

Bottom-Line pursuits invade your family: the spillover effect of supervisor bottom-line mentality on employee work-to-family conflict

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### Funding

This research was funded by Humanity and Social Science Foundation of the Ministry of Education of China (20YJA630072, 20YJC630221), Philosophy and Social Science Foundation of

Guangdong Province (GD19CGL15), Philosophy and Social Science Foundation of Guangxi (20FGL042), Guangdong Basic and Applied Basic Research Foundation(2019A1515010727), Wuzhou University Research Foundation for Advanced Talents (WZUQDJJ17137), and the Project of Guangdong Provincial Humanities and Social Sciences Key Research Base (18JD07).

### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Informed Consent** Oral informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

**Conflicts of Interest** All authors declare no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship or the publication of this article

### Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

## **Abstract**

*Purpose* – The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between supervisor bottom-line mentality (BLM) and employee work-to-family conflict (WFC) through employee psychological detachment, and the moderating role of employee trait optimism.

*Design/methodology/approach* – The research model was empirically tested using a sample of 225 two-wave data gathered from five Chinese companies.

*Findings* – The results revealed that employee psychological detachment mediated the impact of supervisor BLM on employee WFC. Moreover, employee trait optimism buffered the negative relationship between supervisor BLM and employee psychological detachment and the indirect effect of supervisor BLM on employee WFC through employee psychological detachment.

*Practical implications* – Supervisors should pay more attention to the spillover effect of supervisor BLM on employees' family life, and take some training measures to help employees effectively psychological detach from supervisor BLM.

*Originality/value* –The findings, therefore, provide a more comprehensive understanding of the adverse effects of supervisor BLM beyond the work domain and the buffering role of employee trait optimism on work-family intervention.

**Keywords:** Supervisor Bottom-Line Mentality, Work-To-Family Conflict, Psychological Detachment, Trait Optimism, The Stressor-Detachment Model

**Article Type:** Research paper

## **Introduction**

When facing a highly challenging business environment, organizations increasingly

rely on certain bottom-line goals (e.g. profits) to gain and sustain competitive advantages (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2020; Wolfe, 1988). Accordingly, supervisor bottom-line mentality (BLM), which reflects “one-dimensional thinking that revolves around securing bottom-line outcomes to the neglect of competing priorities” (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012), is prevalent in companies (Bonner *et al.*, 2017). Recent literature suggests that supervisor BLM may enhance employee customer service performance (Babalola *et al.*, 2019), task performance (Zhang *et al.*, 2021), and employee thriving at work (Babalola *et al.*, 2020a). Although much emphasis has been on the “bright side” of supervisor BLM, some researchers have disclosed the potentially negative effects of supervisor BLM on employee work-related outcomes, such as coworker-directed unethical behavior (Babalola *et al.*, 2020b; Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012; Zhang *et al.*, 2021) and customer-directed unethical behavior (Babalola *et al.*, 2019).

A few recent studies have started to explore the detrimental impacts of supervisor BLM, as a stressor, on employees beyond the work domain (Babalola *et al.*, 2020a; Quade *et al.*, 2021). Supervisor BLM signals and encourages employees to use whatever means necessary to compete and win - achieving bottom-line goals (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). The stressor from supervisors may be long-lasting and prevent employees from effectively responding to family demands even after they leave a company (Quade *et al.*, 2021) and thus resulting in work to family conflict (Quade *et al.*, 2019). Work-to-family conflict (WFC), defined as the extent to which role pressures from work domains bring about inter-role conflict and tension in home domains (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985), has long been a key outcome of research exploring the spillover effects of negative workplace stressors on the family domain

(e.g. Chen, 2018; Qin *et al.*, 2018). Employees today experience an overwhelming and substantial integration of family and work requirements (Powell *et al.*, 2019). The spillover of workplace stressors such as supervisor BLM on the family field including WFC may be inevitable (Quade *et al.*, 2021). As an important determinant of well-being, physical health, and job performance (Amstad *et al.*, 2011; Frone *et al.*, 1992; Marchese *et al.*, 2002), WFC has drawn the attention of many leading world businesses to intervene and solve these conflicts (Hsieh, 2011). However, little is known about how BLM may have a spillover effect on WFC. An understanding of this critical oversight, i.e. how and when supervisor BLM might impact WFC, is both theoretically and practically important.

In this study, we aim to address the above gaps by drawing on the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag, 2010; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015 ) as our main theoretical framework to understand the spillover effects of supervisor BLM on WFC. This model emphasizes that continuous activation of work-related stressors hampers employees psychologically detaching from work during nonwork time and thus negatively influences one's work-family state (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015). We defined psychological detachment as disengaging oneself psychologically from work when being away from the workplace during nonwork time (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). Psychological detachment acts as a mediator in this stressor-strain process and explains why work stressors, such as supervisor BLM, might be related to employee WFC. Accordingly, we propose that employees subjected to supervisor BLM may experience psychological detachment difficulty from work, which, in turn, results in increased WFC.

