



# Exploring the Outcomes of Leader Bottom-Line Mentality: A Meta-analysis

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## Abstract

Despite growing interest in leader bottom-line mentality, no quantitative synthesis has yet integrated its effects on critical employee outcomes. This study addresses this gap by conducting the first meta-analytic review of leader bottom-line mentality ( $k = 67$ ,  $N = 19,926$ ). Results indicate that leader bottom-line mentality is significantly associated with several key outcomes, including relative deprivation ( $\rho = 0.56$ ), moral disengagement ( $\rho = 0.34$ ), and organizational commitment ( $\rho = -0.32$ ). This study also tested the indirect linkages from leader bottom-line mentality to employee job performance through four theoretically grounded mechanisms—two expected to enhance performance (via increasing employees' controlled motivation and their bottom-line mentality) and two expected to reduce performance (via decreasing employees' leader-member exchange and increasing their emotional exhaustion). Of the four hypothesized mechanisms, three received empirical support—controlled motivation, leader-member exchange, and emotional exhaustion—while the path through employee bottom-line mentality was non-significant. A post hoc analysis further uncovered a U-shaped relationship, suggesting that extreme levels of leader bottom-line mentality may paradoxically enhance performance after surpassing certain stress thresholds. Regarding unethical pro-organizational behavior, this mentality simultaneously increases such behavior via moral disengagement and reduces it through leader-member exchange. These findings underscore the complex nature of leader bottom-line mentality and highlight the importance of integrative frameworks in capturing its multifaceted consequences.

**Keywords** Bottom-line mentality · Performance · Meta-analysis-outcomes · Leader

## Introduction

Leader bottom-line mentality (LBLM), which refers to the leader's "1-dimensional thinking that revolves around securing bottom-line outcomes to the neglect of competing priorities" (Greenbaum et al., 2012, p. 343), has drawn considerable research attention recently (Greenbaum et al.,

2023). By definition, LBLM reflects a leader's singular focus on bottom-line outcomes (i.e., performance targets), which theoretically could enhance followers' job performance by directing their efforts toward clear and measurable goals (Greenbaum et al., 2023). However, empirical findings on the LBLM–performance relationship remain mixed. While some studies report a positive association between LBLM and job performance (e.g., Babalola et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021), others suggest a negative relationship (e.g., Greenbaum et al., 2012; Quade et al., 2019). The inconsistencies across studies may arise not only from inherent statistical limitations, such as sampling and measurement errors (Schmidt & Hunter, 2015), but also from the varied theoretical mechanisms adopted to understand the effects of LBLM on follower job performance. Given the rapid proliferation of research and the increasingly fragmented and contradictory evidence, a comprehensive meta-analysis is urgently needed to synthesize findings, resolve inconsistencies, and advance both theory and practice in this area.

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A significant limitation in existing studies is their narrow focus, either neglecting mediators entirely (e.g., Mawritz et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2022) or examining only one mediator at a time (e.g., Tseng, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). Such an approach risks overlooking the simultaneous and potentially offsetting influences of multiple mechanisms. This oversight has led to an incomplete understanding of how LBLM influences follower job performance. As Greenbaum et al. (2023) argue, “LBLM does not always motivate followers to achieve the desired outcomes, as its effects may be mediated by multiple mechanisms” (p. 2137). For example, from the perspective of social cognition theory (SCT), employees may internalize the perspectives and behaviors of their leaders, such as adopting a bottom-line focus, which could increase their own BLM and, in turn, enhance job performance (Zhang et al., 2021); in contrast, social exchange theory (SET) suggests that by prioritizing bottom-line outcomes over relational dynamics, LBLM may undermine leader–member exchange (LMX) quality, potentially diminishing follower job performance (Quade et al., 2019).

Beyond its impact on job performance, a leader’s singular focus on bottom-line outcomes may also shape other important follower outcomes, including ethical behavior. When leaders prioritize bottom-line results above all else, employees may feel compelled to achieve these goals by any means necessary, even if it involves crossing ethical boundaries. This pressure can elevate the likelihood of engaging in unethical pro-organizational behavior (UPB)—actions intended to benefit the organization but that violate ethical norms (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). While prior research has linked LBLM to UPB, most studies have focused primarily on cognitive mediating processes (e.g., Kamran et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). However, the broader UPB literature emphasizes the importance of considering both cognitive and relational mechanisms (Luan et al., 2023; Mishra et al., 2021). Relational dynamics are particularly relevant, as UPB frequently emerges within the context of leader–follower interactions. The limited integration of these dual perspectives highlights a critical gap in the current understanding.

To address these limitations, we conduct the first comprehensive meta-analysis of LBLM and its outcomes. This approach enables us to correct for statistical artifacts, resolve inconsistencies across studies, and estimate true-score relationships (Schmidt & Hunter, 2015). First, we systematically examine the effects of LBLM on a wide range of followers’ outcomes—including job performance, organizational commitment, well-being, and UPB—providing a more holistic view of its impact (e.g., Guo et al., 2024; Quade et al., 2021; see Fig. 1). Second, we apply meta-analytic structural equation modeling (MASEM) to test complementary mediating pathways drawn from four theoretical mechanisms: SCT, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), SET, and

Job Demands–Resources Theory (JDRT). This enables us to assess how cognitive (follower BLM), motivational (follower controlled motivation), relational (LMX), and strain-based (follower emotional exhaustion) mechanisms jointly mediate the LBLM–performance linkage. Third, we examine dual cognitive and relational mechanisms underlying the relationship between LBLM and UPB, which integrates insights from SCT and SET to provide a more nuanced understanding of LBLM’s ethically ambiguous effects.

Our study makes three important contributions. First, from an empirical level, we provide the first meta-analytic synthesis of LBLM’s effects, integrating findings across more than 20 outcomes (e.g., job performance, attitudes, and UPB) to resolve inconsistencies in the literature. Second, theoretically, we identify and validate four complementary mediating mechanisms that capture the complex interplay of positive and negative processes through which LBLM influences follower job performance. Prior reviews have been largely qualitative (e.g., Greenbaum et al., 2023; Moazzam & Malik, 2025), and our quantitative integration helps clarify the direction, magnitude, and mechanisms of LBLM’s influences. Moreover, we extend the LBLM–UPB literature by uncovering its dual cognitive and relational pathways, refining our understanding of how performance pressure can produce both functional and dysfunctional employee behaviors. Third, our findings offer valuable practical implications. While a strong bottom-line focus may enhance performance motivation, it can simultaneously strain leader–follower relationships and increase followers’ emotional exhaustion and unethical conduct. This balanced perspective equips leaders with a more nuanced understanding of the trade-offs associated with LBLM, helping organizations navigate its risks and benefits more effectively.

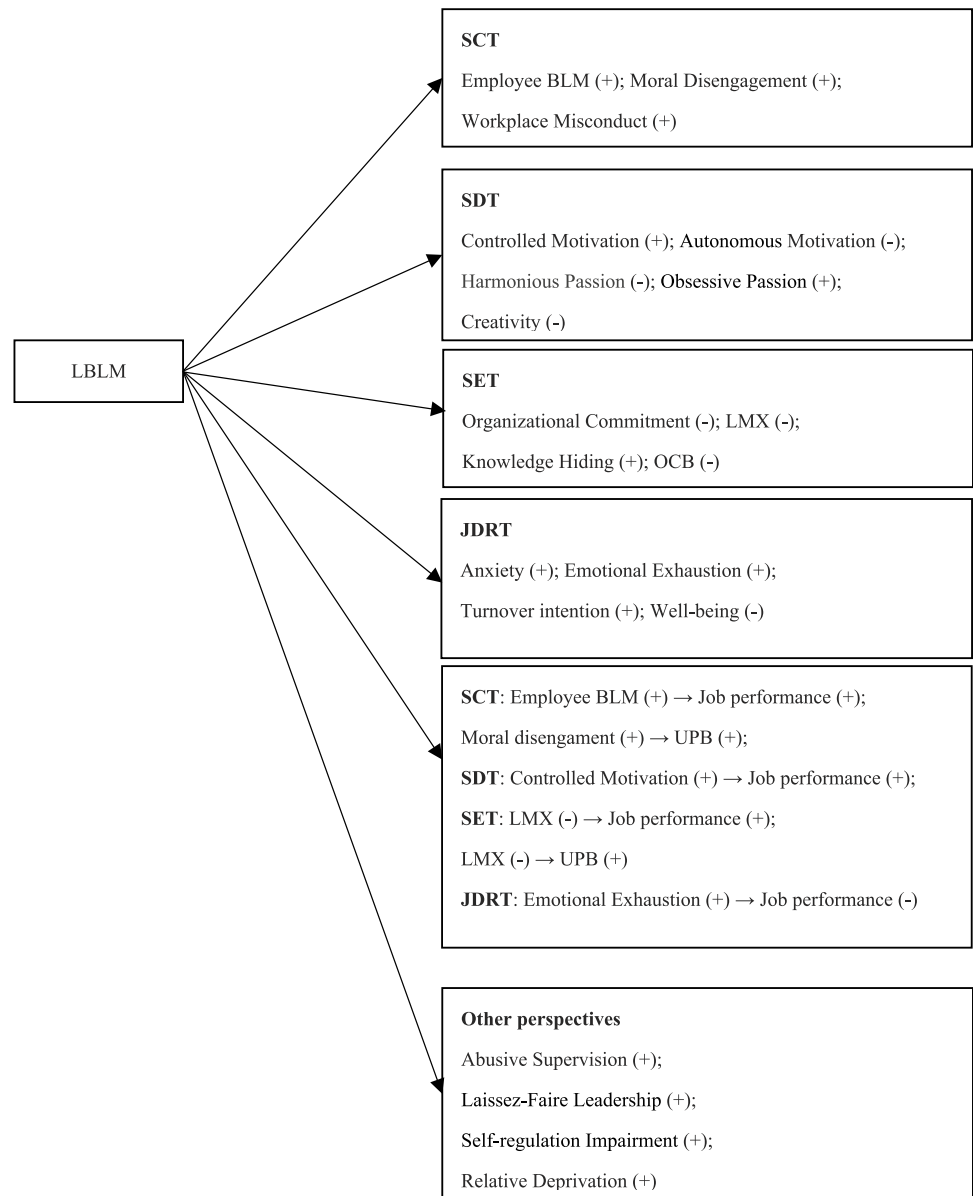
## Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

In this section, we first introduce the concept of LBLM. Then we review four key theoretical perspectives that have been used to explain the influence of LBLM, highlighting the differences between these theories and the associated variables derived from them. Based on these theoretical foundations, we propose the complementary mediating hypotheses. The definitions of the variables used in this study are provided in Table 1.

