

Dealing with Workplace Ostracism: The Role of Psychological Capital and Political Skill in Employee Job Outcomes

Seemab Chaman¹, Irum Bhatti², Asrar Hussain³

Keywords:

Workplace ostracism, job stress, turnover intentions, psychological capital, political skill.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of workplace ostracism on different job outcomes with special emphasis on the moderating effect of psychological capital and political skill. In order to identify the moderating effect of psychological capital and political skill on the relationship between workplace ostracism and job outcomes (job stress, turnover intentions), the study employed the quantitative methodology by collecting data from a sample of 180 employees through survey based questionnaire. The analysis of the data reveals that workplace ostracism is positively related to job outcomes i.e., job stress and turnover intentions. However, the relationship between workplace ostracism and job outcomes is weaker when psychological capital and political skill was high. As this study has proposed moderating impact of psychological capital and political skill on the nexus between workplace ostracism and job outcomes (job stress and turnover intentions), this can also be seen with other organizational consequences.

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive era, numerous organizations are trying hard to attract capable employees who can contribute towards the organization's success (Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999). However, many factors affect employees at workplace and one of them is workplace ostracism (Leung et al, 2011). It is a situation of employees where they feel ignorant and excluded by their co-workers at workplace. Workplace ostracism, reduces the chances of social belongings among employees which in turn affect their social needs (Wu, Wei & Hui, 2011). Thus, employees face vulnerability to fulfil their social and psychological needs which hampers their physical and mental conditions. Ostracism at workplace reduces the social interactions and in turn reduces the level of employee's contributions to workplace (Robinson, O'Reilly & Wang, 2012; Tariq & Amir, 2019). However, if work environment is inclusive where, social interactions and group cohesiveness are considered as an important factor, then group effectiveness can be enhanced (Guzzo & Dickson, 1996). A prevalent phenomenon in most of the organizations is workplace ostracism, but little research has been conducted in order to monitor its effects on the different job outcomes (Chung, 2018). Thus, it is the need of time to study this phenomenon of workplace ostracism and how it affects job outcomes.

¹ Lecturer, University of Kotli Azad Jammu & Kashmir. Corresponding author email: seemabchaman@gmail.com

² PhD Scholar, Comsats University, Islamabad

³ Scholar, Capital University of Science & Technology, Islamabad

Ostracism at workplace can lead to different work outcomes, such as emotional exhaustion, job stress, turnover intentions, job insecurity and job tensions (Lyu & Zhu, 2019). The findings of these researchers (Altun et al., 2020; Choi, 2019) shows that workplace ostracism reduce the competency level of employee's performance and heightens their job stress which further influence their turnover intentions. Thus, those employees who are experiencing ostracized and being excluded from workplace condition deteriorate their physical and mental health. Furthermore, ostracism enhance the employee's distress which produce the undesirable job outcomes low job performance, high stress, high turnover intentions (Leung et al, 2011).

Organizations are trying hard to combat with workplace ostracism and use different strategies because it hampers the organization's success. Effective strategies are required to deal with workplace ostracism and its consequences (Williams, 2007). Similarly, as identified by (Wu, Wei & Hui, 2011; De Clercq et al., 2019) different psychological and organizational behaviour strategies can reduce the level of workplace ostracism. One of the prevalent strategies is psychological capital which focuses on the wellbeing of employees at workplace (Haq, 2014). This is most appropriate way because it focuses on what is right for employees. PsyCap is comprised of four components such as, optimism, hope, resilience, and self-efficacy (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). Psychological Capital is individual's optimistic psychological state that is developed and characterized as: (1) goals preservation when necessary, in order to succeed redirect the goal path; (2) optimism to succeed currently as well as in the future; (3) self-efficacy i.e., confidence to succeed at challenging tasks and (4) resiliency to sustain and bounce back even in case of adversity to achieve success (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007).

Political skill is a crucial positive trait to survive in today's political competitive environment (Ferris et al, 2007). It can be defined as an ability to use different tactics to persuade, manipulate and negotiate to dominate at the workplace (Mintzberg, 1983). Political skills can be defined as 'the ability and competency to efficaciously understand others stance at work and apply such knowledge to enhance their personal as well as organizational objectives (Ferris et al, 2005)'. Individuals having high political skill better understand the motivating factors of coworkers; thereby they can cope with workplace ostracism and reduces the level of job stress and turnover intentions (Wu et al, 2012).

