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Supervisor Bottom-Line Mentality and Unethical Work Behaviors: When Morality Makes a Difference

Dr. Maryam Saleem

Assistant Professor, National Business School, The University of Faisalabad

Email: assist.prof.nbs.731@tuf.edu.pk, maryamsaleem0888@gmail.com

Riffat Gill

Lecturer, Lyallpur Business School, Government College University Faisalabad

Email: riffatgill@gcuf.edu.pk

Rabia Sarfraz

Lecturer, Lyallpur Business School, Government College University Faisalabad

Email: rabiasarfraz@gcuf.edu.pk

Dr. Sania Zafar

Lecturer, Department of Economics, University of Jhang

Email: Saniazafar@uoj.edu.pk

Dr. Aisha Saleem (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor, Lyallpur Business School, Government College University Faisalabad. Email: aishasaleem@gcuf.edu.pk

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between supervisor bottom-line mentality (BLM) and employee expediency, emphasizing the moderating influence of employee moral attentiveness. Rooted in social influence theory, the current study empirically examines the impact of supervisor bottom-line mentality on employee expediency. The study employs a two-wave survey method and collects data from (N=388) employees of service sector organizations in Pakistan, revealing that supervisor bottom line mentality triggers employee expediency. The results show that moral attentiveness moderates the relationship between employee expediency and supervisor bottom line mentality i.e., employees with high moral attentiveness are less likely to engage in expedient activities, even when profit-driven oversight is in place. The results make a valuable contribution to the field of organizational behavior by identifying significant psychological traits that counteract the negative consequences of performance-oriented leadership. Practical implications indicate the necessity for ethics-oriented training and leadership development to enhance moral awareness and avert unethical behaviors in the workplace.

Keywords: Supervisor bottom line mentality, moral attentiveness, employee expediency, social influence

Introduction

The investigation of unethical conduct within business organizations is a significant subject due to its ubiquity and financial consequences for firms (Jannat et al., 2022; Mishra, Ghosh, & Sharma, 2021; Yuan et al., 2025).



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Researchers have documented multiple instances of unethical conduct within the business during their investigation of prominent corporate scandals (Veetikazhi, et al., 2022). Existing literature indicates that supervisors, who hold formal authority over their subordinates and engage in regular interactions with employees, significantly influence the work environment. Consequently, they can foster unethical behavior among employees for personal gain (Babalola et al., 2021). Supervisors have the potential to shape employees' behavior, attitudes, and beliefs in either a constructive or detrimental manner, contingent upon their position and authority within the organization (Guzman & Fu, 2022). This study meticulously investigates the supervisor bottom-line mentality (BLM), a significant phenomenon characterized by a singular focus on achieving bottom-line results, often at the expense of other competing priorities (Greenbaum, Mawritz, & Eissa, 2012) may be ubiquitous in high-profile company disasters like Enron, WorldCom, Volkswagen, HealthSouth, and GM (Callahan, 2007; Hotten, 2015; Isidore, 2015).

In a corporate setting, the bottom line denotes performance criteria associated with organizational profitability. In the current competitive business landscape, managers prioritize securing the bottom line for organizational success, often at the expense of ethical norms and values (Eissa & Lester, 2025; Kamran, Azam, & Atif, 2022). While a limited number of studies highlight the negative consequences of BLM (Tai et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020), the existing literature on empirical investigations into its potential outcomes remains insufficient. Future research is essential to further explore and elucidate these effects (Moazzam, & Malik, 2025; Xiaojun, Wei, & Na, 2021). Previous study indicates that supervisor BLM adversely affects employee behavior but due to individual differences, not all subordinates under BLM supervisors exhibit unethical conduct to the same extent (Farasat et al., 2020). Previous studies have examined various personal traits, including employee entitlement and core self-evaluations (Greenbaum et al., 2012), moral identity (Mesdaghinia et al., 2019), moral disengagement and power-distance orientation (Zhang et al., 2020), as well as employee conscientiousness (Farasat et al., 2020). Nevertheless, contemporary academic discourse fails to recognize the essential significance of moral attentiveness, as the possession of this trait enables individuals to interpret situations through an ethical lens. This study aims to enhance the current understanding by proposing that the moral attentiveness of employees may affect the relationship between supervisor BLM and expediency. It introduces moral attentiveness as a moderating factor in the connection between supervisor BLM and employee expediency. This study suggests that individuals exhibiting greater moral attentiveness might reduce the positive relationship between bottom line mentality and expediency.