### LBLM

For business organizations, achieving financial performance is essential for survival, which necessitates a focus on the “bottom line”. The concept of a BLM was first introduced by Wolfe (1988), who described it as a strong focus on business

**Fig. 1** The Relationships between LBLM and Its Outcomes



outcomes. Initially, BLM was discussed in the context of managers' mindsets, with Wolfe (1988) indicating that a manager's BLM might compromise integrity. When we discuss the "bottom line", following Wolfe's (1988) introduction and subsequent development by Greenbaum (2009), we typically refer to financial outcomes or results that impact an organization's financial health (Greenbaum et al., 2023). First, BLM emphasizes a *sole* focus on this financial aspect. This is evident in BLM measurements, where employees rate their agreement with statements like "my supervisor is solely concerned with meeting the bottom line" (Greenbaum et al., 2012, p. 358). BLM is usually measured based on the 4-item scale developed by Greenbaum et al. (2012). Second, BLM is a type of mentality (Greenbaum et al., 2023). As a mentality, it is relatively stable but not as enduring as other

individual differences (e.g., personality traits). This distinction is important in the BLM literature, as it suggests that BLM could be influenced by other factors, such as personality traits (Eissa et al., 2019) and the BLM of others (Zhang et al., 2021). Third, different types of BLM exist, including leader BLM, employee BLM, and top management BLM. Among them, LBLM is the most widely studied form of BLM (Greenbaum et al., 2023).

#### Four Major Theoretical Mechanisms

Based on a systematic review, we identified four theoretical frameworks—Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Social Exchange Theory (SET), and Job Demands–Resources Theory (JDRT)—commonly

**Table 1** Definitions of Variables

variable	Definition
Abusive supervision	<i>Abusive supervision</i> is defined as “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which their supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178)
BLM	<i>BLM</i> refers to “a one-dimensional frame of mind that revolves around bottom-line outcomes are apt to neglect competing organizational priorities” (Greenbaum et al., 2012, p. 343)
Controlled motivation	When individuals are motivated by controlled motivation, they accomplish behavior to attain a separable consequence (Deci et al., 2017)
Creativity	<i>Creativity</i> refers to the generation of novel and useful products, ideas, or procedures by employees (Oldham & Cummings, 1996)
Emotional exhaustion	<i>Emotional exhaustion</i> refers to a state of feeling emotionally overwhelmed and drained (Maslach, 2003)
Harmonious passion	<i>Harmonious passion</i> is an autonomous form of internalization marked by genuine interest and self-driven engagement in work, often linked to positive outcomes (Vallerand et al., 2003)
Intrinsic motivation	When <i>intrinsically motivated</i> , people do something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable (Ryan & Deci, 2000)
Knowledge hiding behavior	<i>Knowledge hiding</i> is 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)
Laissez-faire leadership	<i>Laissez-faire leaders</i> usually exhibit “frequent absence and lack of involvement during critical junctures” (Eagly, 2003, p.571)
LMX	<i>LMX</i> reflects the “exchange quality between leaders and their followers. Low LMX relationships are characterized by economic exchange based on formally agreed on, immediate, and balanced reciprocation of tangible assets, such as employment contracts focusing on pay for performance; high-LMX relationships increasingly engender feelings of mutual obligation and reciprocity” (Dulebohn et al. 2012, p.1717)
Moral disengagement	<i>Moral disengagement</i> refers to the cognitive process that involves the deactivation of moral self-sanctions (Bandura et al., 1996)
Organizational commitment	<i>Organizational commitment</i> reflects the “relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Mowday et al., 1979, p. 226)
OCB	<i>OCB</i> is defined as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, 1988, p. 4)
Obsessive passion	<i>Obsessive passion</i> is a controlled form of internalization in which individuals feel driven by their work rather than working autonomously, frequently leading to negative outcomes (Vallerand et al., 2003)
Relative deprivation	<i>Relative deprivation</i> refers to the feeling of lacking something desirable (X) when an individual (1) does not have X, (2) notices others have X, (3) wants X, and (4) believes it is possible to obtain X (Wan et al., 2021)
Self-regulation impairment	<i>Self-regulation impairment</i> occurs when an individual’s self-control resources are depleted, making it difficult to restrain impulses and quick, thoughtless responses (Fennis et al., 2009)
Job performance	<i>Job performance</i> involves activities that directly transform raw materials into the goods and services that are the organization’s products or involves activities that service and maintain the technical core by replenishing its supply of raw materials, distributing its finished products, or providing important planning, coordination, supervising or staff functions that enable it to function effectively and efficiently (Motowidlo, 2003)
UPB	<i>UPB</i> is defined as “actions that are intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization or its members (e.g., leaders) and violate core societal values, mores, laws, or standards of proper conduct” (Umphress & Bingham, 2011, p. 622)
Work-Family Conflict	A <i>work-family conflict</i> is a form of inter-role conflict whereby the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect: one role is made more difficult due to participation in the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985)
Well being	<i>Work well-being</i> encompasses “employees’ overall happiness and positive psychological state during work” (Xanthopoulou et al., 2012, p. 1053)
Workplace misconduct	<i>Workplace misconduct</i> refers to a series of behaviors that are harmful and inappropriate within the organizational context, such as counterproductive work behavior, social undermining, incivility, and unethical behavior (Lee et al., 2024; Ogunfowora et al., 2022)

used to explain the effects of leader bottom-line mentality (LBLM). These theories offer complementary rather than competing explanations, each capturing a distinct psychological process through which LBLM influences employee outcomes: cognitive (SCT), motivational (SDT), relational

(SET), and stress-related (JDRT). These processes operate in parallel and are not mutually exclusive. Thus, simultaneous consideration of mediating variables related to these four theories allows for a comprehensive understanding of LBLM’s multifaceted impacts.

Specifically, SCT emphasizes how environmental cues, such as leadership behaviors, shape followers' cognitive frameworks, subsequently affecting their behavior (Bandura, 1989). SDT focuses on the satisfaction or frustration of basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—as key determinants of motivation (Deci et al., 2017). SET underscores the significance of interpersonal relationships and interactions, guided by social exchange mechanisms like trust and reciprocity, in shaping employee behaviors and attitudes (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Finally, JDRT highlights how job demands and resources can trigger either positive (gain) or negative (loss) outcomes, influencing employees' emotional exhaustion and engagement levels (Bakker et al., 2023).

To sum up, the core psychological mechanisms of these theories differ fundamentally, enabling a robust examination of multiple mediating processes simultaneously. Table 2 further illustrates each theory's core mechanisms and their associated mediators.

## SCT

SCT provides a valuable framework for understanding LBLM outcomes by emphasizing reciprocal determinism, where cognition, personal factors, environment, and behavior mutually influence one another (Bandura, 1977, 1989; Greenbaum, 2009). It posits that personal cognition is shaped through interactions with others and that learning often occurs through observation in social contexts. In the context of LBLM, it suggests that LBLM may shape employees' cognitions (e.g., moral disengagement and BLM). These cognitions then drive changes in employees' behavior.

## EBLM

According to SCT, a leader's BLM is likely to be positively related to an employee's BLM. This is because employees often observe other people, especially their leaders, using

this information to construct their own realities (Greenbaum et al., 2012). When leaders emphasize a BLM that prioritizes results over other considerations (Greenbaum et al., 2023), employees may observe and learn from their leaders, becoming similarly focused solely on achieving bottom-line goals.

## Job Performance in SCT

When employees adopt a high BLM, they focus on achieving bottom-line objectives. Job performance, which includes tasks that contribute directly to the production of goods and services or support organizational goals through resource management, product distribution, and critical planning and supervision (Motowidlo & Kell, 2003), is often closely linked to these bottom-line goals (Zhang et al., 2021). EBLM may enhance job performance by providing employees with clear, outcome-driven goals that focus their efforts on results. Supporting this view, prior research has shown that goal clarity is positively associated with performance (e.g., Locke & Latham, 2002). As previously discussed, LBLM may have a positive association with EBLM. Hence, we argue that employees may enhance their BLM by observing and learning from their leaders' BLM, which subsequently boosts their own job performance.

