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## A Review of Workplace Ostracism in Human Resource Management: Antecedents, Impacts, and Strategic Interventions

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### Abstract

Workplace ostracism, characterized by social exclusion and silent treatment, is an emerging issue in Human Resource Management (HRM). This research examines the roots, impacts, and mitigation strategies of ostracism in workplace environments, especially HR departments. Drawing on qualitative content analysis from secondary data sources—case studies, organizational reports, and academic literature—this paper explores how ostracism leads to reduced morale, psychological distress, and organizational inefficiencies. Guided by theoretical frameworks like Social Exchange Theory and Belongingness Theory, the study proposes inclusive HR practices and ethical leadership as solutions. The findings highlight the necessity for proactive organizational change to foster inclusive and resilient work cultures.

**Keywords:** Workplace Ostracism, Human Resource Management, Employee Well-being, Organizational Behavior, Inclusive Work Culture

### 1. Introduction

Workplace ostracism, a nuanced form of social rejection, involves the silent exclusion of employees from communication, decision-making, and social interactions. As companies evolve into diverse and dynamic ecosystems, workplace ostracism poses a significant challenge to inclusivity, psychological safety, and talent retention (Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson et

al., 2013). Within HR departments—charged with fostering ethical standards and employee well-being—the paradox of HR professionals themselves being ostracized due to political dynamics or assertive action is particularly concerning (Howard et al., 2020).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Conceptual Understanding

Workplace ostracism is widely recognized as a psychological stressor that manifests in behaviors such as silent treatment, ignored emails, and exclusion from professional and social gatherings (Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2013). It differs from bullying by being less overt and more ambiguous, making it difficult to report and resolve (Wu, Yim, Kwan, & Zhang, 2012). Ostracism disrupts team cohesion, weakens communication, and leads to social withdrawal (Williams, 2007).

### 2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

- **Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964)**: Suggests that when employees do not receive reciprocal communication or respect, they perceive a social imbalance that leads to disengagement. □
- **Organizational Justice Theory (Greenberg, 1987)**: Highlights the importance of fair treatment in processes and interactions. When employees perceive procedural or interpersonal injustice, ostracism becomes more likely. □
- **Belongingness Theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)**: Posits that humans have a fundamental need to belong; unmet belongingness in the workplace results in emotional distress and disengagement. □

### 2.3 Recent Empirical Findings □

Recent empirical studies have expanded our understanding of workplace ostracism by examining its diverse antecedents and outcomes across industries, cultures, and organizational settings. For example, **Noor (2024)** found that psychological safety mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and affective commitment in South Asian service firms. Similarly, **Manninen (2024)** investigated ostracism in European healthcare settings and noted that even unintentional exclusion caused significant psychological distress and role ambiguity among employees. □ A large-scale meta-analysis by **Li (2021)** confirmed the robust association between ostracism and key workplace outcomes, including emotional exhaustion, counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs), and organizational cynicism. **Mohammad (2023)** framed ostracism as a form of organizational cold violence, emphasizing its covert nature and deep impact on employee morale and mental health. **Bilal (2020)** conducted a qualitative study in Pakistani higher education institutions and reported that organizational politics and perceived non-conformity often triggered ostracism, especially among junior

faculty members. □ **Zong (2025)** explored the relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge hoarding in service organizations, revealing that ostracized employees were more likely to engage in defensive □ behaviors such as withholding valuable information. In Chinese organizational contexts, **Wu et al. (2012)** identified ingratiation and political skill as coping mechanisms for ostracized employees, suggesting that certain interpersonal traits may buffer its effects. Meanwhile, **Howard et al. (2020)** conducted a meta-analytic integration that confirmed ostracism significantly lowers performance metrics, both at the individual and team levels.

**Raja (2023)** introduced a novel angle by examining the link between cyberloafing and ostracism in healthcare organizations, finding that digital disengagement could be both a cause and effect of perceived exclusion. Additionally, **Omran (2024)** investigated ostracism among academic staff in Egyptian universities and identified gender, rank, and departmental politics as significant predictors.

