



# Ethical leadership, organisational citizenship behaviours and social loafing: The mediating effect of perceived organisational politics



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**Purpose:** The main objective of this study was to provide empirical evidence in order to enhance the understanding of how ethical leadership influences employees' organisational citizenship behaviours and occurrence of social loafing through the mediating role of perceived organisational politics in the higher education sector.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The respondents of the study were academics engaged in the education sector in North Cyprus. Structural equation modelling (SEM), regression analysis and bootstrapping technique were employed to test the model and the hypotheses.

**Findings/results:** The statistical findings confirm that the presence of an ethical leader encouraged and motivated employees to develop a politically transparent environment, which in turn encouraged academics to develop organisational citizenship behaviours and reduce social loafing intentions in their workplace.

**Practical implications:** The results demonstrated that organisations aiming to increase organisational performance through encouraging employee discretionary behaviours are recommended to hire and promote ethical leaders and develop strategies to measure perceived levels of organisational politics.

**Originality/value:** This study fills a gap in the literature by asserting that the complete chain effects of an ethical leadership network enhance employee positivity and reduce negative discretionary behaviours. It also highlights that the effect of ethical leadership on organisational citizenship behaviours (OCBs) and social loafing was partially contingent on perceived organisational politics.

**Keywords:** ethical leadership; organisational citizenship behaviour; social loafing; perceptions of organisational politics; discretionary behaviours; counterproductive work behaviours.

## Introduction

The theory of ethical leadership focuses on interactional justice and on balancing the relationship between employees and the organisation in terms of treating every part of the population in a fairly consistent manner (Neubert, Wu, & Roberts, 2013). Specifically, ethical leaders set their sights on strengthening the integrity, social responsibility, moral attitude and behaviours of followers. Equally, they invest in the career advancement and personal growth of the employees as well as engaging other stakeholders and the associates via creating social consensus in the network (Sosik, Chun, Ete, Arenas, & Scherer, 2018; Tourigny, Han, Baba, & Pan, 2019). Contemporary ethical leadership (EL) theory needs a fine-grained attempt to deconstruct the conclusions of previous studies in order to fracture generalisations. In this regard, employee discretionary behavioural outcomes set a meaningful direction for organisations to balance and restrain both organisational functioning and employee effectiveness by investing in research to determine how employees feel and get motivated in their workplace (Resick, Hargis, Shao, & Dust, 2013; Wang, Xing, Xu, & Hannah, 2021). Contemporary research suggests that EL has been found to be positively linked with discretionary behavioural outcomes intended to benefit organisations such as organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB) (Gerpott, Van Quaquebeke, Schlamp, & Voelpel, 2019). Contrarily, employees were observed to take more risks such as efficaciously cooperating in change processes (Qi & Liu, 2014) and deter discretionary behavioural outcomes, which violate significant organisational norms such as deviance (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009).

In this regard, employee discretionary behaviours such as OCBs are vital to the viability and success of organisations (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 2000). Organisational citizenship behaviours benefit the entire organisation; however, they are often not monitored or rewarded (Organ, 1988). Ethical leadership theory provides the necessary background to encourage OCBs and enhance bilateral mindfulness at an individual as well as a group level. Ethical leaders reduce unethical behaviours by actively embedding ethical codes into employee behaviour (Schaubroeck et al., 2012). Previous findings lack clear definitions of what comprises unethical behaviours (Wang et al., 2021); however, social loafing (SL) is a type of unethical behaviour that indirectly affects employee performance by decreasing individual effort and contribution whilst performing as a team. Such behaviours influence not only the personal achievements of individuals but the entire team's work outcomes (Morris, 2004). Ethical leadership helps to prevent code of ethics violations and limit any reputational damage at every level within organisations. Hence, the identification of balancing methods to control loafing levels may be beneficial to business organisations. The current literature on social loafing has largely disregarded leadership influences (Ellemers, Gilder, & Haslam, 2004).

Throughout their careers, employees often face difficult or unfamiliar situations where the appropriate course of action is not immediately clear and/or there might be more than one seemingly acceptable action; workplace environments with a truly embedded code of ethics help employees to be prepared for such situations. In this regard, perceived organisational politics (POP) in union with the code of ethics affect how employees perceive their workplace and the course of action they take. Perceived organisational politics, be they negative or positive, provide an exclusive insight into how employee interactions and organisational performance could establish the general perceived environment of workplaces. Based on the intent of the organisation, this mutual relationship could be perceived positively or negatively (Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2013). Perceived organisational politics is often characterised as a negative phenomenon that is based on self-interest (Landells & Albrecht, 2017). Negative POP is a dominated feeling amongst employees when the political agenda of the workplaces is mainly based on the self-interest of team members but not the welfare of the organisation as a whole; in return, positive POP may also be present mainly when employees indirectly engage in constructive political activities leading to achieve career advancement and recognition (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2011). Having said that, employees develop an opinion in accordance with the level of appreciation received from their employers, which is also an indicator of their future (Eisenberger, Huntington, Huntington, & Sowa, 1986).

Higher education shapes the education sector by setting up social norms and moral standards, placing all senior university leadership as moral agents and exercising authority through decision-making responsibilities in line

with ethical standards (Greenfield, 1991). The fundamental principle of universities is to establish a code of ethics to demonstrate the organisation's values and overall behavioural expectations. Equally, academics develop a professional emphasis on realising their duties based on research and education. Thus, it is essential to have the appropriate work environment to fulfil bilateral duties and behave accordingly. Contemporary organisations incorporate varying employee profiles and business processes which necessitate full-length evaluation and control of aspects affecting or changing the direction of the bilateral duties, interests and behaviours of their members.

