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## Article

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## Article

# Effects of Secure Base Leadership vs. Avoidant Leadership on Job Performance

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**Abstract:** Organizations need high performance from their employees to achieve their goals, provide specialized services and products, and ultimately secure a competitive edge. Performance is also a source of satisfaction for employees, as it creates feelings of mastery and pride. Different leadership styles positively influence both employee performance and organizational excellence; thus, the present study aimed to analyze the relationship between a novel leadership style based on attachment theory, secure base leadership, and job performance (i.e., task and conceptual performance and counterproductive work behaviors). Additionally, a passive-avoidant leadership relationship with performance dimensions is analyzed. Using partial least squares structural equation modeling with self-reported data from 422 Spanish employees, the results show that secure base leadership is positively related to task and contextual performance, while it is negatively related to counterproductive work behaviors. The opposite pattern is found for passive-avoidant leadership (except for the link between passive-avoidant leadership and contextual performance, which is not significant). The promotion of secure base leadership within organizations allows for the cultivation of a supportive environment that favors work behaviors that are aligned with organizational objectives, and since leadership can be trained, these results are relevant for practitioners in organizations.

**Keywords:** leadership; secure base leadership; avoidant leadership; job performance; counterproductive work behavior



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## 1. Introduction

In the competitive environment of modern businesses, achieving high employee performance is imperative for meeting organizational goals and securing a competitive advantage [1]. This level of performance not only fosters personal satisfaction, mastery, and pride among employees, but also enhances their prospects for career advancement, thus driving further excellence in product and service delivery across the organization. Recognizing and rewarding high performance are key strategies that businesses employ to boost motivation and secure ongoing success [2].

The research on job performance categorizes it as a complex construct that includes task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior [3]. These dimensions collectively illustrate the diverse aspects of employee output within business environments. Among the determinants of job performance, leadership has been identified as profoundly influential, affecting all dimensions of performance [4,5]. Various positive leadership styles, such as authentic, ethical, and servant leadership, have been shown to significantly enhance job performance in businesses [6,7].

This study seeks to address a significant gap in the business literature: despite the extensive body of research on leadership within businesses, the specific impacts on job performance of secure base leadership, which is a new model based on attachment theory [8,9], remain underexplored. To address this, our research contrasts secure base leadership with passive-avoidant leadership, traditionally known as *laissez-faire* within Bass's full-range leadership model [10,11]. This comparative analysis aims to deepen our understanding of how different leadership styles—seen as positive and negative forces—affect job performance in business settings. We hypothesize that secure base leadership not only enhances task performance but also influences wider aspects of organizational behavior, potentially improving both individual and collective outcomes. Studying these effects is essential to understand how different leadership styles can influence employee job performance, which in turn impacts overall business performance and operations.

### 1.1. Secure Base Leadership (SBL)

Leadership is a universal phenomenon observed across all human groups and has been studied extensively from various angles, particularly within disciplines such as psychology, organizational studies, and business. Within organizational settings, leadership is more than just a role; it is a critical function that involves guiding, motivating, and inspiring employees to achieve organizational goals [12]. Effective leadership is characterized by the ability to create a shared vision, foster an environment of trust and respect, and drive the organizational change necessary to meet the challenges of a dynamic business landscape.

While numerous approaches to positive leadership exist, such as authentic and servant leadership, each model offers unique contributions that often complement one another [7]. These leadership models, including the recently proposed secure base leadership (SBL) based on attachment theory [8,9], all emphasize the importance of building trusting relationships between leaders and followers. It is crucial to analyze the distinctive characteristics of each approach to understand their influence on employees and job performance. This analysis aids in the selection of the most appropriate leadership style for specific contexts and also enhances our understanding of how these styles impact employee motivation, engagement, and overall job performance, fostering a positive work environment. Specifically, SBL focuses on interpersonal relationships; primarily, it nurtures the emotional bond that forms between the leader and the follower, underscoring the profound impact of emotional connections on effective leadership [8].

SBL is grounded in Bowlby's attachment theory [13,14], which accentuates the significance of nurturing, responsive, and supportive relational partners for overall well-being and health. Initially aimed at elucidating the pivotal roles of caregivers in child development, this theory's tenets—the provision of a safe haven for comfort and a secure base for exploration—have been extrapolated to adult relationships, impacting dynamics within friendships, romantic partnerships, and organizational leader-subordinate interactions [15,16]. Leadership that embodies the provision of a safe haven and a secure base has been identified as crucial for fostering followers' psychological well-being in organizational settings, with research indicating its positive correlation with reduced stress and burnout [8,9,17]. Similarly, other studies have shown that employees who perceive their leaders as security-providing figures exhibit greater commitment and loyalty to the organization, resulting in a higher willingness to follow rules and actively participate in the company [18]. The mediating effect of SBL underscores the importance of perceived leader support, which not only encourages proactive behaviors among workers but also contributes to a positive work experience and the reduction in emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of incompetence [19].