**Hypothesis 1** *LBLM has a positive indirect effect on employee job performance through EBLM.*

## Moral Disengagement

SCT explains why individuals may engage in misconduct, highlighting moral disengagement as a key factor (Bandura, 2002; Bandura et al., 1996). It posits that individuals can disengage from moral standards to justify harmful actions through three mechanisms. First, *moral justification* occurs when individuals rationalize misconduct, especially under leaders who focus solely on outcomes,

**Table 2** An Overview of Theoretical Mechanisms

Theory	Core theoretical perspective	Key mediators	Example studies
SCT	Environmental cues (e.g., leadership) shape cognitive processes, which in turn influence behavior	EBLM, moral disengagement	Bandura (1989)
SDT	Environments influence behavior by either satisfying or frustrating basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness), which in turn shape types of motivation (intrinsic/extrinsic) and subsequent behavior	Basic psychological needs, work motivation	Deci et al. (2017)
SET	Employee-organization (including leaders) interactions influence relationships and behaviors through social exchange mechanisms (reciprocity, trust)	Commitment, LMX	Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005)
JDRT	Job demands and resources lead to gain or loss effects, which in turn influence behavior	Emotional exhaustion, work engagement	Bakker & Demerouti (2023)



creating pressure that employees may justify by thinking, “If my leader only cares about outcomes, I must meet them, or face consequences”. Second, *minimizing, ignoring, or misconstruing consequences* happens when employees feel they won’t be held accountable for negative outcomes, often in environments where financial results are prioritized. Third, *dehumanization or blaming the victim* occurs when leaders foster a results-driven mindset, leading employees to view others as expendable (Resick et al., 2023). These mechanisms illustrate why LBLM is likely to trigger moral disengagement in followers.

## Workplace Misconduct

According to SCT, moral disengagement plays a central role in facilitating workplace misconduct by disrupting individuals’ moral self-regulatory processes (Bandura, 2002; Bandura et al., 1996). Under normal circumstances, individuals possess internal self-regulatory mechanisms that help prevent them from engaging in misconduct. However, when individuals morally disengage, these regulatory mechanisms are weakened. In such cases, they no longer experience the guilt, shame, or self-sanctioning emotions that typically inhibit misconduct. As a result, they become more willing to engage in behaviors that violate ethical norms. In this sense, moral disengagement functions as a psychological enabler of misconduct by neutralizing internal moral constraints. Given that LBLM may foster moral disengagement, it may, in turn, increase the likelihood of workplace misconduct, including unethical actions, cheating, and social undermining (Kidder, 2005).

## UPB in SCT

UPB is a distinct form of workplace misconduct, involving unethical actions intended to benefit the organization or its members (Umpress & Bingham, 2011). Although seemingly pro-organizational, such behaviors violate broader moral and societal norms. This moral contradiction makes UPB especially likely to occur when individuals morally disengage. Like other forms of misconduct, UPB becomes more probable once moral disengagement is activated. Given the theorized link between LBLM and moral disengagement discussed above, we further propose that moral disengagement may serve as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between LBLM and UPB (Umpress & Bingham, 2011).

**Hypothesis 2** *LBLM has a positive indirect effect on employee UPB via moral disengagement.*

## SDT

SDT, a macro theory of human motivation (Deci et al., 2017), offers a valuable perspective for understanding the outcomes of LBLM. SDT explains why people work by identifying various types of work motivations that drive individuals (Deci et al., 2017). One central aspect of SDT is the distinction between controlled and autonomous motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT can be particularly useful in explaining the outcomes of LBLM, as it highlights how the emphasis on bottom-line results—such as financial outcomes—can shape the types of motivation that employees experience and how these motivations influence their behavior.

## Controlled Motivation

According to SDT (Deci et al., 2017), workplace context plays a significant role in shaping employee motivation. Controlled motivation, such as working for financial rewards and work performance pressure (Gagné et al., 2014), is particularly relevant to LBLM. As Deci et al. (2017) suggest, when individuals are externally regulated, they perceive their actions as being controlled by others, often through contingent rewards and threats. LBLM, which focuses predominantly on financial outcomes (Greenbaum et al., 2023), creates a work environment that is full of pressure where employees may feel compelled to align with their leader’s goals. In this context, employees may have to prioritize external goals to avoid being pushed by their leaders (Xing & Yang, 2024), increasing their controlled motivation.

## Autonomous Motivation

SDT posits that when basic psychological needs—autonomy, relatedness, and competence—are unmet, autonomous motivation declines (Deci et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Leaders with a strong BLM focused solely on financial outcomes (Greenbaum et al., 2023) may undermine these needs. LBLM can undermine autonomy needs by restricting employees’ independence (Xing & Yang, 2024), impair relatedness needs by fostering a lack of support and abusive behaviors (Zheng & Zhang, 2023), and hinder competence needs by disregarding personal growth and feedback (Greenbaum et al., 2023). Overall, LBLM can erode these psychological needs, reducing autonomous motivation.

## Obsessive and Harmonious Passion

SDT explains that motivation involves internalizing external behaviors and values, shifting individuals from external control to autonomy (Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Passion, driven by this internalization, can be either obsessive

or harmonious, depending on whether psychological needs are met (Vallerand et al., 2003). LBLM, by undermining these needs and disrupting internalization, may foster obsessive passion instead of harmonious passion.

### Creativity

Research demonstrates that intrinsic motivation—a critical dimension of autonomous motivation—significantly enhances employee creativity and elevates performance quality (Deci et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2016). As noted, LBLM may undermine followers' basic psychological needs, and according to SDT (Deci et al., 2017), unmet needs reduce autonomous motivation. Therefore, LBLM may hinder creativity.

### Job Performance in SDT

Controlled motivation may enhance job performance for several reasons. First, it provides psychological energy for achieving performance, as Baker (1993) likens the effect of controlled motivation to that of a supercharged engine in a car, highly effective at boosting output. Second, it may direct employee efforts toward specific organizational goals. Organizations may use the carrot and stick approach (Ryan & Deci, 2020), such as employing rewards and punishments, to shape employee goals and encourage behaviors that lead to higher performance. Meta-analyses consistently support a positive relationship between controlled motivation and job performance (Cerasoli et al., 2014). As discussed earlier, LBLM is likely to stimulate controlled motivation. Therefore, we expect that controlled motivation may positively mediate the relationship between LBLM and job performance.

**Hypothesis 3** *LBLM has a positive indirect effect on employee job performance through controlled motivation.*

### SET

SET provides some insights for understanding the LBLM outcomes. At its core, SET emphasizes the principle of exchange, where one party (e.g., employees and employers) initiates an exchange of resources (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Cropanzano et al., 2017). Grounded in the principle of reciprocity (Blau, 1965), relationships evolve through this social exchange process. In the context of LBLM, the focus on bottom-line results—such as financial outcomes—may change these exchanges and influence employees' attitudes and behavioral outcomes.

### LMX

Low-quality LMX relationships are often based on economic exchanges, focusing on formal agreements and tangible rewards (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Leaders with a strong BLM prioritize bottom-line outcomes, such as financial results (Greenbaum et al., 2012), which leads them to favor these economic exchanges over building deeper social connections. As a result, they are less likely to offer trust and care, key elements of high-quality LMX (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Moreover, by viewing employees as tools for achieving financial goals (Quade et al., 2019), LBLM may limit the social resources employees are willing to reciprocate, negatively relating to LMX.

### Job Performance in SET

In high-quality LMX relationships (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), employees tend to reciprocate with positive behaviors, which can enhance job performance. In contrast, when LMX quality is low, employees may feel less obligated to exert extra effort to benefit the leader (Rockstuhl et al., 2012). As a result, they are less likely to sustain high levels of job performance. Meta-analyses confirm that LMX is positively linked to job performance (Dulebohn et al., 2012). As previously introduced, LBLM may negatively relate to LMX; therefore, we expect that LMX may act as a negative mediator in the relationship between LBLM and job performance.

**Hypothesis 4** *LBLM has a negative indirect effect on employee job performance through LMX.*

### UPB in SET

UPB is not only a form of unethical behavior but also a type of pro-organizational behavior (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). According to SET, positive social exchange relationships can foster positive behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). However, as mentioned earlier, LBLM may undermine LMX. In organizations, leaders' interests are often aligned with those of the organization (Luan et al., 2023). When LMX quality is low, employees may perceive a weaker relational bond with both their leader and the organization. This weakened social exchange relationship may reduce their motivation to engage in organization-benefiting behaviors such as UPB. Given that we previously established a negative association between LBLM and LMX, we propose the following mediation hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 5** *LBLM has a negative indirect effect on UPB through LMX.*

## Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is considered a social resource rather than an economic one (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In employer-employee exchanges, economic resources are typically exchanged for other economic resources, while social resources are reciprocated with other social resources (Blau, 1965). Leaders with a high BLM focused on bottom-line goals (Greenbaum et al., 2012) are less likely to offer social resources like trust and support. As a result, they may struggle to elicit organizational commitment from employees as a reciprocal outcome.

## OCB

Since LBLM emphasizes bottom-line goals, usually financial outcomes (Greenbaum et al., 2012), leaders are more inclined to offer economic resources. In response, employees may reciprocate with economic outcomes. In turn, employees may respond with economically related behaviors. However, because OCB is voluntary and not covered by reward systems (Organ, 2018), employees may not likely engage in OCB under the influence of LBLM.

