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WHEN BOTTOM-LINE MENTALITY UNDERMINES AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP ROLE CONCEPTUALISATION AND THE BUFFERING ROLE OF MINDFULNESS

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Abstract

This study examined the association between perceived bottom-line mentality (BLM) and supervisors' authentic leadership through authentic leadership role conceptualization (ALRC) and whether mindfulness weakened this process. Drawing on role theory, this study proposes that an overriding emphasis on bottom-line outcomes can narrow supervisors' understanding of leadership responsibilities, thereby reducing subsequent authentic leadership. A two-wave, time-lagged survey was conducted with 230 supervisors working in medium- and large-sized organizations in Pakistan. Perceived BLM, mindfulness, and ALRC were measured at Time 1, and authentic leadership was assessed at Time 2. The findings showed that perceived BLM was negatively associated with ALRC and subsequent authentic leadership, whereas ALRC was positively associated with authentic leadership. The ALRC had a significant indirect association between BLM and authentic leadership. Mindfulness significantly weakened the negative BLM–ALRC relationship, and the indirect association between BLM and ALRC diminished as mindfulness increased. These findings extend BLM research by identifying supervisor role conceptualization as a mechanism linking perceived performance pressure with leadership behavior and by positioning mindfulness as a boundary condition of this process. This study also contributes to authentic leadership research by showing that organizational priorities may shape leadership through supervisors' interpretations of what their roles require under concentrated bottom-line demands.

INTRODUCTION

Bottom-line mentality (BLM) relates to a distinct, narrow focus that explicitly prioritizes delivering bottom-line (BL) results, such as achieving the required outcomes, at the expense of other organizational issues that take a back seat (Greenbaum et al., 2012). This orientation is relevant to supervisors because they may perceive

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Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

it from a higher level, and these higher-level expectations can influence how supervisors define their leadership roles. Babalola et al. (2023) demonstrated this process using role theory, showing how perceived top-management BLM reduced supervisors' servant-leadership role conceptualisation and, subsequently, their servant-leadership behaviour. The results imply that BLM can influence leadership in a way that goes beyond simply creating performance demands; it can also shape how managers perceive and understand what is expected of them as supervisors.

Authentic leadership (AL) theory is especially relevant to this process. Authentic leadership is characterised by the combination of self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced information processing, and an internalised moral perspective (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Supervisors must take into account personal values, alternative information, and relational responsibilities, as well as performance goals, when engaging in these behaviours. Conversely, BLM focuses attention on a rather limited set of outcomes and pays less attention to competing priorities (Greenbaum et al., 2012). In this sense, when there is a strong BLM coming from a higher level, the two orientations can potentially create conflicting role demands for supervisors. However, research on the link between these perceptions and supervisors' authentic leadership remains limited. Jiang et al. (2025) organized leader-BLM research around its antecedents, employee outcomes, and mechanisms involving cognitive compliance, relational impairment, and resource depletion. Similarly, Arain et al. (2026) reviewed a broad range of BLM antecedents, consequences, mediators, and boundary conditions, with particular attention to employee performance and to workplace misconduct. Although this literature provides substantial evidence regarding the consequences of leader BLM, it offers less insight into whether perceived BLM changes supervisors' understanding of authentic leadership as part of their role. Babalola et al. (2023) established this role-conceptualisation mechanism for servant leadership; however, whether the same mechanism applies to authentic leadership remains unresolved.

This issue is also relevant in Pakistan, where recent research has documented the behavioural and psychological consequences associated with supervisor BLM. Existing Pakistani evidence, therefore, establishes BLM as an observable workplace phenomenon but provides a limited understanding of the supervisor-level mechanism linking BLM with authentic leadership. Examining this process in Pakistan shifts attention from employee reactions to how supervisors interpret and enact leadership responsibilities.

Accordingly, this study examines authentic leadership role conceptualisation (ALRC) as a mechanism linking the perceived BLM of a boss or higher authority with subsequent authentic leadership. This extension follows the role-theoretical logic developed by Babalola et al. (2023), but applies it specifically to AL. This study also considers mindfulness as a boundary condition because recent reviews have connected mindfulness with attention regulation, self-regulation, and reduced automatic responses to workplace demands (Tenschert et al., 2025). Specifically, this study examined whether perceived BLM is negatively associates with subsequent authentic leadership through reduced ALRC and whether mindfulness weakens this indirect association.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Bottom-Line Mentality and Authentic Leadership

In spite of its emphasis on performance outcomes, BLM is distinct from a regular performance orientation because it centres on bottom-line outcomes at the expense of other organizational concerns (Greenbaum et al., 2012). This distinction is important because recent evidence on leader BLM has synthesized several outcomes without showing one consistent negative pathway across them. For instance, Jiang et al. (2025)

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Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

identified three mechanisms connecting leader BLM with employee outcomes: cognitive compliance, relational impairment, and resource depletion. Arain et al. (2026) also found that the direction and magnitude of BLM relationships vary across outcomes and methodological conditions, suggesting that these relationships partly depend on the way BLM operates. Thus, the theoretical question is not simply whether BLM is harmful, but which aspects of management become less important when one criterion for performance takes precedence.

