Effects of supervisor bottom-line mentality on subordinate unethical pro-organizational behavior

Yun Zhang

School of Management, Guangdong University of Technology, Guangzhou, China and
School of Business, Wuzhou University, Wuzhou, China

Bin He

School of Management, Guangdong University of Technology, Guangzhou, China

Qihai Huang

Keele Business School, Keele University, Keele, UK, and

Jun Xie

Center for Cantonese Merchants Research, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine how supervisor bottom-line mentality (BLM) influences subordinate unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB), considering the mediating role of subordinate moral disengagement and the moderating role of their power-distance orientation.

Design/methodology/approach – The theoretical model was tested using two-wave data collected from employees of five firms in southern China.

Findings – Subordinate moral disengagement was found to mediate the positive relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate UPB. Furthermore, for subordinates with high power-distance orientation, the positive relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate moral disengagement and the indirect positive relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate UPB were both strengthened.

Practical implications – First, organizations should train their employees to pursue goals ethically based on established standards and policies for acceptable behavior and to punish UPB. Second, organizations should strengthen employees' ethics and reduce their likelihood of moral disengagement. Finally, organizations should create an environment that allows subordinates to question their supervisors' BLM.

Originality/value – First, the results demonstrate that supervisor BLM is an antecedent of subordinate UPB. Second, the study sheds important new light on how employees respond to supervisor BLM through cognitive processes. Third, it examines the moderating role of subordinate power-distance orientation between supervisor BLM, moral disengagement and UPB.

Keywords Supervisor bottom-line mentality, Moral disengagement, Unethical pro-organizational behavior, Power-distance orientation, Moderated mediation model

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Bottom-line mentality (BLM) is defined as "one-dimensional thinking that revolves around securing bottom-line outcomes to the neglect of competing priorities" (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012,

p. 344). Individuals who pursue BLM often prioritize the financial performance of the organization over other objectives (Wolfe, 1988); they tend to focus on their own survival and success in a competitive environment but neglect the needs and wants of other people around them (Bonner *et al.*, 2017). Much of the existing literature has drawn heavily on the bright sides of BLM (e.g. Crotts *et al.*, 2005), which suggests that if supervisors have BLM, their subordinates are more likely to be motivated to engage in pro-organizational behaviors to meet the bottom-line objectives such as profits and other financial outcomes (Wolfe, 1988). However, employees may also engage in behaviors that deviate from social norms under the pressure of supervisor BLM (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012; Mesdaghinia *et al.*, 2019). Research has begun to investigate how supervisor BLM can affect subordinate unethical behaviors for self-interest, e.g. social undermining (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, it has been argued that BLM is a "double-edged sword," which may motivate employee behaviors for hitting the bottom-line objectives, on the one hand. It can lead to unethical behaviors that ignore social and moral norms, on the other hand (Barsky, 2008; Wolfe, 1988).

Despite considerable progress, little research so far has yet examined the impact of supervisor BLM on subordinate unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB), which refers to "actions that are intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization or its members and violate core societal values, mores, laws or standards of proper conduct" (Umphress and Bingham, 2011, p. 622). This is a critical oversight because scholars have long argued that individuals with pro-organizational motivation are likely to violate the ethical norm in the name of achieving organization success (Umphress *et al.*, 2010). For example, the scandal of Kobe Steel, Japan's third-largest steelmaker, in which the employees delivered tampered technical data to users to meet the managers' financial goals [1], ended in reduction its recurring profit by ¥10bn in the full 2017/2018 financial year, in addition to losing customers and government sanction. Such UPB seemed to have helped the managers' BLM, but ultimately led to destructive outcomes for the organization (Wang *et al.*, 2019; Umphress and Bingham, 2011). It is important to investigate how UPB is influenced by BLM, as employees may feel pressured to compromise their values and perform UPB to achieve organizational goals (Tian and Peterson, 2016), which are often specifically the financial performance of the organization over other objectives (Wolfe, 1988). Mesdaghinia *et al.* (2019), thus, call for more research to further explain why and how supervisor BLM may lead to subordinate unethical behavior in the name of "for the benefit of the organization." A better understanding of these issues will not only inform the theoretical direction but also guide organizational practices and managerial decisions regarding how to prevent employees' unethical behaviors when in pursuit of organizational objectives.