Moreover, drawing on the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag, 2010; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015 ), when a stressor is assessed to be surmountable, its impact on psychological detachment will be reduced (Sonnentag, 2010). This evaluation process may be influenced by the trait optimism of an individual, which is an individual's positive attitude toward the future (Carver *et al.*, 2010). Optimistic employees perceive supervisor BLM more positively and have more confidence to cope with bottom-line objectives, and thus they are more likely to maintain a clear mental boundary between work and family and achieve psychological detachment from work (Luthans *et al.*, 2005), which in turn reduces their WFC. Therefore, we further theorize that the relationship between supervisor BLM and employee psychological detachment and, consequently, the indirect relationship between supervisor BLM and employee WFC, mediated by psychological detachment, vary according to employee trait optimism. Figure 1 demonstrates our conceptual model.

Insert **Figure 1** here

This study hopes to make three main contributions. First, this research is among the early effort to explore the ill spillover effects of supervisor BLM on employees beyond the workplace in their family domains, i.e. WFC, and thus enriches the BLM literature. Recent research on supervisor BLM has dominantly focused on its effects on work-related outcomes (e.g. Babalola *et al.*, 2019; Quade *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2020) probably except Babalola *et al.* (2020a) and Quade *et al.* (2021).

Second, we provide a novel perspective, that is, the stressor-detachment perspective, to reveal the underlying mechanisms of the negative impact of supervisor BLM on employee WFC by considering psychological detachment as a mediator. Previous studies on the relationship between supervisor BLM and employee

nonwork-related outcomes tend to be mainly rooted in social information processing theory (Babalola *et al.*, 2020b) or conservation of resources theory (COR) (Quade *et al.*, 2021). Our new theoretical angle complements and enriches prior perspectives for understanding the ill effects of supervisor BLM across domains. Our work provides a sound foundation for potential interventions for researchers and practitioners to mitigate this spillover effect of supervisor BLM on the family domain through psychological detachment.

Finally, by identifying employee trait optimism as a possible buffering variable when examining the spillover effect of supervisor BLM, our study illustrates that individual differences might affect the ill effects of supervisor BLM on nonwork outcomes. Furthermore, our work answers call for more research on the moderating conditions that determine whether workplace stressors (e.g. supervisor BLM) are equally detrimental to everyone in all situations (e.g. Zhou *et al.*, 2020). [Establishing the moderating role of trait optimism can also help organizations identify which employees are more likely to detach from work stress and effectively deal with work-family role changes when facing supervisor BLM.](#)

## **Theory and hypotheses**

### *Supervisor BLM and employee psychological detachment*

[Supervisors with high BLM tend to only focus on one particular factor such as profitability as being most important but neglect others \(Greenbaum \*et al.\*, 2012; Wolfe, 1988\).](#) If employees fail to achieve their supervisors' bottom-line goals, they may face the risk of losing resources controlled by their supervisors (Nedkovski *et al.*, 2017) or even punishment, e.g., lost job opportunities. [Prior study has shown that supervisor BLM might threaten employee self-worth \(Babalola \*et al.\*, 2019\), increase](#)

job insecurity (Zhang *et al.*, 2021), be related to insomnia at home (Babalola *et al.*, 2020), and more specifically WFC (Quade *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, supervisor BLM can be a stressor in the workplace (Babalola *et al.*, 2020a; Quade *et al.*, 2021).

According to the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag, 2010; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015), stressors in the workplace, such as supervisor BLM, can trigger negative activations, leading to psychological detachment difficulty even after employees leave the workplace. First, supervisors with a win-loss mentality will create a climate of excessive competition in an organization, where employees are often under pressure to worry about the consequences of not meeting bottom-line goals, e.g., losing their competitive advantage or job opportunities in the organization (Bonner *et al.*, 2017). Such stress is often long-lasting, even beyond nonwork time.

Second, a supervisor with high BLM may make employees' negative emotions such as worry and anxiety, worse, since these supervisors can view anyone and everyone as an opponent (Callahan, 2004; Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). Thus, employees may be trapped by negative affect and elevated physiological stress responses, making them less likely to participate in physical exercises or engage in activities that are different from their work, which can foster a state of non-detachment after work.

Finally, because bottom-line objectives are linked to personal success and well-being, employees who face supervisor BLM are more likely to think about how to meet high demands, even after work. Thus, employees may spend extra time and energy (such as off-duty time) thinking about and completing supervisors' bottom-line goals, all of which imply a lack of detachment from work (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015). In other words, supervisor BLM, as a long-lasting stressor, blurs employees' cognitive boundaries between their work and nonwork domains,



hindering their mental detachment from work even when they have left the workplace (Ng and Wang, 2019). Therefore, we predict the following:

*H1. Supervisor BLM is negatively related to employee psychological detachment  
Employee psychological detachment and WFC.*

We argued above, supervisors with high BLM can lead to low psychological detachment of employees. We explain further that employees with low detachment tend to have high WFC.