Research Problem

Employees represent a crucial resource for any organization; however, contemporary businesses face challenges in retaining high achievers and sustaining their performance levels, particularly when subjected to pressure from management that jeopardizes their career advancement. The ongoing pressure faced by employees can undermine the commitment needed to adhere to ethical norms and standards, resulting in unethical behavior. Supervisors exhibiting BLM tendencies are inclined to compromise ethical standards or regulations in



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pursuit of bottom-line goals, often disregarding the adverse effects that such unethical conduct may have on both individual and organizational performance (Zhan & Liu, 2021). In this regard, the analysis of supervisor BLM is a significant managerial issue, as the leadership's approach can greatly influence workplace behaviors and practices.

Research Questions

This study strives to answer the following research questions.

RQ1. Does Supervisor bottom line mentality predict employee expediency?

RQ2. Does moral attentiveness play moderating role in the relationship between supervisor bottom line mentality and employee expediency?

Theory, Literature and Hypotheses Development

We utilized the social influence theory (Kelman, 1958) to elucidate the mechanisms through which supervisor BLM incites employee expediency. Social influence occurs when an individual's behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, or emotions are shaped by the actions of others and the surrounding context. The procedure unfolds in three separate phases: compliance, identification, and internalization. Individuals exhibit conformity when they align their behaviors with the established norms and customs of others, despite personal disagreement, or when they act in accordance with expectations to obtain rewards or evade penalties. Individuals are recognized when they are motivated by a revered, socially prominent figure. Internalization refers to the process through which individuals incorporate ideas and behaviors into their personal value systems, achieving alignment both internally and externally. This study, consistent with social influence theory (Kelman, 1958), asserts that supervisors in higher positions command greater respect and exert increased influence due to their access to organizational resources. Such questionable behaviors may be viewed less negatively, allowing subordinates to involve in unethical practices that advance their self-interests without facing public discredit.

Supervisor Bottom-Line Mentality and Employee Expediency

BLM supervisors prioritize bottom-line results over competing priorities due to their strong focus on achieving success (Mawritz, et al., 2024, Mesdaghinia, Rawat, & Nadavulakere, 2019; Rice & Reed, 2021). Supervisors, due to their power and status, influence subordinates and, with the aim of attaining favorable outcomes for themselves and their organizations, promote unethical behaviors (Mesdaghinia et al., 2019). Previous research indicates that supervisors with high bottom-line mentality (BLM) may exhibit dysfunction due to their exclusive emphasis on bottom-line objectives, often at the expense of other competing factors (Lin et al., 2022). The existing literature indicates that supervisor BLM is associated with negative organizational outcomes, including abusive supervision (Mawritz et al., 2017), social undermining (Greenbaum, Mawritz, & Eissa, 2012), decreased performance (Quade, McLarty & Bonner, 2020), and workplace cheating behavior (Farasat, Azam, & Hassan, 2021).

In corporate settings, supervisors are regarded as trustworthy role models by their subordinates. Exerting influence and occupying a superior position relative to their subordinates, they require unwavering adherence from their subordinates. Contemporary firms sometimes face pressure to respond swiftly in ways that enhance financial performance while also achieving operational excellence (Bolino & Turnley,



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2005; Parks et al., 2010). Employee expediency focuses on outcomes without regard for the methods employed to achieve objectives (Cheng, Guo, & Luo, 2021). The employee expediency study remains in its preliminary phases (Zhu et al., 2022). Consequently, researchers examine the determinants of employee expediency and have found that increased initiative from individuals or more expeditious behavior from supervisors correlates with a higher likelihood of employee expediency (Eissa, 2020; Greenbaum et al., 2018). This notion suggests that supervisors possessing a BLM can motivate employees to prioritize their interests by creating the perception that it is acceptable to compromise ethical standards to enhance performance, contingent upon the flexibility of prevailing organizational rules, norms, and practices (Farasat, Azam, & Hassan, 2021). Expedient behavior frequently yields detrimental consequences for both individual employees and their organizations (Eissa, 2020). This study, grounded in social influence theory, suggests that supervisors embrace a BLM to advance their own interests by fostering trust in their previous actions and their esteemed roles. This results in questionable conduct among employees, who might resort to morally ambiguous practices such as taking shortcuts, circumventing established protocols, and manipulating or stretching organizational guidelines to hasten processes (Greenbaum et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2022).

Hypothesis 1: Supervisor bottom-line mentality is positively related to employee expediency.