Our study aims to address the neglected question of how supervisor BLM influences subordinate UPB based on the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1999). According to the social cognitive theory, employees' perception of their supervisor's expectations may guide their behavior (Bandura, 2002). Supervisors who hold a BLM typically does not embody the social and moral norms propagated by society because they are too obsessed with achieving bottom-line results (Wolfe, 1988). When faced with supervisor BLM, employees will be pressured to achieve the bottom-line goals (such as financial goals). Subordinates are likely to engage in unethical behavior because doing so costs fewer resources (e.g. time and energy) to attain the goals (Barsky, 2008) and even is implicitly encouraged by the supervisor with a BLM (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). As such, we propose that supervisor BLM will lead to subordinate UPB. Moreover, based on the social cognitive theory, individuals may behave unethically through disengaging internal standards or justifying their unethical behaviors (Bandura, 1999). These cognitive justification mechanisms are typically indicative of moral disengagement (Detert *et al.*, 2008; Bandura, 1999), which is a process of reconstructing destructive behaviors cognitively as morally acceptable but maintaining the same behavior or moral standards (Bandura, 1999; Chen *et al.*, 2016). We further propose that BLM will

weaken employees' self-regulation mechanisms, encouraging them to cognitively reframe UPB as justifiable ways to achieve bottom-line outcomes. This process of moral disengagement will result in their engagement in UPB.

Nevertheless, personal factors can influence the process of moral disengagement (Huang *et al.*, 2017; Lian *et al.*, 2016), of which cultural orientation may be most highly relevant, as it has a substantial effect on their cognitions and reactions to supervisors' frame of mind (Lin *et al.*, 2013; Kirkman *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, we propose that a subordinate's power-distance orientation, which refers to the extent to which an individual accepts the unequal distribution of power in institutions and organizations. Kirkman *et al.*, (2009), strengthens the relationship between supervisor BLM and moral disengagement and further moderates the mediation of moral disengagement in the relationship between supervisor BLM and UPB. The conceptual model of our study is as demonstrated in Figure 1.

This study aims to make three main theoretical contributions to the literature. First, by examining the effect of supervisor BLM on subordinate UPB based on the social cognitive theory, our study answers Greenbaum *et al.*'s (2012) call to explore the potential "dark side" of BLM. It also extends the literature on the antecedents of UPB by investigating the impact of supervisor mentality, i.e. BLM. Second, whereas prior research has focused on employee personal traits as the primary antecedents of moral disengagement (e.g. Detert *et al.*, 2008; Duffy *et al.*, 2012), we explain how subordinate moral disengagement can be influenced by supervisor BLM. By so doing, we shift the current focus on employee personal factors toward a broader understanding of leader factors such as supervisor BLM, which can trigger the employee moral disengagement process. We also explore one mechanism, namely, moral disengagement, through which BLM influences employee UPB. Third, we identify a boundary condition (power-distance orientation) that influenced the strength of the relationships between BLM, moral disengagement and UPB. As such, this study not only contributes to our understanding of the consequences of supervisor BLM and the mechanism on it influences employee UPB under the condition of employee power-distance orientation, but also offers suggestions for how organizations might mitigate the possible negative influences of BLM.

Theoretical background and hypotheses
Supervisor bottom-line mentality and subordinate unethical pro-organizational behavior
BLM is a frame of mind that individuals only focus on specific factors identified as the most important, while the importance of other factors is minimized (Wolfe, 1988). The bottom line is usually linked to the organizational financial goals (Quade *et al.*, 2019; Wolfe, 1988). Supervisors who hold a BLM prioritize bottom-line outcomes such as profits and bonuses (Wolfe, 1988) and often ignore other considerations (Bonner *et al.*, 2017).

According to the social cognitive theory, individuals can perceive expected positive/ negative consequences of future behavior (Bandura, 2002), which would guide them to demonstrate appropriate behaviors for positive results and avoiding negative outcomes. A supervisor with a BLM will reward subordinates who contribute to achieving bottom-line
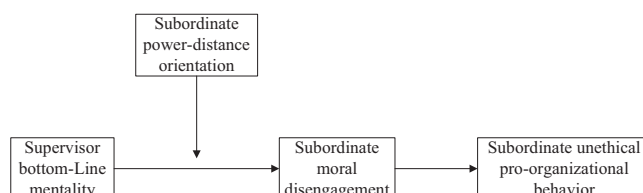
goals and punish those who do not (Bonner *et al.*, 2017), conveying a message to subordinates that the pursuit of bottom-line objectives is a top-down policy, and that achieving bottom-line goals is the only way to win (Wolfe, 1988). Accordingly, employees will increase their pro-organizational motivation that is aimed to achieve the bottom-line objectives (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). The best option for the employee, therefore, is to endeavor to achieve the goals.