Psychological detachment, as a mental process, helps to stop being trapped by job-related issues (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015). Creating a clear cognitive boundary between work and nonwork gives employees time to refill their energy and affective resources when they are mentally away from work (Sonnentag, 2010; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015 ). On the contrary, a lack of detachment can prevent them from recovering from negative experiences caused by job stressors, leading to psychological strains and behavioral strains, in this paper, WFC.

WFC arises when work requirements interfere with personal abilities to meet the demands of his or her family (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). There are three types of WFC. Specifically, time-based WFC occurs when employees' working hours occupy the time they need to fulfil their family responsibilities; strain-based WFC occurs when work roles clash with family roles that employees are expected to perform; and behavior-based WFC occurs when employees' work behaviors become incompatible with their behaviors expected in their family role (Zhou *et al.*, 2020).

Employees experiencing low psychological detachment may continue to think about work or work-related activities (Haun *et al.*, 2018; Meijman and Mulder, 1998 ) even after they leave their companies. Therefore, they are more likely to face three

situations where WFC can arise. First, employees spend extra time and energy thinking about work issues during nonworking hours, which will inevitably reduce their resources for the fulfillment of family responsibilities and induce time-based WFC. Second, employees cannot detach from the pressures of their job roles, resulting in emotional or physical stress (Kilroy *et al.*, 2020), which will induce strain-based WFC. Finally, employees who cannot detach from work will take their work behaviors home, and these behaviors may conflict with family behaviors, thereby arousing behavior-based WFC. Previous studies have also shown that low psychological detachment predicts high WFC (Demsky *et al.*, 2014; Zhou *et al.*, 2020). Thus, we suggest the following:

*H2. Employee psychological detachment is negatively related to WFC.*

*The mediating role of psychological detachment*

The stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015) suggests that employees troubled by workplace stressors may experience more negative activations after regular working hours. Negative activations prevent their psychological detachment in terms of not thinking about work-related matters after office hours. Such detachment difficulty may lead to physiological strains, psychological strains, and behavioral strains. Based on the above theoretical logic, we suggest that psychological detachment may play a mediating role in the relationship between supervisor BLM and employee WFC.

Specifically, when facing high BLM supervisors, employees are more likely to experience negative activations and consequently are unable to detach from work even leaving companies. Employees with psychological detachment difficulty often ruminate about work-related tasks, talk with others about their work-related

experiences, and even attempt to conduct work-related activities. These can constrain employees' abilities to meet the demands of their families, thus increasing WFC. Prior study has shown that psychological detachment played a mediating role in the relationship between workplace stressors, e.g. illegitimate tasks (Zhou *et al.*, 2020) and WFC. Thus, we suggest the following:

*H3.* Supervisor BLM has an indirect effect on employee WFC through psychological detachment.

*The moderating role of employee trait optimism*

The stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag, 2010; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015) suggests that the process of work stress affecting psychological detachment may be influenced by personal factors. When individuals believe work pressure is controllable, their psychological detachment may be less affected by work pressure (Carver *et al.*, 2010). Trait optimism reflects the degree of people's positive expectations for the future. Individuals with optimistic traits are more optimistic about pressure and will be more positive about their future (Kuzmanovic *et al.*, 2014).

When faced with supervisor BLM, optimists are more prone to be immune to work pressure for two key reasons. First, an optimistic nature may affect an employee's assessment of stressors (Antonakis *et al.*, 2012), who is unlikely to regard failure to reach bottom-line goals as a personal threat. Employees who have a high level of trait optimism view things more positively and are inclined to expect positive results (Bleil *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, they may be less likely to worry that their supervisors' BLM will have a detrimental impact on their future, which in turn will produce fewer negative activations or ruminations (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). Second, optimistic employees are more confident that they have more ways to cope with stress, which weakens negative reactions to stress (Aspinwall and Taylor, 1992;

Griva and Anagnostopoulos, 2010). Thus, in the face of supervisor BLM, optimistic subordinates have fewer negative activations or ruminations because they are able to establish a clear boundary between work and family. Therefore, when coming across supervisor BLM, optimistic employees are more likely to experience psychological detachment from stress. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

*H4.* Employee trait optimism moderates the relationship between supervisor BLM and employee psychological detachment and thus a negative relationship is weaker for employees who have a high level of trait optimism.

Based on hypotheses H3 and H4, we propose a moderation mediation model in which supervisor BLM affects employee WFC through psychological detachment, and employee trait optimism moderates the relationship between supervisor BLM and employee psychological detachment (Edwards and Lambert, 2007). Thus, it is logical to believe that employee trait optimism also moderates the strength of the mediating function of employee psychological detachment in the relationship between supervisor BLM and employee WFC. Employees who have a high level of optimism are less likely to worry about their ability to meet the requirements of supervisor BLM, so they are more likely to experience psychological detachment from work, which is less likely to result in the spillover of BLM into their non-work domains, thus reduced WFC. As such, we propose the following:

*H5.* The indirect relationship between supervisor BLM and employee WFC through psychological detachment is weaker when employees have a high level of trait optimism.