Moderating Role of Moral Attentiveness

This research investigates the potential impact of personal attributes on the relationship between expediency and supervisor BLM. It is imperative to acknowledge that not all subordinates who are endeavoring to achieve bottom-line objectives engage in unethical workplace behavior. The influence of supervisor BLM on subordinates is determined by the interplay of human traits and situational circumstances. (Kamran, Azam, & Atif, 2022). Employees exhibit differing levels of sensitivity to ethical considerations, as indicated by a prior study on the cognitive processing of moral signals (Hannah, Avolio, & May 2011; Reynolds & Ceramic, 2009). The variations observed are indicative of moral attentiveness, a construct that assesses the degree to which an individual consistently perceives and contemplates moral dimensions within their experiences (Reynolds, 2008).

The capacity for perceptual moral attention, which involves recognizing moral elements in everyday situations, alongside reflective moral attentiveness, defined as the extent to which an individual consistently contemplates moral issues, has been established as the two primary components of moral attentiveness. Reflective moral attentiveness encompasses both contemplation and action, in contrast to perceptual morality, which is limited to the coding of information. The interplay of these two factors promotes a continuous emphasis on moral substance (Reynolds, 2008). Moral attention does not necessarily imply consistent moral behavior, although it frequently enhances moral awareness and prompts moral action. It signifies a difference in the perception of stimuli by individuals with high moral attentiveness (Khan et al., 2022). Individuals exhibit varying perceptions of stimuli (Afsar et al., 2019). The decision to act morally or immorally is shaped by the moral signals received. The perception of immoral signals in others' conduct can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and perceived



unfair treatment, whereas moral cues in behavior are associated with happiness and moral reciprocation (Al Halbusi, 2022).

Followers with a strong moral awareness frequently support moral actions, perceiving them as the appropriate course of action (Reynolds, 2008). Individuals may occasionally perceive that the actions of others, especially those in leadership positions, contravene moral principles to such an extent that retribution becomes imperative. Counterproductive behavior can be utilized to signal to a leader that ethical shortcomings may lead to negative consequences, such as impeding project advancement through diminished effort. Occasionally engaging in immoral behavior in response to unethical leadership may assist in restoring moral equilibrium within the relationship or serve as a cautionary signal to leaders regarding the negative consequences of immoral actions on themselves or the organization (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2017). High moral attentiveness makes followers more sensitive to the morality of their leader's actions or their results because they instinctively see and interpret it in moral terms. Finally, followers with low moral attentiveness are far less susceptible to the moral effect of either low or high-moral leaders because they do not assess or interpret their surroundings in terms of morality (Ouyang et al., 2022). This study posits that, according to social influence theory, supervisor BLM can incite unethical behavior in subordinates with low moral attentiveness. Conversely, subordinates with high moral attentiveness who perceive supervisor BLM exhibit a reduced tendency to engage in expediency. This study proposes the moderating role of moral attentiveness to test the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Moral attentiveness acts as a moderator between the supervisor's bottom-line mentality and employee expediency such that this positive relationship will be weaker in case of high moral attentiveness.

