
**The Mixed Blessing of Supervisor Bottom-Line Mentality : Examining the
Moderating Role of Gender**

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the double-edged effects of supervisor bottom-line mentality (BLM) on subordinates' work-related behaviors (work performance and knowledge hiding) and the moderating role of subordinate gender.

Design/methodology/approach –The theoretical model was tested using a sample of 218 three-wave multi-source data collected from employees of five firms in southern China.

Findings – The results revealed that supervisor BLM is positively associated with subordinate BLM. Although subordinate BLM can enhance their work performance, it can also lead to knowledge hiding toward coworkers. Furthermore, these indirect effects are moderated by subordinate gender.

Practical implications – Managers should pay more attention to the potential positive and negative consequences of supervisor BLM, and intervene to mitigate the negative impact of BLM.

Originality/value –This study is among the first to examine how supervisor BLM can be a mixed blessing and elicit both positive and negative behaviors from their subordinates. Moreover, by illuminating how subordinate gender moderates the relationship between

supervisor BLM and subordinates' work-related behaviors, we enrich and extend the BLM literature.

Keywords: Bottom-Line Mentality; Work Performance; Knowledge Hiding; Gender

Article Type: Research paper

Introduction

Bottom-line mentality (BLM), which is defined as “a one-dimensional frame of thinking that revolves around securing bottom-line outcomes to the neglect of competing priorities” (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012, p.344), is prevalent in a highly competitive environment (Babalola *et al.*, 2019). Specifically, both supervisors and subordinates may adopt this one-dimensional frame of thinking, termed supervisor BLM and subordinate BLM respectively. Scholars have suggested that supervisor BLM has been a gold mine for organizations, yielding positive outcomes such as decreasing customer-directed incivility and promoting customer service performance (Babalola *et al.*, 2019), leading to eventual increases in organizational profits (Shah *et al.*, 2002).

However, some researchers argue that there may be possible dark sides of supervisor BLM (e.g., Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). This trend of study has proposed that supervisor BLM promotes competitive thinking and encourages antagonistic relationships between subordinates, thus subordinates may engage in negative behaviors as a way of hindering the success of co-workers (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). Despite considerable progress, these studies almost exclusively focused on negative behaviors aimed at undermining a social rival such as

social undermining (e.g., delaying work to make coworkers look bad or slow them down) (Duffy *et al.*, 2002). To the best of our knowledge, no study on the possible negative effect of supervisor BLM on subordinates' knowledge hiding has yet been published. Knowledge hiding, defined as “an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person” (Connelly *et al.*, 2012, p.65). Compared with conducting explicit unethical behaviors, hiding knowledge represents a safer response because it can be concealed more easily and is difficult to identify or detect (Arain *et al.*, 2020). However, knowledge hiding will not only destroy relationships between colleagues but also greatly damage organizational innovation and effective operation (Černe *et al.*, 2014). Connelly *et al.*, (2012) also called for exploration to extract knowledge hiding from social undermining and explore its trigger mechanism. In this paper, we extend the prior study and suggest that supervisor BLM may have both positive (work performance) and negative (knowledge hiding) work-related outcomes. On the one hand, since supervisor BLM focuses on bottom-line objectives (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012), subordinates may be motivated to secure their own work performance to hit the bottom-line objectives. On the other hand, supervisor BLM may foster competitive, game-like thinking that leads to subordinates' knowledge hiding in order to gain a competitive advantage. Thus, exploring the double-edged sword effects of supervisor BLM can also guide organizational practices and managerial decisions around how to alleviate the adverse effects of BLM.

Drawing upon social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), we argue that subordinate BLM acts as a mediating mechanism in explaining the double-edged sword effects of supervisor BLM. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) notes that individuals obtain information about appropriate behaviors in an organization by observational learning

(Bandura, 1977). When supervisors adopt BLM they give signals to their subordinates that bottom-line goals (such as financial goals) supersede other objectives (Mesdaghinia *et al.*, 2019). Subordinates will learn from their supervisors and adjust their behaviors. Therefore, we posit that subordinates influenced by their supervisor BLM would operate with the same mentality within the organization leading to their knowledge hiding behavior and enhanced performance at the same time.