The impact of SBL on job performance has been underexplored; thus, it is the main focus of this study. We aim to examine how SBL affects job performance and to compare it with passive-avoidant leadership. Passive-avoidant leadership, also known as *laissez-faire* leadership [10], represents the absence of leadership transactions, where the leader avoids making decisions, abdicates responsibility, and does not use their authority. In practice,

this style refers to leaders who are not present for their employees, who avoid resolving interpersonal conflicts at work, and who steer clear of engaging with personal issues related to work. This approach is generally considered the most passive and ineffective form of leadership. Previous studies have shown that passive-avoidant leadership has a negative relationship with SBL [8]. In addition, passive-avoidant leadership has been associated with lower leader effectiveness, reduced satisfaction with the leader [8], increased absenteeism [20], and workplace bullying [21], often leading to counterproductive behaviors and lower employee performance.

### 1.2. Organizational Performance

The high relevance of performance is reflected in the research, and job performance is one of most studied variables in management and organizational behavior [2]. A search in Google Scholar for the terms “work performance”, “job performance”, and “organizational performance” yields more than 1 million, 1.7 million, and 1.3 million results, respectively. Different systematic reviews and meta-analyses studies consider aspects as varied as the impact of environmental stress on performance [22], the relationship between flow states and performance [23], and the relationship between personality traits and performance [24,25]. Performance is mainly considered as a dependent variable; thus, performance can be seen as a variable that organizations aim to improve and optimize.

One of the primary reasons for the significant interest in the construct of performance is its multifaceted nature. The authors generally agree that any proposed definition of performance must specify whether it pertains to behavioral aspects or outcome aspects [26–29]. As exemplified by Sonnentag and Frese [26], the behavioral aspect refers to what the individual does in the work situation and encompasses behaviors such as assembling car engine parts, selling cell phones, teaching basic reading skills to children, or performing heart surgery. The performance-as-outcome aspect refers to the consequences of the individual’s behavior. The behaviors described above can result in outcomes such as the number of engines assembled, sales figures, the reading proficiency of students, or the number of successful heart surgeries [26].

In many cases, behavioral and outcome aspects are related but do not fully coincide. It is crucial to recognize that outcome aspects of performance depend on factors beyond the individual’s own behavior, and typically, only actions relevant to organizational goals are considered to be aspects of performance [30]. For example, imagine a software developer who demonstrates average performance in writing clean and efficient code (behavioral aspect of performance), but still completes several successful software projects (outcome aspect of performance) because of a strong collaborative team environment.

Despite a general consensus on the need to differentiate between the behavioral and outcome aspects of performance [26], there remains a debate among scholars about which aspect should be definitively labeled as “performance”. Motowidlo et al. [27–29] argue that behavior represents actions undertaken by individuals, whereas performance should be understood as the value that these actions bring to the organization. This leads to a perspective where performance is treated as a property inherent to individual behavior rather than merely the outcomes of such behavior [31]. This approach has two key benefits: First, it acknowledges that behavioral outcomes are often influenced by factors outside an individual’s control, such as the availability of appropriate tools or materials. Second, by defining performance as a property of behavior, it facilitates a deeper understanding of the psychosocial drivers behind employee selection, training, and motivation—critical components in business management.

Therefore, performance can be defined as the total value that a business expects from the series of discrete behaviors an individual exhibits over a certain period [31]. This definition yields two important insights: firstly, performance is an aggregate property across multiple behaviors, and secondly, it relates to a value expected by the business, meaning it pertains only to those behaviors that significantly impact the achievement of business objectives. Consequently, the domain of performance includes behaviors that can

have either positive effects, such as organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), or negative impacts, such as counterproductive behaviors, on the achievement of these objectives.

### 1.2.1. Task and Contextual Performance

Performance in businesses is a multidimensional concept, as evidenced by the distinction between task performance and contextual performance. Task performance, which is frequently highlighted in formal job descriptions, involves direct activities that transform raw materials into the products and services offered by the organization, as well as indirect activities that maintain key technical aspects of the business. Contextual performance, on the other hand, encompasses behaviors that enhance organizational effectiveness through their influence on the psychosocial and organizational context, such as helping co-workers, making suggestions to improve work processes, or engaging in intrapreneurial behavior [31].

Three foundational assumptions differentiate these performance dimensions: task performance varies significantly across different jobs and is closely tied to specific abilities, whereas contextual performance is more uniform across roles and is influenced by personality and motivation; task performance is prescribed and defined by role expectations, while contextual performance is discretionary and often goes beyond prescribed duties [27–29]. Although task performance has traditionally received more attention due to its measurable outcomes, such as technical proficiency and production indices [32], the role of contextual performance is gaining recognition for its critical contribution to organizational success.