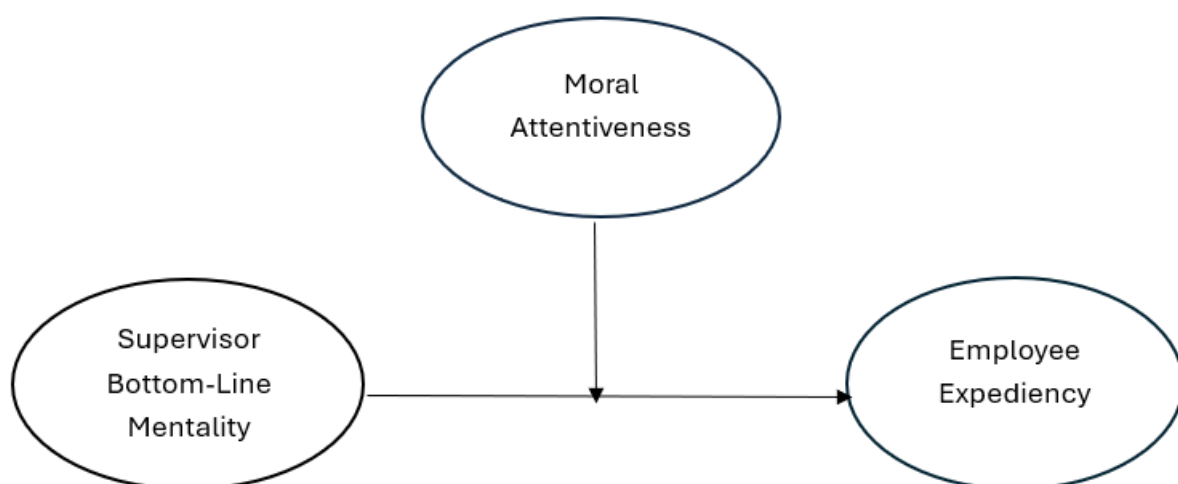


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

Methods

Participants and procedures

Data was obtained via questionnaires from service sector organizations in



Table 1: Sample characteristics

Gender	Male	Female	
Percentage	69.3%	30.7%	
N	269	119	
Graduation	Below graduates	Graduates	Master & above
Percentage	2.8%	32.2%	64.9%
N	11	125	252
Organization type	Government	Semi-government	Private
Percentage	31.7%	12.4%	55.9%
N	123	48	217
Designation	Front-Level Management	Middle-Level Management	Senior Management
Percentage	52.6%	39.7%	7.7%
N	204	154	30

Faisalabad, Pakistan. Data collection involved reaching out to organizations via different contacts. In Pakistan, all official work is carried out in English and previous research has demonstrated the efficacy of English language initiatives within the country (Raja et al., 2020). Consequently, we administered our questionnaires in English to the selected employees. Due to unknown population, convenience sampling was used. Participants were guaranteed the confidentiality of the findings. Primary data was collected in two waves with a two-week interval to mitigate response bias. Supervisor BLM and moral attentiveness were assessed at time 1, while employee expediency was evaluated at time 2, two weeks later. For accurate identification across the two waves and to maintain confidentiality in subsequent responses, a different ID was generated to match the response collected at time 1. A total of 388 complete responses were included in the analyses following the exclusion of incomplete questionnaires.

Sample characteristics

Table 1 reports the characteristics of our sample.

N=388

Measures

The responses of all study variables were obtained on a 7-point Likert type scale, which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly concur), and we measured all variables using self-report instruments.

3.3.1 Supervisor Bottom-Line Mentality: Greenbaum et al.'s (2012) 4-item scale was



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used to measure this construct at time one. The reliability test of this measure shows that Cronbach's alpha is well within the required range ($\alpha=0.89$). *Moral Attentiveness*: To measure moral attentiveness at time one, a 10-item scale (Reynolds, 2008) comprising reflective, as well as perceptual moral attentiveness, was used. The reliability test of this measure is well within the required range ($\alpha=0.96$). *Employee Expediency*: We used a 4-item scale developed by (Greenbaum et al., 2018) to assess this construct the reliability value is ($\alpha=0.91$).

Analysis

The moderation effect was tested using the (Hayes, 2013) process macro in SPSS. This technique is frequently employed to assess the conditional effects using bootstrap CIs (confidence intervals). The moderation effect was evaluated using Model 1.

Descriptive Analysis

A descriptive analysis was performed, and the findings are detailed in Table 2. All variables demonstrate reliability values that surpass the established cut-off level of 0.7. The table demonstrates that all correlations among the variables of interest are significantly positive.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, Correlations, and Reliabilities

Sr#	Variable	Mean	Standard d Deviation	1	2	3
1	Supervisor bottom line mentality	4.55	1.42	(0.89)		
2	Employee expediency	4.20	1.50	1.57**	(0.91)	
3	Moral Attentiveness	4.74	1.42	1.36**	0.008	(0.960)

N=388 Reliabilities are given in parenthesis. * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The CFA is performed to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of the variables being examined, employing AMOS to ascertain the factor loadings associated with each item. Every item displayed standardized factor loadings that surpassed 0.50. We assessed convergent validity through the computation of the average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR), in addition to the values corresponding to each sampled variable. The composite reliability for all sampled variables surpassed the threshold value of 0.70. The mean variance extracted (AVE) for all sampled variables surpasses the critical threshold of 0.50. The standards set forth by Fornell and Larcker (1981) demonstrate that the average variance extracted and composite reliability values for all sampled variables remained within acceptable thresholds thereby confirming convergent validity as presented in Table 2. The square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeds the correlations among variables, thereby confirming the establishment of discriminant validity. A comprehensive measurement model (CFA) was executed, incorporating all three study variables. A three -factor model demonstrated a satisfactory fit, with $\chi^2=510.58$, $DF=132$, $\chi^2/df=3.86$, $GFI=0.86$, $CFI=0.93$,



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TLI=0.92, NFI=0.91, and RMSEA=0.06, which is below the acceptable threshold of 0.08.