Achieving the desired goals signaled by supervisor BLM requires costs, such as time and energy (Barsky, 2008). However, the supervisor with a BLM only emphasizes the completion of goals and ignores other stakeholders (Bonner *et al.*, 2017). This win–lose mentality will create a competitive environment, which reiterates that other processes and values can be ignored (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). In turn, to attain the bottom-line goals, employees are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors and ignore ethical issues or sacrifice the interests of other stakeholders (Chen *et al.*, 2016). This is because using unethical behavior or ignoring the interests of others will achieve BLM goals at a lower cost (Barsky, 2008; Bonner *et al.*, 2017). Employees' UPB is a typical "unethical behavior," with the intention to benefit the organization at the cost of social values, ethics and laws (Umphress and Bingham, 2011), pressured by the supervisor with a BLM. In fact, the employees may not worry about the risk of UPB such as organizational sanctions, because they would even feel to be encouraged by the supervisor with BLM to do so (Wolfe, 1988). Previous research has shown that a supervisor with a BLM may lead to subordinates acting unethically for the benefit of the supervisor's bottom-line goals (Mesdaghinia *et al.*, 2019). Thus, we predict:

H1. Supervisor BLM is positively related to subordinate UPB.

The mediating role of moral disengagement

According to the social cognitive theory, in general, individual behaviors are regulated by a self-regulatory system, in which individuals monitor and evaluate their behaviors for consistency with their internal standards (Bandura, 2002). However, when conflicts between behaviors and internal standards arise, moral disengagement, comprising a set of cognitive justification mechanisms that allow individuals to behave unethically acts while disengaging from their normal internal standards that typically prohibit such behaviors, will be activated to free individuals from guilt and self-condemnation (Chen *et al.*, 2016; Huang *et al.*, 2017). There are three cognitive justification mechanisms for moral disengagement, which are: (1) reconstruction of harmful behavior, (2) transfer of responsibility to minimize the causal relationship with the consequent harm and (3) discrediting or devaluing the victim (Bandura, 2002). Following the existing research (e.g. Chen *et al.*, 2016; Huang *et al.*, 2017; He *et al.*, 2019), we will explain below how moral disengagement may mediate the effect of supervisor BLM on subordinate UPB through the three mechanisms of moral disengagement mentioned above.

First, when faced with supervisor BLM, subordinates may morally disengage by reconstructing the cognition of UPB such that it no longer seems immoral. For example, subordinates might use improper means to suppress a competitor, who may morally disengage by viewing UPB as a way to achieve the supervisor's bottom-line goal. This is because they understand that their supervisor with a BLM only cares about the bottom-line results, which are essential to the success, and can use rewards and punishments to achieve these goals (Wolfe, 1988; Barsky, 2008). As such, the cue given by the supervisor with a BLM helps free employees from moral condemnation and instead persuades them into the belief that UPB is a valued and even righteous behavior in the pursuit of the bottom-line goals.

Second, supervisor BLM might lead subordinates to shirk moral condemnation by transferring or diffusing responsibility for their UPB to the supervisor (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012; Bonner *et al.*, 2017). For instance, an employee who concealed the organizational negative information from the public may transfer this responsibility to his/her supervisor

because the negative information will affect the profit of the organization and the achievement of the supervisor's bottom-line goals. Such a UPB could be deemed by the employee to help the supervisor and also organization. Furthermore, the delayed manifestation of the negative impact of UPB makes it easier to disperse behavioral responsibilities (Miao *et al.*, 2013).

Third, moral disengagement may allow subordinates whose supervisors with a BLM to justify the negative implications of harmful actions directed against others (Bandura, 2002; Duffy *et al.*, 2012). Supervisors with a BLM tend to consider anyone hindering the achievement of bottom-line targets as a potential opponent (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). The supervisors convey this signal to their subordinates, which reduces the subordinates' social and ethical obligations for ensuring the benefits of outside stakeholders (Mesdaghinia *et al.*, 2019). When organizational interests conflict with external interests, the perception of the potential opponent will cause subordinates' hostility to external stakeholders. Consequently, the bottom-line goals become more appealing to the subordinates as a way of justifying UPB (Duffy *et al.*, 2012; Chen *et al.*, 2016). For instance, an employee who became aggressive and abusive toward a coworker to achieve organizational goals might view the victim as "deserving it" (Huang *et al.*, 2017).

Indeed, in their two time-lagged studies of Chinese workers, Huang *et al.* (2017) show that moral disengagement mediates the relationship between job insecurity and employees' deviant behaviors. Taken together, we propose a mediating framework in which supervisor BLM promotes subordinate UPB via moral disengagement:

H2. Moral disengagement mediates the positive relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate UPB.

