

Research Paper

Investigating The Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Work Engagement While Focusing on Mediation Effect of Organizational Based Self-Esteem and General Self-Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

Organizations face challenges of thriving in a changing business landscape. They can gain competitive advantage by identifying and addressing threats to their employees' Work Environment (WE). One of the factors that affect WE is Workplace Ostracism (WO), which is one's perception of being neglected or isolated by others. It also impacts an employee's adequacy and worthiness, known as Organization Based Self-Esteem (OBSE) and confidence in their ability to perform well in various situations, known as General Self-Efficacy (GSE). Literature on WO has reported that self-esteem and self-efficacy can mitigate its effect on work-related activities (such as job performance). However, research on the impact of WO and WE are sparse, and none have reported mediation of GSE and OBSE on their relationship. This study contributes the sparse literature on WO by examining the impact of WO on WE and the mediation effect of OBSE and GSE. Data was collected through an online questionnaire from 206 respondents of private and public sectors of various industries. Results indicate a negative relation between WO and WE. While OBSE was a perfect mediator between the relationship of WO and WE whereas, in another instance, GSE reported partial mediation.

Keywords: *Employee Engagement, General Self-Efficacy, Organization Based Self-Esteem, Work engagement, Workplace Ostracism*

The business world is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) and organizations face challenge of not only surviving but also thriving (Deo, 2018). With the changing economy and rising customer expectations the workspaces of employees are getting clustered with pressures and deadlines. Furthermore, technological advancements and changes in business models are transforming the work environment at an unprecedented pace, leaving little time for employees to adapt (Hamid, 2019). These factors are affecting various aspects of employee performance, collaboration, and work engagement in organizations (Deo, 2018). Prioritizing these critical characteristics, especially work engagement can help organizations increase profits and

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Investigating The Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Work Engagement While Focusing on Mediation Effect of Organizational Based Self-Esteem and General Self-Efficacy

achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Egwuonwu & Marius, 2018). Literature on ostracism suggests that nearly 50% to 70% employees reported being ostracized at work (Fox and Stallworth, 2005; Wu, 2010). Despite its prevalence, organizational psychologists have largely overlooked ostracism (Williams, 1997, 2007; Al-Atwi, 2017; Gutgsell, 2017). So, the focus should be on workplace ostracism. It is a feeling of being ignored or excluded by others (Ferris et al., 2008). It affects more than 65% of employees (Wang, Wu & Luo, 2023 and Xu, Kwan & Li, 2020) and is one of the major reasons of reduced work engagement (Leung et al., 2011). While some of the studies have explored the direct effects of workplace ostracism, few have explained their underlying mechanisms (Anasori et al., 2021). For example, Chung and Yang (2017) conducted a study and reported a partial mediating effect by organization-based self-esteem on the relationship between workplace ostracism and deviant work behavior. Another study by Huertas et al. (2018) described that workplace ostracism negatively impacts self-esteem, and this relationship is moderated by psychological empowerment. Furthermore, Rotich (2016) explained that organizational-based self-esteem highly influences work engagement.

However, since there is sparse literature on the impact of workplace ostracism (WO) on work engagement (WE). This study investigates the influence of WO on WE while exploring the mediating role of organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) and general self-esteem (GSE) individually. The mediation analysis is used to explain the underlying mechanisms by which WO affects WE (Baron and Kenny, 1986). The expected outcomes of this study can be leveraged by organizational psychologists and HR professionals to curate policies, training, and a culture that effectively address the issue of WO, which could ultimately give their organization a competitive edge (Egwuonwu & Marius, 2018) in the VUCA environment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Workplace Ostracism