Table 3: Factor Loadings

Variables	Items	Factor loading
Supervisor bottom line mentality	BLM1	0.827
	BLM2	0.879
	BLM3	0.810
	BLM4	0.775
Employee expediency	EB1	0.833
	EB2	0.804
	EB3	0.863
	EB4	0.836
Moral attentiveness	MA1	0.843
	MA2	0.806
	MA3	0.773
	MA4	0.790
	MA5	0.831
	MA6	0.842
	MA7	0.873
	MA8	0.883
	MA9	0.894
	M10	0.845

N=388

Table 4: Composite Reliability, Convergent & Discriminant Validity

Sr#	Variables	CR	AVE	1	2	3
1	Supervisor bottom line mentality	0.89	0.678	0.824		
2	Employee expediency	0.96	0.704	0.142	0.839	
3	Moral Attentiveness	0.91	0.739	0.171	0.001	0.859

N=388, AVE=Average variance extracted, CR=Composite reliability, Discriminant validity is established when Square root of AVE>latent variables correlations, Bold values in the table shows square root of AVE.

Hypotheses Testing

Regression Results of Direct effect of Supervisor BLM on Employee Expediency

The results given in table 5 show that the direct effect of supervisor BLM on employee expediency ($\beta=0.125^{**}$) is significant (1% significance level) and positive. This finding supports hypothesis 1.



Table 5: Regression Results of Direct Effect of Supervisor BLM on Employee Expediency

			R ²	β	SE	t	p
H1	Supervisor BLM \rightarrow employee expediency		0.025	0.165	0.053	3.11	0.002

Test of Moderation

Moral Attentiveness as Moderator between Supervisor Bottom-Line Mentality and Employee Expediency

This study evaluates the moderating effect of moral attentiveness on the relationship between supervisor BLM and employee expediency using a process macro (SPSS) created by Hayes (2017), with results detailed in Table 6. The findings indicate that the interaction term (BLM*moral attentiveness) is significant ($\beta = -0.075^*$; LL = -0.147, UL = -0.004), with both lower and upper limits excluding zero. This indicates that moral attentiveness functions as a moderator in the association between BLM and employee expediency.

Conditional Effect (Slope Test)

This study employed simple slope analysis to statistically examine the interaction (Aiken & West 1991; Dawson, 2014) at different levels of moral attentiveness. Results are presented in Table 6. This investigation suggests that the association between BLM and employee expediency decreases as moral attentiveness increases. ($\beta = 0.27^{**}$, SE = 0.07; LLCI = 0.128; ULCI = 0.419), as evidenced by a significant interaction term. The findings support hypothesis 2. Figure 2 presents a graphical representation of the moderating effect, illustrating the interaction plot at both high and low values of the moderator. The interaction plot indicates, positive relationship between BLM and employee expediency diminishes at increased value of moderator ($\beta = 0.27^{**}$, SE = 0.07; LLCI = 0.128; ULCI = 0.419) and becomes statistically insignificant at lower levels of the moderator ($\beta = 0.058$; SE = 0.074; LLCI = -0.088; ULCI = 0.204).

