

Study on Workplace Ostracism and its Effect

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Abstract. This article studies on existing literature and finds that workplace ostracism is universal. By sorting out the connotation and the effect of workplace ostracism, this study hope to provide a basis for organizations to properly handle workplace ostracism. By controlling reasonably and focusing in time, this article will shape a good workplace environment and employee relations. At the same time, this article hopes to lay the foundation for further research on workplace ostracism through the collation and analysis of the literature.

Keywords: Workplace ostracism; psychological state; Work attitude; Individual behavior.

1. Introduction

Good communication and cooperation in modern workplaces are essential to achieve organizational goals. Frictions and conflicts of interest are inevitable in the process of interpersonal communication. Workplace ostracism reflects these problems among people as "cold violence" in the workplace[1]. A 2009 online survey of Chinese employees showed that people have long been accustomed to exclusion in organizational contexts, with 71% of employees saying they have suffered varying degrees of exclusion[2]. The workplace is an important social environment where people spend a lot of time interacting with others. And workplace ostracism often leads to negative consequences, causing pain for the excluded. It is important for employees to maintain a positive working relationship, because the quality of the relationship can greatly affect an individual's attitude and behavior at work. As the negative effects of workplace ostracism continue to be discovered, scholars have started to pay more attention to workplace ostracism. However, although it has been confirmed that workplace ostracism is an unavoidable phenomenon in modern organizations, it has not received enough attention from managers. Therefore, it is of great significance to increase research on workplace ostracism and promote it to organizations. This article sorts out the connotation and effect of workplace ostracism in order to provide theoretical basis and practical reference for future management of workplace ostracism behavior. It is also hoped that employees and managers can correctly treat workplace ostracism behavior in order to improve organizational effectiveness and the overall quality of employees.

2. Connotation of Workplace Ostracism

Different scholars have different research focuses on the meaning of workplace ostracism. Ferris et al. (2008) defined workplace ostracism as the attitudes that individuals perceive in the workplace of others' neglect, exclusion, and rejection[3]. Le et al. (2012) defined workplace ostracism as the interpersonal neglect suffered by employees in the organizational environment, as well as the behavior of others who set barriers to the development of a certain workplace through private rights, resulting in employees being marginalized. Robinson et al. (2012) believe that workplace ostracism refers to the behavior of neglecting interaction with others or another group when one person or group is socializing. Although different scholars have different definitions of workplace ostracism, their basic meanings generally include three characteristics: first, behaviors that affect work in the workplace; second, individuals' subjective feelings of being ignored and excluded; third, intentionally or inadvertently ignoring and excluding others. Based on the above characteristics, this article believes that workplace ostracism is the phenomenon that individuals feel neglected and excluded subjectively in the workplace.

3. Effect of Workplace Ostracism

3.1 Psychological State

Individuals who suffer from workplace ostracism may manifest themselves as burnout, depression, stress and so on. For example, Qian et al. (2017) based on the affective event theory, found that employees who were rejected by the workplace would hold an attitude of doubting their abilities, and long-term suspicion would cause individuals to become fatigued and manifested as employee burnout. Leiter (2013) proposed that workplace ostracism can lead to negative emotions and increase stress experience. Exclusion also has threatens the individual's self-esteem, sense of belonging, and meaningful existence. Being ignored and excluded by others may hurt the individual's physical and mentality at the same time. Facing exclusion from others also means a state of "social death."

3.2 Work Attitude

Workplace ostracism may affect employees' work attitudes, causing employees to have defensive silence, turnover intentions, and reduced job satisfaction. For example, based on the social exchange theory, Zhao (2019) believes that facing workplace ostracism, individuals no longer take the initiative to think about the interests of the organization, showing more indifference to the organization, and treating the work arranged by the organization negatively, even secretly exulting for whom have make wrong decisions, treating the organization's problems with silence or avoid positive responses as usually. At the same time, Zhao (2019) believes that the individual's prediction of future results greatly affects the individual's behavioral performance according to the prospect theory. Employees who are excluded in the workplace will have a strong idea of "the words of the lowly carry little weight" when treating problems. Even if the question is raised, it is rarely adopted by the organization, so when it comes to keeping silent or actively speaking, it tends to be silent. In addition, Zhang et al. (2015) found that workplace ostracism will affect the turnover tendency of a new generation of rural migrant workers. According to the theory of belonging, everyone needs to actively communicate with others and form good social relationships. When faced with workplace ostracism, the new generation of migrant workers felt the unrecognized reality, which negatively affected their need for belonging. When this state cannot be changed, the new generation of rural migrant workers will have a tendency to leave.

3.3 Individual Behavior

Faced with workplace ostracism, individuals may produce counterproductive work behavior, customer service initiative behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, voice behavior, unethical pro-organizational behavior, employee deviant behavior and compulsory citizenship behavior. For example, Yan et al. (2014) have found through positive research that individuals who are excluded being more likely to have aggressive behaviors, and passive interpersonal experiences make employees feel unfair, prompting employees to engage in counterproductive work behavior [4]. Zhao et al. (2013) have also proposed based on the concept of negative reciprocity principle, excluded individuals will directly retaliate, which may lead them to engage in more interpersonal forms of counterproductive work behavior[5]; for example, Zhou et al. (2018) ,in a survey of service industry personnel, based on the conservation of resources theory, which was found that employees who were excluded from the workplace were deprived of emotional resources and did not have the extra energy to perform off-duty behaviors. [6].

There are also three different opinions on workplace ostracism affecting organizational citizenship behaviors: workplace ostracism negatively affects organizational citizenship behavior, workplace ostracism has no effect on organizational citizenship behavior and workplace ostracism positively affects organizational citizenship behavior. Williams (1997) argues that workplace exclusion has nothing to do with organizational citizenship behavior, and exclusion has no effect on men's prosocial behavior. Unlike this hypothetical result, based on the principle of negative reciprocity principle, when a person is treated unfriendly, they will return the same treatment in the

same way. Research by Jex et al. (2003), which shows that individuals who perceive the support of others are more, it is possible to participate in organizational citizenship, and individuals who are excluded are more likely to have negative work behaviors. Another hypothesis is to observe organizational citizenship from the perspective of social dilemmas. Individuals must bear short-term personal costs to obtain long-term collective benefits. Based on the goal interdependence theory, people in teams and organizations are interdependent, individual behaviors affect other team members. Excluded employees are more likely to increase organizational citizenship to curb continued rejection after realizing that they and their team members will continue to be interdependent. Joireman et al. (2006) found that organizational citizenship is indeed considered a trade-off between short-term and long-term benefits. Those who are concerned about the consequences of future behaviors are more likely to engage in organizational citizenship than those who are less concerned about the future.

4. Summary and Prospect

Managers must understand the importance of positive interpersonal relationships among members of the organization. Workplace ostracism can cause psychological harm to employees and affect work behavior. For the common development of organizations and individuals, it is urgent to face workplace exclusion. At the same time, the organization should encourage employees to actively speak, which is creating an environment conducive to employees to speak, and eliminating obstacles to employees' active speech, so that the organization will always have fresh blood.

Existing researches tend to analyze the negative impact of workplace ostracism on employees. However, the research on promoting employees' positive behaviors is relatively scarce. Each coin has two sides, so whether workplace ostracism will promote positive behaviors of employees on some levels which needs further research in the future. At the same time, there have been studies on workplace ostracism from the individual level. Whether workplace ostracism will have an impact on the team level is another direction to be studied.

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