Exploring the Dark Side Effects of Visionary Leadership: A Dual-Path Perspective of Cognition and Affect

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Abstract

Purpose- The purpose of this study is to test the mechanism of visionary leadership on subordinates' work withdrawal behavior through cognitive strain and psychological contract violation, and also to reveal the possible dark side of visionary leadership. The moderation effects of subordinates' facades of conformity and leader behavioral integrity in the cognition–affect dual-path process are also discussed.

Design/methodology/approach- This study conducted a three-wave longitudinal survey. The data were collected from 574 employees and their superiors in several Chinese enterprises. We used Mplus 7.4 and adopted a bootstrapping technique in the data analysis.

Findings- Visionary leadership has positive effects on cognitive strain and psychological contract violation; cognitive strain and psychological contract violation mediate the relationship between visionary leadership and work withdrawal behavior, respectively. Subordinates' facades of conformity and leader behavioral integrity moderate the positive effects of visionary leadership on cognitive strain and psychological contract violation, as well as the indirect effect of visionary leadership on subordinates' work withdrawal behavior through cognitive strain and psychological contract violation.

Origin/value- This study reveals the underlying mechanism of visionary leadership's negative impact on job outcome through the cognition and affective reaction of subordinates to visionary leadership, and broadens the scope of visionary leadership research. It also provides some practical suggestions on how to transmit the organizational vision effectively and reduce subordinates' work withdrawal behavior.

Keywords: Visionary leadership; Cognitive strain; Psychological contract violation; Work withdrawal behavior; Subordinates' facades of conformity; Leader behavioral integrity

Paper type: Research paper

1 Introduction

In recent years, research on the "dark side" of leadership has been highly favored by scholars, and some traditionally considered positive leadership styles have also been found to be not always beneficial (Mackey *et al*., 2021). Positive leadership such as transformational leadership, moral leadership, and empowering leadership have been proven to have negative effects (Zhang *et al*.,

2022; Anand *et al*., 2022; Hao *et al*., 2018), and constantly influence the cognition of subordinates' psychology and behavior (Cheong *et al*., 2016). In fact, the emergence of a new leadership style reflects the needs and problems of an era. Vision, as the mainstay of today's corporate culture and an important strategic foundation for organizations (Buss *et al.*, 2023), has become the most active research topic in the field of leadership due to its closely connected leadership style.

However, due to the lack of effective communication of organizational ideals and goals by many business leaders, and the lack of active guidance to subordinates on how to achieve organizational vision, subordinates lack a sense of mission and significance in their work, which to some extent hinders the steady progress and continuous change of the enterprise.Therefore, a vision based leadership style that "points to the future" has emerged as the times require (Kim *et al*., 2023; Van Knippenberg and Stam, 2014).

Visionary leadership focuses on achieving a "shared vision". By conveying a picture of bright future (Kim *et al*., 2023), these leaders encourage the development of a shared vision, and encourage subordinates to strive for the realization of the organizational vision (Liu *et al*., 2022) to achieve the long-term development of the enterprises (Mascareño *et al*., 2020). Reviewing previous studies, we find that scholars have generally focused on the effectiveness and positive effects of visionary leadership, such as increasing employees' psychological resilience and work motivation (Li *et al*., 2023; Kehr *et al*., 2022), promoting employees' creativity and following behavior (Guan *et al*., 2023), enhancing organizational performance and organizational effectiveness, etc. (Zhou *et al*., 2018).

However, is conveying a vision by a leader necessarily a panacea for motivating employees? In fact, some scholars hold opposite positions on the "glamorous" side of visionary leadership. Ateş *et al*. (2020) once pointed out that if middle level leaders and senior leaders in a team do not reach a strategic agreement, middle level leaders will undermine the team's strategic consensus and reduce their strategic commitment to the team.Following the logic, an urgent issue that needs to be explored is whether a "dark side" to visionary leadership in motivating subordinates?

Previous studies have confirmed that setting high organizational visions or goals does not lead to corresponding performance levels (Labianca and Fairbank, 2009; Weinberg *et al*., 1985), and can not only cause psychological and attitudinal stress and threat to subordinates but also lead to negative behaviors (Bardes, 2009). In other words, the organizational vision conveyed by visionary leaders does not always bring positive experiences for subordinates, and leaders who describe too much of the organization's future development may instead be perceived by subordinates as a nuisance or stressor, which then induces negative job performance. However, research on the negative effects of visionary leadership is currently scarce and mainly focuses on the team level

(Ateş *et al*., 2020), lacking exploration of the proximal relationship between visionary leadership and negative behavior of subordinates.

Based on the analysis above, in the Chinese context, this study focuses on the dark side of visionary leadership and selects the typical negative work behavior of job withdrawal as the manifestation (Wang *et al*., 2023; Chen *et al*., 2022) with paired sample data of 574 subordinates and their direct leaders collected in three stages, to explore the negative effects and boundary conditions of visionary leadership on distal outcomes of subordinates' work withdrawal behavior.

First, we explore the indirect role of cognitive strain and psychological contract violation as representative variables in linking the relationship between visionary leadership and subordinates' work withdrawal behavior. The reasons for the choice of these two variables are, on the one hand, that receiving organizational visions from leaders may create tension and dissatisfaction in subordinates, both of which may trigger negative behaviors (Bashir and Ramay, 2010; Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016) and, on the other hand, it will be more comprehensive to analyze the effect of visionary leadership on subordinates' work withdrawal behavior based on both cognitive and affective paths.

Second, in the work environment the organizational vision can be considered an important message from the leaders: it will influence subordinates' cognition, affect, and behavior through their interpretation of the vision. Moreover, individuals' attitudes and behaviors are influenced by their own relevant factors and environmental factors in addition to the characteristics of the information itself (Zalesny and Ford, 1990). Therefore, we examine whether there is a significant difference between subordinates and leaders in how they are influenced by visionary leadership. It will do so by selecting subordinates' facades of conformity and leader behavioral integrity as moderators in our research model.

In summary, we propose theoretical hypotheses based on Cognitive-affective Personality System Theory and Social Information Processing Theory, and conduct empirical research to test the mechanism process of the influence of visionary leadership on subordinates' work withdrawal behavior. Our research results challenge existing mainstream assumptions and provide a more comprehensive and dialectical perspective on the impact and boundary effects of visionary leadership in theory, especially providing new theoretical explanations and empirical evidence for understanding the dark side of visionary leadership. At the same time, in practice, it also sounded an alarm for management practitioners, that vision is not always effective, and vision behavior should be reasonably demonstrated to improve the effectiveness of visionary leadership, thereby promoting better driving effects for subordinates and ensuring the healthy operation of the organization.

