

Theorizing Workplace Ostracism: Significance & Outcomes of Ostracism for Designing better Workplaces

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Abstract:-

Purpose: This study has been intended towards availing insights into the social and industrial aspects of workplace ostracism and its implications at individuals' self-regulation behavior within organizations. In the past studies Ostracism at workplace has been negatively related to variables like employee well-being, performance, employee engagement, employee needs and withdrawal intentions and it has been looked through the organizations perspective in most of the researches. This study is directed towards understanding effects of ostracism on individual employee and its related social and industrial aspects along with organizational citizenship behavior and self-conducts in terms of indulgence or abstinence in counter productive work behaviors.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study highlights the major social aspects of ostracism suffered at workplace by employees and its ill-effects on their psychological balance which may result in serious health hazards. In this study, several related literature has been referred so that a conclusive study can be persuaded related to ostracism and its social consequences towards evolving better workplaces.

Originality Value: This study can be considered as an attempt to emphasize social sufferings of the person being ostracized at workplace by superiors and or peers and how it affects their mental as well as organizational well-being towards meaningful existence and contribution to the organizations.

Keywords:- Workplace Ostracism, Social-Suffering, Self-Regulation, Counter Productive Work Behavior, Well-Being, Citizenship Behavior, Productivity, Retention.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Workplace Ostracism:

Imagine it is lunchtime and you ask one of your colleagues sitting nearby you to join and most of the time, he ignores you by saying, "no, I have some important work on the cards," or "I am full enough," or walks away saying, "Sorry, I have a meeting lined up." If things like this are constantly encountered as a part of your working environment, it will make you feel alienated and detached from your organization, group or team with whom you are expected to meet the goals or tasks assigned.

The above-mentioned scenario represents the most common form of people being ostracized by their peers or superiors at the workplace. Workplace ostracism is a pervasive phenomenon. Researchers have not reached a consensus on the distinct definitions of workplace or social exclusion. However, they firmly believe that workplace ostracism is a kind of behavior that has an immense effect on people's harmony in an organization.

Workplace ostracism is defined as "the extent to which an individual perceives that he/she is being ignored or excluded by others" in the workplace (Ferris et al., 2008). Workplace ostracism has initially been defined as individuals excluded, discriminated or disregarded by other colleagues. It is also referred as "cold violence", which has been discussed thoroughly. Ostracism is a kind of mistreatment that is felt when an employee from the same team is made to feel excluded from the team that he is part of. Some researches reflect that ostracized personnel will become uninterested in helping their organization. It will lead to a continuous fall in his overall organizational citizenship behavior, which is a primary condition to stay in the organizational society.

The outcomes of ostracism in the workplace for victims have been widely explored in management (Mao et al., 2018), (Williams, 2007) and (Wu et al., 2011). A person who is ostracized by other colleagues or immediate boss in a devastated relationship may confront injury, suffers several losses, or may face un-fortune (Aquino and Lamertz, 2004). Ostracism may be intentional or solely unintentional. Ostracism is a kind of retribution, dragging the ostracized person to bear the discomfort (Williams, 2009). From the perspective of the individuals who suffers, ostracism is directly aligned with their diminished organizational identity (Wu et al., 2016) and overall commitment towards work (Ferris et al., 2008) along with mental distress (Yaakobi & Williams, 2016), withdrawal intentions (Fiset et al., 2017), and deviant behavior at workplace (Ferris et al., 2008). It includes cases where human resources feel ignored or discriminated by other employees in the workplace. The intent can be personal or impersonal which can be deliberate. Several employees ostracize a colleague assuming that the person is a potential threat to their existence and position.

Ostracism may lead to ever-lasting emotional gouge to the individuals dealing with it. Various forms of ostracism at work can be via non-recognition, less communication, silent treatment, minor bullying, and harassment. Research has shown that feel of ostracism has a ruinous influence on individual attitudes, behavior, and outcomes may firmly affect personnel engagement dynamism of the firm as a whole.