Workplace ostracism is a problem that exists in different sectors and there has been increasing research interest in this area and its potential effects. It is a painful experience and also a stressor that cause difficulties in employees and they feel less motivated at workplace due to this phenomenon (Xu, 2020). It violates the social norms and involves major ethical issues in the organization. Being an interpersonal stressor, it lead to different undesirable outcomes such as job stress and turnover intentions, so it is of great importance to study this problem and its outcomes in a diverse sample of employees from both private and public sectors (Robinson & Schabram, 2019). It is also important to study how to cope with ostracism because effective strategies such as psy-cap and political skill can reduce the relationship between

ostracism and its negative consequences. Therefore, the purpose of this study to examine the effect of workplace ostracism on different job outcomes with special emphasis on moderating effect of psychological capital and political skill.

This study makes major contributions to the literature related to workplace ostracism, psychological capital, political skill, and job outcomes. Firstly, we test the ostracism model (William, 1997; 2001) theoretically and empirically by extending both the workplace ostracism and its outcomes which has not been studied in previous literature. Secondly, we explore the moderating effects of different behavioural and psychological strategies (i.e., psychological capital and political skill) on the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee work outcomes (i.e., job stress and turnover intentions). Different studies (William, 2001; 2007) have been conducted in the western culture which has different implications, and they cannot be used in non-western settings with more confidence. By conducting a study in Pakistani context, this research fills the gap contextually and examines the validity of ostracism and its outcomes in Pakistani culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace Ostracism and Employee Job Outcomes

Ostracism a kind of stressor that threatens the victims' psychological and social resources which are important to deal with an undesirable situation at workplace (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Hobfoll (1989) presented the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which elaborates that people try hard in order to protect and preserve themselves against the adverse scenarios and conditions at workplace, so for that they maintain their psychological and social resources (Hobfoll, 2001). The likelihood loss of these valued resources is threatening them which intensifies workplace stressor and ostracism (Hobfoll, 1989).

The most widely used model of ostracism was developed by William (1997; 2001) to anticipate ostracism outcomes. As a stressor, ostracism can threaten the social and psychological resources of the target as explained by these models. According to Chow et al (2008), people engage in antisocial behaviours when they feel angry as a result of ostracism and social exclusion. Researchers (Altun et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2014) have shown that Ostracism at workplace leads to different job outcomes such as job stress, job tension and turnover intentions which reduces their job performance, job satisfaction and increased level of turnover intentions.

Previous studies (Jahanzeb et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2012) have examined the undesirable outcomes of ostracism related to employee job outcomes and psychological distress. These outcomes include job tension, emotional exhaustion and depression and these outcomes leads to work family conflict, strain (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999), lofty job stress (Wu et al, 2012), low job satisfaction, job performance (Cropanzano et al, 2003) and intuitive thinking of turnover intentions (Harvey et al, 2007). According to William (1997), ostracism threaten the social needs of individual and result in exhaustion of employee ability to preserve resources needed to deal with undesirable situations which intensify the job stress and

lower level of job performance. This suggests that there is a positive association of workplace ostracism and employee job outcomes. Based on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; 2001) and the models of ostracism prescribed by (William, 1997; 2001), it is hypothesized that;

H₁: Workplace ostracism has a significant and positive relationship with job stress and turnover intentions.

Moderating effect of Psychological Capital

Wu et al (2012) on the basis of COR theory suggested the importance of psychological strategies and individual's psychological resource to lessen the intensity of workplace ostracism. LePine, Podsakoff & LePine (2005) also found that workplace stressors decrease the employee's motivation at work and impacts their job performance and career development. In another case, employee's having good number of psychological resources (psychological capital) can cope the stressors at workplace efficiently. Individuals experiencing workplace ostracism put all efforts to deal with it and want to be a part a efficient working condition (Hobfoll, 2011). Therefore, individual's psychological resources help in erosion of resource loss which occurs due to workplace ostracism.

According to Bandura (1997), individuals having high psychological capital are confident to accept the challenging tasks and strive for the achievement. As, they can efficiently handle the situation of ostracism and feel low negativeism about job related outcomes. Individual's having high level of Psy-Capability and confidence grit towards goal achievement, (Bandura, 1997), re- direct or create their own path towards goal achievement (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998) which is due to their optimisetic thinking about current and future success (Seligman, 1998). According to Luthans and Youssef (2007), individuals with high Psy-Cap effectively deal with negative outcomes and thus protect themselves from distress and failure.

Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman (2000) found that psychological capital especially hope and optimism plays a major role to reduce psychological distress and negative outcomes. Previous studies (Curry et al, 1997; Snyder, 2000) have verified that hope result in high performance and enhances the one's ability to deal with adverse situations. Similarly, Bandura & Locke (2003) suggested that individual with high self-efficacy are able to deal with negative consequences. In the same way, highly resilient individuals are emotionally stable and to with uncertain ostracized situations (Masten & Reed, 2002). All these psychological resources help the individuals to effectively deal with ostracism and its outcomes (Hobfoll, 2002; Avey et al, 2010; Luthans and Youssef, 2007; Wright, 2003). On the basis of above literature, we found that in order to deal with workplace ostracism, psychological capital helps to reduce its effects on different outcomes. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H_{2a}: Psychological Capital moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and job stress.

H_{2b}: Psychological Capital moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and turnover intentions.

Moderating effect of Political Skill

Political skill is the ability to influence the other individuals by persuasion, negotiation, and manipulation

to cater for the work environment and dominant control at workplace (Mintzberg, 1983). Studies of different researchers (Harris et al, 2007; Ferris et al, 2007; Treadway et al, 2007) identified that political skill is an individual’s important trait to have competency to handle the various workplace stressors faced by him to improve the organizational as well as his successful objectives. Ferris et al (2005), have explored that political skill has four facets; networking ability, interpersonal influence, apparent sincerity, and social astuteness and where, employees with a high level of interpersonal influence and social astuteness can efficiently handle job stress and turnover intentions. By having a competency at political skills, employees will be able to develop their social networks to reduce ostracism and pave the way for inclusion at work (Ferris et al, 2005; 2007). Employees are able to develop good relationship with colleagues with the help of networking ability by their genuineness, honesty and sincerity to reduce the ostracism.

Combining all the four facets mentioned above on the political skills helps the employees to deal with workplace ostracism and its job outcomes. Thus, it is hypothesized that.

Hypothesis 3a: Political skill moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and job stress.

Hypothesis 3b: Political skill moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and turnover intentions.

Theoretical Framework

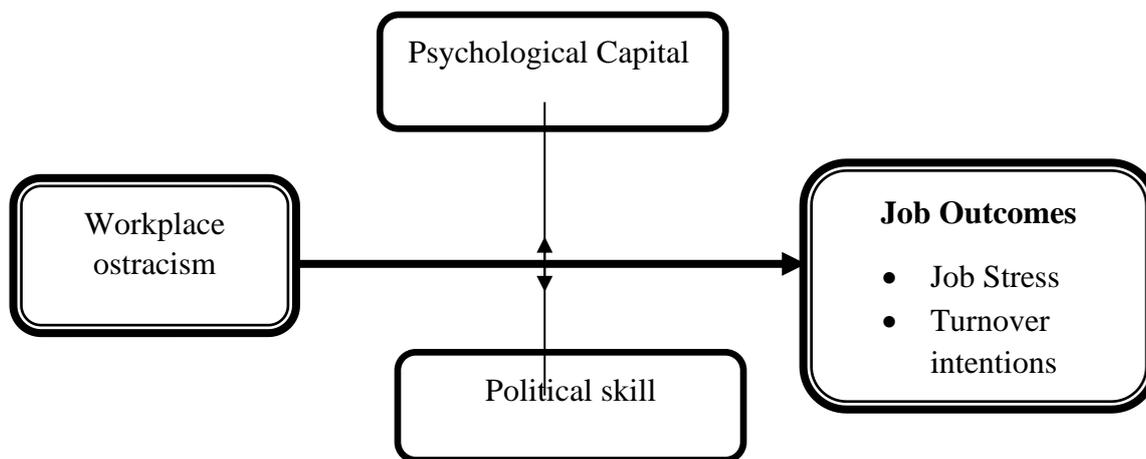


Figure 1: Workplace ostracism, Psychological Capital, Political skill Job Stress, Turnover intentions

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

Population is a pool of people from which sample is drawn. The target population for this study were the employees of public and private service sector. To get more representative sample, we have chosen a diverse sample from different private and public service organizations which include colleges, banks and universities. The data has been collected via convenience sampling technique from a sample of 180 respondents from different private and public organizations of Pakistan and Azad Kashmir. Our sample

includes employees of 4 colleges (2 private and 2 public), 4 banks (2 private and 2 public) and two public universities from three different regions: Mirpur, Kotli and Rawalpindi.

Measures

The medium of data collection was online and self-administered questionnaire, where we have maintained the confidentiality of the respondents. The response rate was also good around 69% of the respondents attempted the questionnaire.

Workplace ostracism

A ten-item scale was adopted to measure workplace ostracism ranged from 1=Never to 7=Always which has been developed by Ferris et al (2008). The questionnaire sample items include 'Others ignored you at work' and 'Others left the area when you entered'. The Cronbach's Alpha measure in the present study was .880.