Workplace ostracism, which is the feeling of being ignored or excluded by others (Ferris et al., 2008), can occur in workplaces regardless of demographic diversities (Kaya et al., 2017). Despite the social amenities provided by workplaces, such as break rooms, gyms, elevators, parking spaces, meeting, and gaming areas where employees can interact and engage with each other, ostracism can easily manifest in these environments (Fox and Stallworth, 2005). Ostracism can take various forms, including verbal and non-verbal behavior (Irshad and Hussain, 2021). Examples of such behaviors include failing to invite colleagues to team events, ignoring their ideas during meetings, "voting them out," "giving the cold shoulder," "giving the silent treatment," "freezing them out," or not reciprocating greetings (Balliet and Ferris, 2013; Leung et al., 2011). Not all instances of this behavior are necessarily intentional or punitive. Sometimes, employees may be too engrossed in their work and unknowingly display behaviors that socially exclude others (Robinson et al., 2013). For example, an employee may fail to include another employee's email address in a group email because they mistakenly believe that they have already been added. On the other hand, ostracism can also be deliberate, with the aim of excluding others (Robinson et al., 2013). Regardless of the intent behind these actions, ostracism can negatively impact interpersonal behavior and work-related attributes (Ferris et al., 2008; Hitlan et al., 2006), such as self-esteem (Williams, 2007), sense of belonging (Williams, 2009), sense of control (Williams, 2001), and self-worth (Al-Atwi et al., 2021), behavior (Ferris et al., 2015), psychological well-being (Tan et al., 2021), work motivation (Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2013), job performance (De Clercq et al., 2019), and the focus of this study, work engagement

Investigating The Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Work Engagement While Focusing on Mediation Effect of Organizational Based Self-Esteem and General Self-Efficacy

(Samo et al., 2019). Overall, workplace ostracism can have significant negative effects on work engagement, which refers to the level of commitment and involvement an employee has in their job (Leung et al., 2011). This can lead to reduced motivation and enthusiasm towards work. Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to recognize and address instances of ostracism in the workplace to promote a positive work environment and maintain high levels of work engagement.

Work engagement

WE is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind, that comprises of three key elements: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Bakker et al., 2008). An engaged employees would exhibit vigor by working hard, their dedication is evident when they are involved in their task and when they are absorbed in work the surroundings cannot distract them (Leung et al., 2011) which is crucial for gaining a competitive edge (Khazanov & Kang, 2021) in the VUCA business environment. They also perceive themselves as capable of handling job demands and contributing to organizational development (Albrecht & Leiter, 2011). However, the perception of being ignored or excluded by others (ostracism) can threaten the elements of work engagement by negatively impacting resources such as organizational support (Choi, 2020), sense of belonging (Williams, 2009), wellbeing (Wang et al., 2023), work motivation (Steinbauer et al., 2018), energy & enthusiasm towards work (Kaya, 2017), and affective commitment (Brinda & Iswarya, 2022), ultimately leading to decreased work engagement (Hobfoll, 1989; Oberaia, 2021) and reduced overall organizational success (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2018). Therefore, the author hypothesized as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Workplace Ostracism (WO) is negatively related to Work Engagement (WE).

Image 1: Visual representation of hypothesis 1



Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE)

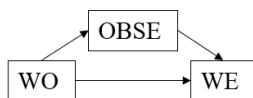
OBSE refers to an individual's perception of their adequacy and worthiness as a member of an organization. It reflects the degree to which they feel important, worthwhile, and meaningful within their employment organization. (Pierce et al., 1989; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). OBSE is one of the major predictors of work engagement (Rotich, 2016; Takhsha, 2020), and WO has been found to negatively impact OBSE (Chung and Yang, 2017; Takhsha, 2020). The negative impact is a concern because employees with low self-esteem lack confidence in their abilities, feel unmotivated, disempowered, and incapable (Gardner, 1989), resulting in reduced personal performance (Hahn and Mathews, 2018), increased stress (Costantini et al., 2019), and negative interpersonal relationships (Tavakoli et al., 2014), all of which contribute to lower work engagement. While previous literature suggests a mixed effect of self-esteem as a mediator to the relationship between workplace ostracism and work-related characteristics, there are sparse studies that have investigated work engagement as a dependent variable. For example, a study conducted by Kuo & Wu in 2022 reports that OBSE mediates the relationship between WO and job performance, with WO decreasing OBSE and hindering employees' job performance. Anasori et al. in 2021 found that workplace ostracism detrimentally affects employees' well-being by inhibiting their self-esteem and social support. However, Takhsha et al. in 2020 did not confirm the mediating role of OBSE in the relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge sharing. Hence, this study resides with the literature that portrays a negative effect of WO on