Authentic leadership is particularly relevant to this issue because its behavioural requirements involve considerations that an exclusive bottom-line orientation may deprioritise. Authentic leadership incorporates self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and an internalised moral perspective (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Recent systematic reviews continue to treat these dimensions as central to authentic leadership while questioning whether authentic leadership can be sufficiently understood through simple antecedent–outcome relationships or independent of contextual conditions (Polat et al., 2024; Gardner et al., 2024). This is important for BLM because balanced processing and internally anchored values require supervisors to consider information and responsibilities beyond immediate performance outcomes, whereas BLM explicitly narrows attention toward a prioritised bottom line (Greenbaum et al., 2012). Therefore, the theoretical tension between BLM and authentic leadership concerns the criteria supervisors use when deciding which behaviours deserve priority.

Evidence that higher-level BLM can influence supervisors' leadership supports this argument, but it does not establish that the same process operates in authentic leadership. Babalola et al. (2023) found that perceptions of top-management BLM were associated with lower servant-leadership role conceptualisation and subsequent servant-leadership behaviour. Their findings suggest that higher-level BLM can influence supervisors through their interpretation of leadership responsibilities rather than only through direct performance demands. However, servant and authentic leadership emphasise different behavioural content. Servant leadership places greater emphasis on serving and developing followers, whereas authentic leadership emphasises self-awareness, internalised moral standards, relational transparency, and balanced processing (Walumbwa et al. 2008). Thus, the mechanism identified by Babalola et al. establishes the theoretical plausibility of a role-based explanation, but whether it extends to authentic leadership remains an open question.

Recent quantitative syntheses have further explained why this question remains unresolved. Jiang et al. (2025) organise much of the established BLM evidence around employee task performance, citizenship behaviour, well-being, and unethical behaviour, with the proposed mechanisms similarly focused on employee responses. Arain et al. (2026) broaden this nomological network but likewise show that a substantial portion of accumulated BLM research concerns employee performance and workplace misconduct, while estimated relationships may also differ depending on the source of reporting BLM. These syntheses, therefore, establish a well-developed literature on downstream consequences without resolving whether perceived BLM changes supervisors' own conceptualisation and enactment of authentic leadership.

Evidence from Pakistan further reinforces this distinction. Naseer and Naqvi (2026) examined supervisor BLM through employee appraisal processes and linked it to employee outcomes rather than supervisors' own leadership role construction. Evidence from Pakistan, therefore, shows that BLM has behavioural consequences in local organizational settings, but it does not establish whether supervisors exposed to a bottom-line-focused authority reinterpret authentic leadership as part of their own managerial responsibility. Therefore, the present study shifts attention away from employee reactions and

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ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

toward the supervisor-level leadership process through which perceived BLM may become consequential.

H1: Perceived BLM of a boss or higher authority is negatively associated with supervisors' subsequent authentic leadership.

2.2 Authentic Leadership Role Conceptualisation as the Mediating Mechanism

A direct association between perceived BLM and authentic leadership would establish that the two are related, but it would not explain how an external priority is translated into supervisors' subsequent behaviours. Existing BLM research offers several alternative explanations, including cognitive compliance, relational impairment, resource depletion, and moral or motivational mechanisms (Jiang et al., 2025; Arain et al., 2026). These mechanisms explain the important consequences of BLM, but they do not directly address whether supervisors redefine the behavioural responsibilities attached to their leadership role. A role-based explanation is therefore particularly relevant when the outcome of interest concerns supervisors' interpretation of the leadership behaviours they are expected to enact.

Role theory proposes that organizational positions contain behavioural expectations that individuals interpret and incorporate into their understanding of appropriate role conduct (Biddle, 1986; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Applied to leadership, this logic suggests that supervisors do not need to mechanically imitate a higher authority for higher-level priorities to influence their behaviour. Instead, such priorities can shape the leadership responsibilities that supervisors regard as central or peripheral. Babalola et al. (2023) provide direct empirical support for this application by showing that perceptions of top-management BLM are associated with supervisors' leadership role conceptualisation. Their findings, therefore, support role conceptualisation as a plausible translation mechanism between higher-level BLM and supervisor leadership.