The moderating effect of subordinate power-distance orientation

Although prior research tends to study cultural values at the societal level only, researchers have taken cultural values as an individual-level variable in recent years (Lian *et al.*, 2012; Lin *et al.*, 2018). At the individual level, power-distance orientation refers to organizational members' personal values about status, authority and power (Kirkman *et al.*, 2009). Subordinates with higher power-distance orientation are more aware of the existence of ranks and respect and obey authority figures (Kirkman *et al.*, 2009). Such subordinates are more obedient to and accept a leader's directive influence (Farh *et al.*, 2007). By contrast, subordinates with low power-distance orientation will show less respect, deference and dutifulness to authority (Lin *et al.*, 2013, 2018).

Subordinates with higher power-distance orientation are more inclined to advocate and follow, rather than question their supervisors' frame of mind (Burgoon *et al.*, 1982). Therefore, they are more likely to accept signals conveying from supervisors who hold a BLM, i.e. who prioritize obtaining economic benefits and neglect other secondary goals (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). Subordinates with higher power-distance orientation are, therefore, more likely to positively classify this information in the process of cognitive representation. When facing conflicts between organizational interests and external interests, they are more likely to morally disengaged and find a justification for their actions (Schweitzer and Hsee, 2002). By contrast, subordinates with lower power-distance orientation place less value on authority and so are less willing to obey supervisors. When faced with supervisor BLM, they are less likely to use the signals associated with BLM as the basis for decision-making, and therefore are less likely to classify the information conveyed by supervisors as positive. In this case, when the interests of the organization conflict with external interests, subordinates consciously abide by their own ethical standards and social norms to avoid harming their moral self-image (Schweitzer and Hsee, 2002), resulting in a significantly lower likelihood of moral disengagement. Accordingly, we predict:

H3a. The positive relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate moral disengagement is stronger when subordinates have a higher power-distance orientation.

By the above-mentioned hypotheses, we propose an integrated framework in which moral disengagement mediates the relationship between supervisor BLM and UPB, and power-distance orientation moderates the relationship between supervisor BLM and moral disengagement. Thus, it is logical to believe that power-distance orientation also moderates the strength of the mediator function of moral disengagement for the relationship between supervisor BLM and UPB – a phenomenon referred to as moderated mediation (Edwards and Lambert, 2007). As we propose a stronger relationship between supervisor BLM and moral disengagement among employees' higher in power-distance orientation, the indirect effect of supervisor BLM on UPB via moral disengagement should be stronger among high power-distance orientation employees. As such, we propose:

H3b. The indirect positive relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate UPB mediated by moral disengagement is stronger when subordinates have a higher power-distance orientation.

Methods
Sample and materials
To test our hypotheses, we collected data from five large companies located in southern China, which included companies in the business of 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 were granted support and access to each company for data collection after we communicated our research purpose and potential benefits with the respective top management team and human resources (HR) department. All the sample companies had been established for over five years and had at least 300 employees. To reduce common method bias, we limited participants' assessment concerns by assuring the participants that the questionnaires were anonymous and solely for academic research purposes. We also established psychological separation in the survey by using different instructions, placing variables in different parts and adding many filler items between them (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). In the first-wave survey (Time 1), participants were asked to report their direct supervisors' BLM and their own power-distance orientation and moral disengagement. Four weeks later (Time 2), participants evaluated their UPB. Consistent with earlier studies (Miao *et al.*, 2013; Umphress *et al.*, 2010), we measured subordinates' UPB by self-report because UPB is intended to benefit others, which makes it difficult for others to observe (Umphress *et al.*, 2010). To reduce the impact on participants of social expectations, we also measured socially desirable responses while measuring UPB. In addition, we collected demographic variables, including participants' age, gender, tenure and education. We used four non-identifying questions (e.g. the last four digits of their mobile phone numbers) to match responses from Times 1 and 2.

The HR departments helped to distribute the questionnaires. At Time 1, we distributed 350 questionnaires, of which 284 completed questionnaires were returned (response rate = 81.14%). At Time 2, we again distributed 350 questionnaires to the same employees surveyed at Time 1; 262 completed questionnaires were returned (response rate = 74.86%). Overall, we received 231 valid matching questionnaires. Gender representation was roughly equal (53.25% male, 46.75% female). The age distribution was as follows: 18–25 years old (y/o): 25.54%, 26–30 y/o: 32.47%, 31–40 y/o: 18.18%, 41–50 y/o: 11.26%, 51–60 y/o: 9.09% and over 60 y/o: 3.46%. The sample's tenure distribution was as follows: less than two years: 26.41%, 3–5 years: 38.96%, 6–10 years: 16.88%, 11–15 years

3.90%, 16–20 years: 10.39%, 21–30 years: 2.16% and over 30 years: 1.30%. Finally, the sample's education distribution was as follows: high school degree: 3.90%, college degree: 32.03%, bachelor degree: 54.98% and master or doctoral degree: 9.09%.

Measures
We used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to measure most of the substantive variables. Original English measures were translated into Chinese using a back-translation procedure.