In practice, task performance forms the contractual basis between managers and employees to fulfill specific duties. However, merely completing these tasks—often described as “working by the book”—is insufficient for achieving comprehensive organizational objectives. Research has therefore increasingly focused on contextual performance, where employees contribute by positively influencing their peers, enhancing their skills, or improving resource efficiency, thereby fostering a more productive and engaging workplace environment [33]. This broader range of behaviors, categorized into personal support, organizational support, and conscientious initiative, demonstrates the extensive scope of contextual performance.

The challenge lies in effectively promoting these behaviors. While traditional individual reward systems can ensure task completion, they often fail to encourage organizational citizenship or initiative. Research suggests that fostering a strong identification with organizational goals is more effective in enhancing both task and contextual performance. This alignment not only motivates task-related activities, but also promotes behaviors beneficial to the organization as a whole, thereby overcoming the limitations of incentive systems focused solely on individual achievements [34]. This integrated approach to performance management is essential for businesses aiming to cultivate a holistic and productive organizational culture.

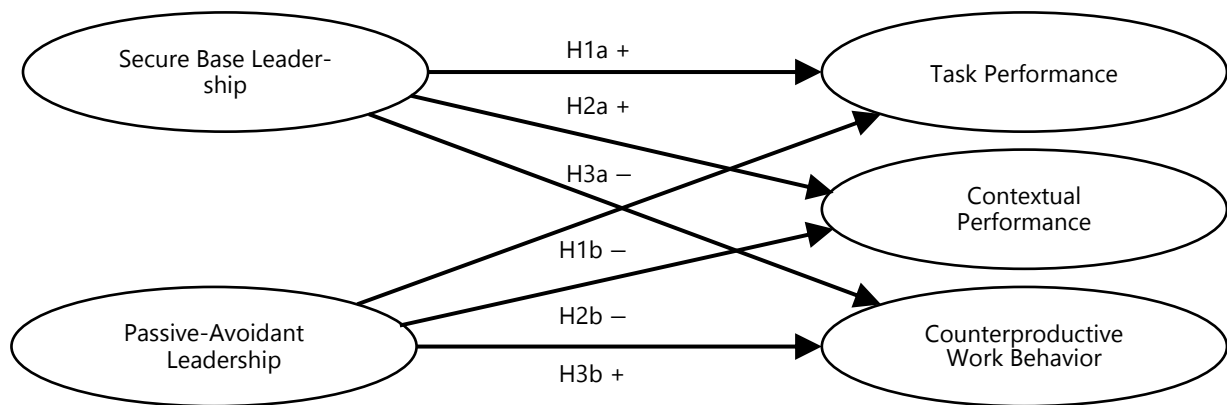
Among the few studies investigating the relationship between SBL and performance, the study by Lisá et al. [18] found that the perception of the leader as a security provider correlated with general work performance and citizenship work performance (particularly organizational allegiance/loyalty and organizational compliance). From the above literature, we hypothesize that secure base leadership will specifically increase task and contextual performance, while avoidant leadership will have a negative impact on both types of performance (Figure 1):

**H1a.** *Secure base leadership is positively related to task performance.*

**H1b.** *Passive-avoidant leadership is negatively related to task performance.*

**H2a.** *Secure base leadership is positively related to contextual performance.*

**H2b.** *Passive-avoidant leadership is negatively related to contextual performance.*



**Figure 1.** Theoretical model and hypotheses.

### 1.2.2. Counterproductive Work Behaviors

Counterproductive behaviors in organizations are voluntary actions taken by employees that negatively affect the organization's legitimate interests. These behaviors directly contradict the objectives of an organization, such as profitability, customer satisfaction, a harmonious work environment, and a reputation for social responsibility [35]. The occurrence of such behaviors can be understood through a framework that acknowledges multiple organizational goals and the central role of employee actions in achieving these goals. Any action that impedes the fulfillment of these objectives is considered counterproductive [36].

The underlying motives for counterproductive behaviors range from deliberate malevolence to inadvertent actions. For example, an employee who steals from their employer typically acts intentionally for personal gain. Conversely, an employee who is inadequately trained may unintentionally engage in counterproductive behaviors by failing to perform effectively, thereby compromising organizational objectives.

The antecedents of counterproductive behaviors are often rooted in the psychosocial interaction between the individual's traits and the organizational environment. For instance, inadequate task design or an authoritarian work climate can exacerbate issues such as poor performance or workplace aggression. This highlights the significant influence of the organizational environment on employee behavior.