The present research suggests that sustained EL and inclusion of ethics in organisational processes and strategies have strong normative implications for developing positive behaviours that promote collective organisational outcomes. Drawing on Brown, Treviño, and Harrison's (2005) conceptualisation of EL, this study develops and tests a model in which POP is positioned as a complementary mediating variable through which EL affects discretionary behavioural outcomes. The study has been based on the group engagement model (GEM) (Blader & Tyler, 2009) and the collective effort model (CEM) (Karau & Williams, 2001), and its objective is to enhance the understanding of how the construction of an EL network, which involves communicating and embedding ethics into organisational networks through the mediating role of POP, will influence employees' OCBs and social loafing tendencies in the higher education sector (Figure 1). Firstly, we aim to advance the EL literature by adding a model framework for managers based on the implementation of a 'triple strengthening mechanism' by drawing attention to the group effect of the study model. Next, we re-evaluate and assert the complete chain effects of an EL network in terms of employee positive and negative discretionary behaviours. Finally, in addition to extending the prevailing insights of EL literature, we contribute by deconstructing prior research conclusions by giving specifications to negative discretionary behaviours and the complementary effect of organisational politics. On that account, we aim to explicate a gap in the literature by examining the effect of EL on social loafing as a type of counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) (Spector & Fox, 2002) and to serve as a corrective method to guide the performance of employees via going the extra mile and investigating the opposite.

## Literature review and theoretical development

### The group engagement model and the collective effort model

This study draws on GEM and CEM in explaining the direct and indirect relationship between EL and employee discretionary behavioural outcomes regarding OCB and social loafing. Group engagement model suggests that the policies and practices of an organisational group shape 'identity-based' and 'resource-based' judgments of

employees (Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003). This aspect of GEM directly focuses on how employees are treated and guided in a workplace environment, mainly through the lens of justice in teams or groups (Tyler & Blader, 2003). The GEM theorises that employees develop positive and reduce negative discretionary behaviours when the policies and practices in their team are transparent, i.e. if procedures are fair and when they are given voice (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Tyler & Blader, 2003). Subsequently, employees form judgments about ethical or unethical behaviours by weighing their actions against what is acceptable and voicing their opinion if needed, which leads to a couple of chain reactions that benefit the entire organisation's bottom line (Blader & Tyler, 2009). The CEM suggests that individual employees put forth effort in teamwork if they are conditioned to be rewarded instrumentally at an individual level upon delivery of a task (Karau & Williams, 2001). Put simply, a cycle of individual instrumental expectancy followed by group performance and outcomes must be triggered as salient in the conscious mind of the employee (Karau & Williams, 2001). By investing in the development of ethics strategies, rules and procedures grounded on appraising the conduct of individuals, ethical leaders encourage employees to go beyond group engagement between members. The ethical leader carefully consults employees on how the skeleton of the group or department works (rules and procedures). Then, through fair treatments, individuals assess the given codes embedded in the group environment. As part of the psychological contract signed between the ethical leader and the employees, individuals will be continuously interested in the well-being and welfare of the organisation by equally investing in performing the given job fully. By helping their coworkers when needed, employees will sustain the needs of the group that will result in the advancement and success of the entity they belong.

### **Ethical leadership and organisational citizenship behaviours**

Brown et al. (2005) conceptualised EL as the 'demonstration and promotion of normatively appropriate conduct' through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision-making processes ultimately strengthening the desirable attitudes and behaviours of employees. Ethical leaders incorporate the 'moral manager and moral individual dimensions, possess wise individual characteristics and ethics through ethical values, and intentionally mentor ethical behaviour, by rewarding the expected behaviour and punishing the unethical' (Brown et al., 2005; Brown & Treviño, 2006). Given their position, ethical leaders use the performance management systems to hold employees responsible for their conduct (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Accordingly, employees are provided with information of what comprises ethical and unethical behaviours (Bouckennooghe, Zafar, & Raja, 2015), wherein unconsciously adapting their values to given codes through observing and role-modelling the leader and others' outcomes. Researchers have acknowledged EL as having a significant effect on employee engagement, job satisfaction, OCBs, performance

and commitment (Men et al., 2020; Newman, Kiazad, Miao, & Cooper, 2014). Furthermore, it was determined that ethical leaders contribute positively to employees' psychology in the workplace through psychological empowerment (Brown & Treviño, 2006), psychological ownership (Avey, Wernsing, & Palanski, 2012) and, negatively, knowledge hiding (Men et al., 2020).

Prevailing studies have emphasised employee extra-role behaviours being essential to the viability and the success of organisations (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000) as well as providing a pragmatic contribution to organisational effectiveness (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Individuals motivated by OCBs possess a wide range of helping behaviours at both individual and organisational levels such as unconditionally supporting subordinates when they are in need or voluntarily attending organisational meetings or defending the image of the organisation publicly. Such helping behaviours radically go beyond written moral rules and have favourable effects on employee psychological well-being, which in turn increases inner commitment and loyalty (Organ, 1988). The most important characteristic of EL that distinguishes it from other follower-oriented leadership styles (e.g. transformational, authentic or participating leadership) is its fundamental emphasis on moral motives (Van Gils, Hogg, Van Quaquebeke, & Van Knippenberg, 2015a; Van Gils, Van Quaquebeke, Van Knippenberg, Van Dijke, & De Cremer, 2015b) and the psychological contract of employees. There are many examples of conduct that may be ethical but considered by some immoral. For instance, organisational politics can be considered ethical; however, the pressures on organisational members that arise as a result of politics can be considered immoral. Adopting a code that clearly lays out ethical principles to inform employees about the conduct the firm expects them to adopt is the first step; however, a moral-ethical role model can inspire specific moral psychological mechanisms such as moral attentiveness (Van Gils et al., 2015a, 2015b) or moral efficacy (Lee, Choi, Youn, & Chun, 2017) that can account for work-related follower prosocial behaviour.

The present study's logic is grounded on GEM in order to shed light on EL and OCB's relationship. The group engagement model can be defined as a blend of social identity theory and social exchange theory to better understand employee motives and psychology in organisational contexts (Blader & Tyler, 2009). Employee identities in organisations are generally associated with the target social identity in the work-group and the workplace, wherein individuals' discretionary behavioural reactions are triggered when they are able to set forth their opinion and have a voice over the general workplace agenda (Blader & Tyler, 2009). The ethical directives and downwards communication strategy by the leader will enhance role-modelling processes (Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003) and alter the individual cognition of employees, encouraging them to develop discretionary extra-role behaviours and to discourage them from deviant ones.



