Journal of Organizational Behavior

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Journal of Organizational Behavior

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Being Left in the Dark: Leader Work-Related Secrecy, Psychological Contract Violation, and Employee Discretionary Behavior

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Received: 26 May 2024 | **Revised:** 9 February 2026 | **Accepted:** 6 March 2026

Keywords: leader work-related secrecy | leader-directed OCB | leader-directed voice | psychological contract violation | trust propensity

ABSTRACT

In organizations, leaders often have to keep work-related secrets to protect employees or prevent negative consequences of the information becoming known. Although a growing body of social psychological work examines how keeping secrets can influence one's psychological states, we know relatively little about how leader work-related secrecy can unintentionally affect employees. By integrating research on secrecy in the social psychology literature with psychological contract theory, the current studies examined how employees' perceptions of leader work-related secrecy may reduce their leader-directed discretionary behaviors (i.e., organizational citizenship behaviors and voice) through perceived psychological contract violation. These effects were especially pronounced among employees with a low propensity to trust. Results from two experiments (Study 1: $N = 287$; Study 2: $N = 177$) and a multisource multiwave field study (Study 3: $N = 364$ leader–member dyads) consistently supported our hypothesized model. Implications as well as directions for future research are discussed.

Leaders, by virtue of their elevated position within an organization, typically have access to information that is not available to employees and have the authority to control its distribution (Magee and Galinsky 2008; Yukl and Falbe 1991). Intentionally withholding some work-related information from subordinates, referred to as *leader work-related secrecy*, is a common practice in modern organizations (Mitchell 1993; Schein 2010). For instance, supervisors may hold details about downsizing, structural changes, personnel decisions, or salary adjustments to prevent anxiety or distractions in the workplace (Costas and Grey 2014; Grey and Costas 2016; Katila et al. 2008). In addition, they might safeguard valuable intellectual property by keeping project- or product-related information confidential until an official release (Lieberman and Montgomery 1988; Slepian et al. 2024). In essence, leaders may engage in secrecy regarding work-related information, considering its potential to provide strategic benefits in streamlining management and maintaining competitive advantages (Bos et al. 2015). However, secrecy, as a phenomenon embedded in social interactions, involves not only those who initiate secret-keeping actions (i.e., secrecy actors) but also those whom are kept in the dark (i.e., secrecy recipients). Indeed, whether it can achieve the strategic benefits anticipated by leaders or result in unintentional consequences could be largely determined by how the recipient employees respond to leader work-related secrecy.

The current literature offers limited insights into how employees respond to leader work-related secrecy, thus constraining our understanding of secrecy phenomenon and its impacts in specific organizational contexts. Thus far, work documented in

Yating Wang and Ke Michael Mai contributed equally to this article. Ke Michael Mai's work on this article was supported by his prior affiliation with the NUS Business School, National University of Singapore (NUS Tier 1 Grant: R-317-000-146-115) and China Europe International Business School (CEIBS) Faculty Research Grant.

the social psychological literature has extensively explored the psychological effects of secrecy on those who keep secrets in general interpersonal contexts (for a review, see Slepian 2022). This body of research reveals that secrecy actors often experience feelings of social isolation (Slepian et al. 2019), shame (Slepian et al. 2020), and inauthenticity (McDonald et al. 2020). Thus, our knowledge on secrecy has largely been limited to its negative *intrapersonal* effects on secrecy actors (e.g., McDonald et al. 2020; Slepian et al. 2017, 2019), while overlooking the potential *interpersonal* impacts on the individuals from whom the secrets are kept (Zhong et al. 2025). Such omission results in an incomplete picture of secrecy. As Simmel (1906) noted, secrecy is inherently woven into social interactions. Ignoring its social impacts on secrecy recipients fails to acknowledge the agency of these recipients in responding to secrecy, which can interact with the actions of secrecy actors to determine the overall consequences of secrecy. In other words, it is the reactions of secrecy recipients that may play a decisive role in determining whether secrecy can achieve its intended aims (e.g., strategic benefits and controlled misinformation circulation). More critically, this oversight may further hinder our ability to unravel secrecy within particular organizational contexts. Unlike secrecy in general interpersonal contexts, the unique dynamics of leader–employee interactions make employees particularly sensitive, even overreactive, to the secrecy initiated by their leader. This heightened sensitivity stems from employees' dependence on leader-provided information to carry out tasks and make decisions that directly affect their job performance and career trajectories. Thus, the responses given by recipients cannot be considered as negligible. By adopting a social perspective and targeting the relationship between followers and their leader, the current research seeks to understand employees' perceptions of leader work-related secrecy and examine how such secrecy can, sometimes unintentionally, influence employees' psychological states and downstream leader-directed behaviors at work.

Based on psychological contract theory (PCT; Conway and Briner 2005; Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2000), we propose that employees' perceptions of leader work-related secrecy[1] will activate a range of psychological and behavioral reactions, which vary as a function of employees' subjective interpretations of the leader's behavior. PCT is an appropriate lens for understanding interpersonal secrecy phenomenon because it explicitly emphasizes not only economic or transactional outcomes (e.g., pay and promotion) but also social-relational and informational obligations, such as transparent communication, respectful treatment, and support (Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2019; Herriot et al. 1997; Rousseau 1989, 1995). Following Rousseau (1995, 2011) and Morrison and Robinson (1997), we conceptualize the psychological contract as employees' implicit beliefs about reciprocal obligations between themselves and their organization, with immediate leaders serving as key agents of the organization in establishing and enacting these obligations (Tekleab and Taylor 2003). Within this framework, we focus on three core elements: (a) the content of employees' perceived obligations in the leader–member relationship—particularly expectations of open communication, fairness, and support; (b) psychological contract violation, defined as the emotional reaction (e.g., disappointment, frustration, and feelings of betrayal) that arises when these obligations are perceived as unmet and the norm of reciprocity is disrupted; and (c) the inherent subjectivity involved in interpreting the cues that signal potential breaches of these obligations, given that the psychological contract is neither formally specified nor explicitly articulated.

Building on these theoretical foundations, we argue that leader work-related secrecy tends to be interpreted by employees as a failure to uphold the obligation of providing forthcoming and transparent communication and as a signal of reduced fairness (i.e., unequal access to work-related information) and diminished support (i.e., relational distancing). In this sense, secrecy is not merely a neutral communication tactic; rather, it is appraised through the psychological contract lens as a breach of core leader obligations. Such breach perceptions are likely to evoke psychological contract violation, characterized by feelings of betrayal, anger, and frustration (e.g., Cullinane and Dundon 2006; Morrison and Robinson 1997; Rousseau 2011). Consistent with reciprocity-based accounts in the PCT literature, this experienced violation further motivates employees to withdraw from discretionary reciprocity (Dabos and Rousseau 2004), reducing their willingness to go the extra mile for their leaders. Accordingly, we propose that leader work-related secrecy elicits employees' psychological contract violation, which in turn undermines leader-directed organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and voice behavior.

Additionally, PCT highlights that psychological contracts are inherently subjective and individually construed, resulting in substantial variation in how employees interpret others' actions (Kramer 2000). Unlike formal contracts, psychological contracts are neither written down nor formally agreed upon (Guest 1998; Lambert 2011), leading individuals to develop personalized understandings of obligations and breaches (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro and Neuman 2004; DelCampo 2007). An important individual difference shaping these interpretations is trust propensity, or the general willingness to rely on others. Employees with higher trust propensity are more likely to give leaders the benefit of the doubt and interpret social cues (e.g., perceived leader work-related secrecy) in a more benign manner, whereas those with lower trust propensity are more inclined to construe the same cues with skepticism (Colquitt et al. 2007; DeNeve and Cooper 1998). Therefore, we examine trust propensity as a moderator, such that a more trusting employee is less likely to interpret a leader's secret-keeping behavior as intentionally violating the implicit contract and thus would less penalize the leader perceived to be engaged in secrecy, whereas employees with lower trust propensity are more likely to experience stronger psychological contract violation in response to perceived leader secrecy and subsequently retract positive discretionary behaviors toward their leaders. In sum, by shaping employees' interpretive processes, trust propensity conditions how perceived leader work-related secrecy translates into employee psychological contract violation and subsequent engagement in OCB and voice (Colquitt et al. 2007; Kramer 2000; McAllister 1995; Morrison and Robinson 1997).

We believe that the current research makes at least three critical contributions to the organizational literature. First, unlike prior empirical work on secrecy that focuses on the secret holders (e.g., Critcher and Ferguson 2014; Slepian 2022; Slepian et al. 2024), we focus on the effect of leader secrecy behavior on individuals from whom the secrets are kept and suggest that

there are further behavioral implications (and costs) to leader secrecy. By adopting this social perspective on secrecy, we respond to longstanding theoretical calls to explore its social value (Dalton 1959; Grey and Costas 2016; Simmel 1906), thereby advancing a more comprehensive understanding of secrecy as a phenomenon embedded in social interactions. More importantly, this perspective enhances our ability to fully grasp how secrecy functions within organizational contexts, particularly in leader–member relationships. In such settings, the information concealed by leader secrecy often carries significant implications—potentially shaping employees' work outcomes and career trajectories. Moreover, the act of withholding information may signal a leader's distancing orientation, further amplifying its social significance. As a result, employees tend to be highly sensitive to leader secrecy and its implications. This sensitivity underscores the need for deeper scholarly inquiry into the underlying mechanisms and consequences of leader behavior through a social lens. In this regard, a social perspective on secrecy may help organizations to better recognize and navigate the potential impacts of leader secrecy.

Second, we advance PCT by using it as an explanatory framework to model how perceptions of leader work-related secrecy translate into changes in employee discretionary behaviors at work, via perceived contract violation as a central mechanism. In specific, we theorize and test perceptions regarding leaders' management of work-related information (i.e., secrecy) as a specific yet under-theorized dimension of psychological contract content in the leader–member dyad, thereby extending PCT beyond its traditional emphasis on tangible exchanges and formal inducements to highlight information flow as a core relational obligation enacted through leader behavior. Moreover, we show that perceptions of leader secrecy, even in the absence of explicit broken promises, are sufficient to elicit psychological contract violation, highlighting the role of implied obligations and leaders' ongoing communicative behavior in shaping violation experiences. By integrating PCT into the context of secrecy, our research clarifies how psychological contract violation functions as a reciprocity-based mechanism through which employees recalibrate their willingness to go beyond formal role requirements, offering nuanced insights into how subtle relational cues lead to behavioral disengagement for both practitioners and scholars.

Third, by integrating PCT with the trust literature, we specifically underline trust propensity as an interpretative filter in translating leader work-related secrecy into psychological contract violation. This approach addresses limitations in the conventional view that interpersonal secrecy is always negative or harmful (e.g., Bamberger and Belogolovsky 2010; Futrell and Jenkins 1978; Griffith and Hebl 2002), particularly to secret holders (Lane and Wegner 1995; Slepian et al. 2019). By emphasizing trust propensity as a boundary condition, we show that the impacts of secrecy are not uniform but depend on individuals' predisposition to interpret social cues in a benign or suspicious manner. In doing so, we identify a potential protective factor that can buffer against the negative consequences of leader secrecy.

To test our proposed model (see Figure 1), we conducted three studies with divergent methodologies. In Study 1, we first manipulated leader secrecy in a business simulation and tested the moderating effect of employee trust propensity on the relationship between perceived leader work-related secrecy and psychological contract violation. In Study 2, we tested the full moderated mediation model by replicating and extending our findings through a modified business simulation featuring a ChatBox function, which enabled participants to engage in simulated real-time conversations with the confederate leader. Finally, in Study 3, to enhance ecological validity, we conducted a three-wave longitudinal field survey of 364 employees and their 77 supervisors working at a multinational marketing consultancy firm to examine the full model in a real-world organizational setting. In the following sections, we turn to reviewing the research on secrecy, differentiating it from other similar constructs, and connecting it to research on psychological contract violation, trust propensity, and employee leader-directed discretionary behaviors.

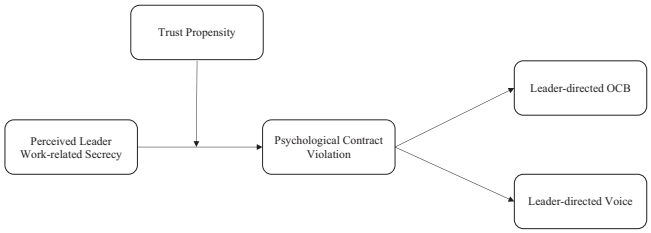

FIGURE 1 | Hypothesized model.

1 | Theory and Hypotheses

1.1 | Prior Secrecy Research and Perceived Leader Work-Related Secrecy

Roughly a century ago, Simmel (1906), a prominent German sociologist, highlighted the universality of secrecy in social life and role in organizing social relationships. In the ensuing decades, organizational theorists introduced the concept of secrecy into organizational research and emphasized the importance of adopting a social perspective to understand its impacts in the workplace. For instance, Dalton (1959) noted the prevalence and significance of secrecy for groups and organizations. He proposed that "secrets … [are] inseparable and essential for group life" (p. 52) and that secrecy can provide the social fabric that unifies or splits organizations. More recently, Schein (2010) theorized that secrecy defines organizational sectors by erecting invisible boundaries between the secret holder and the individuals from whom the secret is kept.