Authentic leadership role conceptualisation (ALRC) is analytically distinct from authentic leadership behaviour because it captures whether supervisors regard authentic leadership-consistent behaviour as part of their managerial responsibility rather than whether they are already enacting that behaviour. The broader role-conceptualisation literature likewise distinguishes beliefs about whether particular conduct belongs within one's role from the actual performance of that conduct (Tangirala et al., 2013). The proposed negative relationship between BLM and ALRC follows this role-based logic. When a higher authority repeatedly privileges bottom-line attainment over competing priorities, supervisors receive information about the responsibilities likely to be valued within their role (Biddle, 1986; Babalola et al., 2023). Authentic leadership behaviours that require transparent interaction, consideration of competing information, and consistency with internalised values may therefore receive lower work-role priority under a strong perception of BLM, even if supervisors do not personally abandon those values. This distinction is theoretically important because the model predicts a shift in role priority rather than a direct transformation of supervisors' personal values.

H2: Perceived BLM of a boss or higher authority is negatively associated with supervisors' authentic leadership role conceptualisation.

If ALRC represents the point at which external expectations are incorporated into supervisors' understanding of managerial responsibility, it should explain part of the relationship between perceived BLM and subsequent authentic leadership. Babalola et al. (2023) provide a precedent for this type of role-conceptualisation mediation in leadership, while role theory provides the theoretical basis for explaining how role expectations shape role definitions that subsequently guide behaviour (Biddle, 1986). The present study extends this logic specifically to authentic leadership, rather than assuming that

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
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Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

the servant leadership mechanism generalises automatically.

H3: Authentic leadership role conceptualisation mediates the negative association between perceived BLM and supervisors' subsequent authentic leadership.

2.3 Mindfulness as a Boundary Condition

However, role theory does not assume that all supervisors will experience the same organizational pressure in the same way, as individual characteristics can influence attention and self-regulation (Biddle, 1986). Mindfulness is relevant to this variation because it involves maintaining sustained attention to the present experience and reducing automatic responses to ongoing stimuli (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Recent systematic reviews of mindfulness and leadership have also linked mindfulness with attentional regulation, self-regulation, emotional regulation, and reflective processing, while suggesting that the mechanisms connecting mindfulness to leadership outcomes remain insufficiently integrated (Tenschert et al., 2025; Doornich & Lynch, 2024).

This makes mindfulness theoretically relevant at the BLM-to-ALRC stage rather than giving it a general predictive role in leadership. A more mindful supervisor would be less likely to interpret a salient bottom-line demand as the only standard for determining legitimate leadership responsibilities (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Tenschert et al., 2025). In turn, lower mindfulness may make externally salient performance demands more likely to shape immediate interpretations of effective supervision. This argument is designed to emphasize a particular informational and self-regulatory role of mindfulness rather than treating it as a generally beneficial personal resource.

The moderation argument is also more precise than explanations based on resilience or general coping mechanisms. The proposed mechanism operates while supervisors interpret what BLM means for their leadership responsibilities, whereas mindfulness concerns how individuals attend to and process their ongoing experiences (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Leadership-focused mindfulness research has also identified awareness, attention, emotion regulation, and self-regulation as recurring qualities associated with mindful leadership (Doornich & Lynch, 2024). Therefore, mindfulness should weaken the extent to which perceived BLM is incorporated into a narrower authentic leadership role conceptualisation.

If mindfulness attenuates the BLM–ALRC relationship, the indirect association between BLM and authentic leadership over time through ALRC should vary across mindfulness levels. This constitutes a first-stage moderated mediation argument because mindfulness is proposed to alter the predictor-to-mediator relationship rather than the relationship between the ALRC and authentic leadership (Hayes, 2015).

H4: Mindfulness moderates the negative association between perceived BLM and authentic leadership role conceptualisation, such that the association is weaker at higher levels of mindfulness; consequently, the negative indirect association between perceived BLM and subsequent authentic leadership through ALRC is weaker when mindfulness is higher.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Setting

A quantitative explanatory research design was used to examine whether perceived bottom-line mentality (BLM) was associated with supervisors' subsequent authentic leadership (AL) through authentic leadership role conceptualisation (ALRC) and whether mindfulness conditioned this indirect relationship. A two-wave time-lagged survey design was used to create temporal separation between explanatory variables and outcomes. Perceived BLM, mindfulness, and ALRC were measured at Time 1, whereas authentic leadership was measured from the same supervisors at Time 2 after a two-month interval. This temporal separation reduced same-occasion

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
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ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

response effects, although it did not establish causal precedence between BLM and ALRC because both were measured concurrently at Time 1 (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Cole & Maxwell, 2003). The study was conducted in medium- and large-sized organisations in Pakistan and focused on the supervisors. The individual supervisor was the unit of analysis because the study examined supervisors' perceptions of a boss or higher authority, their role-related beliefs, mindfulness, and their subsequent self-reported leadership behaviour.