Continuous performance management, active learning processes and the mutual feedback strategies via EL imply that leaders have an executive role in developing discretionary extra-role behaviours (OCBs) and in eliminating CWBs (Blader & Tyler, 2009); thus, we hypothesise the following:

**Hypothesis 1:** Ethical leadership is positively related to OCBs of employees.

### Ethical leadership and social loafing

Compared to the last decade, contemporary management strategies frequently started to use teamwork as a tool to deliver more efficient results. Working as part of a team requires mutual accountability for complementary skills and knowledge of members of a group to achieve a mutual goal. Although it can be favourable for worthwhile organisational objectives, teamwork can involve unethical and corrupted behaviours such as social loafing. Social loafing is a workplace phenomenon that occurs when employees decrease their efforts whilst working as part of a group and contribute fully when working individually (Chang, Hou, Wang, Cui, & Zhang, 2020). Employees may attempt to withhold effort through individual unwillingness as they are sure that other members will complete the task, or they may fear being perceived as the sucker (sucker effect); thus, they become nervous about the fact that their exceeding efforts may be taken advantage of by some members of the team (Chang & Brickman, 2018). Such behaviours can often be complicated. An employee who does not exert the necessary effort into the common task is easily spotted by other team members, and this may have certain repercussions on the other members of the team, namely a decrease in motivation, which in turn will create a negative work environment where most employees begin to withhold their efforts (Johnson, 2018; Mulvey & Klein, 1998). Loafing affects the work environment extensively, and its most common outcomes are a decrease in cohesiveness, a delay in task delivery, dissatisfaction of other members, withholding potential and the emergence of deviant employee profiles (Byun, Lee, Steven, Karau, & Dai, 2020; Monzani, Ripoll, Peiro, & Dick, 2014). Social loafing is an ethical issue based on the morals of individuals, as it impacts not only the free-rider's personal achievements but also the entire team's work cycle and therefore the prospects of companies (Miheli & Culiberg, 2019).

Loafing can be correlated to team and task characteristics. In this regard, the size of the group and absence of cohesiveness intensify social loafing, whilst identification of the employee with the team and the group environments are deemed to be positive in nature and have been proved to eliminate loafing (Martin, Thomas, Legood, & Russo, 2017). Furthermore, the perception or anticipation of loafing by employees has demonstrated an increase in social loafing (Mulvey & Klein, 1998; Thompson & Glaso, 2018). So far, the role of leadership as a remedy to eliminate social loafing from businesses has frequently been disregarded (Perry, Lorinkova, Hunter, Hubbard, & McMahon, 2016). Brown et al. (2005) found that negative employee behaviours such as CWBs and deviance

are discouraged when managers establish dialogue with employees. Drawing from the definition by Spector and Fox (2002), our study places social loafing in the CWB category of negative discretionary behaviours.

Negative and positive discretionary behaviours of employees are triggered by the way they are treated and guided in their actual workplace, and team productivity increases when recognition and rewards for individual efforts are embedded into organisational settings (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Karau & Williams, 2001). Employees are satisfied if they are given voice and when their group membership is secured psychologically (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Accordingly, ethical conduct and two-way communication by the ethical leader will trigger a feeling of belongingness to the organisation, which in turn will invigorate a positive environment and motivate worthwhile discretionary behaviours (Blader & Tyler, 2009). Similarly, the performance evaluations will clear out ambiguities about the reward and punishment systems and create a nurturing work environment, hence eliminating unethical negative discretionary behaviours such as social loafing.

In accordance with the outcomes of the previous studies related to the role of leadership in reducing or eliminating deviance-related behaviours as social loafing, we hypothesise the following:

**Hypothesis 2:** Ethical leadership is negatively related to the social loafing of employees.

### Ethical leadership and perceived organisational politics

Workplace organisational politics is a reality of the contemporary organisational setting. Organisational politics is usually distinguished as a negative phenomenon in which employees try to influence other members through formal organisational procedures or informal rules to realise individual or group self-serving objectives with no consideration for the welfare of the organisation or other members (Rosen & Hochwarter, 2014; Tziner, Drory, & Shilan, 2021). As a result of self-interest-oriented interventions, negative POP can give rise to imbalance and conflicts and can sometimes even damage subordinates' willingness to contribute to the common good in organisations. Specifically, employees react to the state of affairs in line with their perceptions of reality by means of assembling subgroups and hiding key information (Hochwarter, Rose, & Jordan, 2020). These political perceptions of the environment nonetheless are misperceptions that will influence how employees actually feel about their subordinates and managers (Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016). Companies see negative politics as dysfunctional and regard them as barriers that impede organisational efficiency and effectiveness (Ferris, Ellen, Mcallister, & Maher, 2019). Başar and Basim (2016) and Hochwarter, Rose and Jordan (2020) concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between negative politics and intention to quit, high anxiety and stress, as well as decreases in job satisfaction, commitment and organisational

performance. Such negative consequences of POP may be related to the ambiguity of the future realisation of the embedded ethical codes in the work environment. In work contexts where work ethic contradicts organisational politics, rewards may be dependent on power and relationships (Li, Liang, & Farh, 2020). As such, at workplaces with ambiguous performance management systems, employees will not receive signals about the acceptable codes of behaviour. Hence, employees in such organisations lose their motivation over time, and this affects their overall performance.

As a response to the prevailing negative trend, researchers initiated the stream of positive POP by calling attention to the potentially constructive consequences. As part of positive POP, some constructive actions may be considered an opportunity for organisations that will configure employee experience, such as organisational networking processes and forming coalitions enhancing the strategic management tactics of organisations (Butler, Decker, Peters, Thomas, & Merritt, 2019; Hochwarter, 2012). To further validate the evidence of both negative and positive POP, some researchers explored the positives and negatives simultaneously (Fedor, Maslyn, Farmer, & Bettenhausen, 2008; Landells & Albreht, 2017). In the case of negative politics, Landells and Albreht (2017) suggested that in highly political environments one should communicate with members to reshape their outlook on organisational politics. However, this research is exploring mainly the correlation of negative POP with the rest of the variables; hence, when we refer to POP here, we refer to a negative bias of POP.

Ethical leadership promotes the ethical climate by developing positive perceptions of the ongoing organisational practices and procedures in terms of informal and formal behavioural control systems (Trevino & Nelson, 2007) and by strengthening the political environment, as well. By providing signals regarding whether organisational policies are acceptable, making fair decisions and allocating resources based on policies and procedures, employees understand that their actions cannot be manipulated by negative politics; hence, the effect of negative POP is reduced to the minimum.