B. Crucial factors and related terms:

Workplace ostracism has been negatively related to various organizational aspects such as performance, employee engagement, commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior, turnover intentions as well as individual aspects of employees such as overall well-being, employee needs, humor, and stress and contributes to daily hassles at workplace. Ostracism at the workplace results in diminishing productivity and promotes turnover intention. This effect in the long run, not just negatively influences the organizational performance, but also hampers its brand image in the workmen market (Chung & Yang, 2017), further impacting employer branding also. Employees who are being ostracized have higher chances of feeling detached from their team or may be from the organization. It also makes individuals feel unimportant to their organization if it is not well handled by remedial coping mechanism like promoting humor, organizational support or by application of some sort of design interventions at the organizational level to minimize its ill-effects or by introduction of various teams or groups level interventions which may result in better coordination, team-building and contribute towards promoting overall employee wellbeing.

Workplace ostracism leads to breakdown in formal interaction amongst co-workers, which affects individual's mental well-being, because when employees share their feelings and emotions, they does feel mentally content, much engaged and committed to their organization. It is human nature to get familiar and interact with the environment they are around, so they feel the belongingness

and importance of their existence in their work setup. Apart from its potential to create social agony, ostracism is apathetic. It simultaneously threatens four fundamental human needs: need to belong, need for self-esteem, need for purposive existence, and need for self-control, all these may have detrimental and dejecting effect on self identity and self confidence among individuals. Regular scanning of the environment and antecedent conditions may help organizations towards effective control of ostracism. However, effective design and implementation of Interventions as coping mechanisms may save the organizations from serious repercussions of ostracism.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. Origin of Concept:

From the 1990s, growing engrossment in ostracism-related research is visible, basically for real-life applications, with the origin of studies on social exclusion at the workplace closely related to belonging needs. Ostracism has been discussed in various social science arenas (Williams, 1997, 2007), but the basic concept of ostracism is considered in organizational psychology.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) introduced substantial evidence on the relevance of the motivation to belonging to human behavior, feelings, and thoughts. The basic concept of the socio-metric theory is that attaining a belief of acceptance and belonging is a must for self-esteem and psychosomatic well-being in an organizational setup (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). A person's self-esteem is exclusively dependent on his perceived state of inclusion in valuable relations. The primary desire for belongingness has evolutionary origins: persons' dependence on each other assures survival. Ferris came up with the development of a ten-point scale to measure and validate the extent of ostracism in organizations and its relationship with closely related factors such as employee needs, well-being, performance, employee engagement, and withdrawal intentions (Ferris Et al., 2008)

A sense of doubtful belonging gradually generates low self-esteem. Inverse effects and low self-esteem is the random responses to social exclusion (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009). The concept of inclusion vs. exclusion includes a continuum ranging from "maximum inclusion," in which persons intend to maintain good relationships and seek the other's company, to "maximal exclusion," in which individuals intend to neglect or reject other people (Leary, 2005). Thus, the notion of the need to belong is the apex theoretical construct for studies on ostracism.

B. Industrial Aspects:

Ostracism at the workplace has been a permanent factor since ever emergence of corporate undertakings. It is tough to say when ostracism was traced in organizations. Every organization is a set of individuals coming together to accomplish some standard set of goals. They bring their individuality as well in the form of their attitude, behavioral patterns, personality, values and beliefs to the organizational setup, therefore being ignored at workplace by peers or superiors, felt discriminations in promotions or recognitions,

bullied by colleague or immediate boss, excluded from the general discussions in a team environment intentionally or intentionally heard very often. It has been part of institutional working since ever.

The managers need to understand the fundamental nature of ostracism and align their efforts to minimize the adverse outcomes of being ostracized because it is understood that employees feel low self-esteem, and low engagement and further, it results in diminishing productivity and even withdrawal intentions, its more detrimental aspects may be observed in the form of indulgence in counter productive work behaviors.

III. FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

A. Recent studies and trends:

Workplace ostracism has been initially approached majorly from organizations perspectives as to its various forms or modes and how it can be measured so that it can be dealt accordingly. However, studies have focused on the sufferings of ostracism on individual employees and how it affects the organization's operations in terms of productivity, belongingness, citizenship, and commitment.

After undergoing several recently carried out research citations about ostracism at the workplace and findings from domestic as well as foreign studies, one can ascertain that, the locus of studies on workplace ostracism has been under three significant perspectives;

- Workplace ostracism may strongly influence the mental health of human resources and deprive their mental well-being, needs, and may significantly affect their meaningful existence.
- Ostracism reduces overall organizational citizenship behavior and thus leads to counter-productive behavior which appears to be more detrimental to the organizations.
- Workplace ostracism is an influential factor used to ascertain why employees' performed below the mark.