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was used because participation required respondents to occupy supervisory positions relevant to the theoretical model of this study. At Time 1, 250 supervisors' responses were obtained. Participant identifiers were used to match observations across the two measurement periods. Of these respondents, 230 completed the Time-2 survey and were successfully matched with their Time-1 records, producing a final analytical sample of 230 supervisors, with a retention rate of 92%. Structured, self-administered questionnaires were used in both waves. All focal variables were measured using a five-point Likert-type agreement scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.3 Measures

Perceived BLM was measured using a four-item scale developed by Greenbaum et al. (2012). Because the administered items explicitly referred to "my boss", the construct was interpreted empirically as supervisors' perceived BLM of their boss or higher organizational authority rather than as an objective assessment of top management.

Mindfulness was assessed using the 15-item Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) developed by Brown and Ryan (2003). Because the administered questionnaire used agreement anchors rather than the original frequency format, negatively worded mindfulness items were reverse scored so that higher values represented greater mindfulness. ALRC was measured at Time 1 using 16 adapted authentic leadership items based on Walumbwa et al. (2008). The wording of the administered items was predominantly belief-oriented, allowing the measure to capture whether supervisors regarded authentic leadership-consistent behaviour as part of their managerial responsibility. Authentic leadership was measured at Time 2 using 16 first-person items based on Walumbwa et al. (2008) and was therefore interpreted as supervisor self-reported authentic leadership behaviour.

3.4 Data Analysis

IBM SPSS was used for data preparation and preliminary analyses, including descriptive statistics, reliability assessment, bivariate correlations, and multicollinearity diagnostics. Mplus was used for the latent-variable analyses. Confirmatory factor analysis was first used to evaluate whether the observed indicators adequately represented BLM, mindfulness, ALRC, and authentic leadership. Measurement quality was assessed using standardised factor loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted, Fornell–Larcker criterion, and heterotrait–monotrait ratio. Structural equation modelling was then used to estimate the direct association between BLM and authentic leadership and the indirect effect of ALRC.

The moderated mediation hypothesis was tested in Mplus using a latent BLM × mindfulness interaction. The model examined whether mindfulness moderated the first-stage relationship between BLM and ALRC, and whether the indirect association between BLM and authentic leadership through ALRC varied across low, mean, and high levels of mindfulness. The latent interaction was estimated using the XWITH procedure with robust maximum likelihood estimation and numerical integration. Conditional indirect effects and the moderated mediation index were used to evaluate the proposed conditional process.

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal

ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

4. Results

The final analytical sample comprised 230 supervisors. Of these, 128 respondents (55.7%) were male and 102 (44.3%) were female. Regarding organisation type, 121 respondents (52.6%) were employed in private-sector organisations, while 109 (47.4%) worked in public-sector organisations. Most respondents were aged 31–40 years (51.3%), followed by those aged 41–50 years (27.0%), while the remaining participants belonged to other age categories. In terms of education, 210 respondents (91.3%) held at least a graduate-level qualification.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4
1. BLM	3.019	.712	.911	1			
2. Mindfulness	3.041	.720	.979	−.093	1		
3. ALRC	2.987	.694	.979	−.472*	.168*	1	
4. Authentic Leadership	3.009	.723	.980	−.518*	.194**	.638*	1

Note. N = 230. BLM, bottom-line mentality; ALRC, authentic leadership role conceptualisation. * p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

The focal variables were centred close to the midpoint of the five-point scale: BLM (M = 3.019, SD = .712), mindfulness (M = 3.041, SD = .720), ALRC (M = 2.987, SD = .694), and authentic leadership (M = 3.009, SD = .723). Internal consistency was high across all four constructs. BLM was moderately and negatively correlated with ALRC (r = −.472, p < .001) and authentic leadership (r = −.518, p < .001). In contrast, ALRC was positively associated with authentic leadership (r = .638, p < .001). Mindfulness showed relatively small positive correlations with ALRC (r = .168, p < .05) and authentic leadership (r = .194, p < .01), while its relationship with BLM remained weak and non-significant (r = −.093, p > .05).