In line with GEM, subordinates subsequently form judgements about ethical or unethical behaviours by weighing their actions against what is acceptable and voicing their opinion if needed (Blader & Tyler, 2009). This course of action leads to a transparent political environment. Thus, we hypothesise the following:

**Hypothesis 3:** Ethical leadership will be negatively related to employees' negative POP.

### Perceived organisational politics and organisational citizenship behaviours

In general terms, an organisation's dominant environment is the fruit of a perfectly functioning ethical code or POP. Environments dominated by POP are faced with a vast number of negative consequences such as distrust of managers or supervisors, which is a violation of the psychological contract

and damaging to social exchange relationships (Yang, 2017). Such environments generate minimum levels of effectiveness and efficiency amongst employees (Cheong & Kim, 2018), as they are dominated by dysfunctional motivation levels free of extra-role behaviours (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017). Consequently, employees may be nervous in helping or cooperating with coworkers, worrying that those voluntary undertakings may be considered politically motivated. Feelings that are negative in nature have a propensity to increase the CWBs, such as social loafing, whereas feelings that are positive in nature inspire the development of positive discretionary behaviours, such as OCBs. Accordingly, organisations aiming to develop and grow in line with sustaining and encouraging nurturing organisational environments should focus on elaborating strategies to monitor and control positive and negative organisational politics simultaneously.

According to GEM, negative POP may violate the crucial social exchange relationship between employees (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Tyler & Bladder, 2000, 2003). The lack of mutual vision and proper communication in departments, followed by demotivation, may discourage employees from carrying out extra-role behaviours such as OCBs, perceiving that these behaviours will damage the prospects of their position. Hence, a politicised environment instilled with self-promotion activities will prevail (Tziner, Drory, & Shilan, 2021). Thus, we hypothesise the following:

**Hypothesis 4:** Negative POP will be negatively related to OCBs.

### Perceived organisational politics and social loafing

Negative POP involves performing or using power with the aim of undermining the ongoing processes in an organisation (Kim & Yeung, 2015) by disregarding the hierarchical level and the previous experiences of subordinates (Li, Liang, & Farh, 2020). Negative POP has been associated as a potential factor of stress in the workplace (Rosen, Harris, & Kacmar, 2009). This stress is caused by the ambiguity negative POP creates with regard to rules and regulations where the end result is uncertainty and insecurity in the minds of the employees (Li, Liang, & Farh, 2020). The benefits of the members of the organisation are perceived as bound to personal relationships with managers, supervisors or other subjective political components (Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2016). Fear and ethical ambiguity involving extra-role behaviours and the propensity to perform CWBs may become predominant as a result of the stress. As company resources and rewards are not distributed in accordance with company procedures, employees will employ social loafing practices and reduce their efforts (Liden, Wayne, Jaworski, & Bennett, 2004).

GEM postulates that employees are motivated to eliminate negative discretionary behaviours (reduce their social loafing) and enact positive discretionary reactions when they are able to vocalise their point of view, when they are recognised and when the reward systems are embedded into

organisational settings (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003). Thus, we hypothesise the following:

**Hypothesis 5:** Negative POP will be positively related to social loafing.

### Perceived organisational politics as a mediator

Some organisations are constantly under the influence of negative organisational politics. Their procedures and processes, such as performance evaluations, promotions and compensation allocations, are affected by these politics, which in turn impact the final performance of the employees (Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999). The prevalent ethical uncertainty leads to stress and a decrease in confidence that the invested resources by individuals will not contribute to the aimed personal goals and objectives, such as promotions in the hierarchy. Once employees perceive that they do not have prospects in the company, they will most likely leave, and thus the employee turnover is much higher than in companies that have a transparent environment (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997).

Ethical leaders promote an ethical climate through various formal and informal control systems, mainly based on the management of the performance of members and downwards communication. Workplaces that ensure a procedurally fair environment through continuous fair treatments, decision-making systems and processes, providing fair economic incentives that inspire members to relate their social identities to their workplace, will enjoy a transparent political environment free of politics and other unethical consequences (Blader & Tyler, 2009). Accordingly, trust will be ensured by the ethical leader–employee relationship through the effective control of the company departments and procedural systems. Ultimately, employees will balance and enact more extra-role behaviours and eliminate CWBs (Brown et al., 2006).

Based on EL theory, we position negative POP as a key complementary mediating variable through which EL affects discretionary behaviours. Having stated that employee discretionary behavioural reactions are triggered positively by the way they are treated in their actual work environment when recognition and reward for efforts are embedded into organisational contexts (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003), our study claims that negative POP works in a similar complementary manner in the EL-OCBs and EL-social loafing relationships. Thus, we hypothesise the following:

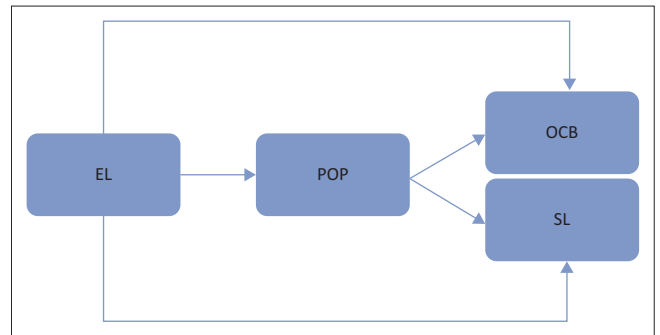
**Hypothesis 6:** Negative POP partially mediates the positive relationship between ethical leadership and OCBs.

**Hypothesis 7:** Negative POP partially mediates the negative relationship between ethical leadership and social loafing.

## Methodology

### Sample and procedures

The study adopted a quantitative and cross-sectional methodological approach. The study data were collected



EL, Ethical leadership; POP, Perceived organisational politics; OCB, Organisational citizenship behaviour; SL, Social loafing.

**FIGURE 1:** Theoretical model.

from academics engaged in the higher education industry. The population was limited to a sample of full-time academics employed by the largest education and research-based university in North Cyprus. The total number of full-time academics was provided by the human resources department at the beginning of the fall 2020/21 academic year as 530.