Despite the accumulated theoretical discussions, empirical explorations in recent decades have surprisingly overlooked the social nature of secrecy, often neglecting a social perspective in investigating the phenomenon (Zhong et al. 2025). In particular, initial empirical work on secrecy primarily focused on the act of concealment within conversation and the potential consequences it brings to the secret holder (e.g., Critcher and Ferguson 2014; Lane and Wegner 1995; Smart and Wegner 1999). More recent work finds that people holding secrets frequently mind-wander to their secrets to their well-being detriment (Slepian et al. 2017; Slepian and

Moulton-Tetlock 2019). Only recently has research begun to examine secret-sharing and secret-keeping behaviors from a social perspective (e.g., Liu and Slepian 2018; Roggensack and Sillars 2014); these studies, however, have predominantly treated secret-sharing and secret-keeping as outcome variables that are largely removed from social dynamics at work. For example, Slepian and Kirby (2018) showed that people are unlikely to share personal secrets with people who are deemed as judgmental and who are more concerned with adhering to social norms and conventions. More recently, research has begun to recognize the importance of factors (e.g., interpersonal obligation) in shaping how people experience and respond to secrecy, highlighting this as an area that warrants further scholarly attention (Slepian and Bastian 2017).

In sum, seminal theoretical pieces explicitly point to secrecy as a social phenomenon and urge scholars to reveal its social significance in interpersonal relations (e.g., Schein 2010; Simmel 1906; Slepian 2022). Despite these foundational insights, empirical explorations thus far have yet to address the social dimensions of secrecy, whereby scholars have primarily focused on intrapersonal effects on secret holders and the social cues that trigger secrecy (e.g., McDonald et al. 2020; Slepian et al. 2017, 2019). The disconnects between the theoretical assertions and the empirical investigations has created a notable gap in understanding secrecy, particularly within organizational contexts. Organizations are inherently reliant on the flow of information, a critical resource that shapes employee performance, career progression, and social identity. Within such environments, secrecy acts as a signal of restricted access to information, often making employees highly attuned and reactive to its presence.

Given the interconnected nature of workplace dynamics—secrecy does not occur in a vacuum—it deeply influences employees who are embedded in interconnected workplace networks. Therefore, ignoring its social implications, particularly in the settings where information exchange is vital (e.g., organizational contexts), results in an incomplete and biased understanding of how secrecy operates within organizations. To address this issue and further extend this line of research, we examine secrecy within a specific yet crucial interpersonal context in organizations (i.e., leader–member interaction), wherein we explore how leader's work-related secrecy impacts employees' psychological and behavioral reactions. Prior to presenting our theoretical model, we first conceptually differentiate leader work-related secrecy from other theoretically similar organizational constructs and highlight its social power by decoupling the act of secret-keeping from secrecy content.

1.2 | Leader Work-Related Secrecy and Existing Relevant Constructs[2]

Secrecy is defined as the social and cognitive processes that follow from intending to keep information from one or more others (Slepian 2022). Building upon this, we accordingly define *leader work-related secrecy*[3] as the processes that follow from leaders' intentions to hold back work-related information (e.g., job-required information; personnel decisions) from their employees. We next theorize that leader secrecy is distinct from other related organizational constructs.

1.2.1 | Different From Leader's Knowledge Hiding

Leader secrecy is conceptually different from knowledge hiding, defined as "the intentional attempt to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another individual" (Connelly et al. 2012, 65), as leader knowledge hiding captures withholding information from the employees *who ask for it*. In contrast, one can intend to keep a secret (and thus has a secret) even if no other person ever asks about it (Slepian 2022). Furthermore, leaders who engage in knowledge hiding often behave in an evasive manner (i.e., providing misleading answers), acting dumb (i.e., pretending to not know), or rationalizing hiding (i.e., indicating they are not allowed to answer questions; Connelly et al. 2012), yet the experience of perceived leader secrecy is not limited to these concrete communicative behaviors in leader–member interactions (which all focus on specific replies to requests for information). A leader may simply leave the secret unsaid without engaging in these behaviors. Furthermore, the present context examines the *perception* of being left in the dark, whereby employees cannot know for sure if secrecy is actually ongoing. The knowledge hiding literature, in contrast, begins with an employee knowingly in the dark, which is the very reason for their request for information. Knowledge hiding clearly signals an interpersonal rejection of the person who requests the information by refusing to help the employee who is asking for it (Connelly and Zweig 2015). In contrast, leader secrecy creates a more ambiguous context for employees as they have no way of knowing for certain that a secret is being kept from them or what the ostensibly hidden information is about and thus cannot point to some concrete behaviors as causing social rejection.

1.2.2 | Different From Leader's Information Justice

Secrecy should not be seen as the direct opposite of informational justice, defined as "the extent to which the supervisor provides the employee with honest information with just reasons" (Colquitt 2001). Information justice refers to the obligation of individuals (e.g., leaders) to provide honest, open, and candid explanations for their decision-making (Colquitt 2001; Colquitt et al. 2006). In other words, information justice is about promoting fairness and equity in access to information. Secrecy, however, does not necessarily have to hinder social justice or honesty. Indeed, as prior research suggested, secrecy can come with a good intention (e.g., to protect others) or without cheating (McDonald et al. 2020; Slepian and Koch 2021). For example, a leader may withhold certain details about an upcoming organizational change to prevent unnecessary panic, while still maintaining transparency by explaining the rationale behind the decision and reassuring employees about their roles and job security.

1.2.3 | Different From Leader's Silence

Silence is defined as "intentionally withholding ideas, information, and opinions with relevance to improvements in work and work organizations" (Van Dyne et al. 2003, 1360). It can be categorized based on motives into acquiescent, quiescent, prosocial, and opportunistic silence (Knoll et al. 2021; Knoll and Van Dick 2013; Pinder and Harlos 2001; Van Dyne et al. 2003).

Regardless of the type, the information, ideas, or opinions withheld by silence are related to improvements or changes in work and/or work organizations (Knoll et al. 2021; Van Dyne et al. 2003; Morrison and Milliken 2000; Morrison 2023). However, secrecy does not require the information to be improvement-related; it may simply involve work-required or work-related information such as project progress, customer details, or financial benefits. Besides, current research on silence has primarily adopted an upward approach (i.e., silence behavior exhibited by an employee and directed to the supervisor or people who seem capable of changing the situation; Chang et al. 2021; Morrison 2023). In this sense, leader silence focuses more on how a leader withholds their ideas, information, and opinions from higher level supervisors rather than from their subordinates. However, secrecy does not require a clear direction in dyadic relationships; a leader can keep secrets from supervisors, coworkers, and subordinates alike. In the current paper, we specifically adopted a downward approach to focus on leader's intentional concealment of information from subordinates.

1.2.4 | Different From Leader's Adherence to Information Confidentiality

Confidentiality involves a formal agreement or ethical obligation to protect sensitive information, such as personal data and business secrets, from unauthorized disclosure (Behr 2006). It is typically governed by legal or contractual frameworks and considered a professional duty to safeguard personal or proprietary information (Bourke and Wessely 2008; Grey and Costas 2016). In organizational settings, this obligation is closely linked to respecting individuals' right to privacy—that is, their entitlement to keep personal information and sensitive data from being accessed or disseminated without consent. By definition, confidentiality differentiates from secrecy in at least three aspects. First, it concerns what is being concealed. Confidentiality and privacy involve information that ought not to be disclosed (e.g., health records, personal performance issues, and proprietary formulas). By contrast, leader secrecy typically involves more mundane work-required or work-related information—such as project updates, criteria for personnel decisions, or upcoming changes—that employees have a legitimate interest in receiving to perform their roles or understand organizational decisions. Second, confidentiality and privacy involve externally imposed obligations, such as laws, regulations, or professional codes, which create a strong requirement not to disclose certain categories of information. Secrecy, in contrast, is discretionary in nature. It relies on the leader's own judgment that information will be withheld, even when there is no legal or ethical mandate to conceal it. Third, these constructs differ in their direction and function in the leader–employee relationship. Adherence to confidentiality and respect for privacy typically function to protect employees and the organization from harm (e.g., misuse of personal data); a leader is expected to maintain confidentiality. Leader work-related secrecy, however, refers to keeping employees "in the dark" about information that could reasonably be shared with them. As such, a leader can simultaneously be high on adherence to confidentiality/privacy and high (or low) on work-related secrecy. This idea is indirectly supported by research suggesting that "confidentiality promotes integration; secrecy promotes splitting and fragmentation" (Behr 2006, 365).

1.2.5 | Summary of Conceptual Distinctiveness

In summary, leader work-related secrecy is not simply another label for knowledge hiding, informational injustice, silence, or confidentiality/privacy. It specifically captures leaders' intentional and discretionary withholding of work-related information from employees who are legitimate stakeholders in that information and can occur even in the absence of explicit requests for information. Unlike knowledge hiding, it does not require a direct information request; unlike informational injustice, it does not necessarily violate fairness norms or involve dishonest explanations; unlike silence, it is not limited to improvement-related information nor to upward communication; and unlike confidentiality/right to privacy, it is not about protecting sensitive personal or proprietary information under formal legal/ethical obligations. We therefore argue that leader work-related secrecy represents a conceptually unique form of leader-controlled opacity in the workplace.

1.3 | Perceived Leader Work-Related Secrecy: From Content Perspective to Act Perspective

A central inquiry surrounding leader secrecy concerns the nature of the information being withheld. Such information could be neutral, negative, or positive in content. However, individuals may hold vastly different interpretations of a secret's valence. In other words, the perceived value or tone of a secret is highly subjective and contingent upon the evaluator's role, perspective, and context. For example, a leader's decision to withhold information about an impending layoff of a coworker may be viewed negatively—as a sign of widespread downsizing during an economic downturn—or positively—as a signal of reduced internal competition during a period of economic growth. In another instance, a leader's withholding of information about someone's unethical behavior could be interpreted positively—for example, as an effort to avoid unnecessary conflict or protect the organization's reputation—or negatively, as a failure to uphold ethical standards or hold individuals accountable.

Despite the varying and subjective nature of secrecy content, the intention to keep a secret from others instigates a set of processes in the secret keeper that do not depend on what the secret is about (Slepian 2022). Similarly, from the perceiver's perspective, the mere act of secret-keeping itself may elicit psychological and behavioral responses that are independent of the secrecy content. This is because the act of keeping secrets carries important social implications, often reflecting an individual's intention to either reinforce or terminate social connections (Dalton 1959; Schein 2010). Being excluded from secrecy may imply vulnerability or social isolation (Slepian et al. 2017). Indeed, Grey and Costas (2016) suggest that the act of secret-keeping may outweigh the content itself, exerting a greater impact on those excluded from the secrecy. For example, information that would otherwise seem trivial can acquire heightened significance simply because it is hidden. In other words, the perception that someone is engaging in secret-keeping can trigger a range of social interpretive processes, independent of the secret's content (Grey and Costas 2016). These interpretations may involve subjective understandings about the motives behind secrecy and its potential impacts on both themselves and on the broader social

context. It is these subjective interpretations surrounding secret-keeping acts, rather than the content of the secrecy, that ultimately shape individuals' responses to secrecy.

1.4 | Perceived Leader Work-Related Secrecy and Psychological Contract Violation

In leader–member dynamics, leaders occupy the positions of influence and resource distribution, exerting a significant impact on subordinates' career development and success. Consequently, subordinates closely scrutinize their every action, interpreting these behaviors through social lenses. However, these interpretations are not arbitrary; they are guided by a shared, socially constructed framework—the *psychological contract*—which shapes subordinates' expectations and defines the implicit rules governing leader–member interactions. Psychological contract, according to PCT, serves as a critical lens through which employee could decode leadership behaviors and their perceived intentions (Morrison and Robinson 1997; Rousseau 1995, 2011). Employees tend to consider their immediate supervisors as representatives of the organization for establishing and maintaining psychological contracts and therefore hold a schema of what obligations their immediate leaders should carry out (Tekleab and Taylor 2003). If the expected or desired obligation is deemed unfulfilled, a perceived psychological contract violation—an emotional reaction of betrayal, disappointment, and anger—follows (Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2019; Morrison and Robinson 1997; Robinson and Morrison 2000). PCT further clarifies that, within organizational contexts, leaders are typically expected to provide open communication, professional development opportunities, and long-term job security in exchange for employees fulfilling their generalized role obligations. (Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2019; Rousseau 1995).

When leaders keep secrets from subordinates, they naturally avoid admitting that they are concealing something to prevent embarrassment or conflict (Costas and Grey 2014). In some cases, to prevent the leakage of secrecy, leaders may pause or hesitate during conversations or provide perfunctory and ambiguous descriptions for employees. In other words, a set of observatory behaviors can signal to employees that certain information—potentially relevant to their work—is being deliberately withheld. Leveraging insights from PCT, we therefore suggest that perceived leader work-related secrecy may trigger psychological contract violation by breaching employees' implicit expectations regarding open communication, developmental support, and long-term job security.

First, leader secrecy violates the implicit expectation that leaders should be forthcoming and transparent. In organizational settings, timely and accurate access to work-related information is not merely helpful—it is essential for employees to perform effectively (Alavi and Leidner 2001; Eaton and Bawden 1991). Leaders are not only gatekeepers of such information but also are expected to proactively facilitate its flow. When leaders deliberately withhold relevant information, it can be seen as a direct contradiction to this expectation. Secrecy, in this sense, is not a neutral act—it signals a failure to fulfill the assumed norm of openness and undermines the leader's ability to meet role demands effectively.

Second, leader secrecy may be interpreted as a failure to provide developmental support and demonstrate relational commitment. Professional development is often closely tied to the quality of the leader–member relationship, which is built on trust, communication, and support. By keeping secrets, leaders may unintentionally convey psychological distance or emotional disengagement. Research suggests that secrecy signals a shift in interpersonal dynamics—from closeness to detachment—by disrupting mutual understanding and reducing relational transparency (Costas and Grey 2014; Jefferson 1988). Employees may thus interpret leader secrecy as a symbolic cue of relational distancing, which in turn diminishes their perceived access to future mentorship, feedback, or growth opportunities. In this light, secrecy reflects not just a withholding of information but also a withholding of investment in the employee's development.