2 Theoretical background

We construct an overall research framework based on Cognitive-Affective Personality System Theory. Cognitive-Affective Personality System Theory suggests that an individual's environment or events can affect their attitude or behavior by individually activating cognitive or affective units (Michel and Shoda, 1995). The internal cognitive and affective states of individuals have information activation functions (Rusting, 1998). Among them, the cognitive system is an individual's information control system that makes rational and strategic behavior through external information. The affective system is an individual's affective automatic system that has a similar ability to conditioned reflex to external stimuli (Metcalfe and Mischel, 1999). Many scholars have confirmed that Cognitive-Affective Personality System Theory can provide a good explanation for the effect mechanism of leadership behavior (Zhao *et al.*, 2021).

Meanwhile, we use Social Information Processing Theory to connect the logic between variables. Social Information Processing Theory suggests that individuals determine their attitudes and behavioral choices based on their interpretation of relevant information or clues in social contexts, such as leadership behavior (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). This theory focuses on the external environment, which can generate various social information and influence individuals' attitudes from two aspects. Firstly, the social environment can provide signals to help individuals determine which behaviors are acceptable in that environment. Second, the social environment focuses individuals' attention on specific information, making it more prominent, and individuals place greater emphasis on the behaviors corresponding to the social information (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978).

3 Hypotheses development

3.1 Visionary leadership, cognitive strain and psychological contract violation

Visionary leadership is a kind of leadership style that communicates vision with employees in oral or written language, and then encourages employees' behavior (Kehr *et al.*, 2022; Van Knippenberg and Stam, 2014). However, previous studies have found that visionary leadership also has negative consequences (Ateş *et al.*, 2020; Greer *et al.*, 2012). In view of this, we combine the core viewpoints of Cognitive-Affective Personality System Theory and Social Information Processing Theory to speculate that visionary leadership provides signal guidance to subordinates in the process of conveying organizational vision, and subordinates are likely to affect their cognitive and affective units due to their interpretation and evaluation of leadership behavior (Cristofaro, 2020).

Cognitive strain is a negative sense of stress caused by multiple cognitive demands and contradictory cognitive processes (Zhao *et al.*, 2021). It is usually manifested by individuals'

unconscious repetitive thinking, even when they are unaware of it. At the same time, this process can also exhaust individuals' cognitive resources (Keller and Weibler, 2015). Previous studies have shown that work-related cognitive stress can weaken employees' professional self-efficacy and psychological well-being, and lead to negative work events (Mohr *et al.*, 2006).

According to Cognitive-Affective Personality System Theory, when visionary leaders convey organizational vision to subordinates, they also convey two important messages to them: first, signifying the scale of the future organization's development, second, indicating the degree and direction of effort required in future work. Therefore, combined with Social Information Processing Theory, when identify the content of the vision conveyed by their leaders (Boekhorst, 2015), subordinates require enough cognitive resources (judgment, discrimination, concentration, etc.) (Keller and Weibler, 2015).

Meanwhile, in order to meet the leaders' requirements for the vision and expectations of their role, subordinates need to adjust and modify their own behavior by consuming cognitive resources, which can cause subordinates to experience high levels of cognitive pressure and tension (Luo et al., 2017), and even result in negative cognitive evaluations due to feeling inadequate (Kalakoski *et al*., 2020) and unable to control their own thinking (Hobfill *et al*., 2018), leading to cognitive resistance to organizational vision (Luo *et al*., 2017) with negative cognitive evaluations. Based on the analyses above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. Visionary leadership is positively related to cognitive strain.

Psychological contract violation, as a strong affective response, is a subjective perception and the affective experience that arises after an employee does not adequately fulfill the psychological contract with the organization (Gervasi *et al*., 2023). Previous studies have shown that psychological contract violation not only reduces subordinates' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, but also leads to a large number of negative events such as explicit or implicit work conflicts (De Clercq *et al*., 2021).

Combining Cognitive-Affective Personality System Theory and Social Information Processing Theory, leaders, as important interpersonal communication objects in organizations, release strong signals and social implications in their words and actions, and play an important role in the construction and maintenance of subordinates psychological contracts (Arici *et al*., 2020), and subordinates realize that they may be faced with higher work responsibilities or additional work requirements and task challenges in their future work in order to achieve the organizational vision. Clearly, to some extent this goes against the belief in mutual obligations between the subordinates

and the organization (Zheng *et al*., 2017). Thus, by dealing with these cues, the subordinates' psychological contract is changed by the evaluations formed (Forgas and George, 2001).

Meanwhile, as the recipient of information, although the vision content presents a beautiful picture of the future in the minds of subordinates (Kim *et al*., 2023), it will also help them recognize the gap between the current organizational situation and future goals. Therefore, it is not enough to convince the subordinates to spend additional resources (time, energy, etc.) to achieve the organization's vision based only on the "vision of the future" that the leaders provide. Conversely, it may break the subordinates' expectations of the organization and bring about a psychological experience that is contrary to their original working intention. Thus, it will then induce subordinates to form a negative evaluation of visionary leaders, which in turn will activate their affective units and generate the perception of a violation of the psychological contract. Based on the analyses above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. Visionary leadership is positively related to psychological contract violation.

3.2 The mediating role of cognitive strain and psychological contract violation

Work withdrawal behavior refers to a series of behavioral responses implemented by employees to move away from the work situation or work tasks that they resist or are dissatisfied with (Jo and Lee, 2022), with a certain slackness and avoidance (Jian and Qu, 2022), mainly manifest as intentional tardiness, leaving early, slacking off during work hours and not trying their best. Research has proved that negative cognitive and affective factors are critical triggers for subordinates' work withdrawal behavior (Chen *et al*., 2022), which not only affects subordinates' career development but also poses tangible or intangible threats to the whole organization (Khalid *et al.*, 2022).

According to Cognitive-Affective Personality System Theory and Social Information Processing Theory, the leader's vision behavior can lead to subordinates falling into a vortex of cognitive strain (Hunter *et al*., 2017). However, this negative cognition further influences the behavioral patterns of subordinates (Lerner *et al*., 2010). As a cognitive pathway, cognitive strain not only reduces the subordinate's sense of control over the work but also makes them feel helpless and powerless in the workplace (Keller and Weibler, 2015). As a result, subordinates often tend to adopt negative coping strategies such as evading work and staying away from the organization as a way to avoid tasks and responsibilities at work through negative behaviors such as being late, leaving early, or leaving (Chong *et al*., 2020). Based on the analyses above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. Cognitive strain mediates the relationship between visionary leadership and work withdrawal behavior.

