

Don't make me feel alone: Ostracism and its effects on Performance

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Abstract

Organizations strive to create an environment where employees work as a team and their basic and advanced needs are fulfilled. One of the basic needs is the need for belongingness or social interaction. However, for certain reasons, some workers face social isolation and deliberate exclusion from social groups, called ostracism. Such a situation leads to poor psychological health and low performance. This study aims at the consequences of ostracism in public sector organizations in Punjab, Pakistan. Three dimensions of employee performance: task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior have been measured, and the effects of ostracism on these performance dimensions have been analyzed through regression. A sample of 384 employees was collected using convenience sampling through a self-administered questionnaire. A high reliability of more than .70 was achieved, as indicated by the Cronbach alpha coefficient. Simple linear regression was used to see the effects of ostracism on performance dimensions. Results indicate that ostracism negatively affects task and contextual performance and increases deviant workplace behavior. It is recommended that managers should closely monitor the organizational environment and make sure that employees are not ostracized.

Keywords: Ostracism, Task performance, Contextual Performance, Counterproductive Work Behavior.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture and climate have always been critical in developing and maintaining a positive workplace environment. Employees devote a significant part of their lifetime to employment, and a better environment fosters employee pleasure, which leads to higher performance. Bullying, harassment, and ostracism, on the other hand, make the workplace stressful and uncomfortable for a few individuals, resulting in low productivity. Ostracism has emerged as the most prevalent workplace phenomenon, in which people or groups isolate other employees in order to maintain their vested interests (Ferris et al., 2015). Employees are more excited in a supportive atmosphere; however, workers' productivity and morale are reduced in a hostile workplace. (Over & Uskul, 2016).

Ostracism is defined as "isolation, neglect, or cold treatment that the employee perceives from others at the workplace" (Ferris et al., 2008). It has increased dramatically in the last decade. It has a negative impact on an individual's life, which might disrupt one's social sphere and lead to emotional issues, making one's life distressed (Williams & Nida, 2014). Ostracism violates human requirements for self-esteem and belongingness and increases emotional suffering, resulting in social isolation with an individual's violent behavior at work (Waldeck et al., 2015).

Previous studies have found ostracizing conduct in all firms, societies, and countries around the globe (Ferris et al., 2008). Growth, learning, and cultural development are hampered by it (Ferris et al., 2015; Hitlan & Noel, 2009; Hua et al., 2023). In the workplace, it occurs when coworkers are socially isolated or excluded, either individually or collectively, through preventing communication, a group task, or organizational activity. (Williams & Nida, 2014). Ostracism may not have an external mark, but it can be felt and continue for a long time, causing misery and physical suffering to individuals or groups of people (Houshmand et al., 2012). It may have a variety of negative effects on individual employee performance, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness. Consequently, it has an impact on overall organizational performance.

Workplace ostracism frequently leads to attrition, which negatively impacts employee performance and reduces goodwill (Chung, 2017). Employee performance has three dimensions, "task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior". If ostracism is not discovered and addressed, it may harm the organization and become uncontrollable (Liu & Xia, 2016).

1.1 Objectives of Study

- To measure workplace ostracism and employee performance in selected Pakistani government agencies.
- To determine how ostracism affects employees' 'task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior'.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Workplace Ostracism

Workplace ostracism occurs “when an individual or group fails to engage another organizational member when doing so would be socially acceptable” (Robinson et al., 2013, p. 206). As social animals, human beings fulfill their psychological requirements by interacting with one another, whether in their personal or professional lives (Williams, 2007).

Ostracism drew the attention of professionals due to its threat to psychological requirements such as self-esteem, belonging, and purposeful existence (Williams, 2009). People have labeled ostracism differently, as cold violence (Aydin et al., 2010; Hua et al., 2023; Blackhart et al., 2009), social shunning (Trautmann & Zeckhauser, 2013), social rejection (DeBono & Muraven, 2014), and oppression (Cullen et al., 2014). Past research has demonstrated and accumulated evidence of the magnitudes of ostracism (Wesselmann et al., 2012). Ostracism badly affects the self-esteem, control and meaningfulness of the victim (Hartgerink et al., 2015).