The survey was conducted online over a 3-month period. The total population sampling strategy was utilised in order to ease the distribution and also to ensure a satisfactory response to the questionnaire. A questionnaire link was sent to faculty deans by email, who later redistributed it to all of the full-time academics working in their faculty at the time of the study. The email also included a general informative introduction, aim of the research, an English and Turkish version of the questionnaire, requisite information about the study, informed consent, participant information sheet and notice of the fact that confidentiality would be handled in line with global general data protection regulations (GDPR). Of 530 members, 230 individuals responded by completing the questionnaire. After eliminating the surveys that had incomplete data, the final sample size was 190. The demographic profile of the respondents was 48.4% female and 51.6% male. More specifically, 12.1% of respondents were aged between 20 and 29 years, 30% were aged between 30 and 39 years, 28.9% were aged between 40 and 49 years, 18.9% were aged between 50 and 59 years and 10% were aged 60 years and above. In terms of the total number of years of work experience in the education sector, respectively, 2.6% had less than 1, 6.8% had 1–2, 18.9% had 3–5, 17.9% had 6–10, 16.8% had 11–14, 12.6% had 15–19 and 26.8% had 20 and above years of experience. In terms of work experience in the current university, 8.9% had 1–2, 30.5% had 3–5, 25.2% had 6–10, 13.2% had 11–14, 10.5% had 15–19 and 11.6% had 20 years and above experience. Please refer to Table 1 for detailed sample information.

### Measurement scales

The survey questionnaire was constructed as two sections: Section 1 included the demographic questions and the next section, comprised EL, OCB, social loafing and POP scales. The original measurement scales were initially in English and were translated by the authors into Turkish as well. All

**TABLE 1:** Sample characteristics.

Category	Characteristics	n	%
Gender	Female	92	48.4
	Male	98	51.6
Age	20–29	23	12.1
	30–39	57	30
	40–49	55	28.9
	50–59	36	18.9
	60–above	19	10
Total number of years of work experience in the education sector	Less than 1	5	2.6
	1–2	13	6.8
	3–5	36	18.9
	6–10	34	17.9
	11–14	32	16.8
	15–19	24	12.6
	20–above	51	26.8
Work experience in their current university	1–2	17	8.9
	3–5	58	30.5
	6–10	48	25.2
	11–14	25	13.2
	15–19	20	10.5
	20–above	22	11.6

measurement scales were on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was pretested on 15 academics and the results indicated that there were no inconsistencies or need for modifications.

Ethical leadership was measured with the 10-item scale developed by Brown et al. (2005). This scale was implemented to assess how employees perceive the ethical or unethical behaviours of supervisors and managers. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement regarding the ethical leader described in the storyline they were provided with. The average response of the employees to the scaled items estimated their overall perception of an ethical leader. Example items are: 'my supervisor sets an example of how to do things the right way in terms of ethics' and 'my supervisor discusses business ethics or values with employees' ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ).

OCB was measured with a 24-item scale developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990). The reason this scale was employed was to encourage employees to specify the level of their extra-mile efforts regarding the organisation and their colleagues. The scale covered 'altruism', 'conscientiousness', 'sportsmanship', 'courtesy' and 'civic virtue' dimensions of OCB. The average of all scaled items estimated the overall OCB level of employees. Example items are: 'I help orient new people even though it is not required' and 'I attend functions that are not required but help the company image' ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ).

We measured social loafing through the 13-item scale developed by Mulvey and Klein (1998). This scale was utilised in order to assess whether the employees recognise the members withholding efforts and what their reactions

are towards loafing. We treated social loafing at the individual level in accordance to Kidwell and Bennet (1993). The aim of selecting the scale was that it fit the sample well (academics) by targeting the measurement of individual-level coworker perceptions amongst group members. Every department was considered as a distinct group where members developed individual perceptions regarding the social loafers. The scale covered the 'perceived social loafing', 'anticipated lower effort' and 'sucker effect' of employees. The average of all scaled items estimated the overall level of social loafing of the employees. Example items are: 'given their abilities, my group members do the best they can' and 'members of my group are contributing less than I anticipated' ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

Perceived organisational politics were measured through a six-item scale developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). This scale measured the level of POP in the organisational environment. The scale covered 'the perceptions of employees of the general political behaviour', 'going along to get ahead' and 'pay and promotion'. The average of all scaled items estimated the overall level of POP of the employees. Example items are: 'some groups in this organisation attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down' and 'since I have worked in this organisation, I have never seen pay and promotion policies applied politically' ( $\alpha = 0.70$ ).

### Analytical strategy

The collected data were analysed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, v. 25 (SPSS) and Analysis of Moment Structures, v.24 (AMOS). We used the structural equation modelling (SEM) technique through AMOS to check whether the study model was suitable to test the hypotheses. This technique focuses on a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) perspective by means of crosschecking paths between the individual relationships with reference to other factors to evaluate distinctiveness of the scales and measure validity and reliability of the model (Byrne, 2012). To begin with, the control variables were not included in this stage of the analysis as they did not show the relevant significant threshold for the study (Petersitzke, 2009).

### Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the NEU Scientific Research Ethics Committee (official document number YDU/SB/2020/819). This article followed all ethical standards for research.

## Results

### Common method variance

To explore retention of EL, POP, OCBs and social loafing items, an initial exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted before checking standard sample adequacy (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test  $> 0.70$ , Bartlett's test  $p < 0.01$ ;



Kim & Mueller, 1978). Items that cross-loaded 0.40 or above were retained (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014). In self-reported measurement constructs, the common method variance (CMV) is often considered an obstacle. Identifying potential sources of bias and implementing both procedural and statistical methods of control eliminates the obstacle (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2011). To begin with, we ran Harman's single-factor test through EFA and extracted only one factor that included all study variables. Only 26% of the total variance (<50%) was explained by one factor. Next, the common latent factor test was tested (2.2% <3%) with the implementation of AMOS. Both methods attested that CMV was not a concern to the interpretation of the study results.