Finally, **Shinde (2025)** contributed insights from Indian corporate environments, suggesting that leadership style and cultural alignment play critical roles in either exacerbating or mitigating ostracism. Collectively, these studies emphasize that workplace ostracism is a global, multidimensional issue requiring targeted organizational interventions.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

- To identify and analyze the underlying causes of workplace ostracism in HR environments. □
- To assess the individual and organizational consequences of ostracism. □
- To propose HR interventions that foster inclusion and reduce instances of social exclusion at work. □

**Table 1: Objective-wise Classification of Prior Research on Workplace Ostracism** □

S. No	Research Objectives	Authors
1	To analyze the psychological and behavioral impact of workplace ostracism	Ferris et al. (2008); Williams (2007); O'Reilly et al. (2015); Noor (2024)
2	To understand the organizational factors contributing to ostracism	Gamian-Wilk (2021); Bilal (2020); Long-mei Wang (2023); Omran (2024)
3	To explore the role of leadership and culture in mitigating	Shinde (2025); Zong (2025); Liu & Ma (2021); Raja (2023)

	workplace exclusion	
4	To identify the moderating effect of individual traits on the effects of ostracism	Li (2021); Wang (2021); Noor (2024); Kamel Ali Omran (2024)

**Source-Author's own compilation** □

**Table 2: Methodological Focus in Workplace Ostracism Research**

S. No	Authors	Methodological Approach	Sample Size	Tool/Technique Used
1	Ferris et al. (2008)	Quantitative (Survey)	250	Workplace Ostracism Scale (WOS); Regression Analysis
2	Bilal (2020)	Qualitative (Interview)	30	Thematic Coding using NVivo 12
3	Li (2021)	Meta-analysis	N= 26,767	Meta-Analytical Structural Equation Modeling (MASEM)
4	Noor (2024)	Quantitative (Time-Lagged)	271	Mediation Analysis via SPSS/AMOS; Commitment Scale Affective
5	Manninen (2024)	Mixed Methods	569	Survey + Open-ended Analysis; Regression & Content Coding

**Source-Author's own compilation**

#### 4. Research Methodology □

##### 4.1 Approach

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretivist approach to capture the

emotional and social dimensions of ostracism, particularly within HR teams. As suggested by Creswell (2014), such an approach is suitable for exploring socially constructed phenomena.

#### **4.2 Data Collection**

Secondary qualitative data were collected from corporate case studies (e.g., Enron, Tesla, WorldCom), peer-reviewed journal articles, and organizational reports between 2015 and 2025. Sources were selected for credibility and relevance using academic databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, and EBSCOhost.

#### **4.3 Data Analysis**

Thematic content analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and constructs (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Categories such as exclusion triggers, mental health outcomes, and HRM strategies were extracted.

### **Figure 1: Research Methodology Flowchart**

#### **Step 1: Research Approach**

Qualitative and Interpretivist Approach (Creswell, 2014)

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#### **Step 2: Data Collection**

- Secondary qualitative data - Sources: Case studies (Enron, Tesla, WorldCom),

peer-reviewed articles, organizational reports - Timeframe: 2020–2025

- Databases: JSTOR, Scopus, EBSCOhost

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#### **Step 3: Data Analysis**

- Thematic Content Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

- Key themes: • Exclusion triggers

• Mental health outcomes • HRM mitigation strategies

### **5. Analysis and Findings**

The analysis of secondary data—including corporate case studies, academic journal articles, and organizational reports—revealed several key themes regarding the nature and impact of workplace ostracism, especially within Human Resource (HR) settings. First, the causes of ostracism were found to be multi-layered, arising from individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors. Organizational culture emerged as a central contributor, particularly

environments characterized by rigid hierarchies, favoritism, and lack of inclusive practices (Gamian-Wilk, 2021). Power dynamics also played a critical role, especially when HR professionals were perceived as threats due to their enforcement of compliance or advocacy for ethical reforms, leading to their social marginalization (Zong, 2025). Additionally, cultural and gender-based biases, as well as marginalization of remote workers due to insufficient digital inclusion practices, further intensified experiences of exclusion (Long-mei Wang, 2023; Raja, 2023).