## **Methodology**

### *Sample and materials*

We surveyed five large companies located in south China from several different industries (commercial bank, green facilities, clothing manufacturing, real estate agency, and insurance, respectively), by convenience sampling. Before the survey, we discussed with top management teams and HR departments in these companies about our research purpose and potential benefits and they supported and granted us access. These companies had at least 200 employees and have been in operation for over six years. The human resource managers helped us post our participation recruitment messages through their internal communication platform. All the surveys were conducted by an online system; the links to questionnaires were sent to participants by e-mail, through which participants could log on to the online questionnaires. Finally, we recruited a total of 350 voluntary participants and obtained their e-mail addresses. The participants were white-collar employees working in the administrative, sales, and customer service departments.

In order to reduce possible common method bias (CMB), we collected data in two waves (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). At Time 1, questionnaires were distributed to 350 employees, and 276 completed questionnaires were returned (response rate: 78.86%). Employees reported on their direct supervisors' BLM, their psychological detachment, and their demographic information. One month later, at Time 2, questionnaires were distributed to the 276 employees who completed the questionnaires at **Time 1**, and 225 complete questionnaires were returned (response rate: 81.52%). Employees reported on their trait optimism and perceived WFC. **Moreover, to further minimize common method bias, we assured participants of confidentiality to reduce their**

anxiety and social bias. We also used different instructions and added fillers between items for creating a psychological separation in our questionnaires (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Finally, we followed Lance *et al.*'s (2000) recommendation to examine whether response attribution created any detectable differences in the sample by conducting a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The results showed no statistically significant differences between the group that completed both wave surveys (n = 225) and the group that only completed the T1 survey (n = 276) in terms of age, gender, organizational tenure, marital status, number of children, duration of work under their current supervisor or our focal constructs. Therefore, attrition bias was not apparent in our sample.

In the final sample, 59.11% of respondents were women. The age distribution of the respondents was as follows: under 20 years old, 0.89%; 21–30 years old, 39.11%; 31–40 years old, 44.44%; 41–50 years old, 14.67%; older than 51, 0.89%. A total of 22.67% of respondents had worked for their company for less than 1 year, 30.67% for 1–3 years, 20.00% for 3–5 years, 20.89% for 5–10 years, 4.89% for 10–15 years and 0.89% for more than 15 years. A total of 26.22% of respondents had worked with their supervisor for less than 1 year, 41.33% for 1–3 years, 18.67% for 3–5 years, 13.33% for 5–10 years, and 0.44% for 10–15 years. A total of 59.11% of the participants were married, and 48.00% of respondents had dependents under 18 years of age. We created four dummy-coded variables in our analyses, as mentioned above, our data were collected from five companies.

### *Measures*

The five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used in this study.

*Supervisor Bottom Line Mentality.* We used Greenbaum *et al.*'s (2012) four-item scale to measure supervisor BLM. A sample item is "My direct supervisor only cares about the business".

*Psychological Detachment.* To measure participants' psychological detachment, we used the four items developed by Sonnentag and Fritz (2007). A sample item is "After working hours, I did not think about work at all".

*Trait Optimism.* Trait optimism was assessed using three items from the Life Orientation Test (LOT; Luthans *et al.*, 2007). A sample item is "I'm always optimistic about my future".

*WFC.* Following Carlson *et al.*'s (2000) study, a 9-item scale was used to measure WFC. A sample item is "Tension and anxiety from work often creep into my family life".

*Controls.* We also collected information on the participants' gender, age, tenure, duration of work under their current supervisor, marital status, and dependents under 18 years of age.

### *Analytical strategies*

First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the discriminant validity of the central variables in this study. Second, we used Mplus 7.4 to test the moderated mediation model by following Preacher *et al.*'s (2007) suggestions. To test the indirect effects and conditional indirect effects, we used the bootstrapping-based approach with 5,000 replications to create 95% confidence intervals for significance testing (Edwards and Lambert, 2007).

## **Results**

### *Confirmatory factor analyses*

We conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to assess the divergent validity of our focal constructs. A four-factor model provided a better fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 337.80$ ,  $df = 164$ ; RMSEA = 0.076; TLI = 0.91, CFI = 0.92) than the other alternative models (see Table 1). Therefore, we are confident that supervisor BLM, psychological detachment, trait optimism, and WFC are empirically distinct, as expected.

Insert **Table 1** here

In addition, we adopted Harman's single latent factor approach to test the potential CMB. As shown in Table 1, all the goodness-of-fit measures indicated a bad fit for the one-factor model ( $\chi^2 = 1741.23$ ,  $df = 170$ ; RMSEA = 0.20; TLI = 0.38, CFI = 0.44). The Chi-squared difference also indicated that the four-factor model yielded a significant better fit than the one-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 1403.43$ ;  $\Delta df = 6$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that CMB was not problematic in this study.

