# Research on the Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Proactive Employee Behavior

## Siyu Chen

*School of Business, Macau University of Technology and Science, Macau, China*
*siyu_chen9@163.com*

*Abstract:* Workplace ostracism, as a negative behavior in organizational behavior, already exists in organizations and is typically destructive, which will have a negative impact on individuals and organizations to a large extent. In recent years, scholars have paid more attention to the impact of workplace ostracism on corporate employees as a whole, and paid less attention to individual employees. To achieve these goals, this study reviews existing domestic and international research literature, consolidating recent research trends and findings. It analyzes and synthesizes previous studies, formulating hypotheses for the current investigation. Data is collected through a questionnaire-based survey using established scales from both domestic and international sources. This study focuses on working women as the research subjects and aims to explore the impact of workplace ostracism on proactive employee behavior. It examines the mechanisms through which workplace ostracism influences proactive employee behavior and proposes a corresponding theoretical model. Based on the research findings, this study provides practical recommendations and countermeasures at both the organizational and individual employee levels to prevent workplace ostracism and promote proactive employee behavior. By addressing this issue comprehensively, this research contributes to the existing literature and offers insights for organizations to create a supportive work environment and enhance employee engagement and performance.

## 1. Research Background

Workplace ostracism is a negative behavior that is pervasive and destructive within organizations, resulting in significant adverse consequences for both individuals and the overall organization. While recent research has primarily focused on the impact of workplace ostracism on corporate employees, there has been a lack of attention given to specific groups of employees who exhibit proactive behavior. Given the pivotal role of proactive behavior in organizational success, this study aims to examine employee proactive behavior and investigate the influence of workplace ostracism on such behavior.

Currently, there is limited research conducted by domestic scholars on workplace exclusion among specific groups of individuals. However, it is important to acknowledge that different groups often possess distinct personalities and may exhibit varying mental states and behaviors when faced with similar pressures. Building upon the research findings, this study presents corresponding

countermeasures and recommendations. The aim is to guide employees in recognizing the impact of workplace ostracism on proactive behaviors and provide targeted approaches to address workplace exclusion, thereby enhancing proactive behaviors among employees.

## 1.1 Review of Workplace ostracism

The concept of workplace ostracism was originally introduced by Ferris et al. (2008) and has since gained recognition among numerous scholars[3]. Many researchers have incorporated this concept into their studies. In line with previous literature, this study adopts the definition of workplace ostracism as employees being excluded, ignored, alienated, treated indifferently, and not accepted by others within their work unit.

## 1.2 Review of employee proactive behavior

In 1993, Bateman proposed that employees with proactive behaviors have the ability to transcend the limitations and constraints of established work norms[1]. These individuals set challenging work goals that align with their own abilities, take the initiative to improve the existing environment, and innovate their roles. Moreover, they consciously assess whether to engage in or disengage from specific tasks or situations, intentionally bringing about change by creating new circumstances or actively modifying existing ones. Scholars widely consider initiative as a behavioral tendency characterized by a forward-looking and transformative nature.

## 1.3 Review sense of organizational belonging

Porter et al.(1974) conducted an analysis that identified three key components related to organizational commitment. Firstly, it encompasses the sense of identification with the organization, including alignment with the corporate culture and the company's strategic goals. Secondly, it involves the desire and eagerness to be an integral member of the organization. Lastly, it entails wholeheartedly serving the organization by actively contributing and supporting other members in the completion of team tasks with utmost efficiency and effectiveness[4].

## 2. Research hypothesis

## 2.1 The impact of workplace ostracism on organizational belonging

Workplace ostracism can be considered a form of psychological aggression encountered in work environments. Unlike physical assaults, workplace ostracism involves subjective experiences of employees. It typically manifests as being ignored or excluded by superiors or colleagues, with limited communication or deliberate avoidance of contact. Ferris et al. (2008) suggested that individuals who experience ostracism may experience decreased feelings of connection towards both the ostracizing parties and their own team[3]. Additionally, Williams (2009) proposed that a sense of belonging is an important aspect of personal experience[6]. Drawing from the aforementioned analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Workplace ostracism has a significant negative impact on organizational belonging.

## 2.2 The impact of organizational belonging on employees' proactive behavior

Research has demonstrated a direct correlation between employees' proactive behaviors and their sense of belonging to the organization. Elloy et al. (1991) suggested that when employees feel a high level of recognition within the organization, they are more likely to exhibit greater dedication

to their work[2]. This indicates that work engagement is a crucial component of organizational commitment.

H2: Organizational belonging has a significant positive impact on employee proactive behavior.

## 2.3 The impact of workplace ostracism on employees' proactive behavior

Ferris et al. (2008) suggests that when employees experience workplace ostracism, they tend to disperse their energy in coping with the resulting pressure[3]. This dispersion of energy depletes the individual's limited internal resources, leading to psychological discomfort and hindering their ability to concentrate on their work. Williams & Sommer(1997) proposed that employees are less likely to engage in proactive behaviors. Particularly for employees exhibiting proactive behavior, being subjected to workplace exclusion intensifies both work-related and personal pressures[5]. Based on the above analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Workplace ostracism has a significant negative impact on employee proactive behavior.

## 2.4 The mediating role of organizational belonging

The level of employees' sense of belonging is directly influenced by the rewards and returns they receive from the company. When employees exhibit proactive behavior and experience negative treatment such as workplace exclusion within the organization, it can lead to a sense of questioning their identity within the company(Zellars et al.,2002)[7]. This can create a sense of alienation from the organization, causing employees to become disconnected from the company's value system, subsequently reducing their sense of belonging.