Third, leader secrecy can create uncertainty and vulnerability, thereby undermining employees' sense of job security. The content of hidden information may concern matters of strategic change, performance evaluation, or organizational restructuring—issues that are highly consequential to employees' career trajectories. Even if the concealed information is benign, the mere awareness that relevant details are being withheld can lead employees to anticipate negative outcomes or fear exclusion from critical organizational decisions. This informational asymmetry places employees in a powerless position, eroding their sense of stability and predictability in the workplace. Over time, such perceptions may escalate into a broader feeling of insecurity regarding their roles, futures, and place in the organization.

Toward this end, perceived leader secrecy may lead employees to perceive a failure by leaders to honor implicit promises of transparency, support, and security. As such, the experiences of disappointment, frustration, injustice, and betrayal—termed as psychological contract violation—could follow (Morrison and Robinson 1997). Regardless of the specific content of the perceived secrecy, the mere act of a leader engaging in secrecy at work may suffice as a trigger for perceptions of unfulfilled psychological contract obligations, thereby inducing the experience of psychological contract violation. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1. *Perceived leader work-related secrecy is positively related to employee psychological contract violation.*

1.5 | Psychological Contract Violation and Positive Leader-Directed Discretionary Behaviors

Grounded in the reciprocity principle (e.g., Aselage and Eisenberger 2003; Blau 1964; Suazo 2009; Zhao et al. 2007), PCT delineates that employee perceptions of the state of the contract (fulfilled or violated) have important implications for work behavior (Bordia et al. 2008; Conway and Briner 2005; Robinson and Morrison 1995, 2000). Employees' reciprocal behaviors toward their supervisor have often been conceptualized as part of the implicit exchange agreement between them and their supervisor (e.g., Angle and Perry 1983). To this point, the experiences of psychological contract violation may prompt employees to withdraw their reciprocal behaviors by discrediting the interpersonal reciprocity rule (Griep and Vantilborgh 2018; Robinson and Morrison 1995;

Rousseau 1995; Tekleab and Taylor 2003). When the experienced violation is caused by the leader's unfavorable treatment (i.e., leader work-related secrecy), followers are likely to act in ways that exempt themselves from making any extra-role contributions to the leader. In the current research, we specifically focused on two critical discretionary reciprocal behaviors toward leaders at work, namely, leader-directed OCB and leader-directed voice.

Leader-directed OCB represents employee behaviors toward the leader that support "the social and psychological environment in which task performance takes place" (Organ 1997, 95), such as offering extra assistance to the leader and taking a personal interest in the leader (Williams and Anderson 1991). As a typical reciprocal behavior at the workplace, employees' decision whether to engage in OCBs largely depends on how they feel they are being treated by their leader (Korsgaard et al. 2010; Newman et al. 2017; Organ 1988; Zhang et al. 2019). When they perceive their leader as having violated the psychological contract, employees are likely to act in less prosocial ways because reducing contributions to the relationship is an effective approach to restore interpersonal balance (Heider 1958; Korsgaard et al. 2010). Therefore, we propose that psychological contract violation, as an effective response to unfavorable treatment, is likely to reduce leader-directed OCB.

Employee leader-directed voice behavior represents employees' expressions, directed toward their leader, of *challenging* but *constructive* opinions, concerns, or ideas about work-related issues (Van Dyne et al. 2003). As a prototypical form of constructive discretionary behavior at work, leader-directed voice is valued and welcomed by leaders as well as the organization as a whole. However, given that voice behaviors may bring a set of risks to the advocators, employees tend to be very cautious about speaking up when it comes to ideas that challenge the status quo (Argyris and Schön 1978; Ng and Feldman 2013). Before making a decision to voice, employees may repetitively ask themselves whether it is worth articulating their opinions or concerns about work at the risk of offending their supervisor (Burris 2012; Morrison 2014). Generally, employees are especially unlikely to take the risk of voicing when they perceive that their supervisor has violated the implicit psychological contract. That is, when leaders act in ways that breach unwritten expectations—such as withholding important work-related information—employees may interpret such behavior as a signal that the leader does not support, trust, or value them. This perception can trigger psychological contract violation, marked by emotional feelings of disappointment, frustration, or even betrayal. In such situations, employees may begin to see voice as futile or unlikely to produce meaningful change. This perceived futility undermines their motivation to engage in proactive communication and instead reinforces silence. Moreover, this sense of violation may further shift employees from a cooperative to a more self-protective or retaliative mindset. This shift compromises the relational and psychological conditions necessary for voice, ultimately making silence the more logical and adaptive response. Thus, when employees feel let down by their leader, the willingness to go beyond formal role expectations—such as offering constructive suggestions or voicing concerns—diminishes significantly. Therefore, we suggest that employees who perceive leader secrecy and thus a psychological contract violation will be less likely to engage in voice behaviors toward their supervisor. Together, we argue that perceived psychological contract violation will inhibit constructive leader-directed OCB and voice. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2. *Employee psychological contract violation mediates the relationship between perceived leader work-related secrecy and employee (a) leader-directed OCB and (b) leader-directed voice.*

1.6 | Underlying Motives of Leader Work-Related Secrecy

It is important to recognize that the intent behind information secrecy—whether benign or malicious—depends on the context and underlying motives. For example, withholding news of a promotion might serve a constructive purpose, such as preventing jealousy or unhealthy competition among colleagues, or a destructive one, such as concealing bias or unfairness in the decision-making process. Similarly, the concealment of another's misconduct could stem from a protective motive, like shielding an individual from immediate public scrutiny to allow private correction of their behavior, or from self-serving motives, such as enabling corruption or exchanging favors for personal gain. Even hiding the agenda for a work meeting may reflect conflicting intentions: One might aim to ostracize someone and put them at a disadvantage or to protect someone from distractions that could interfere with their core tasks. Thus, understanding how individuals *subjectively interpret* leader secrecy is essential for predicting its impact on workplace dynamics and ensuring ethical leadership practices.

1.7 | The Moderating Effect of Employee Trust Propensity

Trust propensity is a stable individual difference that represents an individual's generalized expectations about the trustworthiness of others (Rotter 1971, 1980). Specifically, Rotter proposed that trust propensity is especially important in ambiguous situations where individuals lack diagnostic information about others' underlying motivations behind behaviors. Perceived leader secrecy creates a highly vague situation for employees by leaving them with many open questions: What kind of information is my supervisor hiding? Why does my supervisor keep secrets from me? Will the hidden information benefit or hurt me? In this case, employees' trust propensity will be a key determinant in predicting how they interpret and respond to perceived leader work-related secrecy (see Colquitt et al. 2007; DeNeve and Cooper 1998; Gill et al. 2005; Govier 1994; Lewis and Weigert 1985).

Individuals with a high propensity to trust assume that others are generally good-natured (i.e., benevolent, kind, and friendly) and believe that others will not take advantage of them (Butler 1999). When perceiving a leader as engaged in

secret-keeping, a trusting employee would be more inclined to attribute such behavior to a benign or, at least, harmless motive (Chan and McAllister 2014; Colquitt et al. 2006; Kramer 1999, 2000) and less likely to interpret leader secrecy as an intentional unfulfillment of a psychological contract. In the eyes of these trusting individuals, secrecy could be seen as a normal leadership behavior born out of good intentions (e.g., protect personal privacy) or contextual requirements (e.g., obey firm confidential policy). These employees will not interpret secrecy as a behavioral reflection of leaders' malice (i.e., deliberately creating informational and interpersonal barriers). As a result, the employee with higher trust propensity will less experience a psychological contract violation when they perceive that their supervisor is keeping work-related secrets from them.

In contrast, those who expect others to be less trustworthy are, in general, more cynical and skeptical. These employees are more likely to equate leader secrecy with receiving unfair, unforthcoming, and unsupportive treatment from the leader and consequently experience a higher level of psychological contract violation. Their tendency to distrust others often pushes them into a state of emotional hurt (i.e., psychological contract violation) by providing malicious interpretations of the actions of others (Colquitt et al. 2007; Yakovleva et al. 2010)—even though they can rationally justify that it is reasonable for their leaders to have secrets from them. Taken together, the employee with a higher trust propensity should experience less intense feelings of psychological contract violation. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3. *Employee trust propensity moderates the relationship between perceived leader work-related secrecy and employee psychological contract violation, such that the effect is stronger (weaker) for employees with lower (higher) trust propensity.*

Hypothesis 4. *Employee trust propensity moderates the indirect effect of perceived leader work-related secrecy on (a) leader-directed OCBs and (b) leader-directed voice behaviors, through psychological contract violation, such that the indirect effect is stronger (weaker) for employees with lower (higher) trust propensity.*

2 | Overview of Studies

We adopted a mixed-method approach (i.e., two experimental studies and one field survey study) to examine the hypothesized model. In Study 1, we first established the causal link between leader secrecy and psychological contract violation and examined the moderating effect of trust propensity by manipulating perceived leader work-related secrecy. Study 2 tested the full research model by manipulating perceived leader work-related secrecy to examine its effects on participants' psychological contract violation and downstream leader-directed discretionary behaviors, as well as whether trust propensity moderated these effects. Finally, Study 3 examined the full hypothesized model with a multiwave and multisource field study, to further provide evidence of external validity. All studies were approved by the institutional review board (IRB) of the institution where the first author was once affiliated with (Protocol No. DER-19-0703, Study Title: A Research on Leader secrecy).

3 | Study 1

3.1 | Study 1: Sample and Procedures

We recruited 300 working adults living in the United States and the United Kingdom through Prolific platform.[4] This platform provides a range of demographic details about its participants, such as age, gender, and country of origin, which researchers can use to target their desired participant pool. Panelists on this platform are more diverse, attentive, and honest compared to other more established platforms such as Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Palan and Schitter 2018). As such, management researchers are increasingly using Prolific as the online platform to recruit participants for experimental studies (e.g., Hillebrandt and Barclay 2020; Sherf and Morrison 2020). To be eligible for this study, participants had to currently work for an organization as a full-time employee and have a direct supervisor. Participants were paid with £2.00 upon completion of the study. Of the initially recruited participants, 13 participants were excluded from the sample for failing to pass an attention check, leaving a final sample of 287 employees (95.7% response rate).[5] The participants had an average age of 34.36 years (SD = 9.60) and an average tenure of 14.65 years (SD = 9.48). Among them, 39.4% were women, and 60.6% were men. The final sample was 86.1% Caucasian, 7.7% Asian, 3.5% African, 0.3% Hispanic, and 2.4% others.

We used a between-subject design, and participants were randomly assigned to either the leader secrecy *condition* ($N = 141$) or the control condition ($N = 146$). Before starting the experiment, all participants were told that they would engage in a business simulation, in which they would collaborate with another participant to complete a business negotiation project. In reality, they would later interact with a pre-programmed e-confederate implemented via a computer program embedded within Qualtrics, the platform used to host the entire experimental design (Leavitt et al. 2021; Mai et al. 2022; Qiu et al. 2025).[6] This e-confederate approach effectively increased the psychological realism and internal validity of our experiment (Leavitt et al. 2021).

At the start of experiment, participants were required to generate a username, which would be used to address them throughout the study, and they were then directed to an entry survey. In the entry survey, participants were asked to complete a scale measuring their trust propensity. To disguise the purpose of the experiment, they were asked to answer filler questions, including a series of questions regarding their taste preferences for food and music and a short scale about their personality (Gosling et al. 2003). Participants were then redirected to a business simulation where they were instructed to interact with another participant to complete a business negotiation task. Specifically, they were led to believe that they would be linked with another participant, an e-confederate programmed within the Qualtrics platform, to form a two-member project unit consisting of one supervisor and one subordinate. To enhance realism, the

computer program displayed a sequence of simulated system messages (e.g., "Entering the system …" and "Looking for another participant …") accompanied by dynamic loading animations (e.g., ▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪) and indicated that roles would be randomly assigned. In reality, the computerized program neither accessed the Prolific participant pool nor connected participants to real individuals. All participants were systematically assigned to the role of subordinate, and the e-confederate, named JARA01,[7] was assigned to the supervisor role. Please refer to the Appendix S2 for the detailed procedures directing participants to believe they were linked to another participant, randomly assigned a role, and would subsequently interact with that participant.

Next, participants read an introduction about a business negotiation project (see Appendix S2 for details). Each participant was notified that some important information about the project would be only accessible by the supervisor, JARA01, and they were likely to get the missing information by interacting with JARA01. Then, participants were asked to log in to their assigned email account (a pre-programmed process for this simulation; see Appendix S2 for detailed email system) and to read a message about the project sent from JARA01. To illustrate, the pre-programmed email system first informed participants that they were assigned a company email address, consisting of their username (which they inputted during the initial stage of the experiment) followed by the suffix "@jonesjones.com." The email password was "secrecy123" for participants in the leader secrecy (experimental) condition, and "splings123" for those in the control condition.[8] Participants were then able to log into their email using the generated email address and provided password. To enhance realism, participants were required to wait 32 s for JARA01, their supervisor in the simulation, to finish writing the email that would be later sent and presented to the participants. We used the message in email sent by JARA01 to manipulate participants' perceived leader secrecy (see Section 3.2 in the next section). Lastly, a measure of perceived psychological contract violation, a manipulation check, and demographic information (age, gender, and tenure) were collected at the end of the study.

3.2 | Study 1: Manipulations

3.2.1 | Perceived Leader Work-Related Secrecy[9]

We manipulated leader work-related secrecy in the email from the supervisor JARA01. We developed our manipulation materials based on the conceptualization of leader secrecy, featured by the leader's intentional concealment of work-related information. The email content was the same in both conditions, except for the differences in bold below.[10] Participants in the leader secrecy condition (i.e., experimental condition) would read the following message:

> We both have read the project-related introductions. After reading the materials, you may be curious about why we are so optimistic about getting this change. **I can only tell you the following two key reasons**: First, many people have expressed considerable anger about restoring the Houses for a few high-income families. Second, a new Milton hotel would relieve the city's current shortage of mid-priced hotel rooms and also cater to the conference and convention trade. Moreover, the hotel lobby and bars would be open to the public, unlike the contemplated private residences. **Sorry, I cannot tell you any further information. That's all I can tell you**. Hope these will help.