### Construct validity

Next, in order to assess the validity and reliability of scales and investigate the distinctiveness of the study variables and model fit, we implemented a couple of CFAs. We randomly generated and compared four alternative models that included the four study variables (EL, POP, OCB, social loafing) set in different groups or factors in each model. We checked the significance of factor loadings for each factor and removed the items that violated the goodness-of-fit criteria (Hair et al., 2014). As a result, a four-factor model was examined in which EL (7 items), POP (5 items), OCBs (12 items) and social loafing (8 items) were retained. Table 2 demonstrates CFA items retained and their item range.

Model fit was evaluated through the chi-square mean/degree of freedom, the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), the root mean square error (RMSEA) and the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR). The cut-off criteria for CMIN/df between 1 and 3, CFI and TLI above 0.90, RMSEA below 0.05 and SRMR below 0.09 will indicate a good model fit between the proposed model and the observed values (Hair et al., 2014; Hu & Bentley, 1999). The results confirm that the hypothesised four-factor model fit the data well: 'CMIN/df = 1.7; CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.05;  $p < 0.001$ ' compared to other alternative models. For example, in a three-factor model, OCB, social loafing, 'ethical leadership and POP' comprised the factors (CMIN/df = 3.2, CFI = 0.88, TLI = 0.86, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.07,  $p < 0.001$ ) in a two-factor model, 'ethical leadership and OCB' and 'POP and social loafing' were set together (CMIN/df = 6.4, CFI = 0.80, TLI = 0.77, RMSEA = 0.13, SRMR = 0.11,  $p < 0.001$ ), and the single factor model (CMIN/df = 0.63, CFI = 0.63, TLI = 0.59, RMSEA = 0.15, SRMR = 0.16,  $p < 0.001$ ) did

**TABLE 2:** Items retained and their item range.

Factors	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha
Ethical leadership	7	0.671–0.941	0.95
POP	5	0.652–0.854	0.70
OCBs	12	0.522–0.898	0.88
Social loafing	8	0.542–0.958	0.86

POP, perceived organisational politics; OCB, organisational citizenship behaviour.

not fit well the thresholds for model fit. Table 3 shows the SEM results.

Table 4 represents the model validity measures (Gaskin & Lim, 2016). Convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs were examined through composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE) and maximum shared variance (MSV). The values for AVE were higher than 0.50, CR was higher than 0.70, the MSV was higher than AVE and the values for AVE were higher than the squared correlations between the constructs. This indicates that convergent validity, reliability and discriminant validity criteria were met (AVE > 0.50, CR > 0.70, MSV < AVE, Hu & Bentler, 1999).

### Descriptive statistics

In Table 5, we demonstrate the means, standard deviations and correlations amongst the study variables. Following the positive and negative degree of correlation aspect, we interpreted positive values as increasing the value and negatives as decreasing the quantity of a variable. As predicted, EL was positively correlated with OCBs ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, EL was negatively correlated with social loafing ( $r = -0.49$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and POP ( $r = -0.63$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Amongst the variables, OCBs had the highest and positive mean value (4.5), suggesting that an ethical leader encourages academics to go the extra mile. Social loafing had the lowest and negative mean value (2.0) implying that ethical leaders motivate employees to embed their individual efforts to group tasks. Equally, POP had a negative mean value (2.4) indicating that ethical leader networks promote a positive organisational environment based on ethics.

**TABLE 3:** Structural equation modelling results.

Models	CMIN/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Hypothesised four-factor model	1.7	0.93	0.92	0.04	0.05
Three-factor model	3.2	0.88	0.86	0.08	0.07
Two-factor model	6.4	0.80	0.77	0.13	0.11
One-factor model	8.2	0.63	0.59	0.15	0.16

CMIN/df, chi-square mean/degree of freedom; CFI, comparative fit index; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA, root-mean-square error of approximation; SRMR, standardised root mean square residual.

$N = 190$ .

**TABLE 4:** Model validity measures.

Scale	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	1	2	3	4
EL	0.899	0.647	0.275	0.956	0.804			
POP	0.945	0.715	0.225	0.960	-0.474**	0.845		
OCB	0.992	0.524	0.211	0.918	-0.197*	0.459**	0.724	
SL	0.826	0.670	0.275	0.924	0.524**	-0.434**	-0.258**	0.819

EL, Ethical leadership; POP, Perceived organisational politics; OCB, Organisational citizenship behaviour; SL, Social loafing.

Significance of Correlations: \*,  $p < 0.010$ , \*\*,  $p < 0.001$ .

**TABLE 5:** Means, standard deviations and correlations.

Scale	M	SD	1	2	3	4
Ethical leadership	4.5	0.43	1	-0.634**	0.410**	-0.496**
POP	2.4	0.66	-0.634**	1	-0.395**	0.604**
OCB	4.5	0.43	0.410**	-0.395**	1	-0.235
Social loafing	2.0	0.66	-0.496**	0.604**	-0.235**	1

POP, perceived organisational politics; OCB, organisational citizenship behaviour.

\*\*,  $p < 0.01$  (two-tailed test),  $n = 190$ .



**TABLE 6:** Model mediation analyses.

Paths	Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	VAF	95% CI			
							BootLLCI	BootULCI	LLCI	ULCI
EL→POP→OCB	–	–	0.1307	0.0696	0.2003	0.3474	0.0319	0.1126	0.1511	0.2494
EL→POP	–0.48	–12.94	–	–	–	–	–	–	–0.6999	–0.5338
POP→OCB	–0.12	–3.94	–	–	–	–	–	–	–0.1770	–0.0487
EL→OCB	0.10	4.10	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.0682	0.1931
EL→POP→SL	–	–	–0.1404	–0.2273	–0.3677	0.6922	–0.3063	–0.1524	–0.4386	–0.2967
EL→POP	–0.62	–14.61	–	–	–	–	–	–	–0.6999	–0.5338
POP→SL	0.40	9.59	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.2834	0.4537
EL→SL	–0.08	–2.45	–	–	–	–	–	–	–0.0575	–0.0575

EL, ethical leadership; POP, perceived organisational politics; OCB, organisational citizenship behaviour; SL, social loafing; VAF, variance accounted for (IE/TE); CI, confidence interval; LLCI, lower-level confidence interval; ULCI, upper-level confidence interval.