Furthermore, subordinates' psychological contract violation as an affective path also triggers the following negative behavior (Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016). That is, the more the leaders behave in visionary behaviors, the more easily the subordinates will question or distrust the "organizational vision" described by the leaders based on information interpretation and evaluation (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). They may even view the so-called "vision" as a lie fabricated by leaders for their own development or benefits, leading subordinates to believe that they are being taken advantage of or cheated for the leaders' self-interest.

Therefore, this perception of serious deviation from expectations can cause subordinates to behave in a way that deviates from their normal work trajectory, reduces motivation and drive, and triggers negative behaviors that are detrimental to the organization. In addition, when subordinates perceive that the leaders or organization have violated the psychological contract, they are more inclined to sever their ties with the leaders or organization (Jo and Lee,2022), therefore, it is most appropriate to respond by adopting work withdrawal behavior (Balogun *et al*., 2018). Based on the analyses above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4. Psychological contract violation mediates the relationship between visionary leadership and work withdrawal behavior.

3.3 The moderating role of facades of conformity and leader behavioral integrity

The study of subordinates' perceptions and reactions to leadership in Chinese contexts cannot ignore the influence of "congruence" in the organization. It has been shown that, even under the same leadership situation, differences in "consistency" can lead to differences in cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns of subordinates (Bouckenooghe *et al*., 2015; Colbert *et al*., 2008). Therefore, this study chooses subordinates' facades conformity (Ye and Qian, 2023), which is a "false" presentation of subordinates, and subordinates' perceptions of leadership consistency (Peng and Wei, 2020), which is a "real" presentation of leaders' words and actions, to explore their moderation roles in the relationship between visionary leadership and subordinates' cognitive strain and psychological contract violation in subordinates.

Facades of conformity is a behavior that individuals adopt to disguise their values and falsely support the values of others when their own values are inconsistent with organizational values

(Hewlin, 2009). Studies have shown that, in the Chinese cultural context, which is known to have a high power distance and high collectivism, leader behavior is an important factor that leads individuals to adopt facades of conformity (Vogel and Mitchell, 2017). Therefore, based on Social Information Processing Theory, we argue that subordinates' facades of conformity mitigate the positive effect of visionary leadership on cognitive strain.

Specifically, subordinates with higher facades of conformity are more self-interested than others (Liang, 2022), more often actively pay attention to situational cues about values in the workplace (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978), therefore, they are more sensitive to leader behavior. In other words, subordinates with higher facades of conformity are more inclined to hide their true values in order to maintain consistency with the leaders' values (Akbar and Akhtar, 2018). Subordinates actively obtain relevant information from the work environment and falsely demonstrate consistency with their leader's values such as nodding and approving support, to alleviate the cognitive burden and tension associated with the organizational vision.

In addition, subordinates with high facades of conformity always have a strong purpose (Chou *et al*., 2020), through the strategy of camouflaging their own values, they avoid the risks caused by any inconsistency with the values of leaders or organizations such as not being accepted, being regarded as in the minority, and interpersonal relationship breakdown (Phillips *et al*., 2016). However, this phenomenon of "lip service" shows fake pandering for personal survival needs and clearly violates psychological expectations, which enhances the degree of psychological contract violation. Based on the analyses above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5. Subordinates' facades of conformity moderate the relationship between visionary leadership and cognitive strain. That is, the higher the subordinates' facades of conformity, the weaker the relationship is.

H6. Subordinates' facades of conformity moderate the relationship between visionary leadership and psychological contract violation. That is, the higher the subordinates' facades of conformity, the stronger the relationship is.

Leader behavioral integrity responds to subordinates' perceptions of the degree of consistency between the leaders' words and actions (Elsetouhi *et al*., 2018). According to Cognitive-Affective Personality System Theory, the words and actions of leaders serve as an important source of information (Boekhorst, 2015). By processing and interpreting them, subordinates can influence their cognition, attitude, and coping behavior towards leadership behavior (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). Therefore, leader behavioral integrity affects the extent to which subordinates understand

leadership behaviors (Wang *et al*., 2022).

Specifically, when subordinates perceive a high level of leader behavioral integrity, subordinates recognize the leader's determination to achieve the "vision", but this also leads to subordinates consuming a large amount of cognitive resources to interpret the information and expectations conveyed by the leader (Zhao *et al*., 2021), which increases the cognitive load and drives the development of cognitive strain in subordinates. At the same time, in the high-status, high-powered Chinese organizational context, the leaders' behavioral style is also cognitively stressful for subordinates. If the subordinates perceive a low level of leader behavioral integrity, the subordinates will think that the leaders are "just indulging in empty talk" and may not take it too seriously or think too much about it; thus, the cognitive strain will be reduced accordingly.

In addition, consistency in their words and actions enables leaders to build long-lasting, high-quality interactions with their subordinates. When subordinates perceive a high level of leader behavioral integrity, the leaders' genuineness will reduce subordinates' negative expectations of the organizational vision, increase subordinates' approval of the organizational vision (Leroy *et al*., 2012), and feelings of trust and security toward the leaders (Hinkin and Schriesheim, 2015; Chaman *et al*., 2022), thus increasing the mutual obligations between subordinates and leaders. It also leads subordinates to believe that they should step up to the plate when the organization is in need and give back to the organization with practical actions, thus reducing the degree of psychological contract violation. Based on the analyses above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> *H7.* Leader behavioral integrity moderates the relationship between visionary leadership and cognitive strain. That is, the higher the leader behavioral integrity, the stronger the relationship is.
>
> *H8.* Leader behavioral integrity moderates the relationship between visionary leadership and psychological contract violation. That is, the higher the leader behavioral integrity, the weaker the relationship is.