Those in the control condition, termed the "unintentional non-disclosure" condition, read the following message:

> We both have read the project-related introductions. After reading the materials, you may be curious about why we are so optimistic about getting this change. **I was told not to tell you all the information, but I think you should know the following two key reasons**. First, many people have expressed considerable anger about restoring the Houses for a few high-income families. Second, a new Milton hotel would relieve the city's current shortage of mid-priced hotel rooms and also cater to the conference and convention trade. Moreover, the hotel lobby and bars would be open to the public, unlike the contemplated private residences. Hope these will help.

3.3 | Study 1: Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, the response scale for all items ranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

3.3.1 | Trust Propensity

We measured trust propensity using the eight-item trust facet of the agreeableness personality trait from the NEO-PI-R (Costa and McCrae 1992), which has been validated as an effective trust propensity measure by Ferguson and Peterson (2015). Sample items of this facet include "I believe most of the people I deal with are honest and trustworthy" and "I'm suspicious when someone does something nice for me" (reverse-coded; $\alpha = 0.83$).

3.3.2 | Psychological Contract Violation

Psychological contract violation was measured using the adapted four-item scale from Robinson and Morrison (2000). Sample items include "I feel frustrated by how I have been treated by [JARA01]" and "I feel betrayed by [JARA01]" ($\alpha = 0.89$).

3.3.3 | Perceived Leader Secrecy Manipulation Check

Participants were required to answer a manipulation check question: "After reading the email from [JARA01], to what

extent do you believe [JARA01], your direct supervisor at [Jones & Jones], is keeping work-related secrets from you?" on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Definitely*).

3.4 | Study 1: Results

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, reliability, and correlations among the variables included in the analysis. Results showed that psychological contract violation was positively related to the manipulation of perceived leader secrecy ($r = 0.17$, $p = 0.004$) but negatively related to trust propensity ($r = -0.22$, $p < 0.001$). As is ideal, the intercorrelation between manipulated perceived leader secrecy and trust propensity was not significant ($r = 0.09$, $p = 0.124$).

3.4.1 | Leader Work-Related Secrecy Manipulation Check

The *t*-test results evidence that participants in the secrecy condition reported that they believed their leader would be more likely to keep work-related secrets from them than those in the control condition (secrecy condition: $M = 3.33$, SD = 0.94; control condition: $M = 2.47$, SD = 0.85; $t_{285} = 8.22$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.96$), indicating the effectiveness of our manipulation.

TABLE 1 | Descriptive statistics and correlations in Study 1.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Manipulation condition[a]	—	—	—		
2. Trust propensity	3.26	0.61	−0.09	*(0.83)*	
3. Psychological contract violation	1.52	0.71	0.17**	−0.22**	*(0.89)*

Note: $N = 287$. Reliability (α) estimates are on the diagonal in parentheses.
[a]For manipulation condition, 0 = control condition, 1 = perceived leader secrecy condition.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.

3.4.2 | Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 predicted that perceived leader work-related secrecy would increase employee psychological contract violation. The *t*-test results showed that participants in the secrecy condition perceived a significantly higher level of psychological contract violation than those in the control condition (secrecy condition: $M = 1.64$, SD = 0.63; control condition: $M = 1.39$, SD = 0.77, $t_{285} = 2.65$, Cohen's $d = 0.36$).

We also conducted regression analysis in SPSS 26.0 to test the moderating effect where trust propensity would moderate the effect of perceived leader secrecy on psychological contract violation. In specific, the regression model included a dummy-coded manipulation condition (0, *Control secrecy*; 1, *Secrecy condition*; Independent variable), continuous trust propensity scores (moderator variable), and their interaction term, as well as participants' gender, age, and tenure (control variables) as predictors, with psychological contract violation scores as the dependent variable. The interaction term was created by multiplying the dummy variable by the mean-centered trust propensity scores to properly test the moderation effect. The results indicate a significant main effect of the manipulated leader secrecy on employee psychological contract violation ($B = 0.22$, SE = 0.08, $p = 0.009$), supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that trust propensity would moderate the relationship between perceived leader secrecy and employee psychological contract violation. Results of regression analysis also indicated a significant interaction effect between trust propensity and manipulated leader secrecy on psychological contract violation ($B = -0.28$, SE = 0.13, $p = 0.042$). Simple slope analyses, as shown in Figure 2, confirmed that the effect of manipulated leader secrecy on psychological contract violation was only significant for individuals with low (−1SD) trust propensity ($B = 0.49$, SE = 0.16, $p = 0.002$) but not

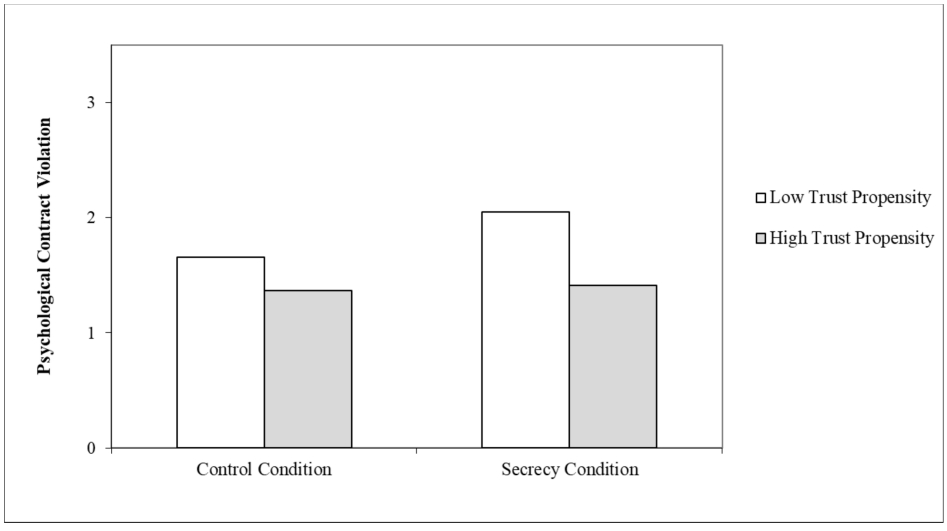

FIGURE 2 | Trust propensity moderated the effect of perceived leader secrecy on psychological contract violation in Study 1.

for individuals with high (+1SD) trust propensity ($B = -0.06$, SE = 0.16, $p = 0.705$), supporting Hypothesis 3. To further decompose this interaction (Spiller et al. 2013), we used the Johnson–Neyman technique[11] to identify the range(s) of trust propensity scores for which the simple effect of condition was significant. This analysis revealed a significant positive effect of perceived leader secrecy on psychological contract violation for any trust propensity score smaller than 3.44, which accounted for 58.5% of participants. Specifically, participants with lower trust propensity (a score of trust propensity below 3.44; +0.30 SD from the mean; 58.5% of participants) were more likely to be influenced by perceived leader secrecy and therefore reported higher psychological contract violation. In contrast, there was no reliable association between perceived leader secrecy and psychological contract violation for individuals with higher trust propensity (a score of trust propensity above 3.44; +0.30 SD from the mean; 41.5% of participants). This critical point fell slightly above the overall mean trust propensity score ($M = 3.26$, SD = 0.61), such that the effect of perceived leader secrecy on psychological contract violation was significant for all propensity to trust scores below the mean.

3.5 | Study 1: Discussion

Study 1 demonstrated both the predicted main effect and moderation effect, evidencing a causal link between the manipulated leader secrecy and employee psychological contract violation. However, Study 1 did not examine the mediating effects of psychological contract violation in transferring perceived leader secrecy into downstream behavioral outcomes. Additionally, the control condition in Study 1 only captured one possible counterpart scenario—where the leader was described as providing limited information for employees, and the scarcity of information was not due to the leader's deliberate intent to keep secrets. Indeed, a more comprehensive comparison would involve another condition where the leader is described as sharing information in a forthcoming manner. To address these limitations, we conducted a second online experiment with e-confederates involving one experimental condition and two control conditions to replicate the findings in Study 1 and to examine the mediating effects.

4 | Study 2

4.1 | Study 2: Sample and Procedures

We recruited 220 working adults living in the United States and the United Kingdom through the Prolific platform. Participants eligible for this study had to currently work for an organization as a full-time employee and have a direct supervisor. This study employed a two-stage experimental design, in which participants complete an entry survey (i.e., the first-stage task) 1 day before the formal experiment (i.e., the second-stage task) to minimize priming effects and obscure the study's true objectives. Participants were paid with £0.70 for the completion of the entry survey and £1.93 for the completion of the formal experiment. Of the initially recruited participants, 217 participants (98.6% response rate) returned the entry survey, and 177 participants (81.6% response rate) took part in the formal experiment, resulting a final sample consisting of 177 participants. These participants had an average age of 37.38 years (SD = 9.89) and an average tenure of 17.13 years (SD = 10.33). Among them, 48.8% were women, and 51.2% were men. The final sample was 77.0% Caucasian, 6.5% Asian, 7.4% African, 1.4% Hispanic, and 7.7% others.

One day before the formal experiment, all participants were asked to complete a survey assessing their trust propensity, past leader secrecy experience, belief about leader secrecy obligation, and demographic information (age, gender, and tenure). In the formal experiment, we employed a between-subject design, wherein participants were randomly assigned to either the perceived leader secrecy condition (experimental condition; $N = 57$), the perceived leader unintentional nondisclosure condition (Control condition 1; $N = 60$), or the perceived leader information transparency condition (Control condition 2; $N = 60$). To clarify, the two comparison conditions were constructed by systematically varying the two defining components of secrecy—intentionality and concealment—to create meaningful contrasts with the secrecy condition. This systematic construction approach means that the two control conditions are not neutral, but rather represent theoretically relevant contrasts that allow us to isolate which aspects of secrecy—intentionality, concealment, or their combination—drive follower reactions. All participants in the formal experiment were first told that they would engage in a business simulation, wherein they would collaborate with other three participants to complete a relay-style team task and were required to generate a username, which would be used to address them throughout the study. In reality, similar to Study 1, they would later interact with e-confederates implemented via a computer program embedded within Qualtrics.

Participants were then redirected to the business simulation (see Appendix S3 for details), where they joined three other ostensibly online participants (JARA01, AliAli, and PL9304) to form a four-member team comprising of one team manager (Role 1) and three team members (Roles 2, 3, and 4). All participants were informed that role assignments would be random and were briefed on each role's responsibilities. In actuality, all participants were systematically assigned to Role 2 (team member), while the other three positions were occupied by pre-programmed e-confederates: JARA01 as Role 1 (team manager), AliAli as Role 3 (team member), and PL9304 as Role 4 (team member). As Role 2, each participant was instructed to collaborate with their supervisor, JARA01 (Role 1; team manager), via an embedded ChatBox to draft a business report using the provided information. They were informed that certain critical details—essential for an effective report—were only accessible to JARA01, requiring them to actively engage with their supervisor to obtain this information. Participants were informed that the finalized business report would be shared with AliAli (Role 3; team member) and PL9304 (Role 4; team member), who would then complete a survey based on its contents. The accuracy of Roles 3 and 4's responses would depend on the report's thoroughness: the more detailed and comprehensive the initial report, the better equipped they would be to answer the survey questions correctly. We used the message in the embedded ChatBox

wherein participants interacted with JARA01 to manipulate participants' perceived leader secrecy (see Section 4.2 in the next section). This manipulation was reinforced by an assessment of JARA01's secrecy behavior, which was also preset by the experimenters but presented to participants as being generated by the business simulation's embedded AI tools (see Section 4.2 in the next section). Lastly, a measure of perceived psychological contract violation, leader-directed OCB, leader-directed voice, and a manipulation check were collected at the end of the study.

4.2 | Study 2: Manipulations

4.2.1 | Perceived Leader Work-Related Secrecy

We manipulated leader work-related secrecy in the ChatBox with the team leader JARA01, followed by a given assessment of JARA01's behavior. The chat content was the equivalent in three conditions, except for the differences in bold below.[12] Similar to Study 1, we designed our manipulation materials based on the conceptualization of leader work-related secrecy, which emphasizes on the leader's intentional efforts in concealment of work-related information. In specific, we referred to prior research exploring the behavior indicators of secrecy, including communicative hesitation, deliberate topic avoidance, and conscious question deflection. Thus, participants in the secrecy condition (i.e., experimental condition) would read the following message in the chat window:

JARA01 [LEADER]: Hello [the username participants generated]. I suppose you have already received some background information about our company's restructuring plan. I've also come across a few additional details on my end... (Present at chat window after 20 s)

JARA01 [LEADER]: There's news that at least 10% of teams will be disbanded within the next month. Fortunately, our team has been spared in this round of cuts. **Hmmm, though ... the salary levels for the team...** (Present at chat window after 30 s; Typo of "nexxt" was intentionally put here to increase its reality).

JARA01 [LEADER]: **Oh, I should not say too much. What I can share is that the decision-making around this restructuring has been incredibly challenging.** Two parties are locked in a stalemate, holding completely opposing views on the restructuring details—especially when it comes to personnel arrangements. **And then there's the star team over at Jones & Jones ...** (Present at chat window after 58 s).

JARA01 [LEADER]: **Sorry, I do not think I should continue to share...that's all I can reveal for now.** I really hope this, along with what you already know, will help you create an effective business report. **Oh, and, uh, just between us, there might be a few more details ... but yeah, that's it for now!** (Present at chat window after 78 s).

After the chat interaction, participants in the secrecy condition (i.e., experimental condition) viewed an assessment of JARA01's behavior, purportedly generated by the business simulation's embedded AI tools:

A lot of details seem to be intentionally hidden by [JARA01]. Throughout the discussion, [JARA01] pauses and hesitates when addressing some topics. When pressing for more details, [JARA01] deflects the questions or steers the conversation in a different direction. It is evident that [JARA01] is deliberately withholding certain information from you.