B. Suggestions to overcome ostracism at workplace:

- Observing the situation at the time of occurrence of WPO may lead to determine the key aspects behind the scenario and consider whether there is anything that you can do to try and improve the situation.
- When individuals perceive being ostracized, self care is important, specially checking self doubts on self confidence, self identity and motivation to cope situations. If individuals struggle to work, best way is to try out next steps, try to leave the ostracism in the office. The best thing individuals can do is to keep them fit, healthy and happy outside of the office. Hanging out with friends, being with family, exercising, could help in self regulation and obtaining a positive balance.
- Proving and measuring the extent of ostracism is a tuff task therefore keeping a record of own behavior may also result in analyzing and dealing with ostracism , still one need to approach it formally, a proper record of instances when one have confronted the ostracism will help in adoption of coping mechanism.
- Perceived organizational support may also result in coping up with ill-effects of ostracism for the workforce.

Mechanism for exploring the options, reviewing anti-bullying and harassment policy and understanding how it will be handled and the possible consequences may result in facilitating the workforce in countering ostracism.

- Ability-based emotional intelligence may play a crucial role in minimizing the adverse effects of ostracism.
- Training programme directed towards human and social skills enhancement can be conducted under the supervision of professionals.
- Engagement opportunities amongst the employees resulting in diagonal communication and socialization across the structure of organization may pave the path for better human relations amongst the workforce.
- Promoting self confidence, self belief and perceiving positive self identity will have lasting effects in coping with mental scars caused due to ostracism.
- Effective design and implementation of interventions focused on severity of ostracism may also bring positive results in countering ill effects related to ostracism, especially in instances of low morale, motivation and dejection.
- Organizational level probes and interventions are required if ostracized employees are found to indulge and exhibit counterproductive work behaviors.

C. Future Possibilities:

Williams (Williams, 2009) came up with one of the most prominent and comprehensive models of social ostracism. The Temporal Needs Threat (TNT) model is proposed in the context of genuine examples and outputs provided by various studies. This frame work can be presented as a base, as it provides valuable inputs for future research on workplace ostracism.

Multiple theories have been made the base for studies on workplace ostracism. Theory of social exchange and social identity theory is the most discussed theoretical perspectives used in current research to understand workplace ostracism and its related aspects. In future research, the theoretical construct can be extended towards social cognitive theory, self-determination theory, social information processing, and resource conservation theory which will enrich the relations between workplace ostracism and its dependent factors further and ultimately facilitate our understanding. Academicians may explore the moderating effects between ostracism and workplace-related consequences and develop an internal mechanism to counter its ill effects. One can also explore the impact of various conditions or interaction variables and study employees corresponding behavior and attitudes for designing better workplaces and reducing cases of counter productive work behaviors. Some rehabilitation activities, diagnosis and psychotherapy in consultation with experts may reduce detrimental effects of ostracism. As an intervention employees with previous encounters/episodes of WPO may be included in the development of WPO trainings and their experiences may be included towards designing better WPO policies and evolving better workplaces.

IV. DISCUSSION

We live in a society where talking about mental health is not what people are used to. In the race of career, ambitions, and need for higher achievements and recognition in society as well as at the workplace, we ignore our emotions all the time, and this leads to psychological disorders, and the same is the case with being ostracized at the workplace as any bullying, ignorance, miscommunication, discrimination among the subordinates or peers is present in corporate undertakings. It is human nature that people resist confessing such things in the public domain as these mental aspects are part of individual self-regulation which results in stress, emotional imbalance and loss of belongingness to their team and organization as well.

Workplace ostracism is a mental phenomenon, and it is challenging to trace and clearly understand it in a practical sense because people in an organizational setup will rarely confess this even if they are dealing with it due to a lack of trust and belief in the persons or due to fear of being judged mentally sick. For the researchers to quantify and measure psychological factors such as emotions, values, and beliefs is difficult, but it is need of the hour to have better insights into it and facilitate industrial workforce as well as managers to counter its ill-effects and promote better mental health in the organizational environment. Co-creation of better workplaces with employees including those who have had history of being ostracized will help organizations in designing of anti ostracism policies and conceiving better sensitization training programs.

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