## Knowledge Hiding

In the context of high-quality LMX, employees are more likely to engage in knowledge sharing and avoid knowledge hiding (Arain et al., 2023). However, as previously noted, under the influence of LBLM, employees may not experience a positive LMX. As a result, followers may be more inclined to engage in knowledge hiding rather than sharing.

## JDRT

The JDRT theory helps us to understand the influence of job resources and demands on employee well-being, motivation, and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In the context of LBLM, this theory explains how a leader's relentless focus on financial or bottom-line outcomes creates significant job demands for employees. These demands, or stressors, can then influence employees' behavior and well-being.

## Anxiety and Emotional Exhaustion

Job demands reflect the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of a job that require sustained physical, cognitive, and/or emotional effort (Bakker et al., 2023). LBLM can be considered a job demand, as leaders with high BLM focus solely on bottom-line goals (Greenbaum et al., 2023), pressing employees to meet these expectations. JDRT proposes a health impairment process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), where the frequency and/or intensity of job demands

lead to increased effort, which in turn heightens strain (e.g., anxiety and emotional exhaustion). Consequently, LBLM may trigger anxiety and emotional exhaustion.

## Well-Being

LBLM is considered a job demand that can increase strain and undermine employees' well-being. Leaders with a high BLM focus exclusively on bottom-line goals (Greenbaum et al., 2023), often ignoring employee well-being.

## Turnover Intention

As previously discussed, under high levels of LBLM, employees may experience strain, such as anxiety and emotional exhaustion. In response, they may consider leaving the organization as a way to relieve this strain.

## Job Performance in JDRT

JDRT suggests that job demands increase strain, which in turn leads to decreased job performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Emotional exhaustion is a key manifestation of such strain. When employees experience emotional exhaustion—a state of feeling emotionally overextended and depleted—they often lack the energy and psychological resources needed to concentrate, persist, and perform effectively. As a result, their ability to sustain high levels of job performance tends to decline. Supporting this view, prior meta-analytic evidence has demonstrated a negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and job performance (Corbeanu et al., 2023). As previously discussed, LBLM may be positively associated with emotional exhaustion. Therefore, emotional exhaustion may serve as a negative mediator in the relationship between LBLM and job performance.

**Hypothesis 6** *LBLM has a negative indirect effect on employee job performance through emotional exhaustion.*

## Other Perspectives

### Abusive Supervision and Laissez-Faire Leadership

Based on the leader process model, leader characteristics serve as antecedents of leader behavior (Fischer et al., 2017). As a leader characteristic, *BLM* may drive behaviors like *abusive supervision* and *laissez-faire leadership*. Leaders with a strong BLM are primarily focused on bottom-line goals (Greenbaum et al., 2023), often neglecting followers' well-being, which can lead to negative leadership behaviors. Additionally, BLM needs the significant effort required to



meet these goals (Zheng & Zhang, 2023), which may drain leaders' energy, diminishing their ability to manage their behavior and increasing the likelihood of engaging in abuse or laissez-faire leadership.

### Self-regulation Impairment

People's self-regulation resources are limited (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996) and a leader's strong focus on BLM may quickly deplete these resources. Supervisors with a BLM mindset may impose unrealistic or conflicting standards on followers, which can exhaust employees' own self-regulation capacities (Kamran et al., 2022). When employees are pressured to meet these demanding standards, their limited cognitive and emotional resources may become depleted, ultimately impairing their ability to self-regulate.

### Work-Family Conflict

LBLM may increase followers' work-family conflict because, under the influence of high BLM leaders, employees are pressured to prioritize work above all else (Greenbaum et al., 2023). In such a context, little time or energy remains for family responsibilities (Quade et al., 2021), triggering work-family conflict.

### Relative Deprivation

LBLM focuses solely on achieving bottom-line outcomes (Greenbaum et al., 2023), often neglecting other priorities like fairness. As a result, employees may experience relative deprivation, perceiving inequity or disregard for their needs.

## Methods

### Literature Search

We conducted a comprehensive literature search. Based on a qualitative review (Greenbaum et al., 2023), we developed

the following keywords: bottom-line mentality\* and BLM. First, to locate potential published papers, we searched the following databases: *Web of Science*, *PsycINFO*, *PsycARTICLES*, *SCOPUS*, and *CNKI*. Second, to include potential unpublished papers, we searched *ProQuest* and the proceedings of the *Academy of Management Annual Meeting*. Third, we reviewed the reference lists from a qualitative review of BLM to identify additional sources (Greenbaum et al., 2023). The initial search was conducted in October 2024, and an updated search was performed in July 2025 during the review process.

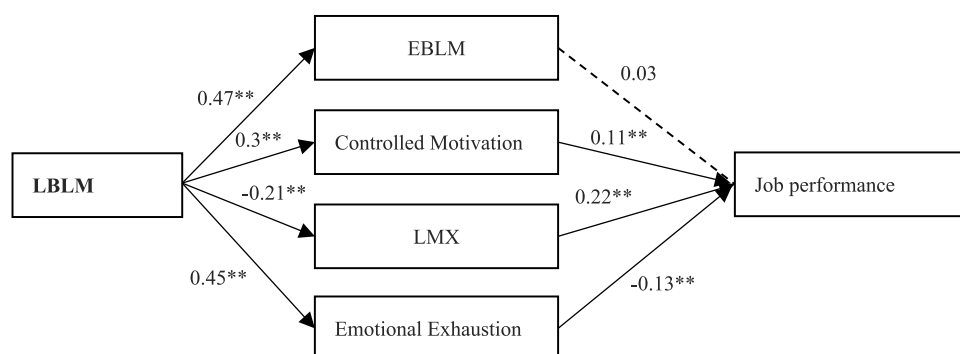
### Criteria for Inclusion

Our literature search identified hundreds of articles, which we organized and processed in EndNote to remove duplicates. After duplicate removal, we applied the following inclusion criteria for further consideration: First, we included only studies that provided correlation coefficients or other statistical information (e.g., F values or d values) necessary to estimate relationships between LBLM and other variables. Therefore, studies that did not provide the necessary effect sizes (e.g., review studies) were excluded. Second, studies needed to focus specifically on the relationship between LBLM and its outcomes. As a result, studies examining other forms of BLM (e.g., top management BLM) but not LBLM were excluded. Third, for certain correlations of interest, we required a minimum of  $k \geq 2$ . Consequently, studies that included relationships between LBLM and its outcomes but had  $k = 1$  were excluded (See Fig. 2).

### Coding

In line with our inclusion criteria, two researchers independently coded the relevant studies. Both bring experience in conducting primary research on BLM and in coding primary studies for meta-analytic research, with each having published over two meta-analytic studies. The coding process included capturing the following details: (1) bibliographic references, (2) effect sizes, primarily as correlations, (3)

**Fig. 2** The Mediating Model between LBLM and Job Performance. Note. \*\*  $p < 0.010$ ; \*  $p < 0.050$



reliability indices, specifically Cronbach's alpha, (4) participant numbers, and (5) other relevant information. In cases where one coder had uncertainties, the two researchers discussed to reach a consensus. In total, 158 independent correlations from 67 studies (55 published and 12 unpublished), encompassing 19,926 participants, were included. A PRISMA flowchart is provided to illustrate the search, inclusion, and coding process (see Fig. 3).

### Publication Bias Test

Before the main analysis, we followed recent methodological guidance on publication bias (e.g., Kepes et al., 2022) and conducted tests including Egger's regression, Begg and Mazumdar's correlation test, and Fail-safe N. All analyses were performed using the *metafor* package in R, with results summarized in Table 3.

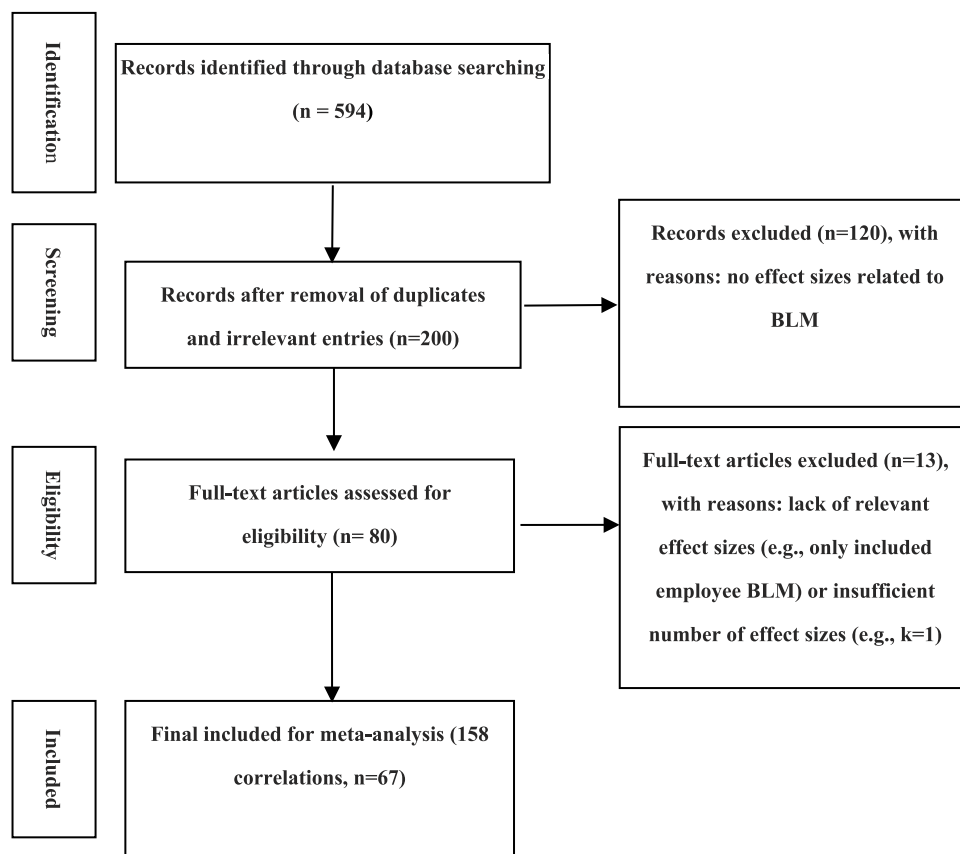
### Meta-analytic Procedure

We first examine the true-score correlations between LBLM and its outcomes. To accomplish this, in line with recent meta-analyses (e.g., Ogunfowora et al., 2022; Young et al., 2021), we applied the Hunter-Schmidt meta-analytic method, which corrects for distorting statistical artifacts