We developed two different control conditions that are thematically related to but district from leader secrecy. Specifically, in the first control condition (i.e., Control condition 1), termed "unintentional nondisclosure" condition, JARA01 was programmed to provide limited information and communicate in a hesitating manner. That is, crucially, JARA01 explicitly clarified that this information scarcity stemmed from confidentiality requirements rather than personal intent. Although this condition shared superficial similarities with the experimental condition (e.g., limited information, nondisclosure), it still created a context involving no leader secrecy, as the core of leader secrecy is the leader's intention to conceal some information. Specifically, participants in this first control condition would read the following message:

JARA01[LEADER]: Hello [the username participants generated]. I suppose you have already received some background information about our company's restructuring plan. I've also come across a few additional details on my end... (Present at chat window after 20 s).

JARA01[LEADER]: There's news that at least 10% of teams will be disbanded within the next month. Fortunately, our team has been spared in this round of cuts. **Hmmm, though... the salary levels for the team...** (Present at chat window after 35 s; Typo of "nexxt" was intentionally put here to increase its reality).

JARA01[LEADER]: **Oh, I should not say too much as I am not allowed to share this specific piece of information by the experimenter. What I can share is that the decision-making around this restructuring has been incredibly challenging.** Two parties are locked in a stalemate, holding completely opposing views on the restructuring details—especially when it comes to personnel arrangements. **And then there's the star team over at Jones & Jones ...** (Present at chat window after 63 s).

JARA01[LEADER]: **Sorry, I do not think I should continue sharing this part—it's been marked as confidential, and I've been asked to keep it to myself. But I've shared everything I can with you for now**. I really hope this, along with what you already know, will help you create an effective business report. **Oh, and, uh, just between us, there might be a few more details ... I'm not supposed to mention yet ... but yeah, that's it for now!** (Present at chat window after 83 s).

After the chat interaction, participants in the first control condition (i.e., Control condition 1) viewed an assessment of JARA01's behavior, purportedly generated by the business simulation's embedded AI tools:

A lot of details are required to remain confidential to [JARA01]. It is evident that [JARA01] wants to provide as much information as possible, but he/she has to withhold certain information from you given the confidentiality requirements.

In the second control condition (i.e., Control condition 2), termed the "information transparency" condition, JARA01 was programmed to provide information in a forthcoming and comprehensive manner. Specifically, participants in this first control condition would read the following message:

JARA01[LEADER]: Hello [the username participants generated]. I suppose you have already received some background information about our company's restructuring plan. I've also come across a few additional details on my end... (Present at chat window after 20 s).

JARA01[LEADER]: There's news that at least 10% of teams will be disbanded within the next month. Fortunately, our team has been spared in this round of cuts. (Present at chat window after 35 s; Typo of "nexxt" was intentionally put here to increase its reality).

JARA01[LEADER]: **The decision-making around this restructuring has been incredibly challenging**. Two parties are locked in a stalemate, holding completely opposing views on the restructuring details—especially when it comes to personnel arrangements. (Present at chat window after 60 s).

JARA01[LEADER]: **I've shared all the information I can for now.** I really hope this, along with what you already know, will help you create an effective business report. **If you need anything else or want to discuss further, just let me know!** (Present at chat window after 75 s).

After the chat interaction, participants in the second control condition (i.e., Control condition 2) viewed an assessment of JARA01s behavior, purportedly generated by the business simulation's embedded AI tools:

[JARA01] is dedicated to giving you the full picture—without withholding anything important. He/she speaks with great attention to detail, offering clear and fluid descriptions of the recent organizational changes and their potential impacts. It is evident that [JARA01] is committed to sharing as much relevant information as possible to keep you fully informed.

4.3 | Study 2: Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, the response scale for all items ranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

4.3.1 | Trust Propensity

We measured trust propensity using the eight-item survey developed by Mayer and Davis (1999). Sample items of this facet include "Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do" and "These days, you must be alert or someone is likely to take advantage of you" (reverse-coded; $\alpha = 0.77$).

4.3.2 | Psychological Contract Violation

Psychological contract violation was measured using the same scale as in Study 1, adapted to the experimental context by adding the suffix "in terms of his/her information-providing behavior" to each item. A sample item is "I feel frustrated by how I have been treated by [JARA01] in terms of his/her information-providing behavior" ($\alpha = 0.92$).

4.3.3 | Leader-Directed OCB

Leader-directed OCB was measured using six interpersonally focused items adapted from Koopman et al. (2016). Sample items include "I would go out of my way to be nice to [JARA01]" and "I would try to help [JARA01] as much as possible" ($\alpha = 0.93$).

4.3.4 | Leader-Directed Voice

Leader-directed voice was measured using four items adapted from Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012). Sample items include "I would make recommendations to [JARA01] for improving work procedures" and "I would speak up to [JARA01] with ideas for change in work procedures" ($\alpha = 0.91$).

4.3.5 | Perceived Leader Secrecy Manipulation Check

Participants were required to answer a manipulation check question: "Do you think [JARA01], your supervisor in the simulation, intentionally hid something related to work from you?" Responses were dichotomized on a scale of 1 (*Yes*) or 0 (*No*).

4.3.6 | Control Variables

We first controlled for participants' gender, age, and organizational tenure. Then, to rule out alternative explanations, we controlled for participants' past perceived leader secrecy experience and beliefs about leader secrecy obligations. We measured past leader secrecy experience using a self-developed five-item scale, which we validated with seven separate samples (see Appendix S4 for the detailed description). A sample item is "My supervisor deliberately concealed some information from me at work" ($\alpha = 0.94$). We adapted the felt obligation scale (Eisenberger et al. 2001) to assess participants' normative beliefs about leader secrecy using five items. This scale measured the degree to which participants viewed a leader's withholding of work-related information as appropriate and legitimate. A sample item is "An individual in a leadership position should have an obligation to the to ensure something secret from their subordinates" ($\alpha = 0.89$).

4.4 | Study 2: Results

4.4.1 | Leader Work-Related Secrecy Manipulation Check

A chi-square test confirmed that perceptions of leader secrecy varied significantly across conditions, $\chi^2(2) = 34.87$, $p < 0.001$. Participants in the secrecy condition were substantially more likely to perceive the leader as intentionally hiding information (93.0%; 53/57) compared to control conditions (Control condition

1: 51.7%, 31/60; Control condition 2: 43.3%, 26/60). Post hoc comparisons with Bonferroni correction (adjusted significant level = 0.017) revealed a significant difference between secrecy condition and Control condition 1 ($\chi^2(1) = 24.61$, $p < 0.001$), and a significant difference between secrecy condition and Control condition 2 was marginally significant ($\chi^2(1) = 32.86$, $p < 0.001$).

4.4.2 | Hypothesis Testing

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, reliability, and correlations among the variables included in the analysis. Hypothesis 1 predicted that perceived leader work-related secrecy is positively related to employee psychological contract violation. The one-way ANOVA results indicated a significant overall effect of the manipulation on perceived leader work-related secrecy ($F(2, 174) = 28.84$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.25$). Post hoc comparisons showed that participants in the perceived leader secrecy condition experienced higher levels of psychological contract violation than those two different control conditions (secrecy condition: $M = 2.96$, SD = 0.92; Control condition 1: $M = 2.44$, SD = 1.18, $t_{111.07} = 2.66$, $p = 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.49$; Control condition 2: $M = 1.59$, SD = 0.82, $t_{115} = 8.49$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.57$). Additionally, we conducted path analysis in Mplus 7.4 to test the full moderated mediation model. We created two dummy variables to present the three conditions using Hayes' (2017) indicator coding approach. With the secrecy condition being the referent group, Dummy 1 was set to 1 for cases in Control condition 1 (0 otherwise) and Dummy 2 was set to 1 for cases in Control condition 2 (0 otherwise). For ease of interpretation, both dummy variables were reverse-coded before being entered simultaneously into the regression model, such that positive coefficients reflected higher levels in the secrecy condition relative to each control condition. This coding strategy allowed us to test whether the indirect effects (via the mediator) differed between the secrecy condition and each of the two control conditions. The results in Table 3 showed that manipulated leader secrecy positively predicted psychological contract violation (secrecy condition vs. Control condition 1: $B = 2.70$, SE = 1.04, $p = 0.010$; secrecy condition vs. Control condition 2: $B = 1.97$, SE = 0.92, $p = 0.032$), supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that psychological contract violation mediates the relationship between perceived leader work-related secrecy and employee (a) leader-directed OCB and (b) leader-directed voice. Results of the path analysis, as shown in Table 3, showed that psychological contract violation negatively predicted employee's leader-directed OCB ($B = -0.30$, SE = 0.07, $p < 0.001$), but not employee's leader-directed voice ($B = -0.08$, SE = 0.08, $p = 0.309$). To calculate the mediation effects, we employed a bootstrapping procedure with 20000 resamples (Preacher and Hayes 2004) in Mplus 7.4. As shown in the bottom half of Table 3, the indirect relationship of manipulated leader work-related secrecy with leader-directed OCB via perceived psychological contract violation was significantly negative for the comparison between the secrecy condition and the unintentional nondisclosure condition (secrecy condition vs. Control condition 1: *indirect effect* = −0.81, *95%*CI = [−1.58, −0.05]) and marginally negative for the comparison between the secrecy condition and the information transparency condition (secrecy condition vs. Control condition 2: *indirect effect* = −0.60, *95%*CI = [−1.28, 0.10], *90%*CI = [−1.17, −0.01]), thus supporting Hypothesis 2a. Furthermore, the indirect relationship of manipulated leader work-related secrecy with leader-directed voice via perceived psychological contract violation was not significant (secrecy condition vs. Control condition 1: *indirect effect* = −0.22, *95%*CI = [−0.73, 0.29]; secrecy condition vs. Control condition 2: *indirect effect* = −0.16, *95%*CI = [−0.56, 0.24]), not supporting Hypothesis 2b.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that employee trust propensity would moderate the effect of perceived leader work-related secrecy on employee psychological contract violation. As shown in Table 3, when setting the unintentional nondisclosure condition (i.e., Control condition 1) as the contrast condition, trust propensity had a significant negative moderating effect on the relationship between the manipulation of leader secrecy and psychological contract violation (secrecy condition vs. Control condition 1: $B = -0.71$, SE = 0.34, $p = 0.037$). Simple slope analyses, as shown in Figure 3, confirmed that the effect of the manipulation of leader secrecy on psychological contract violation was significantly stronger (*difference* = −0.79, SE = 0.38, $p = 0.037$) for individuals with low (−1SD) trust propensity ($B = 3.10$, SE = 1.23, $p = 0.012$) than for individuals with high (+1SD) trust propensity ($B = 2.30$, SE = 0.85, $p = 0.007$).

To further decompose this interaction (Spiller et al. 2013), we used the Johnson–Neyman technique to identify the range(s) of trust propensity scores for which the simple effect of condition was significant. This analysis revealed a significant positive effect of leader secrecy manipulation on psychological contract violation for any trust propensity score lower than 3.19, which accounted for 63% of participants. Specifically, participants with lower trust propensity (a score of trust propensity below 3.19; +0.38 SD from the mean; 63% of participants) were more likely to be influenced by manipulated leader secrecy and therefore reported higher psychological contract violation. In contrast, there was no reliable association between leader secrecy manipulation and psychological contract violation for individuals with higher trust propensity (a score of trust propensity above 3.19; +0.38 SD from the mean; 37% of participants). This critical point fell slightly above the overall mean trust propensity score ($M = 2.98$, SD = 0.56), such that the effect of perceived leader secrecy on psychological contract violation was significant for all propensity to trust scores below the mean.

However, when setting the information transparency condition (i.e., Control condition 2) as the contrast condition, trust propensity did not have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between leader secrecy manipulation and psychological contract violation (secrecy condition vs. Control condition 2: $B = -0.19$, SE = 0.30, $p = 0.537$). Hence, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that employee trust propensity would moderate the indirect effect of perceived leader secrecy on leader-directed OCB and voice. As shown in the bottom part of Table 3, when setting the unintentional nondisclosure condition (i.e., Control condition 1) as the control condition, the indirect effect of leader secrecy manipulation on

TABLE 2 | Descriptive statistics and correlations in Study 2.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Manipulation condition[a]	—	—	—									
2. Experimental condition (Perceived leader secrecy)[b]	—	—	−0.86**	—								
3. Control condition 1 (Perceived leader unintentional nondisclosure)[c]	—	—	−0.02	−0.49**	—							
4. Control condition 2 (Perceived leader information transparency)[d]	—	—	0.87**	−0.49**	−0.51**	—						
5. Trust propensity	2.99	0.54	−0.03	−0.01	0.06	−0.06	*(0.77)*					
6. Psychological contract violation	2.32	1.13	−0.49**	0.39**	0.08	−0.46**	0.11	*(0.92)*				
7. Leader-directed voice	3.69	0.95	0.01	0.03	−0.07	0.04	−0.04	−0.07	*(0.91)*			
8. Leader-directed OCB	3.01	0.93	0.34**	−0.29**	−0.01	0.30**	0.14	−0.42**	0.46**	*(0.93)*		
9. Belief about leader secrecy obligation	2.57	0.87	0.08	−0.10	0.05	0.05	0.20**	0.07	0.14	0.14	*(0.89)*	
10. Past leader secrecy experience	2.40	0.93	0.17*	−0.12	−0.05	0.17*	−0.03	−0.02	0.07	0.10	0.18**	*(0.94)*

Note: $N = 177$. Reliability (α) estimates are on the diagonal in parentheses.
[a]For manipulation condition, 0 = perceived leader secrecy condition, 1 = perceived leader unintentional nondisclosure condition, 2 = perceived leader information transparency condition.
[b]For Experimental condition (Perceived leader secrecy), 0 = perceived leader unintentional nondisclosure condition/perceived leader information transparency condition, 1 = perceived leader secrecy condition.
[c]For Control condition 1 (Perceived leader unintentional nondisclosure), 0 = perceived leader secrecy condition/perceived leader information transparency condition, 1 = perceived leader unintentional nondisclosure condition.
[d]For Control condition 2 (Perceived leader information transparency), 0 = perceived leader secrecy condition/perceived leader unintentional nondisclosure condition, 1 = perceived leader information transparency condition.
*$p < 0.05$,
**$p < 0.01$.