Based on the social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Wood, 1999), we further propose that the relationship between subordinate BLM and work-related outcomes (e.g., work performance and knowledge hiding) and consequently the indirect relationship between supervisor BLM and work-related outcomes mediated by subordinate BLM varies depending upon the subordinates' gender. According to the social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Wood, 1999), men and women have different behavioral patterns that are influenced by social structure (Ouyang *et al.*, 2015) and social expectation (Huang and Gamble, 2005). Regulated by such social norms and expectations, women tend to be more concerned about the maintenance of relationships, whereas men are often instrumental in achieving their goals. Therefore, compared with female employees, male employees with a BLM tend to be driven by bottom-line goals and even work harder to achieve performance – they are also less willing to share work-related knowledge with colleagues to maintain an advantage. Figure 1 depicts the theoretical framework of this study.

Our study makes several theoretical contributions. First, we extend the literature on the dark side of BLM by examining subordinate knowledge hiding as a possible negative consequence of supervisor BLM. Second, by integrating this dark side with the positive outcome of work performance, our research provides empirical evidence for the double-edged effects of BLM. Accordingly, this study enriches the BLM

literature by examining an important mechanism through which subordinate BLM plays a mediating role in the relationship between supervisor BLM and the double-edged outcomes. Finally, we identify subordinate gender as a key boundary condition affecting the proposed double-edged effects of supervisor BLM through subordinate BLM. By so doing, our study advances the BLM literature by bringing in a gender lens.

Insert **Figure 1** here

Theory and hypotheses

Supervisor bottom-line mentality and subordinate bottom-line mentality

According to social learning theory, individuals learn through observing and modelling their role models' attitudes and behaviors, which may then guide their own attitudes and behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Supervisors are often seen as credible role models in an organization (Brown *et al.*, 2005), from whom subordinates learn and gain knowledge about acceptable work-related values and behaviors. When supervisors adopt BLMs, they give cues to subordinates that bottom-line results are incredibly crucial, and the subordinates will behave accordingly to achieve the goals (Sims, 1992). Furthermore, supervisors are representative of the organization (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2010). Their behaviors lead subordinates to form a cognition of organizational expectations (Moore and Gino, 2013). Supervisors with a BLM tend to strengthen such a one-dimensional mentality by punishing or rewarding subordinates (Eissa *et al.*, 2018), indicating bottom line goals as the organizational expectations, which in turn push subordinates to consider how to increase the possibility of being rewarded and reduce the possibility of being punished. Accordingly, subordinates are inclined to follow the assumed organizational expectations and adopt the same

one-dimensional mentality as their supervisors. Thus, we predict:

Hypothesis 1. Supervisor BLM is positively related to subordinate BLM.

Positive outcomes of supervisor BLM through subordinate BLM

According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), individuals can be motivated by anticipatory results and can prognosticate which behaviors can lead to desired results. When subordinates are subject to a BLM, they would regard the achievement of the bottom-line as their only goal (Wolfe, 1988). They will relentlessly pursue the bottom-line as if it were the unique deserved goal (Greenbaum et al., 2012). As work performance represents the effectiveness of employees performing activities that contribute to the organization (Borman and Motowidlo, 1997), it is often part of the bottom-line goals. Subordinates with a BLM consider achieving such bottom-line results as a game to be won (Wolfe, 1988). To win the game, they will endeavor to reach the goal, for example, by spending more energy and time. Babalola et al. (2019) find a positive relationship between top management's BLM and subordinates' customer service performance. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2a. Subordinate BLM is positively related to work performance.

Taking the above arguments together, i.e., supervisor BLM promotes subordinate BLM towards bottom-line goals, which in turn is related to their work performance, we propose:

Hypothesis 2b. Supervisor BLM has a positive indirect effect on subordinate work performance through subordinate BLM.

Negative outcomes of supervisor BLM through subordinate BLM

Since subordinates with BLMs would take the bottom-line outcome as their only goal (Quade et al., 2019) and would consider achieving this as the only way to win

(Wolfe, 1988; Greenbaum et al., 2012), we further argue that they tend to exhibit knowledge hiding behaviors to keep their competitive advantage for securing the win. Work-related knowledge is precious, rare, difficult to imitate, and irreplaceable (Curado and Vieira, 2019). The accumulation of work-related knowledge not only can improve an employee's work performance (Wang *et al.*, 2019) but also confer her/him a competitive advantage (Zhao *et al.*, 2016). If the employee shares personal work knowledge with colleagues, her/his competitive advantage will be weakened (Eissa et al., 2018). Subordinates with BLMs are likely to win at all costs (Eissa *et al.*, 2019), let alone withhold or conceal knowledge such as how to more effectively get jobs done to avoid losing the competitive advantage. Thus, we hypothesize as follows:

Hypothesis 3a. Subordinate BLM is positively related to subordinate knowledge hiding.