$p < 0.01$ .

## Hypotheses testing

We used regression analysis to test hypotheses ranging between 1 and 5 and the SPSS PROCESS macro bootstrapping technique to test mediation for hypotheses 6 and 7. Specifically, Hayes' (2013, model 4) mediation perspective was applied using 5000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2020). Hypothesis 1 predicts that EL will be positively related to OCBs of employees. The findings support the significant positive relationship between EL and OCBs ( $b = 0.20$ ,  $t = 8.02$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 17\%$ ). Hypothesis 2 predicts that there is a negative relationship between EL and social loafing of employees. The findings support the significant negative relationship between EL and social loafing ( $b = -0.37$ ,  $t = -10.20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 24\%$ ). Hypothesis 3 predicts that EL will be negatively related to employees' POP. The findings support the significant negative relationship between EL and POP ( $b = -0.62$ ,  $t = -14.61$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 40\%$ ). Hypothesis 4 predicts that POP will be negatively related to OCBs. The findings support the significant negative relationship between POP and OCBs ( $b = -0.79$ ,  $t = -7.66$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 15\%$ ). Hypothesis 5 predicts that POP will be positively related to social loafing. The findings support the significant positive relationship between POP and social loafing ( $b = 0.79$ ,  $t = 13.52$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 36\%$ ).

Table 6 represents the details of the model mediation analyses and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) that satisfy the bootstrapping thresholds for mediation by not containing zero (H6 and H7). Hypothesis 6 predicts that POP will partially mediate the positive relationship between EL and OCBs. The findings support the partially mediating effect of POP on the positive relationship between EL-OCBs: the negative relationship between EL-POP ( $b = -0.48$ ,  $t = -12.94$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); POP-OCBs ( $b = -0.12$ ,  $t = -3.94$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and the positive relationship between EL-OCBs ( $b = 0.10$ ,  $t = 4.10$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) are all significant (Hayes, 2020). As the value of variance accounted for the relationship (VAF) is in the '20% – 80%' range ('36%'), then we can infer that there is complementary partial mediation (Hair et al., 2014). Hypothesis 7 predicts that POP will partially mediate the negative relationship between EL and social loafing. The findings support the partially mediating effect of POP on the negative relationship between EL-social loafing: the negative relationships between

EL-POP ( $b = -0.62$ ,  $t = -14.61$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), positive relationship between POP-social loafing ( $b = 0.40$ ,  $t = 9.59$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and negative relationship between EL-social loafing ( $b = -0.08$ ,  $t = -2.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) are all significant (Hayes, 2020). As the value of VAF for the relationship is in the '20% – 80%' range ('70%'), then we can infer that there is complementary partial mediation (Hair et al., 2014).

## Discussion

The contemporary world of management consists of differentiated business processes and roles, all of which require a full-length evaluation of all aspects affecting or changing the direction of the bilateral interests of members within an organisation. We developed and tested a model to enhance the understanding of how the construction of an EL network as part of communicating and embedding ethics into employee behaviour will influence employees' OCBs and social loafing through the mediating role of POP in the higher education sector. Our study concluded that OCBs and social loafing are affected by complementary features of the leader's personal characteristics and the constructed environment. As such, our study is one of the first to use social loafing and the mediating role of POP as part of the negative discretionary behavioural outcomes. Specifically, the presence of an ethical leader who utilised continuous performance management applications encouraged and motivated academics to develop a politically transparent environment and behave accordingly, whilst encouraging individuals to enact OCBs and reduce social loafing intentions. The findings highlighted that it is worthwhile for organisations to embed comprehensive ethical culture into the organisational structures and invest in encouraging positive employee discretionary behaviours and discouraging negative ones through executive leadership attention and communicating it accordingly.

The findings of this study demonstrated that EL encouraged subordinates to enact OCBs and reduce social loafing. Grounding on the relationship of EL with GEM and CEM, ethical leaders focus on improving organisations' sustainability by concentrating on improving employee effectiveness via developing strategies to fill the gaps between policies and practices in departments and build functional ethics strategies and corporate culture through

communicating and embedding the codes of ethics into the behaviour of employees (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Karau & Williams, 2001). This complements the results that all senior university leadership and human resources departments must develop instruments to measure the individual and team performance of academics and invigorate ethical features of leaders through continuously inspiring them to reflect the ethical context of the university's organisational environment. Drawing on the robust basis of EL theory, as part of strengthening the psychological contract, it is suggested that all senior university leadership guide individuals to differentiate between individual and team-based duties.

The results also showed that negative POP mediated the positive relationship between EL and OCBs as well as the negative relationship between EL and social loafing. Following the logic of EL with GEM and CEM, the results justify that EL suppresses the negative climate in organisations by providing signals to possess a sense of personal control and illustrating to employees that their agentic unethical actions cannot be manipulated by politics (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Karau & Williams, 2001). Taken together, these results underline the relevance of paying attention to negative organisational politics levels in organisations. This contribution complements the argument that the university managements should be sure to hire or train ethical leaders, provide a procedurally fair environment, voice opportunity and implement ethical decision-making systems and processes. Finally, noting the origins of GEM, fair financial incentives must be implemented with an aim to support and motivate academics to motivate members to relate their social identities to their organisations. In turn, mindful, satisfied and motivated individuals will go the extra mile and eliminate workplace discretionary CWBs.

## Theoretical implications

This study contributes to EL literature in several ways. Firstly, its findings deconstruct the findings of prior research in that it provides other specifications to negative discretionary behaviours than deviance (Avey, Palanski, & Walumbwa, 2011; Babalola, Stouten, Camps, & Euwema, 2019; Kacmar, Andrews, Harris, & Tepper, 2013). Regarding negative discretionary behaviours as unethical, our study is one of the first to examine the effect of EL on social loafing as a type of discretionary CWB. By drawing on the relationship of EL with GEM and CEM, respectively, it was found that university networks guided by ethical leaders who encouraged to clearly differentiate between individual and team-based duties motivated employees to go the extra mile (OCBs) and discouraged social loafing (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Karau & Williams, 2001). In terms of OCBs, our study results are consistent with several past studies (Avey et al., 2011; Gerpott et al., 2019; Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2018).