Job Stress

Job stress was measured through 13- item scale developed by Parker and DeCotiis (1983) and adopted in this research. Responses were taken on a 5-point likert scale ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The sample items include 'I have felt nervous as a result of my job' and 'working here makes it hard to spend enough time with my family'. The Cronbach's Alpha for this measure was .919.

Turnover Intentions

Turnover intentions were measured by a 3- item scale by Vigoda (2000) and adopted in this research. Responses were taken on a 5-point likert scale ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The sample items include 'I often think about quitting this job' and 'Next year I will probably look for a new job outside this organization'. The Cronbach's Alpha for this measure was .970.

Psychological Capital

A 24- item scale named as Psy Cap Questionnaire (PCQ) was adopted to measure psychological capital developed by Luthans et al (2007). Responses were taken on a 6-point Likert scale ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree. The sample items include 'I feel confident analyzing a long-term problem to find a solution' and 'I feel confident in representing my work area in meeting with management'. The Cronbach's Alpha for this measure was .883.

Political Skill

Ferris et al.'s (2005) 18-item measures employee political skill has been adopted in this study. Responses were taken on a 5-point likert scale ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The Sample items included 'I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agenda of others' and 'I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say and do to influence others. The alpha reliability of this study was .884.

Control Variables

Gender, age, education, and experience in the organization were used as a control variables and these are related to job outcomes.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows the results of descriptive statistics, correlation among variables and internal reliability estimates that is Cronbach's alpha of each variable in parentheses. The mean and standard deviation for variables is as follows; workplace ostracism=1.76 (S.D. =.78), job stress = 2.75 (S.D. = .95), turnover intentions =2.63 (S.D. = 1.51), psychological capital =3.84 (S.D. =.464) and Political skill =3.82 (S.D. =.55). The findings of the correlation analysis shows that workplace ostracism is positively and significantly related to job stress ($r=.382, p<.001$) and turnover intentions ($r=.485, p<.001$). The moderating variable (Psy cap) is negatively and significantly related to workplace ostracism ($r=-.188, p<.05$) and political skill is also negatively and significantly related to workplace ostracism ($r=-.222, p<.05$). Psy cap is insignificantly related to job stress ($r= -.143, p<.10$) but has significance with turnover intentions ($r= -.030, p<.05$). Political skill is also positive and significantly related to job stress ($r=-.015, p<.05$) and turnover intentions ($r= -.075, p<.05$).

Table 1. Descriptive and Correlation Matrix

Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	1.45	.50	1								
2. Age	1.39	.66	.057	1							
3. Education	2.81	.60	.251**	.193*	1						
4. Experience	1.35	.60	.112	.225*	-.079	1					
5. WO	1.76	.78	.093	-.234**	.228*	.157	(.880)				
6. JS	2.75	.95	.100	-.062	.015	-.021	.382**	(.919)			
7. TOI	2.63	1.51	.052	-.216*	.102	.060	.485**	.659**	(.970)		
8. PsyCap	3.84	.46	.064	.114	-.041	-.130	-.188*	-.143	-.030*	(.883)	
9. PS	3.82	.55	.214*	.254**	.072	.102	-.222*	-.015*	-.075*	.656**	(.884)

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

To formally test the hypothesis, regression analyses were performed. In the first step to perform regression analysis Gender, age, education and experience were used as control variables. In the next step, we have performed the linear regression in order to check the impact of independent variable on dependent variables.

Table 2. Results of Regression Analyses for Outcomes

B	Job Stress		B	Turnover Intentions	
	R ²	ΔR ²		R ²	ΔR ²
	.013			.085	
.542***	.174	.161***	.869***	.247	.162***

n=124, control variable=age, gender, experience and education

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Hypothesis 1: Workplace ostracism has a significant and positive relationship with job stress and turnover intentions.

The results of regression analysis showed that workplace ostracism is positively related to job stress ($\beta = .542$, $t = 4.790$, $p < .001$) and turnover intentions ($\beta = .869$, $t = 5.032$, $p < .001$). Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported. Moderation analysis as shown on table 3 was used to check the effect of moderating variables.