It is likely that the victimized individuals will feel a great deal of distress and dissatisfaction in their personal and family lives as a result of their abuse (Liu et al., 2013). It also causes anger and rejection in a person (Dotan-Eliaz et al., 2009), leading to stress (Baumeister & Tice, 1990) and suffering (Riva et al., 2011; Stout & Dasgupta, 2011). Individuals who experience ostracism dehumanize or neglect themselves in their personal and professional lives (Bastian & Haslam, 2010). It may result in a person’s social demise (Williams, 2007).

2.2 Employee Performance

According to Otley (1999), an organization has two categories of performance: employee performance and organizational performance. The organizational performance is determined mainly by employee performance which is further categorized under 1) task performance, 2) contextual performance, and 3) counterproductive work behavior.

2.3 Ostracism and Employee Task Performance (ETP)

Consistent with situational leadership theories, it is believed that leaders may employ different participation tactics depending on the task preparedness of their workers. In particular, while evaluations of employee task performance as a reflection of their ability and willingness to complete the task may motivate the delegation (Wagner, 1994), dialogue is more probable to be employed when managers believe a need and an opportunity to facilitate employee development and learning.

According to Borman and Motowidlo (1997) task performance is “the effectiveness with which job incumbents perform activities that contribute to the technical core of the organization.” Wagner (1994) states that a person’s performance on

a task is contingent on his or her aptitude and motivation to complete the task (Ashforth & Hudspeth, 1995). Motivation is the essential factor that explains an employee's engagement and persistence with task performance (Bowen et al., 1991; Motowidlo & Schmitt, 1999). The job characteristic model (JCM) asserts that the five components of a job, namely "task significance, task variety, skill variety, task autonomy, and feedback," play a very significant role in enhancing ETP in the workplace.

Individuals who experience social exclusion and ostracism in the workplace frequently exhibit hostile conduct, which exacerbates stress and deviant work behavior (Rudert & Greifeneder, 2016). According to Wellman et al. (2016), employees begin exhibiting antisocial, dubious behaviors like extreme silence, which negatively impacts their performance along with their credibility at work. O'Reilly and Robinson (2009) stated that planned social isolation poses a risk to employee contribution, organizational performance, and efficiency and effectiveness. Ostracism reduces interaction and bonding among employees, resulting in deteriorating attitudes, mental health, and job-related behavior (Ferris et al., 2015). Negative and adverse performance (Cropanzano et al., 2003), deteriorated well-being (Wu et al., 2019), and role conflict (Grandey et al., 2005) are exhibited by people suffering from ostracism. Keeping in view the aforementioned literature; it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: Ostracism negatively affects task performance.

2.4 Ostracism and Employee Contextual Performance (ECP)

Employee contextual performance explains individual's job-related behavior that supports the organization's psychological and social contexts. Contextual performance implies employee dedication and engagement, which assists the organization in achieving its objectives. In contrast to ETP, contextual performance consists of activities that facilitate the psychological and social milieu of the organization but are not explicitly related to the core tasks of the organization (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). ECP includes organizational citizenship behavior (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Individuals with a strong sense of workplace engagement who go above and beyond to help the organization, consumers, and employees have a positive ECP (Kahn, 1990). Employee with positive ECP is always ready to put extra efforts for his company (Rich et al., 2010). Low job satisfaction is associated with poor contextual performance (Edwards et al., 2008). If an employee is the target of ostracism in the workplace, her job satisfaction will suffer, resulting in poor contextual performance (Robinson et al., 2013). Additionally, Fatima et al. (2019) discovered that it has a negative impact on extra-role behaviors (contextual performance). On the basis of the aforementioned literature, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

Hypothesis 2: Ostracism negatively affects contextual performance.