TABLE 3 | Path analysis and conditional indirect effects in Study 2.

	Outcome variables					
	Psychological contract violation		**Leader-directed voice**		**Leader-directed OCB**	
	B	***SE***	***B***	***SE***	***B***	***SE***
Predictors						
Dummy 1 (Secrecy condition vs. Control condition 1)	2.70**	1.04	0.89	0.96	−0.89	0.86
Dummy 2 (Secrecy condition vs. Control condition 2)	1.97*	0.92	1.10	1.00	−1.98*	0.94
Trust propensity	−0.16	0.24	−0.26	0.23	0.56**	0.21
Dummy 1 × Trust propensity	−0.71*	0.34	−0.24	0.31	0.24	0.28
Dummy 2 × Trust propensity	−0.19	0.30	−0.33	0.31	0.56	0.30
Psychological contract violation			−0.08	0.08	−0.30**	0.07
Control variables						
Employee gender	−0.19	0.14	0.08	0.14	0.12	0.12
Employee age	−0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02
Employee tenure	0.01	0.02	−0.01	0.02	−0.02	0.02
Belief about leader secrecy obligation	0.12	0.09	0.16	0.10	0.13	0.08
Past leader secrecy experience	0.05	0.08	0.04	0.08	0.05	0.08
Indirect effect						
Dummy 1 → Psychological contract violation → Outcome variables						
Indirect effect (Mean)			−0.22 [−0.73, 0.29]		−0.81 [−1.58, −0.05]	
High (+1 SD)			−0.19 [−0.62, 0.25]		−0.69 [−1.33, −0.06]	
Low (−1 SD)			−0.25 [−0.84, 0.34]		−0.93 [−1.83, −0.04]	
Difference (High—Low)			0.06 [−0.10, 0.22]		0.24 [−0.03, 0.51]	
Dummy 2 → Psychological contract violation → Outcome variables						
Indirect effect (Mean)			−0.16 [−0.56, 0.24]		−0.60 [−1.28, 0.10]	
High (+1 SD)			−0.15 [−0.51, 0.21]		−0.19 [−1.15, 0.03]	
Low (−1 SD)			−0.17 [−0.60, 0.26]		−0.25 [−1.42, 0.17]	
Difference (High—Low)			0.02 [−0.07, 0.10]		0.06 [−0.16, 0.28]	

Note: $N = 177$. All indirect effects are significant at the 95% level. Estimates reflect unstandardized coefficients. Control condition 1 refers to perceived leader unintentional nondisclosure condition; Control condition 2 refers to perceived leader information transparency condition.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.

leader-directed OCB via psychological contract violation was marginally stronger (*difference* = 0.24, 95%CI = [−0.03, 0.51], 90%CI = [0.02, 0.46]) for individuals with low (−1SD) trust propensity (*indirect effect* = −0.95, 95%CI = [−1.83, −0.04]) than for individuals with high (+1SD) trust propensity (*indirect effect* = −0.69, 95%CI = [−1.33, −0.06]). However, when setting the information transparency condition (i.e., Control condition 2) as the control condition, the moderated mediation effect of leader secrecy manipulation on leader-directed OCB via psychological contract violation was not significant (*difference* = 0.06, 95%CI = [−0.16, 0.28]). Hence, Hypothesis 4a was partially supported. Moreover, the nonsignificant relationship between psychological contract violation and leader-directed voice precluded any significant moderated mediation effect between leader secrecy manipulation and leader-directed voice. Thus, Hypothesis 4b was not supported.

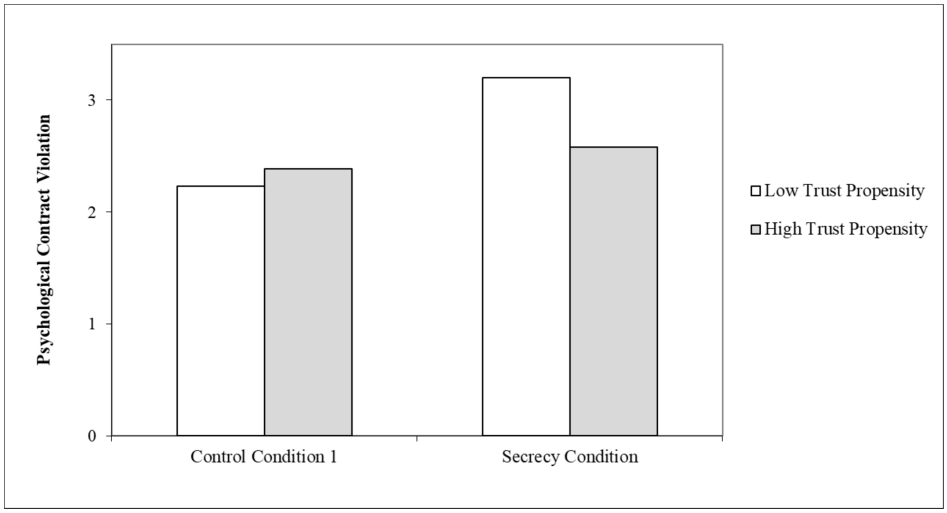

FIGURE 3 | Trust propensity moderated the effect of perceived leader secrecy on psychological contract violation in Study 2.

4.5 | Study 2: Discussion

The findings of Study 2 replicated the direct effect of manipulated leader secrecy on psychological contract violation observed in Study 1, while also demonstrating the indirect effect of manipulated leader secrecy on leader-directed OCB via psychological contract violation. However, the moderating effect of trust propensity on the link between manipulated secrecy and psychological contract violation—as well as the resulting moderated mediation effect on leader-directed OCB—emerged only when setting the "unintentional nondisclosure" condition as the control. Contrary to expectations, the manipulated leader secrecy did not exert an indirect effect on leader-directed voice through psychological contract violation, which precluded a nonsignificant moderated mediation effect on leader-directed voice. In Study 3, we conducted a multiwave, multisource field study to examine the full model in an actual workplace setting within a different cultural context, which helps to establish external validity and generalizability.

5 | Study 3

5.1 | Study 3: Participants and Procedures

We collected data from a multinational marketing consultancy company in Hong Kong, China. Employees in this sample were all full-time employees from different departments, for example, human resources, sales and marketing, and finance. In our initial contact with the targeted employees and their supervisors, we provided a general overview of the research but did not disclose any specific research hypotheses to the potential participants. Subsequently, we administered three voluntary surveys (with a 1-month interval in between each wave; for a similar design, see Lebel and Patil 2018). Employees provided ratings of perceived leader secrecy and trust propensity in the first wave of data collection. Then, employees rated psychological contract violation in the second wave of data collection. Lastly, immediate leaders provided ratings of subordinates' leader-directed voice behavior and leader-directed OCBs in the final wave of data collection.

We contacted 460 employees and 396 of them returned the first wave survey (response rate: 86.08%). In the second wave, 382 of the employees from the prior wave returned the surveys (response rate: 96.47%). In the third wave, 77 out of 81 immediate supervisors provided ratings on the 364 employees, which provided us a final matched sample of 364 employees across the three waves (a 79.13% response rate; 47% were women, 53% were men, 62.90% were tertiary educated, and the mean age and tenure were 39.68 years [SD = 10.19] and 3.48 years [SD = 1.70], respectively), and 77 supervisors (a 95.06% response rate; 39% were women, 61% were men, 79.20% were tertiary educated, and the mean age and tenure were 44.01 years [SD = 7.23] and 6.68 years [SD = 5.62], respectively).

5.2 | Study 3: Measures

The response scale for all items ranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*), with the exception of the perceived leader secrecy, which was scaled with a frequency anchor from 1 (*Never*) to 7 (*Always*).

5.2.1 | Perceived Leader Work-Related Secrecy

At Time 1, perceived leader secrecy was measured by asking the focal employee to rate the five items that we developed and validated in seven separate samples ($\alpha = 0.91$). Details of the scale development and validation procedures are provided in Appendix S4.

5.2.2 | Trust Propensity

At Time 1, trust propensity was measured by asking the focal employee to complete the eight-item scale developed by Mayer and Davis (1999). Sample items include "Most people can be counted on to do what they say they will do" and "Most people answer public opinion polls honestly" ($\alpha = 0.71$).

5.2.3 | Psychological Contract Violation

At Time 2, psychological contract violation was measured by asking the focal employees to complete Robinson and Morrison's (2000) four-item scale. Sample items include "During the last month, I felt frustrated by how I have been treated by my leader" and "During the last month, I felt betrayed by my leader" ($\alpha = 0.93$).

5.2.4 | Leader-Directed OCB

At Time 3, supervisory ratings on focal employee's leader-directed OCBs were collected using five items from Williams and Anderson (1991). Sample items include "During the last month, this employee helped me when I have heavy workloads" and "During the last month, this employee assisted me with her/his work when not asked" ($\alpha = 0.95$).

5.2.5 | Leader-Directed Voice

At Time 3, supervisory ratings on focal employee's voice behavior were collected using three items from Liu et al.'s (2017) study. Sample items include "During the last month, this employee gave me constructive suggestions regarding work-related issues" and "During the last month, this employee pointed out problems in our work or company" ($\alpha = 0.86$).

5.2.6 | Control Variables

We first controlled for employees' gender, age, and organizational tenure. Then, to examine the incremental value of perceived leader workplace secrecy beyond leader knowledge hiding, we controlled for this conceptually similar construct. Leader knowledge hiding was reported by employees at Time 1 based on Connelly et al.'s (2012) 12-item scale ($\alpha = 0.95$). Finally, to exclude the alternative explanations of the mediating mechanisms, we controlled for perceived leader trustworthiness, anxiety, and worry. Employees were asked to rate perceived leader trustworthiness, experienced anxiety, and experienced worry at Time 2 by using a short six-item version of Elsbach and Elofson's (2000) scale ($\alpha = 0.79$), Mccarthy et al.'s (2016) eight-item scale ($\alpha = 0.96$), and Flaxman et al.'s (2012) five-item scale ($\alpha = 0.93$), respectively. Sample items for trustworthiness included "My supervisor would not knowingly do anything to hurt me," for anxiety included "I am overwhelmed by thoughts of doing poorly at work," and for worry included "I worry about things to do with work." Notably, the removal of these control variables does not change the results.

5.3 | Study 3: Analytic Approach

The data in this study were of a nested nature (employees nested under different supervisors). Therefore, we conducted multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using multilevel structural equation modeling (ML-SEM) and using Mplus 7.4 with maximum likelihood estimation. To test our hypotheses, we used multilevel path analysis in Mplus 7.4, enabling us to simultaneously estimate all path coefficients in a single model. To calculate the (moderated) mediating effects, we employed the Monte Carlo method[13] with 20 000 resamples in the online R program (Selig and Preacher 2009). To test the first-stage moderated mediating effects, we calculated the difference between the mediating effects when the moderator was one SD higher and lower than the mean.

5.4 | Study 3: Results

Table 4 shows the means, standard deviations, reliability, and correlations among study variables. To ensure the distinctiveness of our measured variables, we conducted a multilevel CFA. Our multilevel CFA analysis revealed that the fit of a five-factor model to the data was acceptable: χ^2 (265) = 601.18, $p < 0.001$, $CFI = 0.93$, $TLI = 0.92$, $RMSEA = 0.06$, $SRMR = 0.05$. Model comparisons showed that the five-factor model fit the data significantly better than several alternative models,[14] which provided support for the distinctiveness of our hypothesized five-factor model.

The results of path analyses, as shown in Table 5, yielded support for our hypothesized model. Perceived leader secrecy positively predicted employees' perceived psychological contract violation ($B = 0.69$, SE = 0.16, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting Hypothesis 1. Additionally, psychological contract violation negatively predicted employees' leader-directed OCB ($B = -0.29$, SE = 0.06, $p < 0.001$) and leader-directed voice ($B = -0.14$, SE = 0.06, $p = 0.017$). As shown in the bottom half of Table 5, the results of the Monte Carlo analysis with 20 000 iterations supported the significance of the indirect effect of perceived leader work-related secrecy on leader-directed OCBs (*indirect effect* = −0.20, *95% CI* = [−0.33, −0.09]) and leader-directed voice (*indirect effect* = −0.09, *95% CI* = [−0.20, −0.01]), through perception of psychological contract violation, supporting Hypothesis 2a,b.

The interaction term of employee trust propensity with perceived leader secrecy on psychological contract violation was significant ($B = -0.10$, SE = 0.04, p = 0.007). As shown in Figure 4, simple slope analyses confirmed that the effect of perceived leader secrecy on psychological contract violation was stronger for individuals with low (−1 SD) trust propensity ($B = 0.73$, SE = 0.18, $p < 0.001$) than for individuals with high (+1 SD) trust propensity ($B = 0.64$, SE = 0.15, $p < 0.001$). The difference between the effects was significant ($B = -0.10$, SE = 0.04, $p = 0.007$), supporting Hypothesis 3.