#### *Descriptive statistics*

As illustrated in Table 2, supervisor BLM was negatively associated with employee psychological detachment ( $r = -0.20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and employee psychological detachment was negatively associated with employee WFC ( $r = -0.33$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Insert **Table 2** here

#### *Mediation hypothesis testing*

Hypothesis 1 predicted that supervisor BLM would be negatively related to employee psychological detachment. This hypothesis was supported ( $B = -0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , Model 1 in Table 3). Hypothesis 2 suggested that employee psychological detachment would be negatively related to WFC. This hypothesis was supported ( $B =$



-0.23,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , Model 2 in Table 3). Hypothesis 3 suggested that employee psychological detachment would mediate the relation between supervisor BLM and employee WFC. The results of the parameter-based bootstrapping suggested that there was a significant indirect effect of supervisor BLM on employee WFC via psychological detachment ( $B = 0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95% CI [0.01, 0.10]), as shown in Table 4. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Insert **Table 3** here

Insert **Table 4** here

#### *Moderated mediation hypothesis testing*

Hypothesis 4 stated that employee trait optimism moderated the relationship between supervisor BLM and employee psychological detachment. The interaction between supervisor BLM and employee trait optimism had a significant impact on employee psychological detachment ( $B = 0.28$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), as present in Table 3, Model 3. Figure 2 depicts the simple slopes. Regarding employees who had lower trait optimism, supervisor BLM had a significant impact on employee psychological detachment (-1 SD; simple slope = -0.40,  $p < 0.01$ ), but for employees who had higher trait optimism, this relationship was not significant (+1 SD; simple slope = 0.01,  $SE = 0.09$ , *n.s.*). The difference between the two groups was significant ( $B_{diff} = 0.41$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ , 95% CI [0.14, 0.64]). Accordingly, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Insert **Figure 2** here

Hypothesis 5 suggested a moderated mediation model in which employee trait optimism moderates the indirect effect of supervisor BLM on employee WFC via employee psychological detachment. As Table 4 shows, the moderating effect of trait optimism on the indirect relationship between supervisor BLM and employee WFC

was stronger when employees had lower trait optimism (-1 SD; indirect effect = 0.09, 95% CI [0.03, 0.17]) but was not significant when employees had higher trait optimism (+1 SD; indirect effect = -0.00, 95% CI [-0.05, 0.04]). The difference in the indirect effect of supervisor BLM on WFC was significant ( $B_{diff} = -0.09$ , 95% CI [-0.19, -0.03]). Thus, these results support Hypothesis 5.

## **Discussion**

Based on the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag, 2010; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015), our study provides insight into how and when supervisor BLM might affect employee WFC. Our analysis based on a two-wave survey found that supervisor BLM leads to employee WFC by inhibiting psychological detachment. Moreover, employee trait optimism buffers the negative relationship between supervisor BLM and employee psychological detachment and the indirect effect of supervisor BLM on employee WFC via psychological detachment.

### *Theoretical implications*

Our study makes three contributions. First, by demonstrating that supervisor BLM might lead to employee WFC, we are among the early researchers to explore the adverse effects of supervisor BLM from the work domain to the family domain. In previous studies, many scholars have long been concerned about the impacts of supervisor BLM on work-related outcomes, such as social undermining behavior (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012), unethical pro-organizational behaviors (Zhang *et al.*, 2021), task performance (Quade *et al.*, 2019) and team performance (Lin *et al.*, 2021). However, there are few studies or explorations of the spillover effects of supervisor BLM on employee family domain except Babalola *et al.* (2020a) and Quade *et al.* (2021), to the best of our knowledge. By linking supervisor BLM to employee WFC,

our study not only answers Greenbaum *et al.*'s (2012) call to explore the negative impacts of supervisor BLM but also provides a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of supervisor BLM (Quade *et al.*, 2021). Our findings also corroborate and extend the extant leadership or supervision literature (e.g. Braun and Nieberle, 2017; Carlson *et al.*, 2012; Liao *et al.*, 2015; Ten Brummelhuis *et al.*, 2014), in that the effects of different types of leadership (e.g. abusive supervision, ethical leadership, and authentic leadership) would spill over to employees' family domains.

Second, by proposing and testing the mediating effect of psychological detachment, this study offers a new perspective to understand how the detrimental effects of supervisor BLM might impact employees beyond the work domain through the psychological mechanism. Available studies have mainly drawn on social information processing theory (Babalola *et al.*, 2020a) and conservation of resources theory (COR) (Quade *et al.*, 2021), which are useful to understand the adverse impacts of supervisor BLM on employee nonwork outcomes. For example, research building on social information processing theory has argued that supervisor BLM is positively related to employee perceptions of a competitive climate, which leads to employee insomnia outside work (Babalola *et al.*, 2020a). However, social information processing theory focuses on work-related attitudes and behaviors within an organizational environment (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978) where a perceived competitive climate simply represents employees' perceptions of "organizational rewards to be contingent on comparisons of their performance against that of their peers" (Brown *et al.*, 1998: 89). The effects of a perceived competitive climate may not be transferred from work to family.