The consequences of ostracism were found to be equally complex and damaging. On an emotional level, employees who experienced exclusion reported heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout, which often translated into low morale and reduced job satisfaction (Li, 2021; Ferris et al., 2008). Behaviorally, ostracism led to absenteeism, decreased productivity, and in some cases, knowledge hoarding and withdrawal from organizational participation (Zong, 2025). These individual-level effects eventually escalated to organizational consequences, such as reduced innovation, higher employee turnover, and a deteriorating work culture that undermined collaboration and trust (O'Reilly et al., 2015). The findings underscore the importance of targeted HR interventions including inclusive leadership practices, policy reforms, diversity training, and psychological safety measures to preempt and address workplace ostracism.

## **6. Discussion and Future Scope**

This study emphasizes that HR departments must champion proactive, rather than reactive, strategies against ostracism. While digital transformation has expanded organizational boundaries, it has also complicated inclusion for remote and hybrid teams (Wang, 2021). Future research should incorporate industry-specific analyses, include marginalized voices (e.g., gig workers), and examine the intersection of ostracism with AI-driven HR systems.

A mixed-methods approach could offer richer insights into the lived experience of ostracized employees, including longitudinal effects on mental health and job trajectories.

## **7. Limitations**

Despite offering valuable insights, this study is not without limitations. The primary constraint lies in its reliance on secondary data, which, while rich in theoretical and contextual content, limits the researcher's ability to capture real-time, lived experiences of workplace ostracism. The findings are based on interpretations of case studies, journal articles, and reports, which may not reflect the full complexity or uniqueness of individual workplace environments. Moreover, the study is contextually limited to traditional, office-based organizations and does not explore how ostracism may differ in informal work settings, remote gig economies, or highly unstructured start-

ups. Cultural diversity, although discussed, was not deeply examined across global contexts, as most sources were drawn from the Asia-Pacific and North American regions. This restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader, cross-cultural organizational landscapes. Finally, the absence of quantitative data means that while thematic patterns are evident, statistical validation of relationships between ostracism and workplace outcomes is not established, leaving room for future empirical inquiry.

## **8. Originality**

This study makes a distinctive contribution to the field of organizational behavior and human resource management by examining workplace ostracism through a dual lens: HR professionals as both enablers and potential victims of exclusionary behavior. While previous research has extensively documented the outcomes of ostracism for general employees, there is a notable gap in literature regarding how such behaviors impact those tasked with fostering inclusion and fairness—namely, the HR function itself.

By synthesizing diverse theoretical frameworks, including Social Exchange Theory, Belongingness Theory, and Organizational Justice Theory, the study provides a multidimensional understanding of ostracism's root causes and psychological impacts. The inclusion of recent case-based and meta-analytical findings adds depth and contextual relevance, especially in post-pandemic, hybrid workplaces where digital disconnection can intensify perceived exclusion.

Moreover, the study's value lies in its actionable insights. It goes beyond diagnosis by offering a strategic roadmap for mitigation—ranging from inclusive leadership practices and policy reforms to mental health support systems and feedback loops. The research also highlights the emerging relevance of psychological safety, ethical leadership, and cross-functional empathy as critical levers for reducing ostracism.

This work is especially timely and valuable for organizations aiming to build resilient, emotionally intelligent, and inclusive work cultures. It offers not just academic insights, but practical recommendations for HR leaders, corporate trainers, and policymakers, positioning itself as both theoretically robust and practitioner-relevant.

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