Investigating The Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Work Engagement While Focusing on Mediation Effect of Organizational Based Self-Esteem and General Self-Efficacy

the work engagement, while OBSE negatively mediates their relationship. Therefore, we have hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 2: Organization based self-esteem negatively mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and work engagement.

Image 2: Visual representation of hypothesis 2



General Self-Efficacy (GSE)

GSE refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform well in various situations. (Judge, Erez, and Bono, 1998) It is a stable trait that reflects their perception of their overall competence. The terms GSE and self-efficacy are used interchangeably (Nusannas, 2020), and this study follows suit. Low self-efficacy among employees has been associated with the inability to handle difficult situations, a weak belief in one's abilities, reluctance to invest more effort, and giving up quickly when faced with challenges (Heuven et al., 2006). Employees with low self-efficacy also tend to struggle while dealing with failure and experiencing decreased job satisfaction (Lent et al., 2011) which in turn lowers work engagement (Ashraf, 2020). Hence, GSE is of concern. Previous studies have largely suggested the moderator effect of self-efficacy. For example, Bhatt & Rana (2023) reported a negative moderation effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between workplace ostracism and contextual performance, while Ashraf, Mangi, & Laghari (2020) found significant moderation of psychological capital between workplace ostracism and employee engagement, where psychological capital contained self-efficacy as one of its dimensions. No studies reported GSE as a mediator between WO and WE. However, GSE has been found to be a predictor and positive influencer of work engagement (Bakker & van Wingerden, 2021; Lisbona, Palaci, Salanova, & Frese, 2018; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Chan et al., 2017; Xanthopoulou et al., 2013; Yakın and Erdil, 2012) and has been reported to be negatively influenced by workplace ostracism (Bhatt and Rana, 2023; De Clercq et al., 2019; Sarwar, 2019). These results suggest that self-efficacy correlates with both WE and WO, and that WO has negative impact on WE and WE can act as a mediator (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Therefore, the author hypothesized as follows:

Hypothesis 3: General self-efficacy negatively mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and work engagement.

Image 3: Visual representation of hypothesis 3



Ferris and colleagues in 2008 popularized the concept of WO by introducing workplace ostracism scale (Liu & Xia, 2016). Since then, it has been more than a decade and the study of WO is still in its nascent stages (Harvey et al., 2018)., For this reason, literature on WO has few studies that investigates its impact on WE and even fewer that explore the mediating effects of OBSE and GSE on its relation with WE. This research contributes to the growing literature on workplace ostracism by examining its link to a core job factor, work

Investigating The Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Work Engagement While Focusing on Mediation Effect of Organizational Based Self-Esteem and General Self-Efficacy

engagement (Ahmed et al., 2017), and addressing the gap on “why” WO affects WE through usage of OBSE and GSE as mediators. Additionally, the findings of this study could help organizational psychologists and HR professionals to develop policies, training programs, and a culture that effectively address the issue of workplace ostracism while enhancing OBSE and GSE among employees, thereby giving their organizations a competitive edge in the VUCA environment (Egwuonwu & Marius, 2018).

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the relationship between workplace ostracism and work engagement.
- To investigate the mediating effect of organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) on the relationship between workplace ostracism and work engagement.
- To analyze the mediating effect of general self-efficacy (GSE) on the relationship between workplace ostracism and work engagement.