Taking Hypotheses 1 and 3a together, we argue that subordinate BLM is an important key linking supervisor BLM to knowledge hiding. That is, the effect of supervisor BLM on subordinate knowledge hiding is mediated by subordinate BLM. Hence, we expect:

Hypothesis 3b. Supervisor BLM has a positive indirect effect on subordinate knowledge hiding through subordinate BLM.

The moderating role of gender

Drawing upon social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Koenig, 2006), we propose that subordinate gender may be a significant moderator of how subordinate BLM affects their work performance and knowledge hiding. Social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Koenig, 2006) holds that men and women assume different roles because of their different social structures, statuses and socialization process, i.e., their role expectations are different (Eagly and Wood, 1999). These expectations tend to

become behavioral guidelines for men and women respectively: an agentic pattern for males (e.g., competitive and achievement-oriented) and a communal pattern for females (e.g., relationship and service-oriented) (Eagly and Koenig, 2006). When applied to work, this means that male employees are more inclined to place a higher value on extrinsic rewards in the workplace, such as pay and promotion, while social rewards, such as acceptance and good relations with supervisors and coworkers, are considered more salient for female employees (Kacmar et al., 2011; Ouyang et al., 2015).

Such a role expectation and the behavioral pattern remind male employees of the importance of job performance, which fits well into the bottom-line goals prioritized by male employees with BLMs. This is because work performance is the most important indicator of bottom-line objectives (Babalola *et al.*, 2019), which may also determine employees' rewards, promotion, and higher status in the workplace (Kacmar et al., 2011). Therefore, compared with female employees, male subordinates with BLMs may be more likely to be driven by bottom-line goals and even work harder to achieve job performance. In the meantime, consistent with the agentic pattern for men, male subordinates with BLMs are particularly likely to hide their work-related knowledge because they are more obsessed with competitive thinking in terms of win-loss and the pursuit of personal success and higher status compared to female subordinates (Kacmar et al., 2011). Knowledge hiding can become instrumental in achieving their goals providing male subordinates with a covert way to create or maintain their competitive advantage in the workplace (Pan *et al.*, 2018; Hackett *et al.*, 2018).

In contrast, influenced by a communal pattern (Eagly, 1987), female employees are more empathic and relationship-oriented and emphasize interaction and social

support (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Therefore, compared with male employees, female employees with BLMs may not take increasing individual performance as the only way to achieve the bottom-line goals. On the contrary, to hit the bottom-line objectives, female employees with BLMs may be more inclined to build good relationships and gain support from supervisors and coworkers, in line with the communal behavior pattern for women (Eagly and Koenig, 2006). Accordingly, BLM should be less strongly related to work performance among female subordinates, compared to males. Similarly, female subordinates with BLMs may be less likely to pursue a competitive advantage and career success by hiding work-related knowledge since knowledge hiding conflicts with social role norms and behavioral patterns for females. In other words, female employees with BLMs are more inclined to maintain relationships and find it difficult to refuse requests from colleagues to share knowledge, thereby, reducing knowledge hiding (Nelson and Brown, 2012). Indeed, Heilman and Chen (2005) have shown that altruistic citizenship behaviours, including information sharing, tend to be less optional for women than for men. As such, we propose:

Hypothesis 4a. Subordinate gender moderates the relationship between subordinate BLM and subordinate work performance, such that the positive relationship is stronger for male subordinates than for female subordinates.

Hypothesis 4b. Subordinate gender moderates the relationship between subordinate BLM and subordinate knowledge hiding, such that the positive relationship is stronger for male subordinates than for female subordinates.

Combining H2b, H3b, and H4a, H4b, we suggest a moderated mediation hypothesis. We further predict:

Hypothesis 5a. The indirect positive relationship between supervisor BLM and

subordinate work performance through subordinate BLM is stronger when subordinates are male.

Hypothesis 5b. The indirect positive relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate knowledge hiding through subordinate BLM is stronger when subordinates are male.

Methodology

Sample and procedures

The data were taken from five companies in China and were collected by three waves to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). These five large companies are in insurance, real estate, retail, clothing manufacturing, and communication respectively. The participants were full-time staff working in the sales, human resource, manufacture, and financial departments. We invited 350 subordinates to participate in our survey. We asked subordinates to report their direct supervisors' BLM and their demographic information (including education level, age, tenure, and gender) at Time 1, participants' BLM at Time 2, and their knowledge hiding at Time 3. At Time 3, we also asked their direct supervisors to assess the participants' work performance. Finally, we got 218 valid matching questionnaires from Time1, Time2, and Time3. Each supervisor was only matched with one subordinate. In order to minimize common method biases, we commit to the confidentiality of participants to reduce their assessment worries and social expectations and create a psychological separation in our investigation by disrupting items, using different instructions, and adding fillers between items (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

Measures

A five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) was used to measure all the substantive variables.