Supervisor BLM. We used the four-item scale developed by Greenbaum *et al.* (2012) to assess supervisor BLM (α = 0.91). For example, "My supervisor only cares about the business."

Moral disengagement. We assessed moral disengagement with the three-item scale developed by Chen *et al.* (2016) (α = 0.82). This scale was confirmed to have a higher degree of reliability in measuring moral disengagement before participating in UPB (Chen *et al.*, 2016). For example, "It would be okay to be misleading to protect my organization's interests."

Power-distance orientation. We adapted Earley and Erez's (1997) eight-item scale to measure power-distance orientation (Earley and Erez, 1997; Kirkman *et al.*, 2009) (α = 0.87). For example, "In most situations, managers should make decisions without consulting their subordinates."

UPB. We used the six-item measure developed by Umphress *et al.* (2010) to test subordinate UPB (α = 0.83). These items have been widely used in previous studies to measure the UPB of employees in different positions and industries (Miao *et al.*, 2013). A sample item is, "If it would help my organization, I would misrepresent the truth to make my organization look good."

Because our items are on a sensitive topic, we controlled for the impact of social expectations on participants by using the ten-item scale developed by Steenkamp *et al.* (2010) to measure socially desirable (α = 0.83). One item example is, "I sometimes tell lies if I have to" (1 = not at all, 5 = a lot). We also controlled participants' age, gender, tenure and education.

Methods
First, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the discriminant validity of the constructs. Second, we followed Preacher *et al.*'s (2007) method to estimate the moderated mediation model with Mplus 7.0 (Muthén and Asparouhov, 2012). The indirect effects (mediation) and conditional indirect effects (moderated mediation) require the calculation of compound coefficients, which are not normally distributed. We calculated bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) of the indirect effects (mediation) and conditional indirect effects (moderated mediation) by using the bootstrapping-based approach with 20,000 iterations (CI) for significance testing (Edwards and Lambert, 2007).

Measurement model
Our study measured four major variables: supervisor BLM and subordinate power-distance orientation, moral disengagement and UPB. The CFA results are shown in Table 1. The predicted four-factor solution achieved adequate fit with the data (χ^2 = 237.17, df = 183, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.04), demonstrating superiority to the other models (2–4) in this regard. Because the data were collected from the same sources, we used CFA and Harman's single-factor test to examine the possible common method bias (Huang *et al.*, 2017;

Model	Descriptions	χ^2	df	$\chi^2/$df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Model1	Four factors: SBLM, PD, MD, UPB	237.17	183	1.27	0.04	0.97	0.97
Model2	Three factors: SBLM and MD were combined into one factor	455.61	186	2.45	0.08	0.87	0.85
Model3	Two factors: SBLM, PD and MD were combined into one factor	1,126.38	188	5.99	0.15	0.55	0.49
Model4	One factor: SBLM, PD, MD and UPB were combined into one factor	1,519.99	189	8.04	0.18	0.36	0.29

Table 1.
Comparison of
measurement models

Note(s): SBLM = supervisor bottom-line mentality, PD = power-distance orientation, MD = moral disengagement, UPB = unethical pro-organizational behavior, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, CFI = comparative fit index, TLI = Tucker–Lewis index

Xie *et al.*, 2019). The CFA results indicate that the one-factor model is not suitable for the data (χ^2 = 1519.99, df = 189, CFI = 0.36, TLI = 0.29, RMSEA = 0.18). Furthermore, in Harman's single-factor test, the variation of the first principal component was 24.19%, which was below half of the total variance (62.03%). There is, thus, no serious common method bias in this study (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

Results and analysis

Descriptive statistics
Table 2 shows the variables' means, standard deviations, correlations and reliability estimates. As predicted, supervisor BLM was positively correlated with moral disengagement (r = 0.29, p < 0.01) and UPB (r = 0.25, p < 0.01), while moral disengagement was positively correlated with UPB (r = 0.24, p < 0.01).

Hypotheses testing
As Model 6 in Table 3 reports, supervisor BLM was positively related to subordinate UPB (B = 0.18, SE = 0.05, p < 0.001) when controlling for participates' age, gender, tenure, education and socially desirable. Thus, H1 was supported.

Regarding H2's prediction of the mediating role of moral disengagement, supervisor BLM was positively related to moral disengagement (B = 0.21, SE = −0.05, p < 0.001, see Model 2 in Table 3); when both supervisor BLM and moral disengagement were included in the regression analysis (Table 3, Model 8), the impact of supervisor BLM on subordinate UPB was notably weakened (B = 0.15, SE = 0.05, p < 0.01), and moral disengagement had a significant positive impact on subordinate UPB (B = 0.14, SE = 0.06, p < 0.05, see Table 3 Model 8). As shown in Table 4, the indirect effect of supervisor BLM and subordinate UPB through moral disengagement was significant (B = 0.03, SE = 0.02, 95% bias-corrected CI [0.00, 0.07], excluding zero). Therefore, H2 was supported.