Simultaneously, when employees' proactive behaviors are rejected or undermined in the workplace, resulting in a low sense of organizational belonging, their willingness to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization diminishes. As a result, they may become less invested in their work. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The sense of organizational belonging mediates the impact of workplace ostracism on employee proactive behavior.

## 3. Research results and analysis

## 3.1 Section 1 Reliability Analysis

This article adopts Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and corrected item-total correlation coefficient (CITC) to test the internal consistency of the scale Cronbach's for all variables Alpha The coefficients are all greater than 0.8 , and all CITC items of the four variables All are greater than the lower limit of 0.4(see Table1), indicating very good reliability.

Table 1: Reliability analysis results

| variables | Cronbach's Alpha | CITC |
|---|---|---|
| Workplace ostracism | 0.845 | All items CITC>0.4 |
| Employee proactive behavior | 0.935 | All items CITC>0.4 |
| Organizational belonging | 0.851 | All items CITC>0.4 |

## 3.2 Section 2 Validity Analysis

### 3.2.1 Combined reliability

As shown as Table 2 each latent variable corresponding to each topic are basically greater than 0.7, indicating that each latent variable is highly representative of the corresponding topic. In addition, each latent variable is highly representative. Average variance variation AVE of latent variables are all greater than 0.5, and the combined reliability CR All are greater than 0.8, indicating ideal convergent validity.

Table 2: Combined reliability

|  | Estimate | AVE | CR |
|---|---|---|---|
| wo3 | 0.753 | 0.503 | 0.878 |
| wo2 | 0.754 | | |
| wo1 | 0.848 | | |
| ob3 | 0.704 | 0.573 | 0.840 |
| ob2 | 0.794 | | |
| ob1 | 0.860 | | |
| eb4 | 0.748 | 0.690 | 0.834 |
| eb3 | 0.791 | | |
| eb2 | 0.713 | | |
| eb1 | 0.765 | | |

Note: wo: Workplace ostracism; ob: Organizational belonging; eb: Employee proactive behavior

### 3.2.2 Discriminant validity

In addition, as shown as Table 3 the absolute values of all the correlation coefficients are less than 0.5, and at the same time, they are smaller than the corresponding square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) values. This indicates that while there is a certain correlation between each latent variable, there is also a sufficient degree of distinction between them.

Table 3: Discriminant validity

|  | Workplace ostracism | Employee proactive behavior | Organizational belonging |
|---|---|---|---|
| Workplace ostracism | 0.450 | | |
| Employee proactive behavior | - 0.153 * | 0.459 | |
| Organizational belonging | 0.129 * | -0.453 ** | 0.434 |
| AVE square root | 0.754 | 0.825 | 0.768 |

Note: * p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001. The diagonal line is the AVE evaluation variance extraction amount

## 3.3 Section 3 correlation analysis

The correlation coefficient between workplace ostracism and employee proactive behavior was -0.482, demonstrating a significant (p<0.01) negative relationship. The correlation coefficient between organizational belonging and employee proactive behavior was 0.426, representing a positive correlation that was also significant (p<0.01). The correlation coefficient between workplace ostracism and organizational belonging was -0.330, exhibiting a significant (p<0.01) negative correlation (see Table 4).

Table 4: Correlation analysis

| | average value | standard deviation | Workplace ostracism | Employee proactive behavior | Organizational belonging |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Workplace ostracism | 3.450 | 0.928 | 1 | | |
| Employee proactive behavior | 3. 268 | 0.910 | - 0.482 ** | 1 | |
| Organizational belonging | 3. 534 | 0.838 | - 0.330 ** | 0.426 ** | 1 |

## 4. Analysis conclusion

The research findings provide evidence of a negative relationship between employee proactive behavior and workplace ostracism. Additionally, organizational belonging was found to have a positive impact on employee proactive behavior. The study's focus on the connection between employee proactive behavior and workplace ostracism yielded results in line with existing research theories, further highlighting the detrimental effects of workplace ostracism.

This imbalance ultimately diminishes employee proactive behavior. When employees' proactive behavior encounters emotional rejection in the workplace, it leads to reduced psychological satisfaction, gradual self-doubt, and a growing sense of alienation from the organization. Consequently, employees become less aligned with the organization's values and fail to develop a sense of belonging.

The study also examined the mediating role of organizational belonging, concluding that there is an inverse relationship between employee proactive behavior and workplace ostracism. Organizational belonging serves as a mediating factor in this relationship.

## References

[1] Bateman, TS, & Crant, JM (1993). The proactive component of organizational behavior: A measure and correlates. Journal of organizational behavior, 14 (2), 103-118.

[2] Elloy, DF, Everett, JE, & Flynn, WR (1991). An examination of the correlates of job involvement. Group & Organization Studies, 16 (2), 160-177.

[3] Ferris, D. L., Brown, D. J., Berry, J. W., & Lian, H. (2008). The development and validation of the Workplace Ostracism Scale .Journal of Applied Psychology, 93 (6), 1348.

[4] Porter, L. W., Steers, R. M., Mowday, R. T., & Boulian, P. V. (1974). Organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover among psychiatric technicians. Journal of applied psychology, 59 (5), 603.

[5] Williams, KD, & Sommer, KL (1997). Social ostracism by coworkers: Does rejection lead to loafing or compensation. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23(7), 693-706.

[6] Williams, K. D.(2009).Ostracism: A Temporal Need-Threat Model. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, Vol 41, 41, 275-314.

[7] Zellars, K. L., Tepper, B. J., & Duffy,M. K.(2002).Abusive supervision and subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior. Journal of Applied Psychology, 87(6),1068-1076.