3.4 The moderating mediation effect

Combining the above hypotheses, we can infer that subordinates' facades of conformity not only moderate the relationship between visionary leadership and cognitive strain, as well as psychological contract violation, but also moderate the indirect effect of visionary leadership in influencing subordinates' work withdrawal behavior through cognitive strain and psychological contract violation, respectively. That is, subordinates with high facades of conformity are good at deliberately hiding their values to avoid contradicting the outside world (Akbar and Akhtar, 2018),

relieving cognitive strain and pressure brought about by "vision" through false support and advocacy, which ultimately will reduce work withdrawal behavior. On the other hand, such false "obedience" and "compliance" behaviors will intensify the subordinates' psychological contract violation and lead to more withdrawal behaviors. In summary, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> *H9*. Subordinates' facades of conformity moderate the mediation role of cognitive strain between visionary leadership and employee work withdrawal behavior. That is, the higher the leader behavioral integrity, the weaker the mediation role is.
>
> *H10*. Subordinates' facades of conformity moderate the mediation role of psychological contract violation between visionary leadership and employee work withdrawal behavior. That is, the higher the leader behavioral integrity, the stronger the mediation role is.

Furthermore, we further predict that leader behavioral integrity not only moderates the relationship between visionary leadership and cognitive strain and psychological contract violation but also moderates the indirect effect of visionary leadership in influencing subordinates' work withdrawal behavior through cognitive strain and psychological contract violation, respectively. That is, subordinates who perceive higher leader behavioral integrity, focused on the organizational vision, scope of thinking, etc., will subsequently experience increasing cognitive-level load and challenges (Hunter *et al*., 2017), which will ultimately lead to work withdrawal behaviors due to a lack of a sense of control over the job (Chen *et al*., 2022). Conversely, keeping one's word leads to subordinates' trust in their leaders (Peng and Wei, 2020), thereby weakening the degree of psychological contract violation and thus reducing the generation of work withdrawal behaviors. Based on the analyses above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> *H11*. Leader behavioral integrity moderates the mediation role of cognitive strain between visionary leadership and employee work withdrawal behavior. That is, the higher the leader behavioral integrity, the stronger the mediation role is.
>
> *H12*. Leader behavioral integrity moderates the mediation role of psychological contract violation between visionary leadership and employee work withdrawal behavior. That is, the higher the leader behavioral integrity, the weaker the mediation role is.

4 Methods

4.1 Samples and procedures

To verify our hypothesis, we selected multiple mature enterprises in China (including manufacturing,

information technology, service, and finance industries) and collected data through offline questionnaire responses. The data was obtained through a 1:1 pairing of employees and direct leaders at three time points, with an interval of 1 month between each collection.

We obtained a roster of research subjects with the cooperation of the human resources departments of relevant enterprises, and coded the research subjects based on the organizational structure of each department from the roster. Before the start of the research, we also shared with the participants the purpose of this study and ensured that the results of this survey would be strictly confidential and only used for academic research, in order to alleviate the concerns of participants and improve the accuracy of measurements.

We distributed a total of 625 questionnaires in the first survey, and after three rounds of collection, we ultimately obtained 574 valid paired questionnaires between employees and leaders, with a recovery efficiency of 91.84%. In terms of sample structure, male employees are the majority, accounting for 59.8% of the total sample size. In terms of age structure, the majority are young people, with 83.8% of employees under the age of 35. In terms of educational level structure, undergraduate and above accounted for 62.9% of the total samples. The basic information of the samples is shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

4.2 Measurements

The scales used in this study were ones that have been well established or used by many scholars in China and abroad, and each item was scored on a six-point Likert scale. We used SPSS 24.0 to measure the reliability of six main variables: Visionary leadership, cognitive strain, psychological contract violation, work withdrawal behavior, subordinates' facades of conformity, and leader behavioral integrity.

For the measurement of visionary leadership (T1), we applied the scale developed by Kearney *et al*. (2019), which has five items in total. A representative item is "My leaders often talk about the future of the organization"; Cronbach's alpha is 0.89.

For the measurement of cognitive strain (T2), we used the scale developed by Mohr *et al*. (2005), which has three items in total. A representative item is "Even at home, I often think about difficult problems at work"; Cronbach's alpha is 0.85.

For the measurement of psychological contract violation (T2), we used the scale developed by

Robinson and Morrison (2000), which has four items in total. A representative item is "I am angry with the organization"; Cronbach's alpha is 0.83.

For the measurement of work withdrawal behavior (T3), we used the scale developed by Lehman and Simpson (1992), which has 12 items in total. A representative item is "The employees are distracted at work"; Cronbach's alpha is 0.88.

For the measurement of subordinates' facades of conformity (T2), we used the scale developed by Hewlin (2009), which has six items in total. A representative item is "I would conceal personal values that conflict with organizational values"; Cronbach's alpha is 0.93.

For the measurement of leader behavioral integrity (T2), we used the scale developed by Simons *et al.* (2007), which has eight items in total. A representative item is "What my leaders say and what they do are consistent"; Cronbach's alpha is 0.90.

For the measurement of control variables, we selected the age, gender, and education level of employees as the control variables from common demographic variables. Among them, the age of employees was divided into 7 ranges: 25 years old and below, 26-30 years old, 31-35 years old, 36-40 years old, 41-45 years old, 46-50 years old, 51 years old and above. This approximate a continuous scale. Gender was dummy coded, 0 for male and 2 for female. The education level of employees is divided into high school, college, undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and it was also treated as a continuous scale.

5 Results

5.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

In order to verify the subordinate relationship between measurement items and factors, confirmatory factor analysis was performed using Mplus 7.4 on relevant variables to test the discriminant validity between variables. The results are shown in Table 2, and the six-factor model fit is optimal (x^2 = 352.91, df = 155, x^2/df = 2.28, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.06), indicating good discriminant validity among the six variables.

Insert Table 2 about here

5.2 Correlation analysis

In order to test whether there is a correlation between variables, this study used SPSS 24.0 to measure the mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficient matrix of each variable in the

study. As shown in Table 3, The data shows that visionary leadership is significantly positively correlated with cognitive strain ($\gamma = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$) and psychological contract violation ($\gamma = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$); cognitive strain is significantly positively correlated with work withdrawal behavior ($\gamma = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$); psychological contract violation is significantly positively correlated with work withdrawal behavior ($\gamma = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$), and the results of the above analyses tentatively support the hypotheses related to this study.

Insert Table 3 about here

5.3 Main effects testing

In this study, Mplus 7.4 was used to test the fitting indexes and related hypotheses of the structural equation model. First, according to the fitting indexes of the theoretical model ($x^2 = 425.97$, df = 161, x^2/df = 2.65, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.07), it can be judged that the fitting of the model is good. Second, the results of the path analysis are shown in Figure 1: visionary leadership is positively correlated with cognitive strain ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.001$) and psychological contract violation ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$), so H1 and H2 are verified.