Sample and Data Collection

Online questionnaires were used to collect data from the month of January’23 to April’23. A total of 213 responses were received, out of which 7 were invalid leaving 206 usable responses. The sample had nearly half 106 (51.5%) female, 99 (48.1%) male, 1 (0.5%) other gender with mean ages of 29.7, 28.86 and 25 years respectively. The minimum age of the sample was recorded as 21 years and the maximum was 55 years. A large portion of 170 (82.52%) were working in the private sector. Nearly half 102 (49.51%) reported on-premises work, and 137 (66.50%) worked five days a week. Most of the respondents, 65 (35.55%), worked in the IT industry, followed by 38 (18.45%) in the education sector. On average, respondents' workplaces had at least five amenities/engagement/interaction areas, including elevators, punch out machines, microwave ovens, parking spaces, mess areas, gaming areas, and gyms/spas. Due to limitations of data collection, certain demographic variables have been excluded such as region, religion, work experience, designation, organization size and designation. Agarwal (2020) reported that demographic variables can have a positive, negative, or neutral effect on the relationship between workplace ostracism on work-related behaviors.

Measures

The four constructs employed in this study were measured using tools adopted in previous studies. Workplace Ostracism was measured using Workplace Ostracism Scale (WOS) developed by Ferris, D & Brown, Douglas & Berry, Joseph & Lian, Huiwen. (2008). It had 10 items (for example, “Others ignored you at work”, “Others left the area when you entered.”) and it was responded on five -point Likert scale anchoring from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Work engagement was measured using Utrecht Work Engagement Scale–9 (UWES-9) developed by Schaufeli, W.B., Bakker, A.B., & Salanova, M. (2006). It has dimensions of Vigor, Dedication and Absorption, all combined to form nine-items scale (for example, "At my work, I feel bursting with energy.", "I am enthusiastic about my job") which were responded on seven-point Likert scale anchoring from Never (0) to Always (6). Self-Esteem construct was measured using Organization Based Self Esteem (OBSE) scale development by Pierce, Jon & Gardner (1989). It has 10-items (for example, "I count around here", "I am helpful around here") and was responded on five-point Likert scale anchoring from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Self-Efficacy was measured using Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) developed by Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). This scale comprises of 10-items (for example, "I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough", "I can usually handle whatever comes my way.")

Investigating The Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Work Engagement While Focusing on Mediation Effect of Organizational Based Self-Esteem and General Self-Efficacy

and was responded on four-point Likert scale anchoring form Not at all true (1) to Exactly true (4). Out of the four tools, only UWES-9 was multidimensional, and the rest were unidimensional. These scales marked high reliability ($\alpha \geq 0.91$).

ANALYSIS AND RESULT

Table 1 represents descriptive statistics for Workplace Ostracism (WO), Organizational Based Self-Esteem (OBSE) and General Self-Efficacy (GSE). Correlation values for GSE indicate negative correlation with WO (-0.27, $p < 0.01$), whereas positive correlation with WE (0.435, $p < 0.01$) and OBSE (0.523, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, OBSE was found to have positive correlation with WE (0.646, $p < 0.01$) but negative correlation with WO (-0.319, $p < 0.01$). Finally, WO reported negative correlation with WE (-0.236, $p < 0.01$). (See table 1.)