2.5 Ostracism and Employee Counterproductive Work Behavior

When an employee intentionally reduces his performance on the job, it is known as counterproductive work behavior (Lau et al., 2003). This conduct violates the legal and common interests of the organizations. Individuals who exhibit counterproductive behaviors in the workplace pose a significant hazard to an organization (Sackett and DeVore 2001). According to Kaplan (1975), counterproductive behaviors are acts and strategies employed by employees in the workplace that are contrary to organizational norms. Employees' deviation occurs when employees disregard or violate expected behaviors, standard rules, policies, and procedures (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). O'Neill and Hastings (2011) categorized deviant behavior under firm and interpersonal levels. Deviance at interpersonal level refers to impolite behavior, such as mocking colleagues or coworkers, exhibited by an employee in the workplace (Berry et al., 2007). Organizational deviance, such as delayed assignments, absenteeism and theft also contributes in declining efficacy and performance of an organization (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Deviant behaviors in the workplace negatively impact organizational culture and overall productivity (Muafi, 2011). Organizational effectiveness and workforce productivity are threatened by these deviant behaviors. Employees believe they will not be singled out or exposed for their deviant workplace behavior (Jensen & Patel, 2011).

According to Appelbaum et al. (2007), deviant employees and negative behavior put an organization's integrity at risk, thereby transforming it into a noxious one. The high levels of mistrust, deceit, and dishonesty among employees of toxic organizations negatively impact organizational success (Nasir & Bashir, 2012). Social exclusion causes aggressive behaviour in employees. Yang and Tredway (2018) discovered a correlation between social exclusion and counterproductive behavior. Nasir et al. (2017) in their study also confirmed the relationship between deviant behaviors and exclusion. With the preceding arguments in mind, the following hypothesis has been developed:

Hypothesis 3: Ostracism increases counterproductive work behavior.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current study has used deductive approach to test the hypotheses, as this is an explanatory study based on existing theories. A cross-sectional design was employed because data were acquired only once from participants who met the study's criteria. Individual employees constitute the unit of analysis. A worker's perceived ostracism at work may reduce his task and contextual performance and increase his counterproductive behavior. Consequently, the questionnaire was designed to capture data from employees working in strategic departments of government organizations at management's top, middle, and front-line levels.

3.1 Population

The population consisted of Pakistani government employees from five government agencies. Government employees face greater ostracism in the workplace than their private-sector counterparts (Vigod-Gadot & Kapun, 2005; Bodla & Danish, 2009). In Pakistan, government organizations operate under a bureaucratic structure with rigorous control and a centralized command system (Bodla & Danish, 2009).

3.2 Size of the Sample and Sampling Method

Because the sampling frame was unavailable, strategic organizations in Pakistan were surveyed using the convenience sampling procedure. Due to the fact that strategic organizations do not disclose their employees' information, convenience sampling was appropriate for obtaining feedback from officials. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) state that a sample size of 384 is adequate when the population size is at least 75,000. Cohen (1973) and Roscoe (1975) asserted that for social research a sample size between 30 and 500 is appropriate. Consequently, 384 responses were necessary for statistical analysis. More than 50,000 individuals are employed in various capacities by government agencies. Therefore, data from a minimum of 384 respondents was required for analysis. For data collection 500 questionnaires were distributed among the employees. After one month of continuous and consistent follow-up, 328 questionnaires were received. The response rate was almost 66%.

3.3 Data collection tool

The questionnaire included the 13-item Workplace Ostracism scale (Ferris et al., 2008) and the 18-item Employee Performance Scale (Koopmans, 2014).

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4.1 Reliability Analysis

The consistency of questionnaires across different study contexts is evaluated using reliability analysis. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2011), a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.70 or higher generally indicates that the questionnaire and its components are reliable. However, a value of 0.60 or higher is also acceptable. Table 1 displays the reliability of the utilized subscales.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Variables	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
WPO	13	.894
ETP	5	.835
ECP	8	.875
CPWB	5	.722

4.2 Test of Normality

To determine the normality of the data, Kurtosis and Skewness values are considered. The acceptable value of skewness should be between +1 and -1, and the Kurtosis between +3 and -3. If both analyses satisfy the given conditions, the data may be deemed uniformly distributed.

Table 2: Test of Normality

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
WPO	0.370	0.692
ETP	-0.273	-0.091
ECP	-0.224	-0.321
CPWB	0.124	-0.327

Table 2 exhibits that Skewness and Kurtosis values are all within the given ranges, so the data appears to be normal and evenly distributed.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis measures the goodness of model fit. This statistical test explains the change in dependent variables caused by independent variables. Table 3 shows the regression analysis.