Insert Figure 1 about here

5.4 Mediation effects testing

In this study, Bootstrap (repeated sampling 5,000 times) was used to test the mediation effect of cognitive strain and psychological contract violation respectively, and the results are shown in Table 4. The mediation effect of cognitive strain ($\beta = 0.02$, $p < 0.01$) is significant and the 95% confidence interval is [0.007, 0.029], excluding 0, so H3 is supported; the mediation effect ($\beta = 0.03$, $p < 0.01$) is significant and the 95% confidence interval is [0.014, 0.047], excluding 0, so H4 is supported.

Insert Table 4 about here

5.5 Moderation effect test

From Figure 1, it can be concluded that the interaction between visionary leadership and subordinates' facades of conformity has a significant effect on cognitive strain ($\beta = -0.07, p < 0.001$) and psychological contract violation ($\beta = 0.09, p < 0.05$), indicating that leader behavioral integrity significantly moderates the relationship between visionary leadership and cognitive strain, as well as psychological contract violation. The interaction between visionary leadership and subordinates' facades of conformity has a significant effect on cognitive strain ($\beta = 0.17, p < 0.001$) and psychological contract violation ($\beta = -0.10, p < 0.01$), indicating that subordinates' facades of conformity significantly moderate the relationship between visionary leadership and cognitive strain as well as psychological contract violation.

To further explain the moderation effect relationship between the subordinates' facades of conformity and leader behavioral integrity, simple slope tests were conducted as suggested by Aiken and West (1991) and plotted as shown in Figures 2 (A, B, C, D). The results show that, when subordinates' facades of conformity are low, visionary leadership has a strong positive effect on cognitive strain ($\beta = 0.21, t = 4.69, p < 0.001$) and a nonsignificant positive effect on psychological contract violation ($\beta = -0.06, t = -1.21, p = 0.226$); when subordinates' facades of conformity are high, visionary leadership has a nonsignificant effect on cognitive strain ($\beta = 0.03, t = 0.57, p = 0.566$) and a strong positive effect on psychological contract violation ($\beta = 0.37, t = 7.78, p < 0.001$). That is, the higher the subordinates' facades of conformity, the weaker the positive effect of visionary leadership on cognitive strain, and the stronger the positive effect on psychological contract violation, so H5 and H6 are verified.

When leader behavioral integrity is low, the positive effect of visionary leadership on cognitive strain ($\beta = -0.05, t = -1.42, p = 0.157$) is not significant and the positive effect on psychological contract violation ($\beta = 0.15, t = 3.78, p < 0.001$) is strong. When leader behavioral integrity is high, the positive effect of visionary leadership on cognitive strain ($\beta = 0.22, t = 5.16, p < 0.001$) is stronger and the positive effect on psychological contract violation ($\beta = -0.01, t = 0.05, p = 0.853$) is not significant. That is, the higher the leader behavioral integrity, the stronger the positive effect of visionary leadership on cognitive strain and the weaker the positive effect on psychological contract violation, so H7 and H8 are verified.

Insert Figure 2 about here

To test the moderation effect of subordinates' facades of conformity and leader behavioral integrity, this study used Bootstrap (repeated sampling 5,000 times) to test the mediating effect of being moderated. The results are shown in Tables 5 and 6: the mediation effect of cognitive strain between visionary leadership and work withdrawal behavior is moderated by subordinates' facades of conformity. That is, for employees with high facades of conformity (one standard deviation above the mean), the indirect effect of visionary leadership via cognitive strain on work withdrawal behavior is significantly lower than employees with low facades of conformity (one standard deviation below the mean), the difference is significant ($\beta = -0.03$, $p < 0.01$), and the 95% confidence interval is $[-0.044, -0.011]$, excluding 0. Thus, H9 is verified.

The mediation effect of psychological contract violation between visionary leadership and work withdrawal behavior is moderated by subordinates' facades of conformity. That is, for employees with high facades of conformity (one standard deviation above the mean), the indirect effect of visionary leadership on work withdrawal behavior via psychological contract violation is significantly higher than employees with low facades of conformity (one standard deviation below the mean), the difference is significant ($\beta = 0.04$, $p < 0.05$), and the 95% confidence interval is $[0.014, 0.087]$, excluding 0. Thus, H10 is verified.

The mediation effect of cognitive strain between visionary leadership and work withdrawal behavior is moderated by leader behavioral integrity. That is, for employees with high leader behavioral integrity (one standard deviation above the mean), the indirect effect of visionary leadership via cognitive strain on work withdrawal behavior is significantly higher than employees with low leader behavioral integrity (one standard deviation below the mean), the difference is significant ($\beta = 0.03$, $p < 0.01$), and the 95% confidence interval is $[0.015, 0.061]$, excluding 0. Therefore, H11 is verified.

The mediation effect of psychological contract violation between visionary leadership and work withdrawal behavior is moderated by leader behavioral integrity. That is, for employees with high leader behavioral integrity (one standard deviation above the mean), the indirect effect of visionary leadership on work withdrawal behavior via psychological contract violation is significantly lower than that of employees with low leader behavioral integrity (one standard deviation above the mean), the difference is significant ($\beta = -0.03$, $p < 0.05$), and the 95% confidence interval is $[-0.051, -0.010]$, excluding 0. Therefore, H12 is verified.

Insert Table 5 about here

Insert Table 6 about here

5.6 Robustness test

In order to test the robustness of the research conclusions, the following robustness tests are conducted:

Control variables were added or removed. Firstly, to avoid the impact of missing variables on the research results, we added two variables: working time between subordinates and leaders, as well as industry dummies. After adding control variables, the coefficient sign in the regression results remained consistent with the previous regression results, and all models were significant at least at a significance level of 10%. Secondly, after removing all control variables (Alterman *et al.*, 2020), our research conclusion remains robust. Due to space limitations, the above regression results are detailed in the appendix.

Alternative testing methods (Sobel test and Bootstrap method) were used to verify the reliability of research conclusions (Liu *et al.*, 2013). In the previous regression results of the mediation model, we used the stepwise regression method. The results showed that when the mediation variable was added, the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable was significantly weakened, supporting the hypothesis that mediation effect exists. We then use Sobel test to calculate the significance of mediation effect. Sobel test results showed that the mediation effect of the mediation variable reached a significant level ($p < 0.05$), which further verified the existence of the mediation effect, and H3 and H4 were verified. In order to ensure the robustness of the research results, we also used the Bootstrap method for testing. Bootstrap method generated a new sample by resampling, calculated the mediation effect of each sample, and generated a 95% confidence interval. If the zero value is not within this range, it is confirmed that the mediation effect is significant. We selected 1000, 2000, and 5000 resamples respectively, and the 95% confidence intervals of the three sets of results did not include zero values. In conclusion, the results of stepwise regression method, Sobel test and Bootstrap sample method were consistent, verifying the mediation effects of H3 and H4.