Research has shown that the likelihood of counterproductive behaviors can be reduced through careful management of situational antecedents, such as reducing opportunities for negative behaviors and managing stressors within the workplace [37,38]. This understanding leads to the proposal that leadership styles play a pivotal role in either mitigating or exacerbating workplace behaviors. Specifically, SBL, which promotes a supportive and trust-based environment, is expected to reduce the occurrence of counterproductive behaviors. In contrast, passive-avoidant leadership, which does not provide adequate support and guidance, may increase the likelihood of such behaviors. Based on this framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H3a.** *Secure base leadership is negatively related to counterproductive work behavior.*

**H3b.** *Passive-avoidant leadership is positively related to counterproductive work behavior.*

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by providing a detailed examination of how SBL, as a novel application of attachment theory to leadership styles, compares to avoidant leadership in influencing job performance. By focusing on these contrasting leadership styles, the study seeks to contribute groundbreaking insights into the strategic management of human resources, emphasizing how leadership styles grounded in psychological principles can profoundly affect the dynamics and outcomes within businesses. This research not only fills a critical void in existing business literature but also sets the stage for future explorations into the integration of psychological theories, such as attachment theory,

into business leadership practices. This could ultimately redefine how leadership is understood and practiced in contemporary business environments, positioning performance as a crucial dependent variable for sustained business development.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Procedure and Participants

The data were collected between October and December 2023 using a paper-and-pencil questionnaire in Spanish, which included scales measuring the study variables described below, followed by a section that collected sociodemographic data. The participants were recruited by undergraduate psychology students at a Spanish university who received practicum credits for their efforts. Each student contacted at least four eligible participants—employees over 18 years old—and provided general instructions for completing the questionnaire. The recruitment followed Demerouti and Rispens's [39] guidelines for student-recruited samples, employing a combination of convenience sampling and exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling. The participants were informed about the study's voluntary nature, anonymity, and withdrawal options. Completing the questionnaire took approximately 15 to 20 min.

The analyzed sample consisted of 422 participants (55% women,  $n = 229$ ; 45% men,  $n = 193$ ) with an average age of 37.69 years ( $SD = 10.25$ ). Regarding the level of education, 41% of the participants ( $n = 174$ ) had a university education, 26% ( $n = 110$ ) had vocational training, 25% ( $n = 102$ ) had a high school education or secondary education, 5% ( $n = 21$ ) had a basic education, and 4% ( $n = 15$ ) had other types of education. The business size corresponded to 35% small businesses (<50 employees), 40% medium-sized businesses (50 to 249 employees), and 25% large businesses (>250 employees). The distribution of professions in the sample by economic sectors was predominantly in the tertiary sector (services, commerce, transport, and communications), representing 95.68% of the professions. The secondary sector, composed of industry and construction, constituted 2.70%. The primary sector, which included agriculture, livestock, fishing, and mining, represented only 1.62%. The average tenure was 6.41 years ( $SD = 6.66$ ), while the average time that the participants had been with their evaluated supervisor was 4.62 years ( $SD = 5.06$ ). Regarding the gender of the evaluated supervisors, 65% ( $n = 276$ ) were men, while 35% ( $n = 146$ ) were women.

### 2.2. Measures

After obtaining the participants' consent, a questionnaire was provided, which included the following scales:

**Secure Base Leadership (SBL).** To assess employees' perceptions of their leader as a figure providing a secure base, we utilized the 15-item Leader as Security Provider Scale (LSPS) [8]. The participants rated their agreement with each item on a Likert scale from 0 (not agree at all) to 4 (totally agree) and evaluated their perceptions of their leader as a provider of security and support, as exemplified by items such as: "When something bad happens" or "I feel upset at work, I seek support from my leader".

**Passive-Avoidant Leadership.** To assess this construct, we utilized a composite scale comprising nine items: four from the laissez-faire dimension of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) [40] and five additional items specifically designed for this study. This scale measures employees' perceptions of their leader's tendency to be avoidant or passive. An example item from the scale is: "My leader avoids getting involved when an important issue arises". The participants rated their agreement with each item using a Likert scale, which ranged from 0 (not agree at all) to 4 (totally agree).

**Job Performance.** To assess job performance, we employed the Spanish version of the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ; [3]), which includes 18 items. The participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each item using a Likert scale ranging from 0 (rarely) to 4 (always). This questionnaire is designed to measure three primary dimensions of job performance: task performance, which consists of 6 items evaluating behaviors that directly contribute to the production of goods or the

provision of services, such as “I organized my work so as to finish it on time”; contextual performance, which includes 7 items assessing behaviors that support the organization’s goals beyond formal job duties, as exemplified by “I took on challenging tasks when they were available”; and counterproductive work behavior, which contains 5 items aimed at identifying voluntary behaviors that negatively affect the organization’s well-being, such as “I focused on the negative aspects of my work instead of the positive aspects”.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

SPSS v.29 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, IBM) was used to calculate the descriptive statistics, including the means, standard deviations, and correlations, as well as to assess reliability using Cronbach’s alpha. To test our hypotheses, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed due to its ability to handle complex models with multiple relationships between latent variables and indicators. PLS-SEM is particularly suitable for small- to medium-sized samples and does not require data normality [41]. The analyses were conducted using SmartPLS v4.0 [42], and statistical significance was evaluated using the bootstrapping method with 10,000 samples of 422 cases, applying a critical  $t$ -value of 1.96 to determine significance at a  $p < 0.05$  level. Additionally, JASP 0.18.3 [43] software was utilized to perform the common method bias assessment, including exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to further ensure the robustness of our results.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Common Method Bias Assessment