Bottom line mentality

A four-item scale developed by Greenbaum et al. (2012) was used to assess supervisors' and subordinates' BLM. A sample item of supervisor BLM is, "My supervisor only cares about the business". A sample item of subordinate BLM is, "I am solely concerned with meeting the bottom line". The supervisor BLM scale's and subordinate BLM scale's reliability were .91 and .81.

Knowledge hiding

To measure subordinates' knowledge hiding, we used the 12-item scale that Connelly *et al.*, (2012) specifically developed to measure Knowledge hiding. The scale opens with the following instruction: "When your coworkers request helpful knowledge and information from you, to what extent you...?" A sample is "told him/her that I would help him/her out later but stalled as much as possible". The scale's reliability was .92.

Work Performance

We used Farh and Cheng's (1997) a four-item scale to measure subordinates' work performance, rated by the subordinates' supervisors (Chen *et al.*, 2010). The measurement has been validated and widely used for much research in different industries in the Chinese context (Chen *et al.*, 2002; Chen *et al.*, 2011). A sample item is "he/she always completes job assignments on time". The reliability of this scale was .90.

Gender

In this study, gender was included as the moderator variable and coded as a dummy variable (0= female, 1=male). In these five companies, female accounted for

53.8%, 37.2%, 54.9%, 37.5% and 54.8% respectively. In total, forty-eight percent of the participants were female.

Control variables

We controlled for subordinate age, tenure, education level, and industries (Peng, 2013).

Result

Preliminary analyses

Prior to the hypotheses analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the validity of scales. A four factors model provided acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2(246) = 486.82$, TLI = .91, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .07). This model was also better than the other models.

We also conducted a one-way analysis of variance to assess the nested effect ((Tepper *et al.*, 2011). The results show that nesting within organizations did not affect the relationships between main variables. To account for the substantial organization-level effects we observed, we created four dummy variables to represent the five companies and included them as statistical controls.

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presented the means, standard deviations, and correlations of all variables. As shown in Table 1, supervisor BLM was positively correlated with subordinate BLM ($r = .14$, $p < .05$). In addition, both work performance ($r = .21$, $p < .01$) and knowledge hiding ($r = .20$, $p < .01$) were positively correlated with subordinate BLM.

Insert **Table 1** here

Mediation Hypothesis Testing

The results of Table 2 show that the four dummy variables did not have a

significant impact on work performance and knowledge hiding. Hypothesis 1 predicts that supervisor BLM will be positively related to subordinate BLM. This hypothesis was supported ($B=.13$, $SE=.06$, $p<.05$, Model 1 in Table 2). Hypothesis 2a supposes that subordinate BLM will be positively related to their work performance; this hypothesis was supported ($B=.24$, $SE=.08$, $p<.01$, model 2 in Table 2). Hypothesis 2b suggests that subordinate BLM will mediate the relation between supervisor BLM and subordinate work performance; we used (Edwards and Lambert, 2007) method to test the mediating effect. The results showed that there was a significant indirect effect of supervisor BLM on work performance via subordinate BLM ($B=.03$, $SE=.02$, 95% bias-corrected CI [.00, .07], excluding zero, Bootstrap=5000, see Table 3).

Model 4 in Table 3 shows the results of the regression analyses to test Hypothesis 3a, the result supported that subordinate BLM is positively related to their knowledge hiding ($B=.12$, $SE=.04$, $p<.01$). The mediating effect of supervisor BLM on subordinate knowledge hiding was significant ($B=.01$, $SE=.01$, 95% bias-corrected CI [.00, .04], excluding zero, Bootstrap=5000, see Table 3). Thus, Hypothesis 3b was supported.