Propensity score matching（PSM）was used.In empirical testing of the sustained impact and micro mechanism of visionary leadership on subordinates' subsequent work performance, there may be the following causal identification problem: how to effectively eliminate various factors such as individual abilities and personality traits that interfere with subordinates' acceptance of visionary

leadership, and accurately identify the causal relationship between an individual's managed experience and their work performance. Therefore, this study used PSM to address potential model setting and sample selection bias issues (Gupta *et al.*, 2019).

Firstly, considering the comparability between the control group and the treatment group, this study set samples with 'vision leadership' scores less than or equal to the upper third percentile as the control group, and samples with scores more than the upper third percentile as the treatment group. According to existing literature, important covariates that may affect the value of processing variables are included in the first stage regression model of PSM, including age, gender and education. Taking the model of 'visionary leadership leading to cognitive strain' as an example, the regression results of the first stage of PSM show that the model Pseudo R2 is 0.0464, and the chi square test P-value is 0.00, which indicates that the fitting of the model is good and meets the negligible assumption.

Secondly, we used radius matching and kernel matching(the kernel type is Epanechnikov). Finally, taking the kernel matching as an example, we obtained a paired study sample set of 574 observation samples. After analysis using the pstatch2 command of STATA 17.0, ATT difference is 0.256 (T-value = 5.87 > 2.58). Next, we conducted a balance test on the relevant variables in the PSM sample set treatment group and control group. Among them, the sample size of the treatment group (treat = 1) is 153, and the matched control group (treat = 0) has a sample size of 421. After PSM paired screening, there were no significant differences in the control variables between the treatment group and the control group.That is the matching effect of PSM samples is relatively ideal.

Finally, we only retained the matched treatment group and control group for regression analysis. Compared with the results obtained using the overall sample, there was no significant difference in statistical significance between the two groups of test results, indicating that the research findings were more stable after controlling for endogeneity bias.

6 Discussion

Visionary leadership, as a form of "strategic leadership", can effectively influence subordinates' cognition, psychology, and behavior (Kearney et al., 2019; Li *et al.*, 2023). In fact, although existing research has confirmed the existence of a "dark side" in visionary leadership (Ateş et al., 2020; Greer et al., 2012), there is little discussion on the negative impact on subordinates' behavior. It is worth noting that the effectiveness of visionary leadership is likely to be influenced by the cognitive evaluation and information interpretation of subordinates (Zhao *et al.*, 2021; Boekhorst, 2015). When exploring this issue, we have referred to the new research ideas of Cristofaro (2020)and constructed an explanatory framework from a cognition-affect perspective, incorporating

information processing into the overall research logic.

As predicted, everything has two sides, leaders' vision behaviors aggravate subordinates' cognitive strain, and then lead to subordinates' work withdrawal behavior. Meanwhile, subordinates' psychological contract violation is also enhanced, which subsequently induces the occurrence of work withdrawal behaviors. Throughout this entire process, subordinates' facades of conformity and subordinates' perception of leader behavioral integrity also play a promoting or inhibiting role, respectively. The above results expand the research on the mechanism and boundary conditions of visionary leadership in Chinese organizational contexts, and provide practical guidance for organizational managers to effectively apply visionary leadership style.

7 Conclusion

Many previous studies have emphasized the benefits of visionary leadership, especially its positive effect on subordinates' behavior (Mascareño *et al*., 2020), however, too much is as bad as too little. This study is based on the Chinese cultural context and challenges previous research perspectives, from an empirical perspective, it constructs a cognition and affect dual path integration model for the influence of visionary leadership on subordinates' work withdrawal behavior, confirming the existence of a "dark side" in the effect of visionary leadership on subordinates' behavior and providing a new direction for the research of visionary leadership.

Meanwhile, we hope that this study can draw the attention of scholars to pay attention to the negative effects of leaders' vision behavior on subordinates, and call on leaders to pay attention to providing sufficient support for subordinates' cognition and affect, helping them better adapt to the vision leadership style, in order to avoid negative cognitive evaluations and subsequent negative work performance from subordinates. Moreover, it also provides a strong research basis for exploring visionary leadership in the future.

7.1 Theoretical implications

Our research findings provide several important theoretical contributions. First, this study expands the outcome variables and research perspectives of visionary leadership. Previous studies have mostly focused on the positive effects of visionary leadership (Guan *et al*., 2023; Zhou *et al*., 2018), although a few studies have mentioned the potential negative effects of visionary leadership (Ateş *et al*., 2020), few studies have included the negative effects of visionary leadership in their empirical research framework, which is not conducive to a systematic and comprehensive academic understanding of visionary leaders' roles on their subordinates. This study reveals the mechanism by which visionary leadership affects subordinates' work withdrawal behavior, and confirms that

visionary leadership has a dark side, which to a certain extent fills the gap in empirical research on visionary leadership and helps scholars to understand, focus on, and reflect on the effects brought by visionary leadership in organizations more deeply and comprehensively from different perspectives.

Second, this study strengthens the explanatory power of Cognitive-Affective Personality System Theory and Social Information Processing Theory in the field of visionary leadership research, visionary leadership in previous studies has been explored mainly based on theoretical perspectives such as Stakeholder Theory, and Self-expansion Theory (Nwachukwu *et al.*, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2022). This study combined Cognitive-Affective Personality System Theory and Social Information Processing Theory as the theoretical framework to construct an overall logic among the variables. From multiple perspectives, the complete chain of "leadership style → subordinates' cognition/affect → subordinates' behavior" is constructed, which further expands the research on the negative effects of visionary leadership, providing a new theoretical perspective for the study of the effect mechanism of visionary leadership.

Finally, this study explores the moderating effect of subordinates' facades of conformity and leader behavioral integrity. Currently, subordinates' facades of conformity and leader behavioral integrity are more often examined in the research as independent or mediation variables (Ye and Qian, 2023; Elsetouhi *et al.*, 2018), this study verifies the mechanism of the effect of visionary leadership on subordinates' cognitive strain and psychological contract violation, which change depending on the level of subordinates' facades of conformity and leader behavioral integrity. Reviewing the literature, few studies have examined the mechanism of visionary leadership effect on subordinates' behavior from the perspective of "consistency." It also provides a useful addition to the research on the moderation mechanism of the effect of visionary leadership.