4.2 Measurement Model

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model Fit

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	90% CI	CFI	TLI	SRMR
Five-factor CFA	1597.266	1367	1.168	.027	[.021, .033]	.984	.983	.033
One-factor CFA	7024.526	1377	5.101	.134	[.130, .137]	.600	.584	.198

The hypothesised five-factor measurement model showed a strong fit, $\chi^2(1367) = 1597.266$, $\chi^2/df = 1.168$, RMSEA = .027, 90% CI [.021, .033], CFI = .984, TLI = .983, and SRMR = .033. In contrast,

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Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

the one-factor model fitted poorly, $\chi^2(1377) = 7024.526$, RMSEA = .134, CFI = .600, TLI = .584, and SRMR = .198. The substantial deterioration in all approximate fit indices supported the treatment of the constructs as empirically distinguishable rather than as an undifferentiated factor.

Table 3. Standardized Factor Loadings for the Focal Constructs

Construct	Item	Std. loading	SE	z	p
BLM	BLM1	.858	.022	38.604	< .001
BLM	BLM2	.816	.026	31.609	< .001
BLM	BLM3	.860	.022	39.169	< .001
BLM	BLM4	.864	.021	40.354	< .001
Mindfulness	MF1R	.873	.016	54.038	< .001
Mindfulness	MF2R	.854	.018	47.601	< .001
Mindfulness	MF3R	.863	.018	48.385	< .001
Mindfulness	MF4R	.881	.016	55.338	< .001
Mindfulness	MF5R	.863	.018	46.952	< .001
Mindfulness	MF6R	.880	.016	56.358	< .001
Mindfulness	MF7R	.883	.016	56.583	< .001
Mindfulness	MF8R	.880	.015	57.390	< .001
Mindfulness	MF9R	.854	.018	47.220	< .001
Mindfulness	MF10R	.873	.017	51.637	< .001
Mindfulness	MF11R	.887	.013	66.942	< .001
Mindfulness	MF12R	.873	.017	52.148	< .001
Mindfulness	MF13R	.898	.014	62.355	< .001
Mindfulness	MF14R	.875	.016	55.179	< .001
Mindfulness	MF15R	.845	.020	41.980	< .001
ALRC	ALRC1	.882	.017	52.902	< .001
ALRC	ALRC2	.869	.018	48.759	< .001
ALRC	ALRC3	.851	.020	41.661	< .001
ALRC	ALRC4	.852	.019	44.059	< .001
ALRC	ALRC5	.842	.021	39.546	< .001
ALRC	ALRC6	.881	.016	54.146	< .001
ALRC	ALRC7	.874	.018	48.035	< .001
ALRC	ALRC8	.869	.019	46.040	< .001
ALRC	ALRC9	.863	.020	43.946	< .001
ALRC	ALRC10	.856	.020	42.202	< .001
ALRC	ALRC11	.880	.017	51.825	< .001
ALRC	ALRC12	.840	.022	38.116	< .001
ALRC	ALRC13	.885	.016	56.757	< .001
ALRC	ALRC14	.861	.020	42.531	< .001
ALRC	ALRC15	.853	.021	41.043	< .001
ALRC	ALRC16	.880	.017	50.447	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL1	.854	.021	41.528	< .001

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

Authentic leadership	AL2	.846	.021	40.203	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL3	.864	.017	51.122	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL4	.852	.020	42.862	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL5	.860	.019	44.183	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL6	.862	.018	47.141	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL7	.877	.016	53.584	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL8	.872	.017	52.571	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL9	.875	.017	50.741	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL10	.877	.016	55.419	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL11	.863	.019	45.408	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL12	.877	.016	56.386	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL13	.843	.021	39.916	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL14	.911	.012	76.415	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL15	.881	.015	58.487	< .001
Authentic leadership	AL16	.861	.018	47.625	< .001

Note. STDYX standardised loadings were reported.

All indicators strongly loaded on their intended latent variables. Loadings ranged from .816 to .864 for BLM, .845 to .898 for mindfulness, .840 to .885 for ALRC, and .843 to .911 for AL.. Every loading was statistically significant at $p < .001$, and the lowest loading (.816) remained well above the commonly used minimum criteria, supporting indicator reliability across the focal measures.

4.3 Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Discriminant Validity

Table 4. Composite Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Discriminant Validity

Construct	CR	AVE	√AVE	BLM	MIND	ALRC	AL
BLM	.912	.722	.850	—	.100	.605	.713
Mindfulness	.979	.761	.872		—	.159	.192
ALRC	.979	.748	.865			—	.850
Authentic leadership	.980	.752	.867				—

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
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Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

Note. The off-diagonal entries are the HTMT ratios. MIND = mindfulness; AL = authentic leadership.

The composite reliability was .912 for BLM, .979 for mindfulness, .979 for ALRC, and .980 for authentic leadership. The AVE values were .722, .761, .748, and .752, respectively, indicating that each construct captured more than 70% of the variance in its indicators, on average. Discriminant validity was generally supported because all the HTMT values were below .90. The ALRC–authentic leadership ratio was .850, which met the .90 criterion but sat at the stricter .85 boundary, indicating that these two constructs were distinguishable but empirically close.