Regarding H3a's prediction that subordinate power-distance orientation moderates the relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate moral disengagement, the interaction between the two variables had a significant positive impact on moral disengagement (B = 0.13, SE = 0.06, p < 0.05, see Table 3 Model 4). Figure 2 depicts this moderating effect: for high power-distance orientation subordinates (one standard deviation above the mean), supervisor BLM had a significant impact on moral disengagement (B = 0.32, SE = 0.07, p < 0.001); for low power-distance orientation subordinates (one standard deviation below the mean), this relationship was not significant (B = 0.02, SE = 0.10, n.s.). Therefore, H3a was supported.

Variable[a]	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	2.56	1.40									
2. Gender[b]	0.53	0.50	0.12								
3. Tenure	2.45	1.42	0.75**	0.18**							
4. Education	2.69	0.69	−0.12	−0.07	−0.12						
5. SD	3.20	0.58	0.10	0.10	0.06	−0.05	(0.83)				
6. SBLM	3.04	1.21	0.02	0.05	0.01	0.06	0.18**	(0.91)			
7. MD	2.84	1.05	0.04	0.11	−0.01	0.05	0.27**	0.29**	(0.82)		
8. PD	3.13	1.14	−0.00	0.02	−0.02	0.14*	−0.37**	0.10	−0.05	(0.87)	
9. UPB	2.88	0.93	−0.00	0.05	0.00	0.02	0.15*	0.25**	0.24**	0.20**	(0.83)

Note(s): $N = 231$. Coefficient alphas are given in parentheses on the diagonal

[a]SD = socially desirable, SBLM = supervisor bottom-line mentality, MD = moral disengagement, PD = power-distance orientation, UPB = unethical pro-organizational behavior

[b]Females were coded as 0, and males were coded as 1

$**p < 0.01$

$*p < 0.05$

Table 3.
Regression results of moral disengagement and UPB

Variable[a]	MD								UPB							
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Age	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.07	−0.02	0.06	−0.02	0.06	−0.03	0.06	−0.03	0.06
Gender[b]	0.20	0.14	0.18	0.13	0.18	0.13	0.18	0.13	0.07	0.12	0.06	0.12	0.04	0.12	0.03	0.12
Tenure	−0.07	0.07	−0.07	0.07	−0.07	0.07	−0.05	0.07	0.01	0.07	0.01	0.06	0.02	0.06	0.02	0.06
Education	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.04	0.09	0.02	0.09	0.02	0.09	0.01	0.09
SD	0.47***	0.12	0.39**	0.11	0.39**	0.12	0.38**	0.12	0.24*	0.11	0.18***	0.10	0.16	0.11	0.12	0.11
SBLM			0.21***	0.05	0.21***	0.06	0.17**	0.06			0.18***	0.05			0.15**	0.05
MD													0.19***	0.06	0.14*	0.06
PD					−0.00	0.06	0.05	0.07								
SBLM × PD							0.13*	0.06								
χ²	21.13		36.27		36.27		41.72		5.96		18.16		15.55		23.66	
Df	5		6		7		8		5		6		6		7	
AIC	669.72		656.58		658.58		655.13		629.69		619.49		622.09		615.99	
BIC	693.81		684.12		689.56		689.56		653.78		647.02		649.63		646.97	
Sample-size adjusted BIC	671.63		658.76		661.03		657.86		631.60		621.67		624.28		618.44	
R^2	0.09		0.15		0.15		0.17		0.03		0.08		0.07		0.10	

Note(s): $N = 231$
[a]SD = socially desirable, SBLM = supervisor bottom-line mentality, MD = moral disengagement, PD = power-distance orientation
[b]UPB = unethical pro-organizational behavior; Females were coded as 0, and males were coded as 1
***$p < 0.001$
**$p < 0.01$
*$p < 0.05$

Regarding H3b's moderated mediation prediction, Table 4 also shows that the indirect effect of supervisor BLM on UPB via moral disengagement was stronger when subordinates had higher power-distance orientation ($B = 0.04$, SE $= 0.02$, 95% bias-corrected CI [0.01, 0.10], excluding zero), but not significant when subordinates had lower power-distance orientation ($B = 0.00$, SE $= 0.02$, 95% bias-corrected CI [–0.03, 0.04], including zero). The difference between the two groups was significant ($B_{\text{diff}} = 0.04$, SE $= 0.03$, 95% bias-corrected CI [0.00, 0.12], excluding zero). Taken together, these results support H3b.