To ensure the validity of our findings, we first addressed potential common method bias (CMB), which is a pervasive issue in social science research, as highlighted by Podsakoff et al. [44]. To mitigate socially desirable responses, we maintained the anonymity of the questionnaire, aligning with recommended procedural remedies. To be consistent with Fuller et al. [45], who noted that Harman’s single factor test was the most commonly used method in business research to detect CMB, we applied this test to our data. This test, which involves performing an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using all the items from the questionnaire, generally indicates a problematic CMB if the first factor accounts for more than 50% of the variance among the variables. In our case, the test revealed that the first factor explained 34.08% of the total variance, suggesting that CMB probably did not significantly influence our results. Additionally, we assessed CMB through the variance inflation factor (VIF), where a VIF greater than 3.3 is considered an indication of pathological collinearity and potential common method bias in PLS-SEM [46]. As all the VIFs in our model were below 3.3, the model could be considered free of common method bias. Furthermore, we conducted another EFA using JASP software, extracting five factors through parallel analysis (PA) and the minimum residual factoring method with oblique Promax rotation. The Bartlett test of sphericity,  $\chi^2(861) = 12,131.953, p < 0.001$ , confirmed the model’s significance. All the factor loadings exceeded the recommended cut-off value of 0.40. The factor loadings suggested the following five factors (cumulative variance = 57%): SBL (23.3% explained variance), contextual performance (11.7% explained variance), passive-avoidant leadership (10% explained variance based on eigenvalues), task performance (6.8% explained variance), and counterproductive work behavior (5.3% explained variance). The only anomaly was item 6 of the task performance dimension, which loaded onto the contextual performance dimension; however, since these dimensions belonged to the same scale, this was not deemed critical to the model.

### 3.2. Reliability and Construct Validity

In this study, the scales were assessed for reliability and construct validity using Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) across a model comprising 42 indicators distributed among five latent constructs. The factor loadings ( $\lambda$ ), set with a benchmark of 0.60 to evaluate the adequacy of the indicators in capturing the substantive variance attributed to their respective latent constructs [47], showed

robust outcomes across all the measures, as detailed in Table 1. Additionally, the internal consistency and reliability of the scales were confirmed, with both the Cronbach's alpha and the CR values exceeding the 0.70 threshold; furthermore, the AVE scores surpassed 0.50, substantiating that a significant proportion of the variance in the observations was accurately captured by the intended constructs [47].

**Table 1.** Factor loadings ( $\lambda$ ),  $t$ -values, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), composite reliability coefficient (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE).

Indicator	$\lambda$	$t$ -Value	$\alpha$	CR	AVE
SBL			0.96	0.97	0.67
SBL1	0.79	42.28 **			
SBL2	0.84	61.83 **			
SBL3	0.77	32.16 **			
SBL4	0.74	30.64 **			
SBL5	0.73	28.27 **			
SBL6	0.84	48.23 **			
SBL7	0.83	46.01 **			
SBL8	0.85	52.84 **			
SBL9	0.85	48.25 **			
SBL10	0.81	38.45 **			
SBL11	0.79	39.01 **			
SBL12	0.82	46.00 **			
SBL13	0.87	64.89 **			
SBL14	0.83	47.34 **			
SBL15	0.89	91.78 **			
Passive-Avoidant Leadership			0.88	0.90	0.51
PAL1	0.75	24.06 **			
PAL2	0.67	17.69 **			
PAL3	0.81	39.74 **			
PAL4	0.67	20.63 **			
PAL5	0.76	24.77 **			
PAL6	0.67	18.95 **			
PAL7	0.69	19.45 **			
PAL8	0.62	15.74 **			
PAL9	0.75	27.59 **			
Task Performance			0.85	0.89	0.58
Task1	0.77	22.26 **			
Task2	0.82	35.18 **			
Task3	0.82	35.71 **			
Task4	0.73	18.83 **			
Task5	0.72	17.28 **			
Task6	0.68	16.93 **			
Contextual Performance			0.91	0.93	0.65
Contextual7	0.86	58.08 **			
Contextual8	0.72	18.68 **			
Contextual9	0.69	15.88 **			
Contextual10	0.83	40.44 **			
Contextual11	0.87	58.76 **			
Contextual12	0.89	83.95 **			
Contextual13	0.75	30.05 **			

**Table 1.** Cont.

Indicator	$\lambda$	<i>t</i> -Value	$\alpha$	CR	AVE
Counterproductive Work Behaviors			0.79	0.85	0.54
Counterproductive14	0.61	13.19 **			
Counterproductive15	0.60	11.89 **			
Counterproductive16	0.78	31.14 **			
Counterproductive17	0.79	27.10 **			
Counterproductive18	0.86	48.80 **			

Note. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Fornell and Larcker [48] propose that, for adequate discriminant validity among scales, the square root of the AVE values should exceed the squared inter-construct correlations. This criterion ensures that more variance is captured by the construct than by the error or any other construct. Additionally, the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) provides a further assessment of discriminant validity. According to this metric, HTMT values below 0.85 indicate sufficient discriminant validity between constructs [41]. Our analysis confirms that both criteria are satisfied within our model, as documented in Table 2, and show robust discriminant validity across the measured constructs. This is particularly important given the complexity of our study, which includes two types of leadership that are opposites yet closely related, and three types of job performance that are also interconnected. The results confirm that these constructs are indeed independent and can be treated as such in our predictive model.