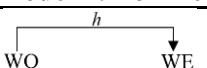
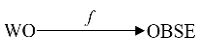
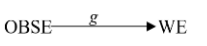
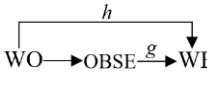
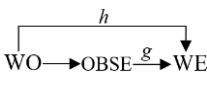
Table 1: Represents Mean, Standard deviations, and correlations of the four major variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1 Work Engagement	38.87	11.539	---			
2 Workplace Ostracism	16.44	9.876	-0.236**	---		
3 Organizational Based Self-Esteem	40.38	7.522	0.646**	-0.319**	---	
4 General Self-Efficacy	31.22	6.638	0.435**	-0.27**	0.523**	---

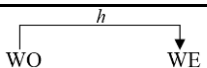
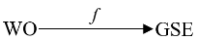
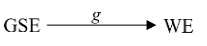
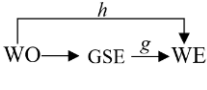
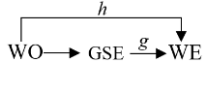
** $p < 0.01$

The author tested the hypothesized mediating effect of OBSE and GSE using Baron and Kenny's (1986) method. This method is described in table 2 along with results. OBSE was used in model 1 and GSE in model 2, and both were found to mediate the relationship between WO and WE. In this regard, OBSE was found to have a perfect mediation effect because its presence decreased β (from -0.236 to -0.033) and the direct path became insignificant ($p=0.559$). Whereas, in the second model, GSE was found to have partial mediation effect because its presence decreased β (from -0.236 to -0.128) but the p value for direct path was marginally insignificant ($p=0.051$). (See table 2)

Table 2: Standardized regression weights of the full latent model using Baron and Kenny's (1986) method.

Visual Description	Model	R ²	SE	β	t	P
Model 1: For mediator 1: Organizational Based Self-Esteem (OBSE)						
	WO → WE	0.056	11.241	-0.236	-3.465	0.001
	WO → OBSE	0.102	7.147	-0.319	-4.807	0.000
	OBSE → WE	8.829	8.829	0.646	12.09	0.000
	WO → WE (Indirect path g)	0.418	8.843	0.636	11.254	0.000
	WO → WE (Direct path h)	0.418	8.843	-0.033	-0.585	0.559

Investigating The Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Work Engagement While Focusing on Mediation Effect of Organizational Based Self-Esteem and General Self-Efficacy

Visual Description	Model	R ²	SE	β	t	P
Model 2: For mediator 2: General Self-Efficacy (GSE)						
	WO → WE	0.056	11.241	-0.236	-3.465	0.001
	WO → GSE	0.068	6.407	-0.270	-4.008	0.000
	GSE → WE	0.189	10.417	0.435	6.895	0.000
	WO → WE (Indirect path g)	0.204	10.345	0.400	6.154	0.000
	WO → WE (Direct path h)	0.204	10.345	-0.128	-1.962	0.051

DISCUSSION, CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this study, the author examined three hypotheses, and all of them were accepted. The findings indicated that Workplace Ostracism (WO) (hypothesis 1) had a negative association with Work Engagement (WE). Moreover, when Organization Based Self-Esteem (OBSE) (hypothesis 2) and General Self-Efficacy (GSE) (hypothesis 3) were analyzed in two separate models, the results showed that both OBSE and GSE negatively mediate the relationship between WO and WE. In model 1, the author found that OBSE ‘perfectly mediates’ the relationship between WO and WE, while in model 2, GSE ‘partially mediated’ the relationship (Baron and Kenny, 1986). This implies that organizations with high levels of WO can negatively impact the WE of their employees. Also, the results reveal that individuals with elevated values of OBSE and GSE may be less affected by WO, leading to an increase in their WE.

The results for Hypothesis 1 align with previous literature, including works by Williams (2022), Shaikh (2022), Anasori (2021), Haldorai (2020), Xu and Kwan (2020), Kaya (2017), Khanna (2016), and Leung (2011). For Hypothesis 2, a few research investigated the mediation role of self-esteem between WO and work-related activities. Self-esteem has played a mixed role as a mediator. For instance, Kuo and Wu (2022) found that organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) mediated the relationship between WO and job performance. Similarly, Anasori et al. (2021) indicated that WO impairs employees' well-being by undermining their self-esteem and social support. However, Zhang, Kang, Jiang, and Niu (2022) reported that OBSE moderates the relationship between WO and thriving at work, with individuals who have high OBSE being more susceptible to the negative effects of WO. Also, Takhsha et al. (2020) did not find conclusive evidence supporting the mediating role of OBSE in the relationship between WO and knowledge sharing. On contrarily, in this study, the author found that OBSE plays a role of a perfect mediator (Baron and Kenny, 1986) between the relationship of WO and WE, suggesting that employees with high level of OBSE can mitigate the negative effects of WO on their WE. With regards to hypothesis 3, prior research has predominantly emphasized self-efficacy as a moderator, and none reported a mediation effect of GSE on the relationship between WO and WE. For example, Bhatt & Rana (2023) demonstrated a negative moderation effect of