General discussion

Using a two-wave survey yielding 231 matched responses from five companies, we found that: (1) supervisor BLM is significantly positively associated with subordinate UPB, (2) subordinate moral disengagement mediated the relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate UPB, (3) subordinate power-distance orientation positively moderated the relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate moral disengagement and (4) the indirect effect of supervisor BLM on subordinate UPB via moral disengagement was positively moderated by subordinate power-distance orientation.

Theoretical implications

This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, we extend the literature on both BLM and UPB by proposing and demonstrating that supervisor BLM is positively related to subordinate UPB in a field setting. Previous studies have not established such a connection. As noted above, most prior BLM research has focused on the self-interested

Relationships	B	SE	95% bias-corrected CI
Indirect effect of SBLM on UPB	0.03	0.02	[0.00, 0.07]
Conditional indirect effect			
Higher level of PD (+1 SD)	0.04	0.02	[0.01, 0.10]
Lower level of PD (−1 SD)	0.00	0.02	[−0.03, 0.04]
Difference between groups	0.04	0.03	[0.00, 0.12]

Note(s): $N = 231$. SBLM = supervisor bottom-line mentality, MD = moral disengagement, PD = power-distance orientation, UPB = unethical pro-organizational behavior; CI = confidence interval. The indirect effect and conditional indirect effect tests were based on 20,000 bootstrapping resamples

Table 4.
Results of indirect and conditional indirect relationships
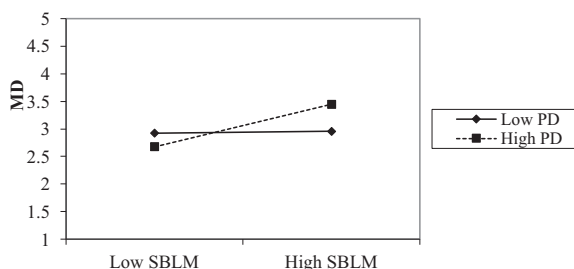
Note(s): SBLM=supervisor bottom-line mentality,
PD=power-distance orientation,
MD= moral disengagement

Figure 2.
Interaction between supervisor BLM and power-distance orientation on moral disengagement

unethical behaviors as the main consequence of supervisor BLM (e.g. Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012; Mesdaghinia *et al.*, 2019), assuming self-interested motives of employees but neglecting the potential UPB. By establishing the link between supervisor BLM and subordinate UPB, which is motivated by a pro-organization intention, this study broadens our understanding that supervisor BLM would lead to subordinate UPB, a "dark side" of the outcomes of supervisor BLM (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). Our study, thus, is a timely response to Greenbaum *et al.*'s (2012) call to explore the potential "dark side" of BLM. Additionally, we extend the literature on the antecedents of UPB by demonstrating that supervisor BLM can be related to subordinate UPB. Existing research has mainly examined how organizational factors, e.g. high-performance work systems (Xu and Lv, 2018), and individual employee personal factors, e.g. locus of control orientation (Detert *et al.*, 2008) and Machiavellianism (Castille *et al.*, 2018), can influence employee UPB. However, there is a lack of empirical research linking supervisors' frame of mind to subordinate UPB. By demonstrating the positive relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate UPB in a field study, we enrich research on the antecedents of UPB.

Second, based on the social cognitive theory, we propose and test one mechanism through which BLM influences employee UPB by introducing moral disengagement as a mediator of the relationship between supervisor BLM and subordinate UPB. As such, it enhances our understanding of why and how supervisors' attitudes on the bottom-line outcome would result in subordinates' neglect of the social moral issues and engagement in unethical behavior. The moral disengagement mechanism we demonstrated in our research may be extended to explain how subordinates react in the other dilemmas, e.g. organizational profits versus social moral pressured by the supervisor's or the organization's bottom-line goals (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). By doing so, our research points toward more broadly how supervisors' thinking may shape the cognitive processes of subordinates and ultimately their negative behaviors. Also, whereas previous studies focused on the role of personal traits (e.g. Detert *et al.*, 2008; Duffy *et al.*, 2012) as the primary causes of moral disengagement, we examine how moral disengagement can be influenced by supervisor BLM. By so doing, we shift the current focus on employee personal factors toward a broader understanding of leader factors, which can trigger employee moral disengagement process. Our research, thus, responds to the call for further research on conditions in which moral disengagement is likely to occur (Huang *et al.*, 2017).