**Table 2.** Correlations and discriminant validity.

	<i>M</i>	<i>DT</i>	Fornell–Larcker Criterion					HTMT				
			1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	
1. SBL	2.17	1.02	<i>0.82</i>									
2. Avoidant leadership	1.38	0.91	−0.66 **	<i>0.71</i>					0.71			
3. Task	3.01	0.69	0.33 **	−0.29 **	<i>0.76</i>				0.33	0.31		
4. Contextual	2.45	0.96	0.42 **	−0.22 **	0.58 **	<i>0.80</i>			0.43	0.23	0.62	
5. Counterproductive	1.25	0.78	−0.36 **	0.42 **	−0.34 **	−0.34 **	<i>0.74</i>	0.39	0.48	0.39	0.37	

Note. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ;  $\sqrt{AVE}$  estimates for latent variables are presented on the diagonal in italics (based on PLS measurement model).

### 3.3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations between Variables

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 show a moderate recognition of SBL with a mean of 2.17 and a standard deviation of 1.02, suggesting varied experiences of supportive leadership within different contexts. Passive-avoidant leadership has a lower mean of 1.38 and a standard deviation of 0.91, indicating less frequent occurrence or endorsement of this leadership style among the participants, though there is still considerable variability in how it is perceived. Task performance records the highest mean score at 3.01 and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.69, indicating a consistent and widespread acknowledgment of effective task management among the participants. Contextual performance and counterproductive work behaviors exhibit wider variability in the responses, with means of 2.45 and 1.25, respectively, indicating not only more mixed perceptions but also generally lower scores in these types of job performance compared to task performance. This suggests a varied interpretation of roles beyond core job duties and the infrequency of negative behaviors in the workplace.

Correlation analysis underscores the significant relationships between the studied leadership styles and the performance dimensions. There is a strong negative correlation between SBL and passive-avoidant leadership ( $r = -0.66$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), highlighting their conceptual opposition. Furthermore, SBL positively correlates with both task ( $r = 0.33$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and contextual performance ( $r = 0.42$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that supportive lead-

ership positively influences both fundamental and discretionary job functions. Conversely, passive-avoidant leadership positively correlates with counterproductive behaviors ( $r = 0.42, p < 0.01$ ) and negatively with task ( $r = -0.29, p < 0.01$ ) and contextual performance ( $r = -0.22, p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that less engagement from leaders can detrimentally affect both productivity and proactive work engagement. These correlations not only reveal the significant impact that different leadership styles have on various aspects of job performance, but also provide preliminary support for our hypotheses and highlight the critical role of active and engaged leadership in fostering positive organizational outcomes.

### 3.4. Hypotheses Testing

Based on attachment theory, the results from the PLS-SEM analysis provide substantial evidence supporting the impact of leadership on job performance, as shown in Table 3. First, hypothesis H1a was confirmed ( $\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01$ ), indicating that SBL positively affects task performance. This suggests that an increase in SBL correlates with enhanced employee task performance. Furthermore, hypothesis H2a, positing that SBL positively influences contextual performance, was supported ( $\beta = 0.49, p < 0.01$ ). This substantial effect demonstrates that SBL can significantly enhance behaviors that extend beyond specific tasks, contributing positively to the organizational environment. Additionally, hypothesis H3a, which hypothesized a negative relationship between SBL and counterproductive work behaviors, was validated ( $\beta = -0.15, p < 0.05$ ), indicating that leaders that provide a secure base tend to reduce occurrences of behaviors detrimental to the organization.

