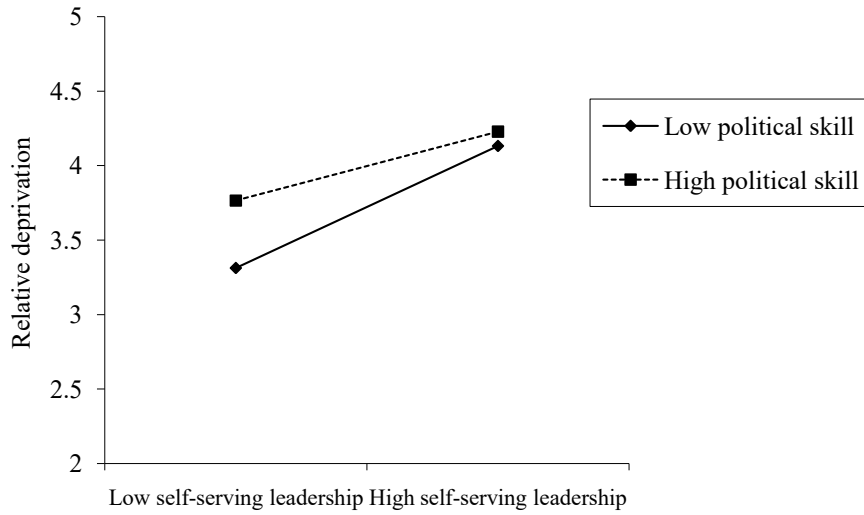
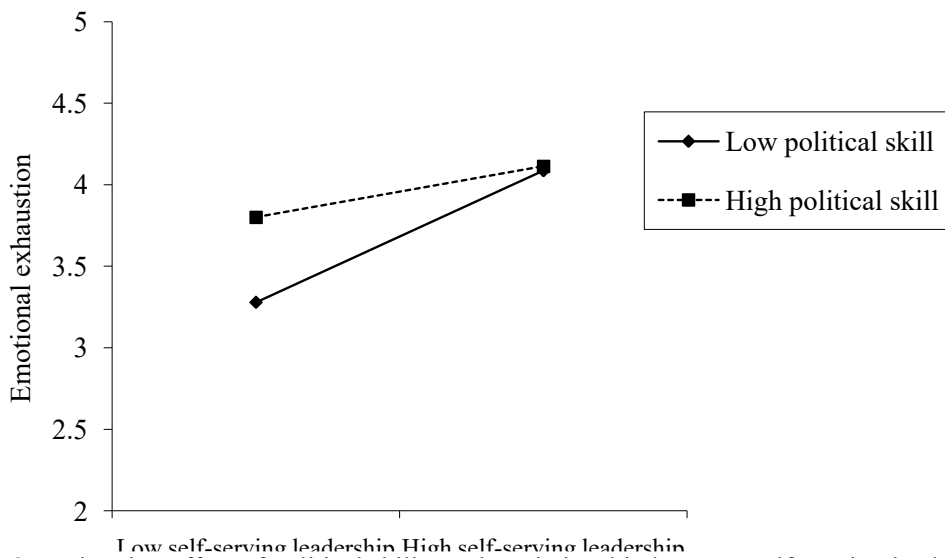


Figure 1: Theoretical model



**Figure 2** Moderating effect of political skills on the relationship between self-serving leadership, and relative deprivation



**Figure 3** Moderating effect of political skills on the relationship between self-serving leadership, and emotional exhaustion