Insert **Table 2** here

Insert **Table 3** here

Moderation and Moderated Mediation Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 4a stated that subordinates' gender moderated the relationship between subordinate BLM and work performance. However, the result shows that this hypothesis was not supported ($B=.40$, $SE=.23$, $p>.05$, see Table 3 Model 3). Hypothesis 4b proposed that subordinates' gender moderated the relationship between subordinate BLM and knowledge hiding. As shown in Table 3 Model 5, the

interaction between subordinate BLM and gender had a significant, positive impact on knowledge hiding ($B=.26$, $SE=.09$, $p<.01$). Figure 2 depicts this moderating effect: for male subordinates, subordinate BLM had a significant impact on knowledge hiding ($B=.25$, $SE=.06$, 95% bias-corrected CI [.13 .37], excluding zero, Bootstrap=5000), while for female, this relationship was not significant ($B=-.00$, $SE=.07$, 95% bias-corrected CI [-.13, .13], including zero, Bootstrap=5000). The difference between the two groups was significant ($B_{diff}=.26$, $SE=.09$, 95% bias-corrected CI [.07, .43], excluding zero, Bootstrap=5000). Taken together, Hypothesis 4b was supported.

Insert **Figure 2** here

H5a and H5b suggested a conditional indirect effect model, in which subordinates' gender moderate the indirect effect of supervisor BLM on work-related outcomes via subordinate BLM. As Table 4 shows, the moderating effect of gender on the indirect relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate work performance was non-significant ($B_{diff} = .03$, $SE = .03$, 95% bias-corrected CI [-.01, .10], including zero, Bootstrap=5000), Hypothesis 5a was not supported. Hypothesis 5b predicts that the indirect (i.e., mediated) effect of supervisor BLM on knowledge hiding varies as a function of gender. As summarized in Table 4, the indirect effect of supervisor BLM on knowledge hiding via subordinate BLM was stronger when participants are male ($B = .03$, $SE = .02$, 95% bias-corrected CI [.00, .07], excluding zero, Bootstrap=5000), but not significant when participants are female ($B = -.00$, $SE = .01$, 95% bias-corrected CI [-.02, .02], including zero, Bootstrap=5000). The difference between the two groups was significant ($B_{diff} = .03$, $SE = .02$, 95% bias-corrected CI [.00, .08], excluding zero, Bootstrap=5000). Thus,

these results support Hypothesis 5b.

Discussion

Integrating the social learning theory and social role theory as our theoretical framework, we propose and test a moderated mediation model to examine the double-edged effects of supervisor BLM on subordinate work-related behaviors. Our empirical results based on multisource time-lagged data ($n = 218$) find that supervisor BLM is positively related to subordinate BLM, which is in turn associated with subordinate work performance and knowledge hiding. Furthermore, subordinate gender moderates the relationship between subordinate BLM and subordinate knowledge hiding and the indirect relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate knowledge hiding via subordinate BLM such that these relationships were more pronounced among male subordinates compared to female subordinates. However, the moderating effect of subordinate gender on the relationship between subordinate BLM and subordinate work performance was not supported -- neither was the indirect relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate job performance via subordinate BLM.

Theoretical implications

Our research has made several important theoretical contributions to the BLM literature. First, we extend the literature on the dark side of BLM by examining subordinate knowledge hiding as a possible negative consequence of supervisor BLM in the workplace. Prior work has provided evidence that supervisor BLM may evoke subordinates to engage in unethical behaviors, e.g., unethical pro-organizational behaviors (Zhang *et al.*, 2020), and social undermining (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012).

However, available research neglects an important behavior, i.e., knowledge hiding, which is very damaging to the innovation and competitiveness of organizations, particularly in the era of the knowledge economy. Our research as the first to investigate this ignored behavior not only complements but also enriches the research on the dark side of BLM. Moreover, it enhances our understanding of the antecedents of knowledge hiding. Previous studies on the antecedents of knowledge hiding behavior have largely focused on organizational contexts, e.g., management support (Lin, 2007), interpersonal and team characteristics (Connelly et al., 2012), and cultural characteristics (Serenko and Bontis, 2016). We extend this line of research by examining from the perspective of a thinking framework, i.e., the impacts of both supervisor and subordinate BLM (Khalid *et al.*, 2018).

Second, by integrating the dark side with the positive outcome of work performance simultaneously, our research provides empirical evidence for the double-edged effects of BLM. Accordingly, this study enriches the BLM literature by examining an important mechanism through which subordinate BLM plays a mediating role in the relationship between supervisor BLM and the double-edged outcomes. Although previous studies have separately explored the positive and negative effects of supervisor BLM, they are from different theoretical perspectives. For example, based on social-cognitive theory, Greenbaum et al. (2012) studied the relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate social undermining. Wheares Babaola et al. (2019) examined the relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate customer service performance, based on social information processing theory. However, no research exists with an integrative theoretical framework to explain the double-edged sword effect of supervisor BLM on employee outcomes. Based on social learning theory, our research is among the first effort to integrate the

same theoretical lens and explain how and when supervisor BLM is related to simultaneously to both positive and negative job-related behaviors. Specifically, we suggest that subordinate BLM serves as the underlying mechanism for connecting supervisor BLM to both the positive and negative workplace outcomes associated with supervisor BLM.