(Schmidt & Hunter, 2015). Specifically, sampling errors were addressed by calculating sample-size weighted correlations, and measurement errors were corrected using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Analyses were performed using the *psychmeta* package in R, with results shown in Table 4. Given the heterogeneity of true effect sizes (as shown in Table 4,  $SD\phi > 0$  in many cases), we applied a random-effects rather than a fixed-effect approach for greater accuracy (Schmidt & Hunter, 2015).

Next, we assess the mediation mechanisms between LBLM and job performance, as well as between LBLM and UPB, using the MASEM methodology, which requires constructing correlation matrices that include all relevant information (Bergh et al., 2016). First, we obtained this information from our meta-analysis. For correlations not available in our meta-analysis, we relied on previously published meta-analyses. However, we were unable to find correlations for EBLM with controlled motivation and emotional exhaustion. To address this, several methods are recommended, such as substituting similar variables or consulting expert estimations (Bergh et al., 2016). Following Bergh et al.'s (2016) guidance, we opted to conduct a survey, as this approach uses actual data without conceptual or empirical manipulation. We collected 500 online samples through Credamo to evaluate these correlations. Credamo is a widely used survey platform similar

Fig. 3 The PRISMA Flowchart



**Table 3** Results of Publication Bias Tests

	Begg and Mazumdar's test		Egg's regression test				Fail-safe N	
Variable	Kendall's tau	p	Estimate	t	df	p	N	α
Abusive supervision	0.123	0.5	− 0.179	1.298	3	0.285	110	0.05
Anxiety	− 0.600	0.233	0.807	− 1.739	3	0.181	422	0.05
Cheating behavior	0.330	0.750	0.838	− 0.12	2	0.910	92	0.05
Controlled motivation	0.333	0.750	− 0.106	0.604	2	0.608	100	0.05
Employee BLM	− 0.048	1	1.263	− 0.907	5	0.406	594	0.05
Creativity	− 0.143	0.773	− 0.332	0.588	5	0.582	266	0.05
Emotional exhaustion	− 0.167	0.612	0.650	− 0.785	7	0.458	1455	0.05
Harmonious passion	1	0.333	− 2.288	5.448	1	0.116	210	0.05
Autonomous Motivation	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−
Knowledge hiding	− 0.333	0.750	0.408	− 0.8	2	0.508	65	0.05
Laissez− Faire leadership	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−
LMX	− 0.333	0.750	− 0.190	− 0.006	2	0.996	40	0.05
Moral disengagement	− 0.556	0.193	0.558	− 0.591	3	0.596	231	0.05
Organizational commitment	− 0.067	1	− 0.234	− 0.110	4	0.918	312	0.05
OCB	− 0.333	1	0.568	− 0.365	1	0.777	24	0.05
Obsessive passion	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−
Relative deprivation	− 0.150	0.340	0.554	− 1.27	20	0.220	265	0.05
Self− regulation impairment	− 0.333	1	5.885	− 0.614	1	0.650	20	0.05
Turnover intention	− 0.429	0.179	1.267	− 2.611	6	0.040	627	0.05
Job performance	− 0.231	0.279	0.259	− 0.876	12	0.398	0	0.05
UPB	− 0.037	0.900	0.823	− 1.066	6	0.328	411	0.05
Well-being	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−
Work-Family conflict	0	1	0.460	− 3.245	2	0.083	156	0.05
Workplace misconduct	0.160	0.320	0.617	0.160	22	0.320	3012	0.05

to Qualtrics, offering demographic targeting, identity verification, and response quality control (e.g., attention checks and duplicate filtering). Several studies published in the Journal of Business Ethics have also used Credamo for data collection, supporting its academic credibility (e.g., Wei & Shen, 2025; Zhou et al., 2022). With the completed correlation matrix (see Table 5), we performed path analyses using Mplus to examine the mechanisms between LBLM and job performance (see Table 6). Similarly, the correlation matrix for LBLM and UPB and the corresponding path analysis results are presented in Table 7 and Table 8. Given that multiple mediators exist, in line with earlier meta-analyses (e.g., Zhong et al., 2025), we compared the relative strengths of different mediating mechanisms by calculating the difference in indirect effect estimates using Mplus.

## Results

### Publication Bias Test

First, Begg and Mazumdar's test showed p-values greater than 0.05 for all variables, indicating no significant bias

(see Table 3). Second, Egger's regression test also yielded p-values above 0.05, further suggesting no bias. Third, Fail-safe N values were large for most variables, exceeding the conventional threshold of "5 k + 10" (Rosenthal, 1979). For example, the Fail-safe N for abusive supervision ( $k=5$ ) was 110, well above the threshold of 35, and for employee BLM ( $k=9$ ), it was 594, far exceeding the threshold of 55. Together, these results indicate no detectable publication bias.

### LBLM and Its Outcomes

#### SCT

Under the SCT framework, LBLM shows significant associations with multiple cognitive and behavioral outcomes. As shown in Table 4, the 95% confidence intervals exclude zero, with positive  $\rho$  values for EBLM ( $\rho=0.47$ ,  $CI=[0.30, 0.64]$ ), moral disengagement ( $\rho=0.34$ ,  $CI=[0.28, 0.40]$ ), and workplace misconduct ( $\rho=0.33$ ,  $CI=[0.26, 0.40]$ ). For UPB,  $\rho$  is 0.35 ( $CI=[0.30, 0.40]$ ), and for cheating behavior,  $\rho$  is 0.32 ( $CI=[0.14, 0.49]$ ).

**Table 4** Meta-analytic Results

Construct	<i>k</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r</i>	$\rho$	<i>SD<math>\rho</math></i>	95% <i>CI</i>	80% <i>CR</i>
Abusive supervision	5	773	0.26	0.28	0.14	[0.09, 0.48]	[0.07, 0.49]
Anxiety	5	1531	0.43	0.47	0.19	[0.23, 0.71]	[0.18, 0.76]
Cheating behavior	6	1651	0.28	0.32	0.16	[0.14, 0.49]	[0.09, 0.55]
Controlled motivation	4	993	0.26	0.3	0.08	[0.13, 0.46]	[0.17, 0.42]
Employee BLM	9	1827	0.41	0.47	0.21	[0.30, 0.64]	[0.18, 0.76]
Creativity	8	3218	− 0.19	− 0.21	0.11	[− 0.32, − 0.11]	[− 0.37, − 0.06]
Emotional exhaustion	9	2420	0.41	0.45	0.14	[0.33, 0.57]	[0.25, 0.65]
Harmonious passion	3	736	− 0.48	− 0.53	0.21	[− 1.06, 0.01]	[− 0.92, − 0.13]
Autonomous motivation	2	512	− 0.12	− 0.14	0	[− 0.32, 0.05]	[− 0.14, − 0.14]
Knowledge hiding	4	1013	0.22	0.24	0	[0.15, 0.34]	[0.24, 0.24]
Laissez-Faire leadership	2	571	0.26	0.27	0.25	[− 2.00, 2.54]	[− 0.49, 1.02]
LMX	4	814	− 0.19	− 0.21	0.1	[− 0.42, − 0.01]	[− 0.38, − 0.04]
Moral Disengagement	7	1604	0.29	0.34	0	[0.28, 0.40]	[0.34, 0.34]
Organizational Commitment	6	1683	− 0.28	− 0.32	0.17	[− 0.51, − 0.13]	[− 0.57, − 0.07]
OCB	5	1958	− 0.15	− 0.17	0.21	[− 0.44, 0.11]	[− 0.50, 0.16]
Obsessive passion	2	555	0.3	0.33	0.34	[− 2.78, 3.44]	[− 0.72, 1.38]
Relative deprivation	3	1074	0.45	0.56	0.07	[0.35, 0.77]	[0.43, 0.69]
Self-regulation Impairment	3	505	0.2	0.24	0.06	[− 0.03, 0.51]	[0.12, 0.36]
Turnover intention	8	2083	0.32	0.36	0.16	[0.22, 0.50]	[0.14, 0.58]
Job performance	14	3188	− 0.01	− 0.02	0.19	[− 0.13, 0.10]	[− 0.27, 0.24]
UPB	8	1661	0.29	0.35	0.16	[0.20, 0.50]	[0.12, 0.57]
Well-being	2	562	− 0.38	− 0.43	0	[− 0.66, − 0.19]	[− 0.43, − 0.43]
Work-Family conflict	4	1068	0.32	0.36	0	[0.32, 0.41]	[0.36, 0.36]
Workplace misconduct	25	5844	0.29	0.33	0.15	[0.26, 0.40]	[0.13, 0.54]