4.4 Structural Model and Direct Effects

Table 5. Structural Model Fit and Direct Path Estimates

Model fit / path	Estimate	SE	β	p
$\chi^2(697)$	816.196			.0012
χ^2/df	1.171			
RMSEA [90% CI]	.027 [.018, .035]			
CFI	.988			
TLI	.987			
SRMR	.070			
BLM → ALRC	−.640	.092	−.641	< .001
ALRC → Authentic leadership	.486	.055	.506	< .001
BLM → Authentic leadership (c′)	−.148	.056	−.154	.008

The structural model showed good fit, $\chi^2(697) = 816.196$, $\chi^2/df = 1.171$, RMSEA = .027, 90% CI [.018, .035], CFI = .988, TLI = .987, and SRMR = .070. BLM was negatively associated with ALRC (B = −.640, SE = .092, z = −6.925, p < .001, β = −.641, whereas ALRC was positively associated with authentic leadership (B = .486, SE = .055, z = 8.867, p < .001, β = .506. The direct BLM–authentic leadership path remained negative and significant after the mediating pathways were included (B = −.148, SE =.056, z = − 2.645, p =.008, β = −.154).

4.5 Indirect and Total Effects

Table 6. Indirect and Total Effects

Effect	Estimate	SE	z	p	95% CI
Indirect effect via ALRC	−.311	.050	−6.237	< .001	[−.409, −.213]
Total indirect effect	−.593	.079	−7.523	< .001	[−.748, −.439]
Total BLM → Authentic leadership effect	−.741	.084	−8.805	< .001	[−.906, −.576]

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal

ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

The specific indirect effect of BLM on authentic leadership through the ALRC was −.311 (SE = .050, z = −6.237, p < .001, 95% CI [−.409, −.213]), with the confidence interval excluding zero. The total BLM–authentic leadership effect was −.741 (SE = .084, z = −8.805, p < .001, 95% CI [−.906, −.576]). The total indirect effect in the estimated model was −.593 (SE = .079, z = −7.523, p < .001, 95% CI [−.748, −.439]). Because BLM and ALRC were measured concurrently, these indirect estimates were interpreted as evidence consistent with the proposed mediation process, rather than as definitive causal mediation.

4.6 Moderating Role of Mindfulness

Table 7. First-Stage Moderation by Mindfulness

Parameter	B	SE	z	p
BLM → ALRC	−.712	.064	−11.210	< .001
Mindfulness → ALRC	.159	.058	2.749	.006
BLM × Mindfulness → ALRC	.867	.073	11.863	< .001

Latent interaction analysis showed that mindfulness significantly moderated the BLM–ALRC association. BLM was negatively associated with ALRC (B = −.712, SE =.064, z = − 11.210, p <.001), while mindfulness was positively associated with ALRC (B =.159, SE =.058, z = 2.749, p =.006). The BLM × mindfulness interaction was positive and significant, B = .867, SE = .073, z = 11.863, p < .001, indicating that the negative BLM–ALRC relationship weakened as mindfulness increased.

4.7 Conditional Indirect Effects

Table 8. Conditional Indirect Effect Through ALRC

Mindfulness level	Indirect effect	SE	z	p	95% CI
Low (−1 SD)	−.575	.073	−7.875	< .001	[−.718, −.432]
Mean	−.311	.043	−7.305	< .001	[−.394, −.227]
High (+1 SD)	−.046	.030	−1.518	.129	[−.106, .013]
Index of moderated mediation	.378	.053	7.145	< .001	[.274, .482]

The conditional indirect effect of ALRC weakened as mindfulness levels increased. At low mindfulness (−1 SD), the effect was −.575 (SE = .073, z = −7.875, p < .001, 95% CI [−.718, −.432]); at the mean, it was −.311 (SE = .043, z = −7.305, p < .001, 95% CI [−.394, −.227]); and at high mindfulness (+1 SD), it declined to −.046 (SE = .030, z = −1.518, p = .129, 95% CI [−.106, .013]). The index of moderated mediation was .378 (SE = .053, z = 7.145, p < .001, 95% CI [.274, .482]), confirming that the indirect association systematically changed as a function of mindfulness.

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Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine whether perceived bottom-line mentality was associated with supervisors' subsequent authentic leadership through authentic leadership role conceptualisation and whether mindfulness constrained this process. These findings support the proposed conditional mechanism. Perceived BLM was negatively associated with ALRC and subsequent authentic leadership, whereas ALRC was positively associated with authentic leadership. The indirect association with ALRC was also supported. Taken together, these findings suggest that bottom-line emphasis is related not only to supervisors' leadership behaviour but also to how they define the responsibilities embedded in their leadership role.