Investigating The Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Work Engagement While Focusing on Mediation Effect of Organizational Based Self-Esteem and General Self-Efficacy

self-efficacy on the relationship between WO and contextual performance. Similarly, De Clercq et al. (2019) found that self-efficacy moderated the impact of WO on job performance. Furthermore, Sarwar et al. (2019) discovered that WO was positively associated with stress and negatively linked to employee self-efficacy. Additionally, Ashraf, Mangi, & Laghari (2020) revealed that psychological capital, which encompasses self-efficacy as one of its dimensions, significantly moderated the relationship between WO and employee engagement. Whereas in this study GSE was found to be a partial mediator between the relationship of WO and WE, suggesting that employees with high levels of GSE can partially mitigate the negative effect of WO on their WE.

There is a paucity of research that reports mediating effects of OBSE and GSE on the relationship of WO and WE, and ostracism has been largely ignored by organizational psychologists (Williams, 2001, 2007; Al-Atwi, 2017). The findings contribute to the sparse literature on WO, with OBSE having perfect mediation effect and GSE having partial effect on the WO-WE relationship. Furthermore, by focusing on these mediators, the impact of WO on WE can be mitigated. Researchers can develop a better understanding of "why" WO is linked to employee WE as the author has utilized mediation mechanisms. Additionally, these findings can be leveraged by organizational psychologists and HR professionals to curate policies, training, and a culture that effectively address the issue of WO while enhancing OBSE and GSE among their employees, which could ultimately give their organization a competitive edge (Egwuonwu & Marius, 2018) in the VUCA environment.

In this study, WE is related to multiple variables, and the results obtained can potentially be expanded to these related variables. For instance, previous research has used work engagement and employee engagement interchangeably, possibly because they originated from research on burnout (Kosaka & Sato, 2020). Additionally, Schaufeli and Salanova's (2007) study found several variables related to employee engagement, which suggests that increasing work engagement levels could lead to higher levels of "organizational commitment", "job satisfaction", "organizational citizenship behavior", "lower turnover rates", improved "wellbeing", and increased "learning motivation". Engaged employees are more likely to demonstrate proactive and helpful behavior, be less "stressed", have better physical health outcomes, be motivated to learn and grow, and increase both "employee performance: and "organizational performance".

Limitations and Future Direction

An organization is composed of diverse employees who have unique demographic backgrounds including region, religion, work experience, designation, organization size and designation. The current study did not consider these demographic variables in data collection, so future research could explore their implications. Secondly, this study utilized self-rated variables with good reliability and validity, and measures were taken to reduce common-method-bias (CMB). However, future research could consider data from diverse sources and introduce time gaps between the independent and dependent variables to further reduce common method bias. Thirdly, this study did not differentiate between various epicenters of Workplace Ostracism (WO) (for instance, peers and bosses). These different sources could have distinct effects or interact to influence employees' work outcomes. Therefore, the author recommends that future studies include different epicenters of WO that may affect employee outcome. Additionally, future research could examine the impact of WO on various aspects of work engagement, such as vigor, dedication, and absorption.

**Investigating The Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Work Engagement While Focusing on
Mediation Effect of Organizational Based Self-Esteem and General Self-Efficacy**

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