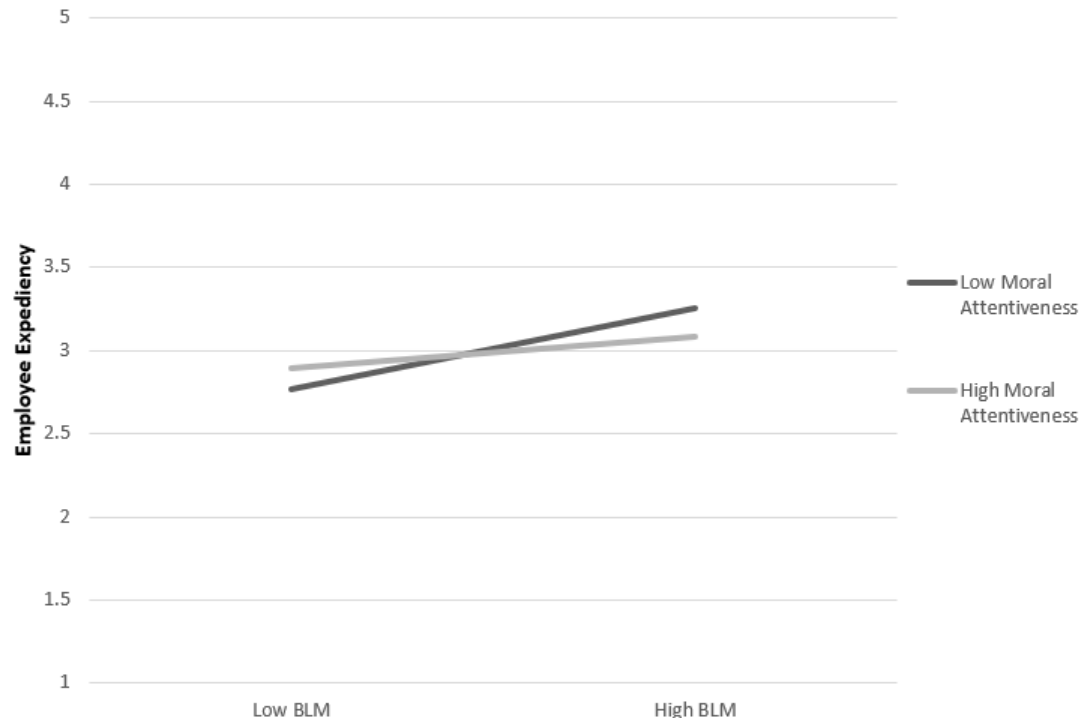


Figure 2. The Interactive Effect of Supervisor BLM and Moral Attentiveness on Employee Expediency

Table 6: Regression Results of Moderation Analysis

Employee Expediency						
Predictor		β	SE	t	p	
Constant		4.22	0.075	55.805	0.000	
Supervisor BLM		0.166	0.053	3.1243	0.001	
Moral Attentiveness		-0.011	0.053	-0.2081	0.835	
Supervisor BLM*MA		-0.756	0.036	-2.0819	0.038	
ΔR ² due to interaction		0.0109*				
F		4.334				
Conditional Effects of Supervisor BLM on Employee Expediency						
MA	Effect	Boot SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-1.4284	0.2742	0.0741	3.6998	0.0002	0.1285	0.4199
0.0000	0.1661	0.0532	3.1243	0.0019	0.0616	0.2707
1.4284	0.0581	0.0745	0.7797	0.4361	-0.0884	0.2045

N= 388. Supervisor BLM &MA were mean centered before analyses. Bootstrap Sample Size 5,000, LL=Lower Limit; CI=Confidence Interval; UL=Upper Limit,

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Discussion

Theoretical Contributions

This research offers contributions in several key areas. The present study adds to the existing body of literature on unethical behaviors by introducing supervisor



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bottom line mentality as a novel predictor of employee expediency. Secondly, this research offers a novel contribution to existing literature by empirically examining moral attentiveness as a significant moderator in the relationship between supervisor BLM and employee expediency. Third, this research broadens the application of social influence theory within the context of the workplace, specifically focusing on the behaviors of supervisors.

Practical Implications

This research elucidates the ramifications of supervisor BLM. When the pursuit of financial objectives takes precedence above all else, it can compel employees to engage in unethical behavior, thereby exposing the organization to the potential for considerable harm and the emergence of scandals. Organizations must recognize that a limited perspective and an exclusive emphasis on singular thought, while disregarding other factors, is neither an optimal nor effective strategy, as it may elevate the incidence of unethical conduct within the workplace. Organizations ought to consider the nuances of how fundamental messages are conveyed or understood. Given their proximity to subordinates, direct supervisors play a crucial role in influencing employee behavior.

It is advisable for organizations to place greater emphasis on morality, ethics, service, and harmony rather than solely on efficiency and profitability when hiring, socializing, and educating supervisors. To mitigate expedient behavior, organizations should assess their processes to pinpoint factors that may promote such behavior, including unrealistic deadlines, and refine procedures to diminish the necessity for shortcuts. Organizations have the capacity to offer consistent training sessions focused on company policies, ethical guidelines, and the ramifications of expediency, thereby aiding employees in comprehending the enduring advantages of upholding elevated standards. This initiative can assist employees in comprehending the enduring advantages of upholding elevated standards. Promoting moral awareness within the workplace necessitates cultivating an atmosphere in which employees are sensitive to ethical implications and are equipped to make principled decisions.

Limitations

Following the limitations, significant avenues for future research are outlined below. This study exclusively examines the moderator; future research should integrate mediators into the model. This study employed self-report measures, which may introduce common method bias; future research should consider utilizing peer reporting measures. This study is conducted in a developing country, Pakistan, which may restrict its generalizability to other contexts. Future studies can be conducted in different context.

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