This role-based explanation extends BLM research in a specific direction. Recent meta-analytic evidence shows that leader BLM operates through cognitive compliance, relational impairment, and resource depletion, indicating that its consequences cannot be reduced to a single ethical or motivational process (Jiang et al., 2025). The present findings point to another supervisor-level mechanism: the relationship between perceived BLM and leadership may partly operate through supervisors' understanding of what their roles require. This builds on Babalola et al. (2023), who linked perceived top-management BLM with servant-leadership role conceptualisation, and extends that logic to authentic leadership, which involves balanced processing, relational transparency, self-awareness, and internally anchored conduct.

Therefore, the ALRC is more than an intermediate statistical variable. Role theory suggests that organizational behaviour is partly shaped by how individuals interpret the obligations attached to their positions (Biddle, 1986). These findings are consistent with the idea that an overriding bottom-line priority may narrow the range of responsibilities that supervisors regard as central to effective leadership. This interpretation also provides an alternative to explanations based solely on resource loss or relational deterioration. Although these mechanisms are important in BLM research, Jiang et al. (2025) did not directly explain how supervisors cognitively redefine leadership responsibilities. Therefore, the ALRC adds explanatory value by locating part of the BLM process within the meaning supervisors attach to their managerial roles.

The remaining direct relationship between BLM and authentic leadership is theoretically informative. Because ALRC does not account for the entire relationship, role conceptualisation should not be treated as a comprehensive mechanism. Other processes identified in contemporary BLM research, including resource depletion, interpersonal deterioration, performance-related appraisal, and psychological insecurity, may operate alongside role cognition (Jiang et al., 2025; Naseer & Naqvi, 2026; Munaf et al., 2025). Therefore, the findings support a more plural explanation in which supervisors' role beliefs represent one theoretically distinct route rather than the sole explanation for the BLM–leadership relationship.

Caution must be used when considering the strong relationship between ALRC and authentic leadership. While evidence for their discriminant validity was supported, the two constructs were empirically close. In theory, this makes sense because believing that authentic conduct belongs within one's leadership role should be closely connected to reporting such conduct. However, there is an important difference between the two: role conceptualisation is about defining leadership responsibility in the mind of an individual, while authentic leadership is about enacting that responsibility. This distinction responds to recent concerns about the authentic leadership literature failing to clearly separate construct development, antecedents, and outcomes, as well as concerns about the inconsistent use of strong research designs (Gardner et al., 2024). Thus, in the current model, the focus moves away from asking what authentic leadership can give rise to and instead

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
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Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

looks at associations between organizational priorities and the formation of authentic leadership.

Mindfulness also helps explain why managers in the same organisation, when subjected to similar bottom-line pressure, might interpret it differently. The relationship between BLM and ALRC weakened as mindfulness increased, and the indirect association through ALRC also became progressively weaker at higher levels of mindfulness. Recent writings describe mindful leadership as involving greater attention, awareness, and authenticity, while mindfulness-oriented leadership development research focuses on more deliberate processing of ongoing leadership demands (Doornich & Lynch, 2024; Tenschert et al., 2025). The present results build on previous research by specifically demonstrating a function of mindfulness: it is associated with reduced susceptibility of supervisors' role conceptualisation to an overriding bottom-line orientation.

The nonsignificant association between BLM and mindfulness is also noteworthy. Mindfulness does not simply represent the opposite of a bottom-line mentality. Instead, its relevance emerged in the way supervisors responded to BLM. This strengthens the interpretation of mindfulness as a boundary condition rather than as an alternative to explanatory variables. It also distinguishes the present mechanism from approaches that treat personal resources as direct predictors of favourable outcomes.

The Pakistani context further sharpens this contribution to the literature. Recent studies conducted in Pakistan have linked supervisor BLM with employee incivility, goal progress, psychological safety, voice, innovation, job insecurity, and workplace jealousy through different employee-level processes (Hameed, 2025; Munaf et al., 2025; Naseer & Naqvi, 2026). The present study moves beyond these employee-focused explanations by examining supervisors as the focal actors and identifying their role conceptualisation as a mechanism. This distinction is important because the organizational consequences of BLM may arise not only from how employees react to a bottom-line-focused supervisor but also from how supervisors interpret the leadership obligations transmitted from above.

6. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The first theoretical contribution of this study lies in extending BLM research from employee response mechanisms to supervisor role cognition. Contemporary evidence has largely explained BLM through employee appraisal, psychological safety, relational impairment, resource depletion, and other downstream responses (Jiang et al., 2025; Hameed, 2025; Naseer & Naqvi, 2026). By identifying ALRC as an intervening mechanism, this study shows that perceived organizational priorities may also be associated with the meaning supervisors attach to leadership.