Table 3. Results of Moderation Regression Analyses

Predictor: Psy Cap	Job Stress			Turnover Intentions		
	β	R ²	ΔR ²	B	R ²	ΔR ²
Step 1: Control Variables		.013			.085	
Step 2: Workplace Ostracism	.574***			.904***		
Psy Cap	.420**	.213	.199***	-.462*	.265	.180***
Step 3: WO × PsyCap	.239	.217	.004	-.724*	.281	.016*
Predictor: Political Skill						
Step 1: Control Variables		.013			.085	
Step 2: Workplace Ostracism	.563***			.897***		
Political Skill	-.129*	.179	.165***	.171*	.250	.165***
Step 3: WO × PS	-.901***	.281	.102***	-.327**	.255	-.005**

n=124, control variable=age, gender, experience and education

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Hypothesis 2a: Psychological Capital moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and job stress.

In the first step, control variables were entered. In the second step, the impact of workplace ostracism and psy cap was controlled, then in the last step, interaction term was entered. The result of interaction term ($\beta = .239$, $t = .803$, $p < .10$) showed that psychological capital is not an efficient moderator of workplace ostracism and job stress.

Hypothesis 2b: Psychological Capital moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and turnover intentions.

In the first step, control variables were entered. In the second step, the impact of workplace ostracism and psy cap was controlled, then in the last step, interaction term was entered. The result of interaction term ($\beta = -.724, t = 2.592, p < .05$) showed that psychological capital moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 3a: Political skill moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and job stress.

In the first step, control variables were entered. In the second step, the impact of workplace ostracism and political skill was controlled, then in the last step, interaction term was entered. The result of interaction term ($\beta = -.901, t = 4.905, p < .001$) showed that political skill moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and job stress.

Hypothesis 3b: Political skill moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and turnover intentions.

In the first step, control variables were entered. In the second step, the impact of workplace ostracism and political skill was controlled, then in the last step, interaction term was entered. The result of interaction term ($\beta = -.327, t = 4.058, p < .01$) showed that political skill moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and turnover intentions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study support the proposed theoretical model. Workplace ostracism positively impacts the job outcomes such as job stress and turnover intentions. Psychological capital moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and turnover intentions where this relationship was weak at high level of psy cap. psychological capital does not moderate the association between workplace ostracism and job stress. Political skill has a moderating effect on the relationship between workplace ostracism and job outcomes (job stress and turnover intentions) such that the relationship was weaker when political skill was high.

Our findings are in line with the previous studies (Haq, 2014; Wu et al, 2012; Wu, Wei & Hui, 2011) that ostracism at workplace increase job stress and turnover intentions among employees. Ostracism is a stressor which affects physical and mental health of employees at workplace. However, in order to deal with ostracism, individual psychological resources are used by employees and one of them is psychological capital. PsyCap is helpful in reducing ostracism and its outcomes. Individuals with high psychological capital have higher level of confidence to succeed at challenging task (Bandura, 1997). They take ostracism as a challenge which can likely help them to deal with ostracism and in turn feel less negative job related outcomes. Previous studies (Haq, 2014; Avey et al, 2010; Youssef & Luthans, 2007) also supported our findings that in case of high PsyCap, the relationship between ostracism and turnover

intentions is weaken. However, it does not moderate the relationship between ostracism and job stress. Employees feel ostracism at very high level and besides having PsyCap; it does not help them to reduce their level of job stress.

The findings of the study also suggest that political skill as a moderator reduces the impact of ostracism on job outcomes (job stress and turnover intentions). With the help of political skill, employee can reduce ostracism and its outcomes. The studies of (Wu et al, 2012; Ferris et al, 2007; Treadway et al, 2007) also supports our findings on the link between ostracism and job outcomes is weaken when political skill is high. Political skills help to reduce negative effects of ostracism. To be successful, every individual must possess political skill and good behaviour (Mintzberg, 1983). This study also proves that to deal with ostracism at workplace, political skill plays an important role. Thus, employees having high political skill, can be better able to cope with stressors such as ostracism and its subsequent outcomes.

Our study is a small endeavour to the literature on the workplace ostracism, psychological capital, and political skill and job outcomes by testing the ostracism model. This study has been conducted in the Pakistani context, this research fills the gap contextually and examines the validity of ostracism and its outcomes in Pakistani culture. However, this study has some limitations as well. One limitation is time and resource constraint in data collection due to which few organizations were targeted. The sample was not representative of all population. Secondly, in reporting ostracism and its outcomes, people feel hesitant in telling such kind of behavior.

Future research can consider other individual variables as moderators on the relation between ostracism and its outcomes such as personality traits, proactive personality. Future research can also be carried out on a more diverse sample from different sectors in order to get more accurate results. Future research can also consider other work outcomes such as employee performance, interpersonal relationships and counterproductive workplace behaviour. Future researchers can also consider dimensions of political skill and psy cap to be used as moderator on ostracism-outcomes relationship.

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