*k*=number of studies contributing to meta-analysis; *N*=total sample size; *r*=mean observed correlation;  $\rho$ =mean true-score correlation; *SD $\rho$* =residual standard deviation of  $\rho$ ; *CI*=confidence interval around  $\rho$ ; *CR*=credibility interval around  $\rho$

**Table 5** MASEM Matrix of LBLM and Job Performance

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. LBLM		(14, 3188)	(9, 1827)	(4, 814)	(4, 993)	(9, 2420)
2. JP	− 0.02		(5, 894)	(146, 32670)	(143, 36264)	(11, 2151)
3. EBLM	0.47	0.03		(4, 761)	(1, 500)	(1, 500)
4. LMX	− 0.21	0.3 <sup>a</sup>	− 0.02		(8, 3447)	(9, 2246)
5. CM	0.3	0.18 <sup>b</sup>	0.31	0.31 <sup>a</sup>		(50, 26679)
6. EE	0.45	− 0.19 <sup>c</sup>	0.29	− 0.35 <sup>d</sup>	0.08 <sup>e</sup>	

The values above the diagonal represent *k* and *N*, respectively. Sources are as follows: <sup>a</sup>Martin et al. (2016); <sup>b</sup>Good et al. (2022); <sup>c</sup>Swider and Zimmerman (2010); <sup>d</sup>Harms et al. (2017); <sup>e</sup>Van den Broeck et al. (2021). Unlabeled correlations are from our current study. *JP* Job performance, *CM* Controlled motivation, *EE* Emotional Exhaustion

## SDT

LBLM is significantly correlated with various outcomes. The 95% confidence intervals exclude zero for controlled motivation ( $\rho=0.30$ ,  $CI=[0.13, 0.46]$ ). For Autonomous motivation, the CI includes zero ( $\rho=-0.14$ ,  $CI=[-0.32, 0.05]$ ). Obsessive passion shows a wide CI that includes zero ( $\rho=0.33$ ,  $CI=[-2.78, 3.44]$ ). Harmonious passion is negative ( $\rho=-0.53$ ,  $CI=[-1.06, 0.01]$ ). Creativity

shows a negative  $\rho$  with a CI excluding zero ( $\rho=-0.21$ ,  $CI=[-0.32, -0.11]$ ).

## SET

LBLM shows significant correlations with several outcomes under SET. The 95% confidence intervals exclude zero, showing negative relationships between LBLM and LMX ( $\rho=-0.21$ ,  $CI=[-0.42, -0.01]$ ), and

**Table 6** Path Analysis of LBLM and Job Performance

Path	Estimate	SE	95% CI	P value
LBLM → EBLM	0.47	0.03	[0.42, 0.52]	<0.001
LBLM → CM	0.3	0.03	[0.25, 0.35]	<0.001
LBLM → LMX	-0.21	0.03	[-0.26, -0.16]	<0.001
LBLM → EE	0.45	0.03	[0.41, 0.49]	<0.001
EBLM → JP	0.03	0.03	[-0.03, 0.08]	0.302
CM → JP	0.11	0.03	[0.06, 0.16]	<0.001
LMX → JP	0.22	0.03	[0.17, 0.28]	<0.001
EE → JP	-0.13	0.03	[-0.18, -0.08]	<0.001
Indirect effect				
LBLM → EBLM → JP	0.01	0.01	[-0.01, 0.04]	0.303
LBLM → CM → JP	0.03	0.01	[0.02, 0.05]	<0.001
LBLM → LMX → JP	-0.05	0.01	[-0.07, -0.03]	<0.001
LBLM → EE → JP	-0.06	0.01	[-0.08, -0.03]	<0.001
Total effect				
LBLM → JP	-0.06	0.02	[-0.09, -0.02]	<0.001

$n = 1335$  (harmonic mean). *JP* Job performance, *CM* Controlled motivation, *EE* Emotional Exhaustion

**Table 7** MASEM Matrix of LBLM and UPB

	1	2	3	4
1. LBLM		(4, 814)	(7, 1604)	(8, 1661)
2. LMX	-0.21		(4, 900)	(14, 4225)
3. MD	0.34	0.02 <sup>a</sup>		(26, 8067)
4. UPB	0.35	0.33 <sup>a</sup>	0.52 <sup>a</sup>	

The values above the diagonal represent  $k$  and  $N$ , respectively. Sources are as follows: <sup>a</sup>Luan (2024). Unlabeled correlations are from our current study. *MD* Moral Disengagement

organizational commitment ( $\rho = -0.32$ ,  $CI = [-0.51, -0.13]$ ). There is a positive relationship between LBLM and knowledge hiding ( $\rho = 0.24$ ,  $CI = [0.15, 0.34]$ ). However, OCB shows a  $CI$  that includes zero ( $\rho = -0.17$ ,  $CI = [-0.44, 0.11]$ ).

**Table 8** Path Analysis of LBLM and UPB

Path	Estimate	SE	95% CI	P value
LBLM → LMX	-0.21	0.03	[-0.26, -0.16]	<0.001
LBLM → MD	0.34	0.02	[0.29, 0.39]	<0.001
LMX → UPB	0.32	0.02	[0.28, 0.36]	<0.001
MD → UPB	0.51	0.02	[0.47, 0.55]	<0.001
Indirect effect				
LBLM → LMX → UPB	-0.07	0.01	[-0.09, -0.05]	<0.001
LBLM → MD → UPB	0.18	0.01	[0.15, 0.20]	<0.001
Total effect				
LBLM → UPB	0.11	0.02	[0.08, 0.14]	<0.001

$n = 1529$  (harmonic mean). *MD* Moral Disengagement

## JDRT

Positive relationships are supported between LBLM and anxiety ( $\rho = 0.47$ ,  $CI = [0.23, 0.71]$ ), emotional exhaustion ( $\rho = 0.45$ ,  $CI = [0.33, 0.57]$ ), and turnover intention ( $\rho = 0.36$ ,  $CI = [0.22, 0.50]$ ). There is a negative relationship with well-being ( $\rho = -0.43$ ,  $CI = [-0.66, -0.19]$ ).

## Other Perspectives

LBLM is positively related to abusive supervision ( $\rho = 0.28$ ,  $CI = [0.09, 0.48]$ ), relative deprivation ( $\rho = 0.56$ ,  $CI = [0.35, 0.77]$ ), and work-family conflict ( $\rho = 0.36$ ,  $CI = [0.32, 0.41]$ ). No significant relationships are found with laissez-faire leadership ( $\rho = 0.27$ ,  $CI = [-2.00, 2.54]$ ) or self-regulation impairment ( $\rho = 0.24$ ,  $CI = [-0.03, 0.51]$ ).

## Mediating Effects

As shown in Table 6, H1, which posited a positive indirect effect of LBLM on job performance through EBLM, is not supported (indirect effect estimate = 0.01, 95%  $CI = [-0.01, 0.04]$ ,  $p = 0.303 > 0.050$ ). In contrast, H3 is supported, indicating that LBLM is positively related to job performance through controlled motivation (estimate = 0.03, 95%  $CI = [0.02, 0.05]$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). H4 and H6 are also supported, showing negative indirect effects of LBLM on job performance via LMX (estimate = -0.05, 95%  $CI = [-0.07, -0.03]$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and emotional exhaustion (estimate = -0.06, 95%  $CI = [-0.08, -0.03]$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Figure 2 further illustrates the mediating effects between LBLM and job performance.

For LBLM and UPB, as shown in Table 8, H2, which suggests that LBLM has a positive indirect effect on employee UPB via moral disengagement, is supported (estimate = 0.18, 95%  $CI = [0.15, 0.20]$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This result indicates that LBLM positively influences UPB through the mediator of moral disengagement. H5, which proposes that LBLM has a negative indirect effect on UPB through LMX, is also



supported (estimate =  $-0.07$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.09, -0.05]$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings are illustrated in Fig. 4.

### Comparative Strengths

For the relationship between LBLM and job performance, given that the mediation path through EBLM was not significant, we focused on comparing the remaining three mediators. When comparing the original values of indirect effects, controlled motivation showed a significantly stronger mediating effect than LMX ( $\Delta\beta = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and emotional exhaustion ( $\Delta\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The difference in indirect effects between LMX and emotional exhaustion was not significant ( $\Delta\beta = 0.01$ ,  $p = 0.431 > 0.050$ ).

Additionally, when comparing the absolute magnitudes of indirect effects, the effect via controlled motivation was nonsignificantly stronger than that via LMX ( $\Delta\beta = -0.01$ ,  $p = 0.255 > 0.050$ ) and emotional exhaustion ( $\Delta\beta = -0.03$ ,  $p = 0.081 > 0.050$ ). The difference in indirect effects between LMX and emotional exhaustion was also not significant ( $\Delta\beta = -0.01$ ,  $p = 0.431 > 0.050$ ). Together, although the indirect effect via controlled motivation is significantly more positive than those via LMX and emotional exhaustion, the absolute strengths of the three indirect effects are relatively similar.