Secondly, the study findings deepen knowledge about the mediating role of negative POP on the EL-OCBs and the

EL-social loafing relationships. Following the logic of GEM, the proposed relations were justified that in the presence of an ethical leader, employees are informed that manipulations through politics are not justifiable, and as a result, the effect of negative POP is eliminated or reduced to a minimum (Blader & Tyler, 2009). Combining together EL theory and GEM, the findings show that organisations that ensure a procedurally fair environment will enjoy a transparent environment free of politics and other negative unethical behavioural consequences (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Brown et al., 2006). Accordingly, this reveals that by the presence of an ethical leader, trust in the leader is ensured through the effective control of the individual departments, procedural systems and voice opportunity. Ultimately, academics will enact OCBs and eliminate social loafing. Although studies covered the mediating role of negative POP in the EL-OCB domain (Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris, & Zivnuska, 2011; Kacmar et al., 2013), there are no similar examples in the EL-social loafing domain. In this respect, we fill a gap in the EL literature by allocating negative POP as a complementary mediating variable to the relationship.

This study further found that the EL and the employee discretionary behaviours regarding OCBs and social loafing can be rationalised better through GEM and CEM. The basis of employees' relationship with their workplace is attached to the organisation's role in making sure how their members think and feel about the work environment and organisation as a whole and individual effort in teams is determined by the extent to which the recognition and reward for efforts are embedded into the organisational contexts (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Karau & Williams, 2001). This is emphasising both the relevant macro-level conditions and the micro-level psychological processes for the study analysis.

Finally, we extend the EL literature by basing our study in a non-Western, Mediterranean context. Hence, our study stands as a reaction to the call of investigating study models in the organisational behaviour context in non-Western geographical areas (Johns, 2006). We focused specifically on coworkers working as academics in the higher education sector in North Cyprus. There are no examples investigated in the study topic in this domain as well as EL literature. The results suggest that an ethical leader will guide and motivate academics to amplify their duties in line with interpreting OCBs and eliminating loafing. A healthy operational environment constructed by an ethical leader may motivate academics to concentrate equally on the individual and team or group goals and therefore be stimulated to actively help students and their colleagues and contribute to the general image of the institution, both on a research and practical level.

## Practical implications

Given that the gap between policies and practice requires building functional ethics strategies and corporate culture (Webley & Werner, 2008), we provide valuable guidance for practitioners. According to our findings, EL positively

impacts OCBs and negatively impacts social loafing. Firstly, for organisations and their leaders that aim to encourage employees to go the extra mile through enacting positive discretionary behavioural outcomes (citizenship) and reduce negative ones (social loafing), it is important for leaders to enact ethical behaviour with regard to letting employees to have voice over the workplace agenda and trigger role-modelling processes for the expected ethical codes and behaviours. That is, organisations aiming towards sustainability in terms of increasing organisational performance through employee efficiency are suggested to hire and promote ethical leaders and construct meaningful performance management systems that represent the strategic aims of the entities. Such managerial efforts would be valuable as they uplift the psychological contract of employees (Başar, Sigrı, & Basım, 2018). For example, ethical leaders communicate and embed ethical codes into employee behaviour that trigger employees to identify with the organisation and its members. Such attempts can reduce unethical behaviours in the workplace (social loafing) and encourage citizenship to go the extra mile.

Secondly, the study results pinpoint the mediating role of POP on EL and discretionary behavioural outcomes (social loafing and OCBs). Ethical leaders invigorate a transparent workplace political environment, that is, reduce negative POP by ensuring the clarity and effectiveness of ethical codes. Namely, if managers conduct themselves ethically, they can motivate employees to reduce unethical actions such as social loafing and enact citizenship. That is, managers are encouraged to construct a workplace environment based on formal and informal behavioural control systems that restrain employees from enacting negative politics and social loafing. For example, ethical leaders, by providing signals regarding the acceptable organisational policies and procedures, help employees learn that actions based on manipulative negative politics are not welcomed. This will reduce the effect of negative politics and POP to a minimum. In the course of time, continuous review via structured discussions may brief individuals on what is expected from them, encourage involvement as well as give voice to employees to set individual influence or power and identify themselves with the organisational goals. Thereby, the organisational duties and general departmental workloads would be functionally executed. Such clarifications speak to the value of upgrading mindfulness and motivation levels vividly, which would allow the organisation better control over the individual employee performances. By ensuring that the work monitored by them is under control, that deadlines are met and delivered on time, ethical leaders will recognise moments of performance decrease and take control of counterproductive issues on the spot. An effective ethical system may encourage an organisational climate of teamwork including trust, autonomy, collaboration and communication. We suggest that organisations and managers develop workplace politics strategies (positive and negative simultaneously) and measure the negative and positive POP levels of employees periodically. More broadly, organisations could potentially

stand to prosper from an established EL and ethical system if its permanence is supported through establishing education programs and team-building facilities based on up-to-date ethics and with EL instructions embedded into the individual behaviour of the members of the organisation.

## Limitations and future research directions

Despite the empirical and theoretical contributions, our research has a few limitations. Firstly, the proposed model used only survey data; we suggest future studies use a mixed method through the application of the interview method. Also, the comparison of the study results to existing financial performance data (secondary data) can also be considered. Secondly, a longitudinal analysis in time would increase the scope by showing the causal inferences of the model. Thirdly, the addition of other situational factors would give researchers the opportunity to compare the study results. Finally, a bigger sample size would have been preferred and therefore is suggested in future research.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we provide theoretical and empirical support for suggesting a new approach for EL. Our focus on POP as a mediator in the study model has been supported statistically. The findings theorised a need for the deconstruction of the overall prior research conclusions by giving specifications to negative discretionary behaviours apart from that of deviance and by examining the effect of EL on social loafing as a type of discretionary CWB with an emphasis on questioning the organisational climate of trust, autonomy, collaboration, communication and teamwork, adding to the strategic and economic well-being of organisations. Finally, we believe that this study has a pioneering effect on encouraging organisations to draw strategic maps wherein connecting and embedding them into tactical employee behaviour and comprehensive ethical cultures with balanced positive and negative politics levels.

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The authors declare that no competing interests exist.

## Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to this research.

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## Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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