In addition, as shown in the bottom half of Table 5, trust propensity significantly moderated the indirect effects of perceived leader work-related secrecy on both leader-directed voice and leader-directed OCB through employee perceived psychological contract violation. Specifically, the negative indirect effect of perceived leader secrecy on leader-directed voice through psychological contract violation was stronger (difference of indirect effects = 0.01, *95% CI* = [0.00, 0.03]) for employees with a low trust propensity (conditional indirect

TABLE 4 | Descriptive statistics and correlations in Study 3.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Perceived leader work-related secrecy (T1)	2.18	1.13	*(0.91)*											
2. Trust propensity (T1)	4.25	0.77	−0.14**	*(0.71)*										
3. Psychological contract violation (T2)	2.75	0.91	0.53**	−0.19**	*(0.93)*									
4. Leader-directed voice (T3)	4.72	0.84	0.04	0.10	−0.08	*(0.86)*								
5. Leader-directed OCB (T3)	5.03	1.00	−0.14**	0.21**	−0.26**	0.44**	*(0.95)*							
6. Employee gender[a] (T1)	0.47	0.50	0.06	0.04	0.00	0.02	0.04	—						
7. Employee age (T1)	39.58	10.19	−0.01	−0.01	0.03	0.00	0.00	−0.04	—					
8. Employee tenure (T1)	3.48	1.70	0.00	−0.01	−0.12*	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.09	—				
9. Leader knowledge hiding (T1)	2.00	1.11	0.58**	−0.09	0.50**	0.00	−0.18**	−0.02	0.04	0.00	*(0.95)*			
10. Perceived leader trustworthiness (T2)	4.19	0.90	−0.18**	0.19**	−0.23**	0.11*	0.11*	−0.01	−0.01	0.10	−0.16**	*(0.79)*		
11. Anxiety (T2)	4.46	1.33	0.17**	0.10*	0.15**	0.12*	0.04	0.01	0.05	0.00	0.06	0.08	*(0.96)*	
12. Worry (T2)	4.50	1.36	0.26**	0.05	0.25**	0.09	0.03	−0.04	0.02	−0.03	0.12*	0.02	0.75**	*(0.93)*

Note: $N = 364$. Reliability (α) estimates are on the diagonal in parentheses.
[a]For employee gender: 0 = men, 1 = women.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.

TABLE 5 | Path analysis and conditional indirect effects in Study 3.

	Outcome variables					
	Psychological contract violation (T2)		**Leader-directed voice (T3)**		**Leader-directed OCB (T3)**	
	B	***SE***	***B***	***SE***	***B***	***SE***
Predictors						
Perceived leader work-related secrecy (T1)	0.69**	0.16	0.21	0.22	0.39	0.28
Trust propensity (T1)	0.07	0.08	0.10	0.12	0.37*	0.17
Perceived leader work-related secrecy × Trust propensity	−0.10**	0.04	−0.03	0.05	−0.08	0.06
Psychological contract violation (T2)			−0.14*	0.06	−0.29**	0.06
Control variables						
Employee gender (T1)	−0.00	0.08	0.01	0.09	0.05	0.10
Employee age (T1)	0.00	0.00	−0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
Employee tenure (T1)	−0.07**	0.02	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.03
Leader knowledge hiding (T1)	0.21**	0.05	0.01	0.05	−0.07	0.06
Perceived leader trustworthiness (T2)			0.08	0.06	0.03	0.08
Anxiety (T2)			0.05	0.05	0.02	0.06
Worry (T2)			0.02	0.06	0.04	0.06
Indirect effect						
Perceived leader work-related secrecy → Psychological contract violation → Outcomes						
Indirect effect (Mean)			−0.09 [−0.20, −0.01]		−0.20 [−0.33, −0.09]	
High (+1 SD)			−0.09[−0.18, −0.01]		−0.18 [−0.31, −0.08]	
Low (−1 SD)			−0.10 [−0.22, −0.01]		−0.21 [−0.36, −0.09]	
Difference (High—Low)			0.01 [0.00, 0.03]		0.03 [0.01, 0.05]	

Note: $N = 364$. All indirect effects are significant at the 95% level. Estimates reflect unstandardized coefficients.
*$p < 0.05$.
**$p < 0.01$.

effect = −0.09, *95% CI* = [−0.22, −0.01]) than for those with a high trust propensity (conditional indirect effect = −0.10, *95% CI* = [−0.22, −0.01]). Additionally, the negative indirect effect of perceived leader secrecy on leader-directed OCBs through psychological contract violation was also stronger (significant difference of indirect effects = 0.03, *95% CI* = [0.01, 0.05]) for employees with a low propensity to trust (conditional indirect effect = −0.21, *95% CI* = [−0.36, −0.09]) than for those with a high propensity to trust (conditional indirect effect = −0.18, *95% CI* = [−0.31, −0.08]). Hypothesis 4a,b were thus supported.

In sum, our findings indicate that employees who perceived higher levels of leader work-related secrecy also tended to report higher levels of psychological contract violation and, in turn, to display lower levels of leader-directed voice behaviors and OCBs, with these associations being more pronounced among employees with lower trust propensity.

6 | General Discussion

Keeping a work-related secret is necessary for leaders in many organizational situations (e.g., pay secrecy; Bamberger and Belogolovsky 2010; Belogolovsky and Bamberger 2014). Placing leader secrecy within the leader–employee relationship, we examined whether and how perceived leader work-related secrecy relates to employees' discretionary behaviors at work. Integrating the social psychology literature on secrecy with PCT, we proposed a theoretical model wherein employees' perceptions of leader work-related secrecy are associated with higher psychological contract violation and, in turn, with reduced reciprocity toward the leader. Results from both experiments and a field study provided converging, although not unequivocal, support for key elements of this model: Higher perceived leader work-related secrecy tend to co-occur with higher psychological contract violation and lower leader-directed OCB and voice. Given the time lag between measurements (e.g.,

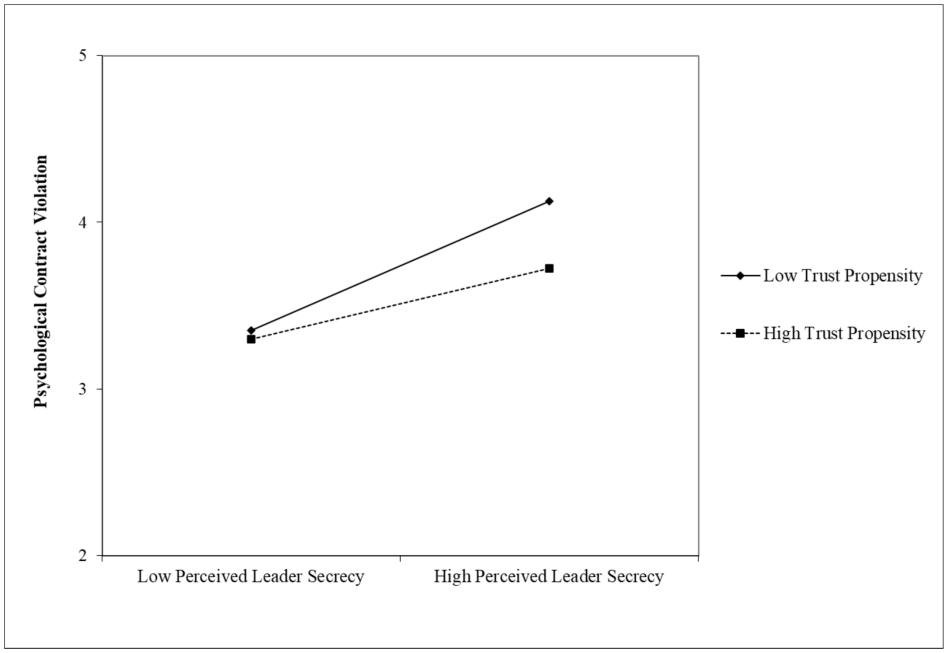

FIGURE 4 | Trust propensity moderated the effect of perceived leader secrecy on psychological contract violation in Study 3.

concurrent measurement of mediator and outcomes in Study 2 and a 1-month time lag among independent variable, mediator, and outcomes in Study 3), these findings should be interpreted as evidence of associations consistent with, rather than definitive proof of, the proposed process. We also found that this pattern was contingent on trust propensity: employees higher in trust propensity were less likely to experience psychological contract violation in response to perceived leader secrecy and, correspondingly, were more likely to engage in leader-directed OCBs and voice than those lower in trust propensity. In sum, our results suggest that while employees cannot be fully certain about what information is being held back from them, the mere perception of leader work-related secrecy, particularly among employees low in trust propensity, can be associated with reductions in behaviors that would benefit the leader and, by extension, organization, pointing to leader secrecy as a potentially consequential yet often overlooked aspect of organizational life.

6.1 | Theoretical Implications

Our research contributes to secrecy and the leader–member exchange literature in several important ways. First, our research extends prior research on individual secrecy that has predominantly focused on the negative intrapersonal effects of secrecy on the individuals who hold secrets (e.g., McDonald et al. 2020; Slepian et al. 2017, 2019) and responds to calls for research on the social significance of secrecy in the organizational setting (e.g., Costas and Grey 2014; Simmel 1906). Across three studies, we consistently found that perceiving a leader to be keeping work-related secrets brings about psychological contract violation for employees. Additionally, while prior secrecy research has examined the negative psychological effects for secret-keeping, we found that the perception of others' secrecy (beyond whatever concrete information is hidden) has far-reaching behavioral consequences for employees, including those that terminate their social reciprocity. We believe the present work serves as a pioneering attempt to view secrecy as an informative social process rather than just a repository of information, and we examine the consequences of feeling left out of a secret from the perspective of followers. Future work would benefit from this perceiver perspective on secrecy and would further extend this line of inquiry by further exploring the sociobehavioral consequences of perceiving secrecy at work.

Second, we further expand the role of PCT in research on leader–member relationships by highlighting how leader secrecy shapes leader–member interactive processes. Drawn from PCT, we positioned both leader work-related secrecy and member leader-directed discretionary behaviors as specific types of social behaviors linked by implicit psychological contract perception. Indeed, in Studies 2 and 3, we evidenced perceived leader work-related secrecy as a unique trigger for psychological contract violation and employees' leader-directed reciprocation behaviors (i.e., less OCBs and voice behaviors). Toward this end, leader work-related secrecy could be viewed as a new antecedent of psychological contract violation, which helps provide a complete picture of the leader–employee interactive processes at work. Our findings highlight that the perception of psychological contract violation can be signaled by a wide range of leader behaviors (Morrison and Robinson 1997), including those that are not necessarily targeted towards the focal employee, such as leader secrecy.

Last but not least, by integrating PCT with the trust literature, we identified trust propensity as a critical personal interpretive filter and boundary condition of the abovementioned psychological contract violation process. Specifically, trust propensity shapes how employees perceive and respond to supervisor's secrecy. As Morrison and Robinson (1997, 235) noted, "the terms of a psychological contract are inherently perceptual," which provides space for individualized interpretations. Our findings showed that trust propensity played an essential role in deciding such individualized interpretations and resulting reactions,

highlighting a mitigating factor that may buffer the negative effects of secrecy. This contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how secrecy functions within leader–employee relationships, moving beyond a uniformly negative view of secrecy to acknowledge the variability in employee responses based on individual dispositions. By doing so, our work not only refines theories about psychological contracts but also provides practical insights for organizational leaders. Specifically, it suggests that building and recognizing individual trust tendencies can help leaders better manage information flow, particularly in situations where withholding information is necessary or unavoidable (e.g., Fine and Holyfield 1996; Grey and Costas 2016; Simmel 1906).

Employees with lower propensity to trust others tended to be more hostile to leader secrecy, as indicated in their enhanced psychological contract violation perception and reduced social reciprocity. This finding is intriguing because research points to the potential constructive impacts of trust propensity in building and developing social relationships, such that when employees are willing to trust others, they tend to be viewed as warmer and more competent and find it easier to build favorable social relations at workplace (Bernerth and Walker 2009; Colquitt et al. 2007). Aside from this, we concur with Shore (2007) that trust propensity could also work as a protective factor for interpersonal relationships, especially when a party in the relationship consciously or unconsciously engages in some minor relationship-hurting behavior (e.g., work-related secrecy). Our findings highlight the potential for future research to consider trust propensity as a critical trait when exploring various secrecy-related effects.

6.2 | Practical Implications

Secrecy prevails in organizations (Mitchell 1993). It is often heard that leaders are caught in a dilemma in managing secrecy, and employees complain about being kept in the dark. Several articles have been published in outlets such as *The New York Times* and Harvard Business Review spotlighting business practices of secrecy (e.g., Dean 2019; Zhou 2019) and debating the potential problems caused by secrecy in modern organizations (e.g., Burkus 2016; Stone and Vance 2009; Tugend 2014). Yet, organizational scholars have fallen behind in joining such ongoing conversations. Our study takes a pioneering step in providing several practical implications for organizations and managers in dealing with workplace secrecy.

First, our findings offer caution about the possibility of cascading negative effects in the workplace derived from leader work-related secrecy. In our field study, supervisors observed employees' reduced leader-directed OCBs and voice behaviors as a function of the employees' perceptions of leader secrecy. In other words, when employees perceive that their leaders are keeping secrets, the employees might in turn keep things from their leaders, including not speaking up about ongoing problems and issues in the workplace, not providing ideas and solutions that can help with the organization, and not helping others in need. These damaging side effects may have been previously overlooked by organizations, given the benefits associated with secrecy, for example, protecting team intellectual property and avoiding producing anxiety in employees (Katila et al. 2008). As such, we encourage managers and practitioners to pay special attention to their behaviors that could potentially cause perceptions or even misperceptions of secrecy and proactively try to limit the chance that employees develop such perceptions. Managers would benefit from, whenever possible, not letting their employees develop negative interpretations for leader secrecy in the first place, perhaps by being open about why they have to keep certain information confidential.