7.2 Practical implications

Our research findings have inspiration and reference significance for the management practices of enterprises. First of all, consistent with previous findings (Hogan *et al.*, 2021), we find that active leadership does not necessarily lead to good results. Especially in today's increasingly diverse organization of subordinates (Negoro and Wibowo, 2021), how to achieve the "organizational vision" requires leaders to consider more from the perspective of subordinates and avoid the negative impact of the "vision" on subordinates. We suggest that organizations should establish a sound and effective feedback mechanism so that leaders can timely observe the cognitive reactions and emotional changes of subordinates when facing the "organizational vision", thus achieving positive communication, which will greatly restrain the negative effects of visionary behaviors. In addition,

organizations can also strengthen the visionary communication skills of leaders through targeted leadership training.

Besides, the research results indicate that excessive vision needs or role expectations are the root cause of negative cognition and emotions in subordinates (Labianca and Fairbank, 2009). Therefore, we suggest that leaders should adjust the available resources of the organization in advance (Luo *et al*., 2017) in order to avoid subordinates' psychological burden at work and falling into cognitive tension (Kalakoski *et al*., 2020). Meanwhile, leaders always need to pay attention to the changes in the status of subordinates' psychological contracts and avoid a series of negative behaviors brought about by negative affect that harm the organization or the interests of others (Gervasi *et al.*, 2023). Creating a safe work environment for subordinates, and conducting regular mental health training or vocational training and other activities will actively guide subordinates to pursue the meaning of work, and to avoid subordinates' psychological discomfort caused by specific work requirements.

Lastly, we have once again confirmed the importance of "leader behavioral integrity" for organizational development (Bouckenooghe *et al*., 2015). We suggest that organizations should actively lead subordinates to self-enhancement through fair and reasonable performance evaluation mechanisms and resist the phenomenon of too much uniformity of values within the organization. Subordinates can perceive a supportive atmosphere in the organization and speak up more boldly if a good communication environment and open information channels are established, thus suppressing the harm of overly unified values within the organization (Liang, 2022). Meanwhile, organizations should also incorporate behavioral integrity into leadership training content to strengthen the ethics of leadership by instilling the theory of behavioral integrity in leaders. An organizational culture of integrity can be established through a system of rewards and punishments, etc., and behavioral integrity can be valued in the workplace so that it becomes a commonly accepted value among the organization's members (Chaman *et al*., 2022).

7.3 Research limitations and future study directions

This study still has some limitations and shortcomings that need to be further explored in future studies. First, it confirms the multiple mediating roles of subordinates' cognitive strain and psychological contract violation in the relationship between visionary leadership and work withdrawal behavior. In the future, researchers can further introduce other mechanisms to continue exploring variables such as self depletion, moral permission, psychological privilege, etc.that have not yet been focused on, and compare the differences in their mechanisms of action based on our findings.

Second, regarding the selection of the visionary leadership scale, this study adopted one used by many foreign scholars. In future studies, we suggest using the visionary leadership scale developed based on Chinese organizational contexts to further verify its effects and compare the differences between domestic and international visionary leadership concepts.

Third, the control variables included in this study are limited, and other control variables that may affect the findings, such as time spent with superiors, superior–subordinate relationships, and compensation incentives, can be added to the study design in the future.

Fourth, this study mainly explored the mechanism of the effect of visionary leadership and subordinates' work withdrawal behavior at the individual level, and team-level variable measurement such as team relationship conflicts, team competitive atmosphere, team forced work passion, etc. could be attempted in future studies so as to further explore the study of the dark side effect of visionary leadership on teams or organizations.

Fifth, the cross-sectional data used in this study may not accurately reveal the dynamic process between variables: the effect of visionary behavior is a dynamic change process that changes over time. Therefore, an experimental research method or log tracking can be used in future studies to make the findings more accurate and credible.

Sixth, due to our limited social resources, the sample in this study mainly focused on the data findings from a local area in Henan, and the external validity of the sample categories may have certain shortcomings; the generalizability of the study results still needs to be further confirmed. In the future, researchers can expand the sample range or conduct cross-cultural research, and obtain samples in different countries and regions, so that the results can be more convincing.

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Figure 1. Path coefficients
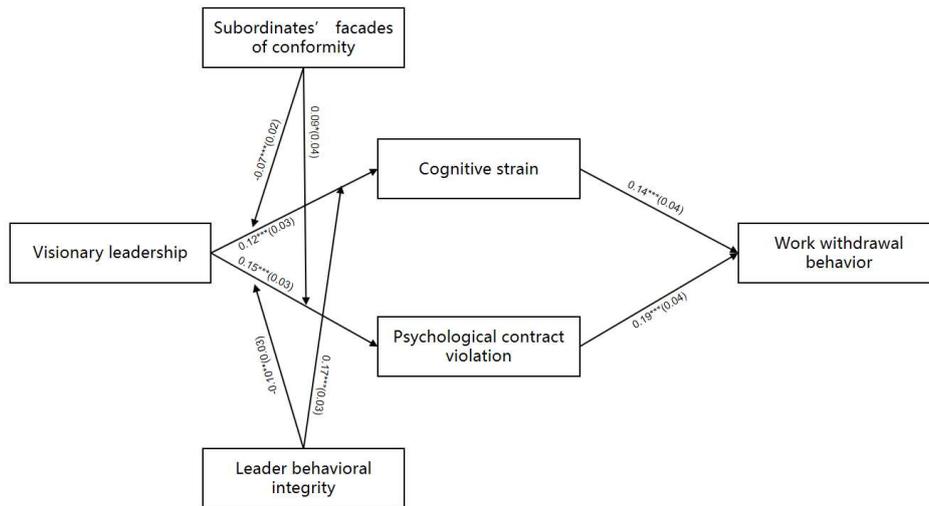
Notes: ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$; coefficients in the figures are standardized coefficients, and standard errors are in parentheses; control variables are age, gender, and education level.