Similarly, research building upon COR theory posits that supervisor BLM depletes an employee's personal resources causing difficulty for employees to cope

with family demands (Quade *et al.*, 2021). Our study finds that a lack of psychological detachment prevents employees who are affected by supervisor BLM from replenishing their resources and accounts for their high degrees of WFC. Psychological detachment is a concept that captures why employees cannot escape supervisor BLM or mentally disengage from work during their off-hours (Sonnentag and Kühnel, 2016). Therefore, our research enriches and complements the available research for a better understanding of the spillover effects of supervisor BLM across domains. This study also responds to the call for more research on the conditions when low psychological detachment may occur (Dettmers, 2017; Sanz-Vergel *et al.*, 2011) by adding supervisor BLM as a new antecedent to the literature and complementing previous research, which has considered obvious stressors such as illegitimate tasks (Zhou *et al.*, 2020) as the main causes of psychological detachment.

Third, by investigating the moderating role of employee trait optimism in the relationship between supervisor BLM, psychological detachment and employee WFC, this study identifies important but neglected individual differences that explain why employees respond differently to supervisor BLM. Our results show that when employees had lower trait optimism, the indirect relationship between supervisor BLM and employee WFC via psychological detachment was stronger. However, when employees had higher trait optimism, the indirect effect was not significant. This implies that the spillover effect of supervisor BLM on employee WFC through psychological detachment is likely to occur among employees with low optimism. Thus, this study furthers the understanding of when supervisor BLM is most likely to yield negative nonwork-related outcomes for the employee. Moreover, by investigating the moderating effect of employee trait optimism, our study responds to the calls for future studies on the boundary conditions that answer whether workplace

stressors (e.g. supervisor BLM) are equally detrimental to everyone in all contexts (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2015).

### *Practical implications*

Our research has several practical implications. First, it is generally believed that a supervisor with high BLM can generate profits for an organization (Wolfe, 1988). However, our research indicates that supervisor BLM may affect the family life of employees. Therefore, organizations and managers should be aware that while BLM seems instrumental in achieving certain objectives, it can also lead to undesirable consequences. When supervisors pursue bottom-line goals, they should keep an eye on whether BLM may become a stressor spilling over employee family, i.e. WFC.

Second, the finding that psychological detachment is an important process through which supervisor BLM influences employees' WFC reminds organizations to help their employees maintain work and non-work boundaries. For example, by training employees on how to cope with bottom-line pressures and enhance their psychological control, organizations can guide employees on how to psychologically detach from work tasks when off work. In addition, organizations can discourage managers to contact employees during nonworking hours, helping them draw a clear boundary between work and nonwork.

Third, the finding that employees with low optimism are more likely to be affected by supervisor BLM, resulting in lower psychological detachment but higher WFC indicates organizations should do more to help them. Managers should give these employees more emotional support and help them reduce any psychological distress caused by bottom-line objectives.

### *Limitations and future directions*

Our research has several limitations. First, although our two-wave research design enables stronger causal inferences than the cross-sectional, there is the possibility that common method bias may have influenced our results. Future research could consider using longitudinal or even experimental studies to prove causality. Second, our study explains the spillover effect of supervisor BLM on employee WFC by following the stressor-detachment model. Since supervisor BLM is a source of stress for employees, future research can consider the stress perspectives, e.g., the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), to better elaborate on the detrimental effects of supervisor BLM on employee WFC. Finally, our paper focuses only on the moderating effect of employee trait optimism. Other personality traits (e.g. conscientiousness) or contextual conditions (e.g. leader-member exchange) may also play important roles in buffering the detrimental effects of supervisor BLM. Therefore, we encourage future research to further examine other possible moderators when exploring the spillover effects of supervisor BLM on employee outcomes in the nonwork domain.

### *Conclusion*

Our research shows that supervisor BLM can lead to employee WFC by impeding psychological detachment. Furthermore, employees low in trait optimism are particularly more likely to struggle with psychological detachment difficulty and perceive more WFC, provoked by high BLM supervisors, than those high in trait optimism. The current research contributes to the BLM literature by offering a new perspective on how and when the ill effects of supervisor BLM might extend to the employee family domain. It highlights that organizations and managers should comprehend the adverse impacts of supervisor BLM and help employees detach from

the stressor of bottom-line pursuits, ultimately, aiding them to successfully balance their work and family demands.

### **Appendix. Measurement items**

#### **Supervisor Bottom Line Mentality** (Greenbaum et al., 2012):

“My direct supervisor treats the bottom line as more important than anything else.”

“My direct supervisor only cares about the business.”

“My direct supervisor is solely concerned with meeting the bottom line.”

“My direct supervisor cares more about profits than employee well-being.”

#### **Psychological Detachment** (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007):

“After working hours, I forgot about work.”

“After working hours, I did not think about work at all.”

“After working hours, I distance myself from my work.”