Second, this study advances authentic leadership research by identifying a concrete organizational antecedent of authentic leadership role conceptualisation. Recent reviews have called for greater attention to the antecedents, development, and conceptual boundaries of authentic leadership, rather than maintaining a predominant focus on its outcomes (Gardner et al., 2024; Polat et al., 2024). The findings respond to this gap by connecting supervisors' role beliefs to the priorities communicated by higher-level organizational authorities.

Third, this study offers a clear indication of the role of mindfulness rather than treating it as a generally beneficial individual resource. Mindfulness is important because it weakens the specific BLM–ALRC relationship. Thus, its contribution is based on its conditional function rather than simply its positive association with leadership. This interpretation is consistent with recent literature highlighting attention and awareness as central mechanisms through which mindfulness may influence leadership (Doornich & Lynch, 2024).

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
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ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

In terms of the practical implications, the results indicate that organisations should distinguish between performance challenges that require strong accountability and managerial messages that imply that other responsibilities should be set aside to secure bottom-line returns. There is no requirement for organisations to lower their performance accountability. Rather, senior leaders can reinforce key performance targets while also clearly communicating expectations concerning balanced judgment, transparency, ethical consistency, and stakeholder responsibility. Leadership development programs can also reinforce authentic leadership responsibilities as part of a supervisor's role, rather than treating them as an additional interpersonal leadership style.

Mindfulness-based development may complement these practices, but it should not be considered a replacement for organizational design. Evidence on mindfulness and self-leadership development is promising, although contemporary reviews continue to identify variations in intervention quality and effects (Tenschert et al., 2025). Therefore, organisations should avoid using individual mindfulness training to compensate for performance systems that consistently communicate excessively narrow priorities.

7. Limitations and Future Research

The findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, BLM, mindfulness, and ALRC were measured concurrently; authentic leadership was assessed later. Therefore, the temporal design separated the outcome from the earlier variables but did not establish whether perceived BLM preceded changes in ALRC. Future research should use three-wave or longitudinal designs in which BLM precedes role conceptualisation and role conceptualisation precedes leadership behaviour.

Second, all focal constructs were reported by the supervisors. Future studies could combine supervisors' perceptions of higher-level BLM with subordinate assessments, behavioural observations, or archival indicators of leadership. Such designs would provide a stronger test of whether role conceptualisation predicts leadership behaviour that is visible to others.

Third, the strong empirical proximity between ALRC and authentic leadership warrants further measurement. Future research should refine ALRC items to capture perceived role obligation more distinctly from behavioural self-description. It should also examine whether the ALRC explains additional variance in leadership behaviour beyond closely related attitudinal constructs. This would provide stronger evidence that ALRC represents a distinct cognitive precursor rather than simply being another expression of authentic leadership.

Fourth, the Pakistani setting provides useful evidence from a context in which contemporary BLM research is developing; however, the findings should not be assumed to generalise uniformly across countries. Jiang et al. (2025) found that some BLM relationships differed across cultural and contextual characteristics, suggesting that context influences the consequences of bottom-line orientation. Cross-national research should therefore examine whether performance systems, power structures, institutional expectations, or leadership norms strengthen or weaken the BLM–ALRC mechanism, rather than relying on broad cultural labels without direct testing.

Future studies should also examine competing and complementary mediators. Employee appraisal, psychological safety, resource depletion, and job insecurity have emerged as relevant mechanisms in recent BLM studies (Hameed, 2025; Munaf et al., 2025; Naseer & Naqvi, 2026). Testing these mechanisms alongside role conceptualisation would clarify whether BLM is associated with leadership primarily by changing how supervisors define their role, consuming psychological resources, or through several pathways operating simultaneously.

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Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

8. Conclusion

This study advances the understanding of bottom-line mentality by showing that its relationship with authentic leadership extends beyond a direct behavioural association to supervisors' interpretation of what leadership requires. Authentic leadership role conceptualisation emerged as a meaningful mechanism linking perceived BLM with subsequent authentic leadership, whereas mindfulness weakened this role-based process. Therefore, this study connects BLM research with contemporary calls to understand the antecedents and development of authentic leadership rather than focusing predominantly on its outcomes. More broadly, the findings suggest that performance systems can become leadership-shaping systems when priorities communicated from higher levels influence supervisors' understanding of legitimate managerial responsibilities. Authentic leadership may therefore depend not only on the characteristics supervisors bring to their roles but also on the role expectations they infer from the organizational environment and the psychological resources they draw upon when interpreting those expectations.

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