Figure 2. Moderation effect
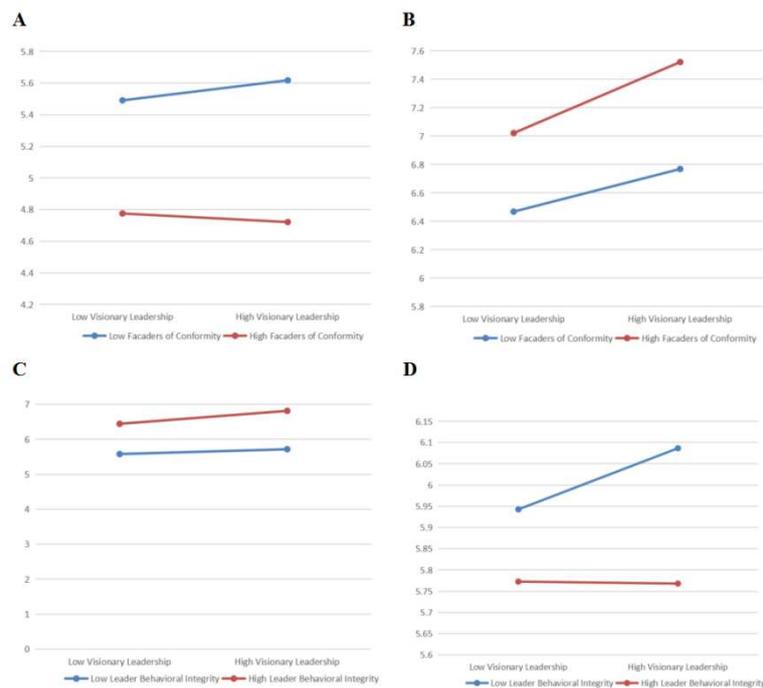
Notes: N = 574; Moderation effect diagram of subordinates' facades of conformity on visionary leadership and cognitive strain (A); Moderation effect diagram of subordinates' facades of conformity on visionary leadership and psychological contract violation (B); Moderation effect diagram of leader behavioral integrity on visionary leadership and cognitive strain (C); Moderation effect diagram of leader behavioral integrity on visionary leadership and psychological contract violation (D).

Table 1 Basic Information of Samples

Variable	Attribute	Number	Percentage
Age	≤25	87	15.2
	26-30	193	33.6
	31-35	201	35
	36-40	35	6.1
	41-45	27	4.7
	46-50	19	3.3
	≥51	12	2.1
Sex	Male	343	59.8
	Female	231	40.2
Education level	Senior high school	55	9.6
	Junior college	158	27.5
	Bachelor	246	42.9
	Master	92	16
	Doctor	23	4

Table 2. Results of validation factor analysis

Models	Description	x^2	df	x^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Model a	One-factor model	2372.33	170	13.96	0.33	0.25	0.20	0.19
Model b	Two-factor model	2183.46	169	12.92	0.39	0.31	0.19	0.18
Model c	Three-factor model	1833.11	167	10.98	0.49	0.42	0.17	0.17
Model d	Four-factor model	905.67	164	5.52	0.78	0.74	0.12	0.12
Model e	Five-factor model	643.14	160	4.02	0.85	0.83	0.10	0.09
Model f	Six-factor model	352.91	155	2.28	0.94	0.93	0.06	0.06

Notes: N = 574; a: all six variables were combined as the same factor; b: cognitive strain, work withdrawal behavior, visionary leadership, subordinates' facades of conformity, and psychological contract violation were combined as the same factor; c: cognitive strain, work withdrawal behavior, visionary leadership, and subordinates' facades of conformity were combined as the same factor; d: cognitive strain, work withdrawal behavior, and visionary leadership were combined as the same factor; e: cognitive strain and work withdrawal behaviors are combined as the same factor; f: hypothetical model.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and correlations of study variables

	Mean value (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	29.52	7.21									
2. Gender	0.40	0.49	0.12**								

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. Education level	3.47	1.40	0.03	−0.03							
4. Visionary leadership (T1)	5.18	0.71	−0.05	0.05	0.17**	(0.89)					
5. Cognitive strain (T2)	5.18	0.60	−0.12**	−0.04	0.03	0.16**	(0.85)				
6. Psychological contract violation (T2)	5.21	0.63	−0.17**	−0.08*	−0.10**	0.16**	0.12**	(0.83)			
7. Work withdrawal behavior (T3)	5.34	0.61	−0.12**	−0.03	0.10**	0.33**	0.19**	0.23**	(0.88)		
8. Subordinates' facades of conformity (T2)	2.50	1.25	0.11**	0.08*	−0.003	−0.05	−0.35**	−0.14**	−0.12**	(0.93)	
9. Leader behavioral integrity (T2)	5.07	0.74	−0.14**	−0.10**	−0.01	0.26**	0.33**	0.37**	0.17**	−0.50**	(0.90)

Notes: N = 574; **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.

Table 4. Results of the test for mediation effects of cognitive strain and psychological contract violation

Indirect path	Indirect effect β	95% confidence interval CI
Path 1: Visionary leadership → Cognitive strain → Work withdrawal behavior	0.02**	[0.007, 0.029]
Path 2: Visionary leadership → Psychological contract violation → Work withdrawal Behavior	0.03**	[0.014, 0.047]

Notes: N = 574; ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$; Bootstrap = 5,000 times.

Table 5. Test results of moderated mediating effects of facades of conformity on subordinates

Subordinates' facades of conformity on	Visionary leadership → cognitive strain → work withdrawal behavior		Visionary leadership → psychological contract violation →work withdrawal behavior	
	Indirect effect β	95% confidence interval CI	Indirect effect β	95% confidence interval CI
Low subordinates' facades of conformity	0.03**	[0.014, 0.048]	0.001	[−0.017, 0.025]
High subordinates' facades of conformity on subordinates	0.003	[−0.005, 0.013]	0.04**	[0.021, 0.074]
Differences	−0.03**	[−0.044, −0.011]	0.04*	[0.015, 0.087]

Notes: N = 574; ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$; Bootstrap = 5,000 times.

Table 6. Results of the moderated mediating effect test on the leader behavioral integrity

Leader behavioral integrity	Visionary leadership → cognitive strain → work withdrawal behavior		Visionary leadership → psychological contract violation → work withdrawal behavior	
	Indirect effect β	95% confidence interval CI	Indirect effect β	95% confidence interval CI
Low leader behavioral integrity	−0.01	[−0.023, 0.001]	0.03**	[0.013, 0.050]
High leader behavioral integrity	0.03**	[0.013, 0.046]	0.001	[−0.015, 0.016]

| Differences | 0.03** | [0.015, 0.061] | −0.03* | [−0.051, -0.010] |

Notes: N = 574; ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$; Bootstrap = 5,000 times.

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