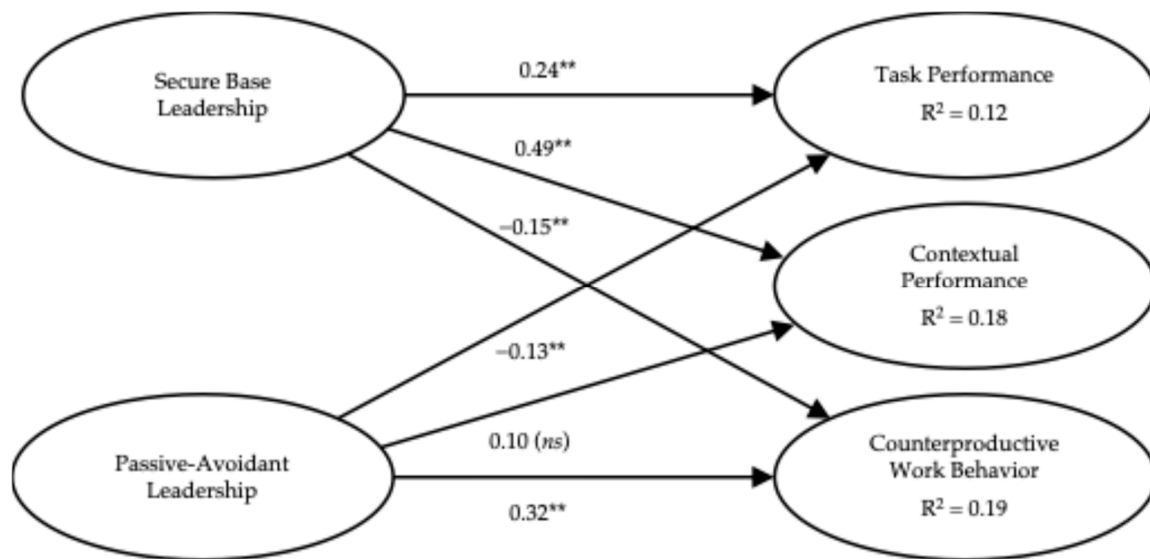
**Table 3.** Synthesis of hypotheses support.

Pathway		Estimate	STDEV	t-Value	p	Hypothesis
SBL	Task	0.24	0.06	3.97	0.00 **	H1a Supported
	Contextual	0.49	0.05	8.98	0.00 **	H2a Supported
	Counterproductive	-0.15	0.07	2.27	0.02 **	H3a Supported
Passive-Avoidant Leadership	Task	-0.13	0.06	2.01	0.04 **	H1b Supported
	Contextual	0.10	0.06	1.67	0.10	H2b Not supported
	Counterproductive	0.32	0.07	4.66	0.00 **	H3b Supported

Note. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Regarding passive-avoidant leadership, the findings for hypothesis H1b, which suggested a negative relationship with task performance, were significant ( $\beta = -0.13, p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that an increase in passive-avoidant leadership is associated with lower task performance. However, hypothesis H2b, proposing a negative relationship with contextual performance, was not supported ( $\beta = 0.10, p = 0.10$ ). Lastly, hypothesis H3b, which anticipated a positive relationship between passive-avoidant leadership and counterproductive work behaviors, was supported ( $\beta = 0.32, p < 0.01$ ). This finding underscores that passive-avoidant leadership significantly correlates with an increase in counterproductive behaviors at work, further substantiating the distinct effects that different leadership styles have on various dimensions of job performance.

These findings highlight the importance of different leadership styles in influencing various aspects of work behavior, suggesting that while SBL can foster positive behaviors and reduce negative ones, passive-avoidant leadership tends to have the opposite effect (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Standardized estimations for the full model. Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; *ns*—non-significant. R<sup>2</sup>—coefficient of determination.

#### 4. Discussion

This study aimed to analyze the influence of SBL, based on attachment theory, on the job performance of employees from various businesses. We also explored how passive-avoidant leadership correlates with the same performance dimensions, i.e., task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behaviors. This approach enabled a comparison of the effects of caring versus avoidant leadership styles on key aspects of business effectiveness.

First, in a manner that is consistent with our hypotheses, secure base leadership (SBL) is positively and significantly related to both task (H1a) and contextual (H1b) performance. SBL appears to foster a climate of psychological safety that not only mitigates stress and burnout—as suggested by prior studies [9,17]—but also seems to enhance job performance. The literature indicates that variations in leadership styles can significantly impact employee job performance, with increases in effective leadership styles correlating with enhanced performance. Studies have consistently shown that a transformational leadership style has a significant positive impact on employee performance [4]. Wang et al. [49] conducted a meta-analytic review revealing that transformational leadership is more strongly associated with follower contextual performance than with task performance. Similarly, our findings suggest that SBL may have a greater influence on contextual performance than on task performance, aligning with the patterns observed for transformational leadership.

Second, passive-avoidant leadership, traditionally referred to as *laissez-faire* leadership, is negatively related to task performance (H2a), suggesting that leader absence and disengagement detrimentally impact employee performance. Contrary to our initial hypotheses, our findings revealed no significant relationships between passive-avoidant leadership and contextual performance (H2b). These results indicate that, unlike SBL, which enhances performance, passive-avoidant leadership does not exert a significant detrimental impact on contextual performance. Rather, it seems to exert no influence on this performance outcome. This aligns with the existing literature [4], which similarly reports an absence of significant effects of *laissez-faire* leadership on performance metrics. This lack of influence may stem from the characteristics of passive-avoidant leaders who tend to avoid intervening in subordinates' work affairs or shirk their responsibilities altogether, effectively making their presence as leaders non-existent.