For the relationship between LBLM and UPB, when comparing the original values of indirect effects, moral disengagement showed a significantly stronger mediating effect than LMX ( $\Delta\beta = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). When comparing the absolute magnitudes of indirect effects, moral disengagement also showed a significantly stronger mediating effect than LMX ( $\Delta\beta = 0.11$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings suggest that moral disengagement serves as a more dominant explanatory mechanism linking LBLM to UPB compared to LMX.

### Post Hoc Test

A potential reason for the inconsistent findings is that previous research has typically assumed a linear relationship

between LBLM and job performance. As a result, the possibility of a nonlinear relationship has often been overlooked. Regarding LBLM and UPB, given that the number of studies ( $k$ ) is relatively low, we did not aim to detect their potential nonlinear relationship. To further explore the possible nonlinear relationship between LBLM and job performance, we conducted a post-hoc test using meta-regression, following prior meta-analyses (Curran & Hill, 2019; Sturman, 2003). Mean levels of LBLM from each primary study were coded and normalized for comparability (e.g., dividing by 7 for 7-point scales, 5 for 5-point scales; Curran & Hill, 2019). These normalized scores served as a moderator to predict correlations between LBLM and job performance, analyzed using the *metafor* package in R. As shown in Table 9, the coefficient for mean levels of LBLM is 1.24, with a 95% CI of  $[0.54, 1.94]$ , excluding zero. This indicates that mean levels of LBLM significantly moderate the relationship, with correlations between LBLM and job performance increasing as mean levels of LBLM rise.

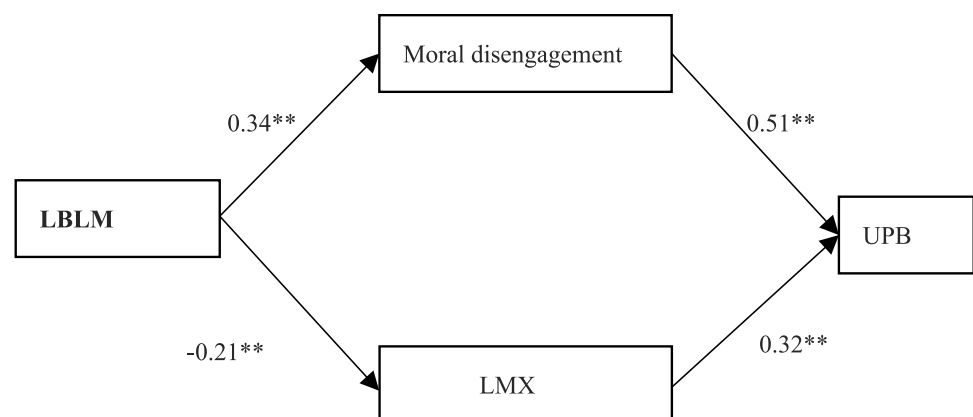
Figure 5 illustrates a U-shaped curve between LBLM and job performance. For a 5-point scale, when LBLM scores are below the threshold of 2.6, the correlation between LBLM and job performance is negative (left side of the curve). The threshold is derived from the regression equation  $Y = 1.24 \times \text{LBLM} - 0.65$ , where  $Y = 0$ . Solving for LBLM gives  $\text{LBLM} = 0.52$ . To revert to the original scale, this value is multiplied by the scale maximum ( $0.52 \times 5 = 2.6$ ). In this range, as LBLM increases, job performance decreases. When LBLM scores exceed 2.6, the

**Table 9** Results of Meta-Regression

Predictor	Estimate	SE	z	p	95% CI
Intercept	-0.65	0.19	-3.52	0.0004	$[-1.02, -0.29]$
LBLM	1.24	0.36	3.46	0.0005	$[0.54, 1.94]$

The independent variable is the mean LBLM score from each primary study, and the dependent variable is the correlation between LBLM and job performance

**Fig. 4** The Mediating Model between LBLM and UPB



correlation turns positive (right side of the curve), indicating that as LBLM increases, job performance improves. In summary, the analysis reveals a U-shaped relationship between LBLM and job performance.

The U-shaped finding is particularly intriguing, and we conducted robustness tests to further strengthen our confidence in the result. Using the *metafor* package, we performed influential case diagnostics, calculating indicators such as Rstudent, Cook's D, and leverage (Viechtbauer, 2010) to identify data points that might disproportionately influence the results.

Our goal was to assess whether the U-shaped relationship would be affected by influential cases. The results, presented in Table S3 of the supplemental materials, confirm the robustness of the U-shaped relationship.

## Discussion

This study presents the first meta-analytic synthesis of LBLM and its outcomes. By correcting for statistical artifacts across 67 samples, we provide true-score correlations between LBLM and over 20 key outcomes, including job performance, misconduct, and organizational commitment. This synthesis helps resolve prior inconsistencies and offers a more comprehensive understanding of LBLM's impact.

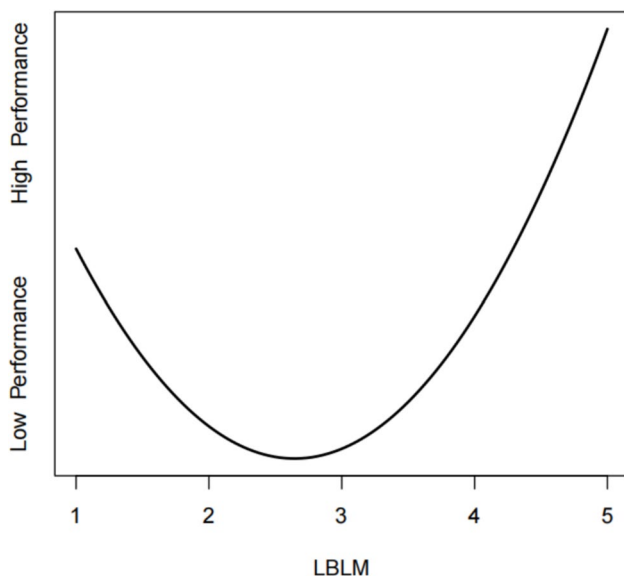


Fig. 5 The U-shape between LBLM and Job Performance

## Theoretical Implications

### Complementary Mechanisms Linking LBLM to job Performance

This study applied the methodology of meta-analysis to examine the mediating mechanisms linking LBLM to follower job performance. This attempt responds to the call by Greenbaum et al. (2023) for empirical exploration of both positive and negative influences of LBLM on performance outcomes. Drawing on SCT, SDT, SET, and JDRT, we proposed four complementary mechanisms. Empirical evidence supported three mechanisms—controlled motivation (SDT), leader–member exchange (SET), and emotional exhaustion (JDRT)—but did not support the SCT-based mechanism (EBLM).

We first elaborate on the three significant mediators. Although controlled motivation showed a relatively stronger indirect effect, the absolute magnitudes of all three mediators—controlled motivation, LMX, and emotional exhaustion—were comparable, suggesting each contributes similarly but in opposing directions to the LBLM–performance relationship. These findings enhance theoretical insights into the multifaceted pathways through which LBLM influences employee performance across motivational, relational, and strain-based domains. From the perspective of SDT, LBLM promotes controlled motivation by pressuring employees to achieve externally set performance targets. Based on SET, LBLM undermines reciprocal social exchange, which weakens the quality of leader–member exchanges. Finally, from the JDRT viewpoint, LBLM constitutes a hindrance demand that exhausts employees' emotional resources. Together, these findings highlight the complex and dualistic nature of LBLM's influences on job performance. Importantly, the similar magnitudes of these effects indicate how the motivational benefits of controlled motivation may be offset by the detrimental outcomes associated with emotional exhaustion and impaired LMX. As shown in Table 6, the overall effect of LBLM on follower job performance was negative ( $\rho = -0.06$ , 95% CI =  $[-0.09, -0.02]$ ), underscoring its predominantly negative impact.

In contrast, the SCT-based EBLM mechanism did not demonstrate a significant effect. Specifically, the relationship between EBLM and job performance was non-significant, as illustrated in Fig. 3. A potential explanation is that employees who internalize their leader's bottom-line mentality may nonetheless encounter psychological resistance, hindering the full enactment of this mindset. Such resistance could arise from value misalignment or insufficient autonomous motivation, thereby limiting performance improvement. We further discuss this possibility in our exploration of the U-shaped relationship between LBLM and performance.

Our integrative framework enriches existing theory by elucidating the simultaneous, but directionally opposing roles of motivational (SDT), relational (SET), and strain-based (JDRT) mechanisms under conditions of LBLM. Our findings highlight the importance of adopting multiple theoretical lenses to achieve a comprehensive understanding of LBLM. Notably, despite functioning in opposite directions, the three supported mechanisms demonstrated similar effect sizes, indicating they do not compete but rather operate concurrently. Thus, relying on a single theoretical lens may yield a biased interpretation. By integrating these diverse perspectives, our study contributes a more nuanced and balanced account of how LBLM simultaneously enhances and undermines follower job performance.