“After working hours, I got a break from the demands of work.”

#### **Trait Optimism** (Luthans et al., 2007):

“I’m always optimistic about my future.”

“I hardly ever expect things to go my way (R).”

“I rarely count on good things happening to me (R).”

#### **Work-to-Family Conflict** (Carlson et al. 2000):

“The stress from my job often makes me irritable when I get home.”

“When I get home from work I am often too physically tired to participate in family activities/responsibilities.”

“Tension and anxiety from work often creep into my family life.”

“I often feel I am rushing to get my nonwork responsibilities taken care of in order to get back to work.”

“I am often stressed trying to balance my responsibilities when work interferes with the rest of my life.”

“I am often so emotionally drained when I get home from work that it prevents me from contributing to my family.”

“I am often preoccupied with work while I am at home.”

“Due to all the pressures at work, sometimes when I come home I am too stressed to do the things I enjoy.”

“Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by all of my responsibilities at work.”

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**Table 1** Comparison of Measurement Models

<b>Model</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2/df$	<b>RMSEA</b>	<b>CFI</b>	<b>TLI</b>
Model 1	Four factors: BLM, PD, TO, WFC	337.80	164	2.06	0.076	0.92	0.91
Model 2	Three factors: BLM+PD, TO,WFC	950.75	167	5.69	0.14	0.72	0.68
Model3	Two factors: BLM+PD+TO,WFC	1494.66	169	8.84	0.19	0.53	0.47
Model 4	One factor: BLM+PD+TO+WFC	1741.23	170	10.24	0.20	0.44	0.38

*Notes:* N=225. BLM= bottom-line mentality, PD=psychological detachment, TO= trait optimism, WFC= work-family conflict, += combined into one factor.



**Table 2** Descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, and reliabilities

Variable <sup>a</sup>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Gender	1.59	0.49														
2. Age	2.76	0.74	-0.08													
3. Tenure	2.57	1.23	-.02	.37**												
4. Work together	2.20	0.99	-.02	.30**	.68**											
5. Marital	1.41	0.49	-.01	-.59**	-.37**	-.27**										
6. Child	1.52	0.50	.11	-.40**	-.25**	-.13*	.71**									
7. Dummy1	0.38	0.49	.25**	.04	-.16*	-.03	-.00	.06								
8. Dummy2	0.16	0.36	.16*	.01	.12	-.03	-.06	-.05	-.34**							
9. Dummy3	0.14	0.35	-.30**	.17*	.09	.23**	-.12	-.18**	-.31**	-.17**						
10. Dummy4	0.18	0.38	-.16*	-.13	-.18**	-.11	.13*	.12	-.37**	-.20**	-.19**					
11. BLM	3.03	0.87	-.01	.08	.08	.14*	-.07	-.09	-.11	-.03	.06	.08	(0.89)			
12. PD	2.78	0.83	.14*	-.10	.08	.08	.04	.10	.11	-.14*	-.04	-.08	-.20**	(0.90)		
13. TO	3.51	0.72	-.02	.06	.08	.07	-.01	-.05	-.10	.04	.07	.13	.19**	-.22**	(0.84)	
14. WFC	2.71	0.64	-.04	-.08	-.04	.00	.11	.04	-.10	.06	.01	.01	.30**	-.33**	-.22**	(0.89)

Notes: *N*=225. Coefficient alphas are given in parentheses on the diagonal.

<sup>a</sup> BLM= bottom-line mentality, PD=psychological detachment, TO= trait optimism, WFC= work-family conflict

<sup>b</sup> Females were coded as 2, and males were coded as 1.

\*\**p*<.01

\**p*<.05

**Table3** Regression results for moderated mediation path models

Variable <sup>a</sup>	Model 1		Model 2		Model3	
	PD		WFC		PD	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Gender <sup>b</sup>	0.23	0.12	-0.01	0.09	0.31**	0.11
Age	-0.15	0.09	-0.06	0.07	-0.15	0.08
Tenure	0.05	0.07	-0.03	0.05	0.09	0.07
Work together with supervisor	0.07	0.08	0.05	0.06	0.04	0.09
Marital Status	-0.13	0.17	0.13	0.13	-0.07	0.18
Child	0.15	0.15	-0.01	0.11	0.13	0.15
Dummy1	-0.16	0.17	-0.16	0.13	-0.18	0.18
Dummy2	-0.55**	0.19	-0.08	0.14	-0.51**	0.18
Dummy3	-0.20	0.21	-0.14	0.16	-0.13	0.23
Dummy4	-0.29	0.19	-0.21	0.14	-0.27	0.21
BLM	-0.20**	0.06	0.18**	0.05	-0.20**	0.07
PD			-0.23**	0.05		
TO					-0.25**	0.09
BLM×TO					0.28**	0.09
$\chi^2$	109.49		59.44		60.73	
df	25		13		13	
AIC	1474.38		903.16		520.33	
BIC	1532.45		957.82		571.57	
Sample-size adjusted BIC	1478.58		907.11		524.03	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.13**		0.20**		0.24**	