Regarding counterproductive work behaviors, our findings corroborate the hypotheses within the context of businesses. SBL, which emphasizes providing a secure base and a safe haven, fostering proximity, and enabling emotional bonding, effectively reduces these types

of behaviors (H3a), while passive-avoidant leadership exacerbates them (H3b). Since such behaviors undermine the goals of businesses and can adversely affect other employees, minimizing them is crucial. Our results underscore the significant role that leadership, rooted in attachment theory, plays in mitigating counterproductive behaviors, highlighting the importance of leadership that ensures security, closeness, and emotional connection in maintaining a productive business environment.

The job demands-resources (JD-R) theory [50] provides a comprehensive framework for understanding employee performance within businesses; in particular, it analyzes how SBL may serve as a crucial resource in organizational settings. This theory explains the interplay between job demands and resources and their impact on job performance, noting how employees can utilize proactive or reactive behaviors to modify these elements. Mumtaz and Rowley [51] highlight the fact that LMX leadership fosters new organizational resources; in a similar manner, our findings suggest that SBL enhances task and contextual performance while protecting against counterproductive behaviors. By fostering a secure base and a safe haven and promoting proximity and emotional bonding, SBL creates a supportive environment that not only elevates performance but also mitigates the job demands that might lead to adverse behaviors, such as lack of training or discomfort in communicating with management. This underscores the pivotal role of SBL in enhancing workplace dynamics and performance in businesses.

Our study underscores the pivotal role of SBL in the business world, emphasizing the following four fundamental aspects: providing a secure base, offering a safe haven, maintaining proximity, and fostering emotional bonds, all of which are rooted in a caring leadership style that is crucial for enhancing employee well-being [8]. Given that leadership skills can be developed, these insights are highly relevant for business practitioners involved in organizational training programs. In the realm of attachment-informed leadership training, it is essential for business scholars and consultants to integrate the concept of “fortification”, as explained by Feeney and Collins [52], into their training modules. Fortification involves not only offering emotional reassurance but also aiding employees in recognizing and building upon their own strengths and coping mechanisms. Positive leadership training should therefore focus on equipping participants with skills rooted in attachment theory to effectively support subordinates. This includes fostering confidence and resilience, enhancing their ability to build secure and trusting relationships, and encouraging innovative problem solving within the team. By cultivating these attachment-oriented capabilities, leaders can provide substantial emotional support and empower their teams to independently address challenges. This not only boosts overall performance but also promotes professional growth across the organization. Such training ensures that leaders maintain a caring and supportive approach, which is integral to sustaining a positive and productive business environment.

To encourage organizations to shift from traditional styles, such as passive-avoidant leadership, to SBL, it is essential to raise awareness about SBL’s unique contributions to organizational performance. Several strategies could be implemented. Presenting empirical evidence, such as the findings in this study, through comparative studies can substantiate SBL’s superior organizational outcomes, including enhanced employee performance and overall well-being. Highlighting the unique benefits of SBL, such as its focus on establishing secure bases and fostering healthy workplace relationships, can differentiate it from other leadership styles. Sharing success stories and testimonials from organizations that have successfully implemented SBL illustrates tangible improvements and offers practical evidence of its advantages. Encouraging respected business leaders to endorse SBL can increase its credibility and promote wider acceptance. Additionally, offering comprehensive training programs that elucidate SBL’s theoretical underpinnings and its comparative advantages can facilitate deeper understanding and adoption. Arguing for the strategic alignment of SBL with contemporary organizational goals—such as innovation, organizational agility, and talent retention—highlights its relevance and potential as a catalyst for achieving these objectives. Finally, initiating pilot programs enables organizations to directly experience

the benefits of SBL with regard to job performance, facilitating a smoother transition from conventional leadership styles and creating a more receptive environment for change.

## 5. Conclusions

This study investigated the impact of SBL, which was derived from attachment theory, on employee job performance within business settings. Our findings indicate that SBL positively influences task and contextual performance and reduces counterproductive work behaviors, thereby affirming the application of attachment theory in the organizational context. By fostering SBL, businesses can cultivate a supportive environment that enhances work behaviors aligned with organizational goals. These results underscore the essential role of SBL in creating a workplace that not only promotes productivity and engagement but also minimizes behaviors detrimental to organizational health. Consequently, this study enriches the understanding of SBL's effectiveness in business management, suggesting that integrating these principles can lead to more cohesive and efficient organizational dynamics. This advancement in knowledge about SBL provides a strategic perspective for business leaders aiming to optimize workforce performance and well-being through supportive and caring leadership practices.

## 6. Limitations and Future Research

All studies have limitations; thus, new avenues are opened for future research. First, as this was a cross-sectional study, it was not possible to establish causal relationships, only correlations. Secondly, a self-reported measure was chosen to measure performance, and given that there are different dimensions and different ways of measuring performance [53], it is recommended that future studies expand the research with other self-reported and objective measures. In addition, performance can be measured at the individual and team level. Third, other organizational and individual variables may moderate the relationship between leadership and performance. For example, innovation efforts positively impact business performance [54]. Finally, it is recommended to carry out interventions to train middle managers in organizations in this novel leadership model (SBL) and to analyze the impact on the performance of their employees.

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