Furthermore, our research provides managers practical insights regarding how to avoid violating employees' perceptions of psychological contract and how to maintain a positive social reciprocity with direct reports at work. Previous research has found that organizational agents (i.e., leaders) *knowingly* fail to meet obligations or hold different understandings about a given obligation, which can invite employees' perceptions of psychological contract violation, as employees may feel betrayed and thus withdraw from reciprocal behaviors (Morrison and Robinson 1997; Robinson and Morrison 1995, 2000). Our findings thus show that leaders' *unintended* contract-violating behavior (i.e., work-related secrecy) is also likely to work as a social signal to stop social reciprocity process by inducing psychological contract violation. These findings echo the practice that psychological contracts are viewed to be entirely perceptual, which provides room for employees to selectively take others' behavior (i.e., leader work-related secrecy) as an important social signal, from which they may generate different social understandings and reactions. Ultimately, our research encourages managers to exercise caution against the multiple unintended side effects of a specific workplace behavior (i.e., leader work-related secrecy) before taking action.

Finally, our studies highlight the importance of trust propensity in attenuating the negative impacts of perceived leader work-related secrecy. If managers must keep secrets from their direct reports, we suggest that managers should pay special attention to employees who would have a low propensity to trust, as it is easier for them to experience psychological contract violation. Managers should consider how to mitigate the negative effects of perceived leader secrecy, for example, showing trust for employees in other domains, and trusting employees with sensitive information that can be shared.

6.3 | Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Our paper has several strengths that bolster the validity of our conclusions. First, our mixed-methods approach allows for rigorous testing of our predictions and offsets the limitations of each study in isolation. The overall pattern across three studies supports our assertion that perceived leader work-related secrecy interacts with employee trust propensity in predicting psychological contract violation. We are the first to our knowledge to manipulate secrecy with an e-confederate in two different simulations that provide a realism that enhances the validity of our findings (Leavitt et al. 2021). To address the potential limitations of the experimental designs, we conducted a multisource multiwave field study. Study 3's field design provided evidence of generalizability while giving us the opportunity to test the outcome variables in our theoretical model. To validate

our perceived leader work-related secrecy scale, we conducted a scale validation study using seven separate samples to ensure that we closely follow the steps to develop a valid scale (MacKenzie et al. 2011).

Despite these strengths, our work is not without limitations. First, our manipulation of leader secrecy was conducted in hypothetical settings, though consistent with previous treatments of secrecy (e.g., Critcher and Ferguson 2014; Lane and Wegner 1995), and was fairly low in intensity, resulting in an observed effect size that was relatively small. As shown by previous literature, the more significant a secret is, the more intensely it harms (e.g., Slepian and Bastian 2017; Slepian et al. 2017, 2020). Thus, we would predict that the significance of secrecy, as perceived by the employee, would influence the present effects. Towards this end, future research could consider exploring the set of secrets that employees perceive themselves as kept in the dark about, and whether more significant secrets would trigger higher levels of psychological contract violation, and again whether this effect is moderated by trust propensity.

Second, in this study, we chose to conceptualize and operationalize leader work-related secrecy as a behavioral tendency or state, as opposed to a trait. Previous research, however, has indicated that people do vary to a large degree in their tendency to keep secrets from others (Boland et al. 2024; Larson et al. 2015). Combining these insights with our findings, our research suggests new avenues for future research. For example, scholars can further explore leaders' general propensity to engage in secrecy and how that can influence employees' psychological reactions. As a supplementary study (please refer to Appendix S5 for more details), we recruited 183 undergraduate students to participate in a business simulation in which they interacted with an e-confederate. We manipulated leaders' general propensity to engage in secrecy by showing the participants a "personality test" score for their leader, who either engaged in high or low levels of secrecy. Consistent with our primary studies, when leaders engaged in more secrecy, participants perceived a higher level of psychological contract violation ($B = 0.50$, SE $= 0.16$, $p = 0.002$, $d = 0.48$), and, similarly, manipulated trust propensity again moderated this effect ($B = -0.53$, SE $= 0.20$, $p = 0.010$, $d = 0.40$).

Third, although we measured perceived secrecy at work, it is hard for us to know what exactly causes the secrecy perception in the first place. In the domain of personal secrets, people can accurately gauge how forthcoming their romantic partners are, which itself is a dynamic process (Willems et al. 2020). This is likely the case for employees and their leaders. There may be times when leaders are more open, and there may be other times when leaders are more secretive. More importantly, employees often have multiple opportunities to learn that information is being held back from them. For example, through conversations with coworkers, they may discover that their leader has shared a different set of details or spun a different story for a recent decision. Additionally, employees may form perceptions of secrecy by observing a leader's behavior—such as frequent pauses, hesitations, the use of vague and perfunctory language, abruptly stopping a conversation, or lowering their voice when someone passes by. Moreover, contextual factors can shape how these behaviors are interpreted. For instance, in times of organizational change—such as during economic downturns or upturns—employees may be more likely to attribute such behaviors to deliberate secret-keeping. Indeed, in our scale validation studies (see Appendix S4), the mean level of perceived leader secrecy in Sample D was significantly higher than in other samples (Samples E, F, and G, as well as the Study 3 sample), suggesting contextual or situational variation in secrecy perceptions. To this point, future research would benefit from a better understanding of the antecedents to perceived leader work-related secrecy and how they impact the processes documented in the present work.

Fourth, our research focuses on the act of secret-keeping rather than the specific content of the secrets or the underlying motives behind them. Although our current measure of perceived leader work-related secrecy offers a useful starting point, it may inadvertently prompt respondents to interpret secrecy in a predominantly negative light—an issue we observed during the initial stages of scale development. In the present study, however, we are unable to determine whether this negativity stems primarily from participants' general aversion to uncertainty (which is inherent in secrecy) or from the framing of the scale items themselves. More importantly, this negative tendency likely reflects employees' subjective inferences of motives rather than leaders' actual motives for engaging in secrecy. Future research could extend this line of inquiry in two complementary ways. First, scholars could integrate insights from the literature on actual secrecy motives—for example, whether the leader's intent is protective, strategic, or exclusionary—and develop more nuanced measures that differentiate among these forms of secrecy to help capture the full range of secrecy experiences. Second, future work could explicitly examine the interplay between leaders' actual motives and employees' perceived motives by distinguishing when secrecy is misinterpreted versus accurately inferred. Such efforts would help explain the heterogeneous effects of secret-keeping on employee attitudes and behavior and clarify the boundary conditions under which leader secrecy is perceived as acceptable—or even beneficial—versus when it is viewed as harmful and contract-violating.

Finally, we focused only on leader work-related secrets in the current research. Based on our theory, we expect less psychological contract violation if employees perceive the content of the secret to be nonwork related. As shown in our pilot study about the content of perceived leader secrecy (see Appendix S1), the most frequently mentioned perceived secrets in the workplace included job-required information (17.9%), payment-related information (17.2%), promotion-related information (13.4%), performance-related information (11.2%), personal career development information (7.4%), work arrangement or plan information (6.7%), negative opinions (5.2%), selfish motivations (4.5%), gossip (9.7%), and other (6.8%). Thus, the majority of participants suspected perceived leader secrets were work-related (83.5%). While we did not examine the specific content of secrecy in our studies, future research can further examine the effects of different types of secrets. For example, nonwork-related secrecy may be more associated with other types of organizational reactions, such as rumor or gossip.

7 | Conclusion

Keeping secrets and engaging in secrecy can be critical to organizational practice, but that does not mean that secrecy comes with no costs. Our studies documented unintended social consequences of perceived leader secrecy on employees' leader-directed OCBs and voice as a function of perceived psychological contract violation, particularly among employees with a low propensity to trust. Based on our findings, leaders should pay attention to how they conceal information from their employees and work toward mitigating perceptions of secrecy. We hope this work can inspire future research to further examine the predictors and other outcomes of secrecy at work.

Funding

Research supported by the National University of Singapore Grant: R-317-000-146-115 and China Europe International Business School (CEIBS) Faculty Research Grant.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at https://osf.io/59ks8/?view_only=e8cd00cf297e4f28b108793189a77d9e.

Endnotes

[1] We are aware that leaders can hold other types of secret (e.g., a secret about a leader's private life or other types of social life; Costas and Grey 2014; Grey and Costas 2016). However, we believe that employees would not necessarily expect leaders to share all their secrets with them, especial nonwork-related ones, but they should still expect their leader to share important information that is germane to their work. Therefore, in the current research, we only focus on leader *work-related* secrecy. To ensure that only focusing on work-related secrecy is a reasonable choice without missing any key features of workplace leader secrecy, we conducted a pilot study to examine whether employees often believe the information hidden from them by their leader to be work-related. Specifically, we collected data from a separate sample of working adults and found that a significant portion of perceived leader secrecy is related to work (83.5%). Please refer to Appendix S1 for more details.

[2] Please refer to our pilot scale validation studies (see Appendix S4 for details) for the empirical evidence of discriminant validity of our focal construct.

[3] Given the scope of our paper, as well as for simplicity, we refer to *leader work-related secrecy* as *leader secrecy* in the rest of the paper.

[4] Using G*Power to conduct a power analysis, to detect a small effect size of 0.25 at the standard 0.05 alpha error probability and with a power of 0.95, the recommended sample size is 210 (i.e., 105 per cell). We recruited more in case participants dropped out from the study.

[5] Results remained largely the same with or without those excluded participants.

[6] To clarify, the computer program was not embedded within Prolific. Rather, Prolific was used solely for participant recruitment and management, and participants were redirected to an external experimental environment hosted on Qualtrics. Specifically, after accepting the study on Prolific, participants were presented with a link on the Prolific interface that redirected them to an external business simulation implemented on the Qualtrics platform. Upon completing the simulation and survey, participants received a unique completion code, which they entered back into Prolific to confirm participation and receive payment. No identifying information from Prolific (e.g., Prolific IDs) was stored within the experimental environment beyond what was necessary to verify completion codes for compensation.

[7] A gender hidden username was adopted for this study. We asked participants to guess JARA01's gender at the end of experiment and found that there was no clear tendency to identify JARA01 as male or female.

[8] The password could be seen as providing a subtle cue related to the manipulation. Our intention in doing so was to follow a commonly used priming approach in psychological experiments (see Stajkovic et al. 2006; Welsh and Ordóñez 2014 for similar approach), where minor contextual elements are used to reinforce the intended mindset without making the manipulation overly explicit.

[9] To test the effectiveness of our secrecy manipulation, we utilized the same manipulation materials to conduct a pilot study with 54 working adults in the United Stated and the United Kingdom recruited from Prolific Academic (see Gino and Pierce 2009 for similar validation procedures). Specifically, we examined whether our manipulation induced, beyond perceived leader secrecy, other alternative perceptions on leader, including perceived leader rudeness, abruptness, ignorance, ostracism, and undermining. The results indicated that our manipulation only significantly differentiated perceived leader secrecy across two conditions ($M_{control} = 2.68$, $M_{secrecy} = 3.31$, $t_{(49)} = 2.16$, $p = 0.022$) but no other perceptions of the leader (Rudeness: $M_{control} = 1.40$, $M_{secrecy} = 1.62$, $p = 0.345$; Abruptness: $M_{control} = 1.84$, $M_{secrecy} = 1.69$, $p = 0.508$; Ignorance: $M_{control} = 1.56$, $M_{secrecy} = 1.68$, $p = 0.527$; Ostracism: $M_{control} = 1.88$, $M_{secrecy} = 1.81$, $p = 0.643$; Undermining: $M_{control} = 2.04$, $M_{secrecy} = 2.15$, $p = 0.797$), which supported the effectiveness of our secrecy manipulation.

[10] Bolding used here for emphasis only. The bolding and word count were not used in the actual experiment.

[11] Johnson–Neyman technique is suitable for conducting interaction analysis when the independent variable is categorial and the moderating variable is continuous. Traditionally, researchers dichotomize the continuous moderating variable (at + and −1 SD from the mean) for conducing such analyses. However, as recent research has highlighted, there are two problems associated with this approach (Spiller et al. 2013). First, by dichotomizing the continuous variable, statistical power for detecting the interaction is typically reduced (Irwin and McClelland 2003). Second, the traditional approach can be sample-dependent in defining high and low values of the continuous moderating variable. In other words, the high and low values of the moderator can be different across different samples. Thus, recent scholars recommend the use of Johnson–Neyman technique, which can show regions in the range of the moderator variable (trust propensity) in which the effect of the independent variable (perceived leader secrecy) on the dependent variable (psychological contract violation) is significant (Hayes and Matthes 2009; Johnson and Neyman 1936; Spiller et al. 2013). We also used the traditional approach in displaying the moderating effect by dichotomizing the continuous moderating variable, and the patterns were consistent to the Johnson–Neyman analysis.

[12] Bolding used here for emphasis only. The bolding and time details were not used in the actual experiment.

[13] In our analysis, although the nested structure of our data (i.e., employees nested within teams) did not yield significant between-group variance, we still adopted a multilevel analytical approach to account for the potential clustering in the data. To further ensure the robustness of our findings, we double-checked the mediation models using a single-level path analysis with a bootstrapping method. The results remained consistent across both approaches.

[14] Four-factor model (combining perceived leader secrecy with trust propensity): $\chi^2(269) = 804.70$, $p < 0.001$, $\Delta\chi^2(4) =$, $CFI = 0.89$, $TLI = 0.88$, $RMSEA = 0.07$, $SRMR = 0.08$; Four-factor model (combining leader-directed OCBs with leader-directed voice behaviors): $\chi^2(270) = 1489.67$, $p < 0.001$, $\Delta\chi^2(5) = 684.97$, $CFI = 0.75$, $TLI = 0.72$, $RMSEA = 0.11$, $SRMR = 0.12$; Two-factor model (combining perceived leader secrecy, trust propensity with psychological contract violation): $\chi^2(274) = 1894.03$, $p < 0.001$, $\Delta\chi^2(9) = 1894.03$, $CFI = 0.66$, $TLI = 0.63$, $RMSEA = 0.13$, $SRMR = 0.11$; One-factor model: $\chi^2(275) = 3692.95$, $p < 0.001$, $\Delta\chi^2(10) = 3692.95$, $CFI = 0.29$, $TLI = 0.23$, $RMSEA = 0.19$, $SRMR = 0.18$.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Data S1:** Supporting information.