Table 3: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	P-Value	Beta Value
1 (ETP)	0.361	0.130	0.128	0.0000	- 0.361
2 (ECP)	0.335	0.112	0.110	0.0000	- 0.335
3 (CPWB)	0.473	0.224	0.221	0.0000	0.473

In the model 1 (Employee Task Performance), R² equals 0.13. It indicates a 13% change in dependent variable i.e ETP due to independent variable i.e workplace ostracism. The beta value indicates that a one-unit change in independent variable (WPO) would result in a 0.361-unit decrease in ETP. The P-value is less than 0.05, showing that the regression model between WPO and ETP is significant.

Similarly, model 2 (ECP) has an R² value of 0.112. It indicates that a change of 11.2% in ECP is attributable to workplace ostracism. A P-value less than .05 indicates that the regression model between WPO and ECP is significant. Model 2's beta value indicates that a one-unit change in WPO would result in a 0.335 decrease in ECP.

Contrary to models 1 and 2, model 3 (Employee CPWB) has an R² value of 0.224, which is higher than other two dimensions of performance. It indicates that a 22.4%

change in counterproductive behaviors is due to workplace ostracism. Model 3's beta value indicates that a one-unit change in WPO would result in a 0.473-unit increase in counterproductive employee behavior. The P-value (>0.05) indicates a significant relationship between WPO and employee CPWB.

Statistical analysis reveals that ostracism in the workplace decreases employee task and contextual performance, whereas counterproductive behavior increases as ostracism increases. Therefore, hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 are confirmed.

5. DISCUSSION

Individual and organizational performance are negatively impacted by WPO, and employees frequently leave their positions, resulting in a brain drain in well-established organizations. Humans are the primary source of organizational survival, and the attrition of high-performing employees can be costly (Wu et al., 2016).

Considered to be a competitive advantage for any business, human resources are a necessity for organizational success. The loss of talented individuals or the recruitment of talented individuals by competitors is detrimental to the organization. Compared to other passive deviant behaviors in the workplace, WPO is an active behavior. The primary objective of ostracism is to control and possess organizational resources for one's own self-interest. On a group level, ostracism has the same effects as other deviant work behaviors; however, on an individual level, ostracism has more terrible and grievous effects than other deviant behaviors.

This study considers three dimensions of employee performance. Employee task and contextual performance are inherent job requirements, whereas counterproductive behavior demonstrates employee participation in deviant behavior.

Previous research examines the relationship between ostracism and employee performance as a singular variable. However, this study has focused on the three dimensions of employee performance as dependent variables in Pakistan's government organizations, "Task Performance, Contextual Performance, and Counterproductive Work-Behavior". Three hypotheses were developed to examine the relationship between ostracism and employee performance. Results indicate that ostracism significantly affects the task and contextual performance of employees, as well as their counterproductive work behavior. The results indicate that WPO negatively impacts the task and contextual performance of employees (Ding & Wang, 2022 ;Imran et al, 2023). Nevertheless, ostracism has a positive relationship with the CPWB of employees in organizations that has validated the findings of Hua et al. (2023) who found positive impact of ostracism on deviant behaviour.

It implies that employee task and contextual performance are diminished by exclusion. It also encourages employees to abandon their jobs or compels them to engage in deviant behavior at work, thereby reducing employee performance. The decline in employee performance decreases the organization's overall efficiency and effectiveness.

5.1 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Existing research contributes to the literature by studying the role of emphasizing the influence of ostracism on different dimensions of employee performance. The purpose of this study was to develop a unique framework for the relationship between various dimensions of employee performance and ostracism in Pakistan's government organizations. The study demonstrates that ostracism has a negative relationship with positive dimensions of employee performance while it positively enhances deviant behaviors.

When other individuals or groups ostracize excellent employees in the workplace, their performance suffers. Their task and contextual performance decline as a result of low job engagement, inattention, falling self-esteem, or a lack of motivation. In order to survive, these employees become voiceless or isolate themselves while remaining at work or participating in CPWB. It contributes to an increase in deviant behavior and a decline in employee productivity.

It is recommended that managers should take care of the employees and should have individualized consideration. According to Maslow (1943), humans are social animals and must be accepted in social groups. When social or belongingness needs are unmet, such a situation negatively impacts one's psycho-social health and results in low productivity and poor organizational performance.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

It is declared that the authors of this research work have no competing interests.

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