Note:  $N=225$ . \*\* $p<.01$ ; \* $p<.05$

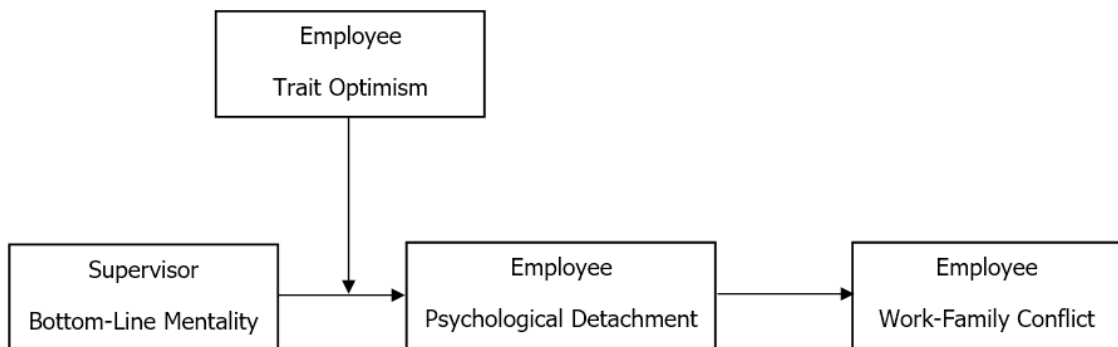
<sup>a</sup> BLM= bottom-line mentality, PD=psychological detachment, TO= trait optimism, WFC= work-to-family conflict

<sup>b</sup> Females were coded as 2, and males were coded as 1.

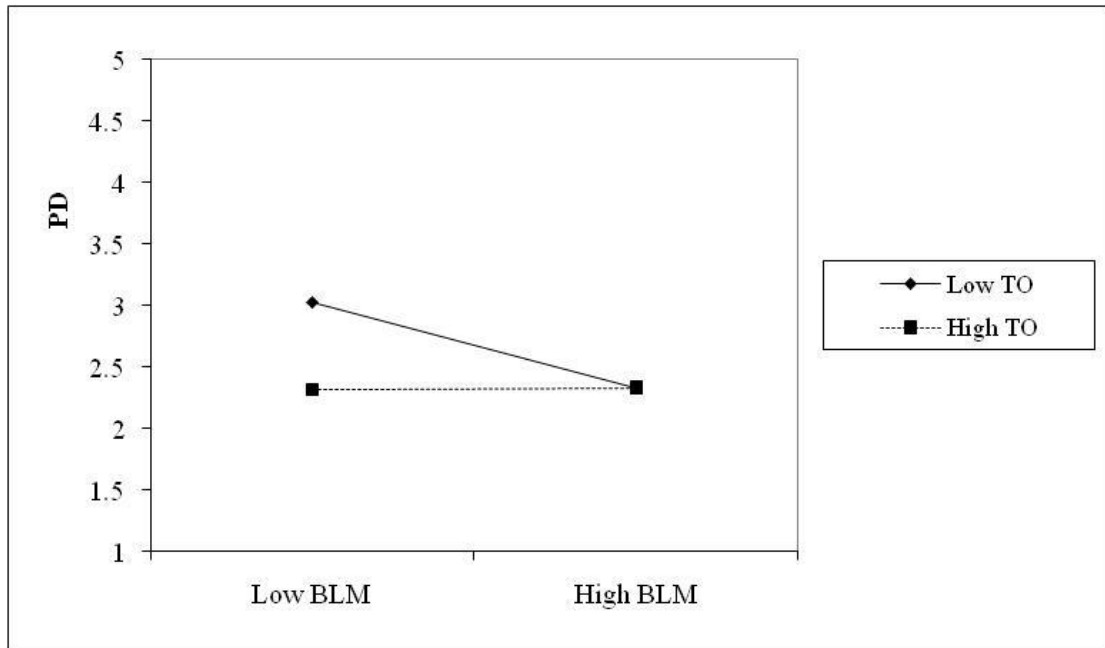
**Table 4** Results of Indirect and Conditional Indirect Relationships

Relationships	B	SE	95% bias-corrected CI
Indirect effect of BLM on WFC	0.05	0.02	[0.01, 0.10]
<b>Conditional indirect effect of BLM on WFC</b>			
Low TO	0.09	0.04	[0.03, 0.17]
High TO	-0.00	0.02	[-0.05,0.04]
Difference between groups	-0.09	0.04	[-0.19, -0.03]

Note:  $N=225$ . BLM= bottom-line mentality, TO= trait optimism, WFC= work-to-family conflict. The indirect effect and conditional indirect effect tests were based on 5,000 bootstrapping resamples.



**Figure 1** Hypothesized theoretical model



*Note:* BLM= bottom-line mentality, TO= trait optimism, PD= psychological detachment.

**Figure 2** The moderating effect of trait optimism on the relationship between BLM and psychological detachment