Third, by considering the moderating effect of employee power-distance orientation in explaining how supervisor BLM influences subordinate UPB via moral disengagement, the present study identifies an important boundary condition, which strengthens the negative consequences of leaders' BLM (Bonner *et al.*, 2017). Employees with high power-distance orientation are particularly likely to be influenced by supervisor BLM through moral disengagement to conduct UPB because they show more respect, deference and dutifulness to their supervisors (Farh *et al.*, 2007; Kirkman *et al.*, 2009). In other words, our study highlights the peril of supervisor BLM is highly likely to occur for high power-distance orientation employees, and probably more costly as the Kobe Steel scandal mentioned above demonstrated. It answers the calls for more attention to boundary conditions when examining the influence of BLM on subordinate work-related attitudes and behaviors (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012). Although previous research on BLM has identified some moderating variables, such as employee core self-evaluations and employee conscientiousness (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2012), our investigation of the moderating effect of power-distance orientation, a most important dimension of cultural values in collectivism cultures (Kirkman *et al.*, 2009), which has a substantial impact on employee cognition process and response to leaders' frame of mind (Lin *et al.*, 2013), enhanced our nuanced understanding of when the negative impact of BLM would be more significant.

Managerial implications
Our research has several practical implications. First, it is commonly believed that supervisors with a high BLM bring benefits to their organizations by improving productivity and financial success (Mesdaghinia *et al.*, 2019). However, our findings indicate that supervisor BLM may motivate subordinates to engage in UPB. Organizations should, thus, be aware that whereas BLM may seem useful for achieving desired results (e.g. maximizing profits), it can also have undesirable consequences. It is important to stress that although supervisors can have their bottom-line goals, they must be aware of potential negative outcomes. Moreover, organizations should establish standards for acceptable behavior by establishing policies that punish UPB, enabling employees to know which behaviors are permitted and encouraged, thereby guiding employees' organizational behavior.

Second, from the link found between supervisor BLM and subordinate moral disengagement, it can be inferred that subordinates whose supervisor has high BLM are more likely to relax their moral reasoning to engage in UPB in the pursuit of bottom-line outcomes. To reduce the tendency employee moral disengagement, organizations should clearly emphasize the importance of social moral values in organizational policies and practices and incorporate these ethical standards into management practice.

Third, our finding that subordinates with high power-distance orientation are more likely to be influenced by supervisor BLM through moral disengagement to engage UPB reminds organizations to pay more attention to such employees for mitigation of potential risk of UPB. Organizations should have clear guidelines and train their employees to stick to ethical and other moral values when faced with supervisor BLM.

Limitations and directions for future research
Our study has several limitations. First, although we used time-lagged data, causality cannot be inferred. Future research should test causality using experimental methods or by collecting cross-lagged panel data. Second, the data for this study came from a single source and may, therefore, be affected by common method variance (CMV). Although empirical evidence suggests that our data are unlikely to be affected by CMV issues, future researchers can collect data from multiple sources. Third, we used a self-reporting scale to measure UPB. Although this method consistent with previous literature (Umphress *et al.*, 2010; Xu and Lv, 2018) and we have controlled participates' social desirability, self-reporting measures would be less obtrusive than behavioral measure (Umphress *et al.*, 2010). Future research could use behavioral observation to detect employee UPB. Finally, because supervisor BLM would cause subordinates to adopt the same way of thinking, which in turn triggers subordinates' work relates behavior (Mesdaghinia *et al.*, 2019), future research not only needs to control the effect of subordinate BLM, but also can use polynomial regression to explore how the degree of matching between supervisor BLM and subordinate BLM affects subordinates behavior.

Conclusion
Our study draws from the social cognitive theory and expands the UPB literature by analyzing the psychological mechanism and boundary conditions of the influence of supervisor BLM on subordinate UPB. Our results show that supervisor BLM, which some companies encourage (Crotts *et al.*, 2005), can raise the likelihood of subordinates engaging in UPB. Managers should realize the negative impacts of BLM and strive to promote (or establish) an ethical culture within the organization and strengthen employees' moral awareness.

Note
1. Scandal-hit Kobe Steel seeks loans, shareholder offers support. Available at: https://www.reuters. com/article/us-kobe-steel-scandal/kobe-steel-seeks-loan-shareholder-offers-support-after-data-scandal-idUSKBN1CZ04F (accessed March 2, 2020).

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About the authors
Yun Zhang is an Associate professor at Wuzhou University. She received her PhD degree from Guangdong University of Technology. Her current research interests include leadership, organizational behavior and knowledge management.

Bin He is a Professor at Guangdong University of Technology. His current research interests include leadership, manage experiments and organizational behavior.

Qihai Huang is a Professor at Keele University, UK. His current research interests include entrepreneurship, creativity and human resource management.

Jun Xie is a Professor at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China. His current research interests include leadership, proactive behavior and workplace gossip. Jun Xie is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: xiejun3874@163.com