### Complementary Mechanisms Linking LBLM to UPB

As illustrated in Fig. 4, our results demonstrate that LBLM exerts dual opposing effects on UPB: it *amplifies* UPB through moral disengagement while *attenuating* it via LMX. This study advances the burgeoning literature on LBLM by illuminating how its consequences are simultaneously shaped by complementary cognitive and relational pathways—a critical theoretical nuance overlooked in prior work. Whereas existing research has predominantly focused on singular mechanisms, particularly cognitive mechanisms (e.g., Kamran et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020), our findings reveal that the ethical ramifications of LBLM emerge from a tension between employees' propensity to morally disengage and their reluctance to jeopardize high-quality LMX relationships. Notably, both the relative and absolute effect comparisons indicate that moral disengagement plays a significantly stronger mediating role than LMX. This highlights the primary role of cognitive disengagement processes in driving UPB under LBLM. Interestingly, the overall effect of LBLM on UPB is possible ( $\beta=0.12$ ). This finding provides a theoretical foundation for future research and encourages scholars to consider multidimensional cognitive and relationship pathways when examining the ethical consequences of LBLM and similar leadership styles.

### A U-Shaped Relationship Between LBLM and Job Performance

Our meta-analytic findings reveal a U-shaped relationship between LBLM and follower job performance. This finding offers a response to a question posed by Greenbaum et al. (2023): “Does an exclusive focus on a particular bottom-line outcome always (or mostly) help in attaining that outcome?” (p. 2137). Based on our findings, the answer is *not always*.

The U-shaped relationship between LBLM and follower job performance can be understood through the cognitive processes of resistance and adaptation. At relatively low levels of LBLM, followers initially experience cognitive resistance to leaders' explicit emphasis on performance. They may perceive such a focus as unreasonable, illegitimate, or misaligned with their autonomous motivations, which results in followers' limited internalization of the leader's performance expectations. Consequently, followers' performance remains subdued despite exposure to bottom-line pressures. However, as LBLM surpasses a critical threshold, sustained resistance becomes increasingly difficult. Followers begin to recognize that the leader's bottom-line demands are unwavering and non-negotiable, which prompts a cognitive shift toward adaptation. This adaptation involves internalizing the leader's expectations through a reassessment of the work context, acknowledging the necessity of meeting performance targets for organizational functioning and personal effectiveness. This cognitive realignment enhances clarity, legitimacy, and coherence of performance expectations, resolving internal motivational conflicts. As a result, followers exert greater effort, demonstrate heightened focus, and show increased commitment to achieving performance goals. In summary, the U-shaped relationship emerges because moderate levels of LBLM provoke resistance and decreased engagement, whereas higher levels of LBLM stimulate cognitive accommodation and internalization of performance expectations, ultimately enhancing follower job performance.

Interestingly, Zhang et al. (2022) also examined the curvilinear relationship between LBLM and follower job performance, reporting an inverted U-shaped pattern grounded in the challenge–hindrance stressor framework. According to their perspective, moderate levels of LBLM are likely appraised by employees as motivating challenges that enhance effort and focus, whereas very low or very high levels might be perceived as hindrances that negatively impact performance. However, our meta-analytic results revealed a U-shaped relationship, which differs from their findings. This divergence may stem from two primary factors. First, the theoretical perspectives differ: Zhang et al. (2022) employed a stress-based lens, while we utilized a cognitive interpretation. Second, the methodological and empirical scopes vary: Zhang et al. (2022)'s study was based on a single organizational context ( $N=284$ ), whereas our study integrates data from 13 independent samples ( $N=3906$ ) across diverse organizational and cultural settings, which offers broader generalizability. Collectively, adopting a non-linear perspective challenges prior linear assumptions and enhances understanding by emphasizing the cognitive dynamics underlying how LBLM affects follower job performance.

## Practical Implications

Our study offers practical insights for organizations and managers. In today's fiercely competitive business world, leaders often adopt a BLM. First, our findings help leaders understand the impact their BLM can have on various outcomes. For instance, LBLM is positively associated with emotional exhaustion and workplace misconduct, highlighting the potential dark side of this approach. Leaders need to be aware of the negative impacts that BLM can have, as it may lead to unintended consequences.

Second, managers should recognize that LBLM has a complex effect on job performance. While LBLM may increase controlled motivation and thereby improve performance, it can also reduce performance through emotional exhaustion and LMX. Our results suggest that LBLM has a complex influence on job performance, operating through both positive and negative mediators. Therefore, managers need to adopt a more balanced perspective to fully understand the dual impact of LBLM on performance.

Third, we observe a U-shape between LBLM and job performance. As shown in Fig. 5, job performance initially decreases as LBLM increases, but then increases again at higher levels of LBLM. This may help explain why many leaders adopt a BLM, as performance tends to be high when BLM is high. However, we should *bear in mind* that, as demonstrated in our meta-analysis, LBLM is positively related to turnover intention and emotional exhaustion. Therefore, while using BLM may enhance performance at a high level, it comes with significant costs for employees. The high demands associated with LBLM can lead to increased emotional exhaustion and turnover intention.

Finally, we find that the overall effect of LBLM on UPB is positive, even after accounting for two mechanisms: LMX and moral disengagement. While UPB may bring short-term benefits, it has the potential to harm the organization's long-term interests, as highlighted by Umphress and Bingham (2011). This suggests that while leaders with a BLM may foster behaviors that appear advantageous in the immediate term, such behaviors could ultimately undermine organizational sustainability and ethical standards in the long run.

## Limitations and Future Directions

There are some limitations in this meta-analysis. First, since the original data do not use an experimental design, our meta-analysis cannot draw causal conclusions. Future studies could apply causal designs to replicate our findings. Second, our meta-analysis does not consider the influence of potential moderators. Future meta-analyses, once more data are accumulated, could build upon our data using meta-analytic methodologies, such as meta-regression, to detect potential moderators (e.g., cultural or country-level factors).

Third, due to data constraints, we were unable to examine mediating variables between the U-shaped relationship of LBLM and job performance. Future studies should explore these mediators to provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying this relationship.

In addition to these, as a quantitative review, we recommend the following directions for further advancing the research. First, future studies should consider multiple mediation mechanisms when researching LBLM's influence. Future LBLM literature needs to explore various interrelated mediators simultaneously. By investigating multiple mediation pathways, researchers can offer a more comprehensive understanding of how LBLM influences employee behavior and outcomes.

Second, future studies should adopt more longitudinal research designs. In our review, we observed that LBLM studies predominantly used time-lagged designs, with very few employing panel designs. This limits our ability to track the long-term effects of LBLM. In different work situations, leaders may change their LBLM, which could help determine whether the observed effects are temporary or sustained. Longitudinal studies would also shed light on the long-term consequences for employee performance and organizational outcomes.

Third, future studies should explore the relationship between LBLM and other related leadership styles. Existing research has largely overlooked how LBLM influences leader behavior. Future studies could adopt a leadership-focused perspective to investigate how LBLM affects leadership behavior in different contexts. Since LBLM primarily focuses on results, it would be valuable to explore whether leaders might engage in positive behaviors (e.g., empowerment, service) to achieve these outcomes. Boundaries and conditions under which this occurs could also be examined.

Fourth, future research should examine the role of employees in shaping LBLM. While existing studies have primarily taken a top-down approach, focusing on how leaders influence employees, it is equally important to consider the potential influence of employees on leaders. In team environments, where members frequently learn from and influence each other, exploring how exposure to EBLM may impact LBLM could yield valuable insights. Investigating this reciprocal relationship could enhance our understanding of organizational dynamics between leaders and employees.

Fifth, as a direction for future research, we encourage scholars to examine mechanism-specific boundary conditions. Specifically, contextual or personal moderators may influence one or two theoretical pathways between LBLM and its outcomes. Given the distinct nature of each mechanism, it may be difficult to identify a universal moderator that simultaneously affects four pathways.

Finally, to further establish the theoretical uniqueness of LBLM, we encourage future meta-analyses to conduct



relative weight analyses once a sufficient number of relevant primary studies become available. Such analyses could quantify the incremental predictive value of LBLM beyond that of related constructs and offer meta-analytic evidence of its distinctiveness.

## Conclusion

This study offers valuable insights into the outcomes of LBLM, which represents the first meta-analysis of this topic. Our findings indicated that LBLM was positively associated with outcomes such as moral disengagement, emotional exhaustion, workplace misconduct, and anxiety. Conversely, LBLM was negatively related to outcomes like organizational commitment and LMX. The mediation analysis revealed that while LBLM may enhance job performance by fostering controlled motivation, it simultaneously undermines performance through negative mediators, such as emotional exhaustion and LMX. Additionally, our results suggest an overall U-shaped relationship between LBLM and job performance. Finally, we identify LBLM's double-edged effect on UPB, where it increases UPB via moral disengagement, but decreases UPB via LMX. In summary, this study contributes to the LBLM literature by providing empirical evidence on the outcomes of LBLM, and we hope it will stimulate further research in this area.

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**Author Contributions** YL: Introduction, Hypotheses, Coding, Methods, Results, Discussion. KZ: Introduction, Discussion, Revision. ZW: Hypotheses, Method, Results, Coding. JX: Hypotheses, Method, Results, Coding.

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**Data Availability** This is a review study that do not have original data.

**Code Availability** The coding information is shown in the supplemental material.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors have no potential conflicts of interest to disclose.

**Ethical Approval** This is a review study. The research ethics committee in Renmin University of China and the research ethics committee in Sichuan University have confirmed that no ethical approval is required.

**Consent to Publish** The study is a meta-analytic review and not a primary study. Consent was obtained from the published study; thus we do not need to inform any individuals.

**Research Involving Human and Animals Participants** This study is a meta-analytic review that we did not collect data from any human participants and/or animals.

**Informed Consent** Since the study is a meta-analytic review that we did not collect data from any human participants and/or animals, we do not have informed consent.

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