Finally, we identify subordinate gender as a key boundary condition affecting the proposed relationship between supervisor BLM, subordinate BLM, and knowledge hiding. Specifically, we find that, compared with female employees, the indirect positive relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate knowledge hiding through subordinate BLM is stronger when subordinates are male. By so doing, our study advances the BLM literature by bringing in a gender lens. Researchers have previously examined various boundary conditions, e.g., employee conscientiousness (Greenbaum et al., 2012), Machiavellianism (Eissa et al., 2019), moral identity (Mesdaghinia et al., 2019), employee core self-evaluations, and employee ambition (Babalola et al., 2020) of BLM and relevant outcomes. However, few BLM studies have explored the moderating role of gender. Such neglect is unfortunate as gender is an important issue in the workplace (Huang and Gamble, 2005; Huang *et al.*, 2019) with serious managerial implications (Hackett *et al.*, 2018) as the new era has witnessed almost identical percentages of the male and female working population. Moreover, our finding that the detrimental effects of supervisor BLM on subordinate' unethical behavior (e.g., knowledge hiding) differ between gender reminds managers to pay attention to subordinates' gender and the behavioral outcomes when they emphasize achieving the bottom-line goals.

In contrast to our hypothesis, our results show that the relationship between subordinate BLM and work performance and the entire indirect effect is not affected

by gender. This may be due to the fact that both male and female employees are under the same pressure to perform if they are pushed by their supervisors to adopt a BLM, regardless of their gender, since realizing the bottom-line goals often includes performance. Performance is more explicit and can be observed by leaders and colleagues (Wang *et al.*, 2019; Singh, 2019) , which is often related to rewards and promotion (Salamon and Robinson, 2008). The meta-analyses showed that there is no significant difference between gender in job performance (Mackey *et al.*, 2019; Roth *et al.*, 2012). We suggest future research to explore the complex picture of gender, behavioral pattern, and job performance.

Practical implications

Our findings have several implications for practitioners. First, managers should pay attention to the potential negative consequences of supervisor BLM as our double-edged outcomes suggest. Pursuing the bottom-line by managers is often assumed to bring profits to organizations and can even improve employees' work performance (Wahid and Mohd. Mustamil, 2017). In the meantime, such a mentality may generate negative behaviors such as knowledge hiding in the workplace. Managers should be aware of this possibility and try to reduce the negative behavior that employees may exercise while pursuing bottom-line results.

Second, our finding that the effects of BLM on subordinate behavior, both negative and positive, is through subordinate BLM, managers should be aware that subordinates will imitate the manager's mentality by observing learning. For managers, it is thus necessary to emphasize the balance between appropriate behavior and bottom-line goals. For example, managers should communicate with subordinates that even as the bottom-line goal is important, so is the manner of implementation (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012).

Third, organizations should pay more attention to male employees because they are more likely to engage in knowledge hiding, probably due to their more care about winning the game and pursuing bottom-line goals as the only goals. Therefore, managers should think about how to help them cope with BLM, such as by adjusting their role expectations at work (Lee *et al.*, 2017) and a win-lose mentality.

Limitations and future directions

Our study has several limitations. First, in common with previous studies, although we use multi-source multi-stage data, the causal relationship between the variables of this study cannot be fully tested (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). Future research can examine the impact of subordinate mentality on supervisor mentality (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). Second, we conducted this research in China, in which the cultural influence, e.g., on gendered social role expectations, may be more manifest (Huang and Gamble, 2015). Future research could compare the findings from different countries and regions. Finally, further research should consider other possible negative outcomes of BLM.

Conclusion

Our study investigates the double-edged effects of supervisor bottom-line mentality on subordinates' work-related behaviors, namely, work performance and knowledge hiding. By drawing on social learning theory and social role theory, our paper shows that supervisor BLM is associated with subordinate BLM, which is related to employee performance and hiding work-related knowledge. Furthermore, the effect of BLM on knowledge hiding is significant for male employees. Managers should recognize and manage the potential both positive and negative impacts of pursuing bottom-line goals by bearing gender differences in mind.

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