UNCOVERING THE CONCEPT WORKPLACE OSTRACISM: A REVIEW ON SEQUENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Although the concept of ostracism in general and workplace ostracism, in particular, has attained attention of researchers in the last decade; yet main focus remained on its psychological outcomes. Furthermore, management researchers failed to express the temporal nature of workplace ostracism based on comprehensive theoretical grounds. Thus, the present research has adopted an integrated review methodology to consolidate and synthesize the existing literature on the concept of workplace ostracism in light of conservation of resource theory (COR), social capital theory (SCT), social identity theory (SIT) and social exchange theory (SET). Data were collected from the electronic databases of PsycINFO, ProQuest, Emerald, Elsevier, Science Direct, Academy of Management, Sage, Willey Black well, Taylor and Frances along with the use of Google Scholar. The abstracts were examined and the relevant articles were selected and integrated. A sequential stage model of workplace ostracism has been proposed that uncovers its process in four stages i.e. exclusion, disassociation, depletion stage and repercussion stage.

Keywords: Integrative Review, Ostracism, Workplace Ostracism, Social Exclusion, Social Exchange Theory, Social Capital Theory.

JEL Classification: Z000

Introduction

James (1890) gave his historic statement about being ignored and deliberated that if no one gave attention to us, answered our conversations and be concerned with what we did, it would be like cutting us dead and making us feel non-existent. This behavior is more hurting than bodily torture and makes a person feel non-worthy of attention. This statement explains the intensity of being ignored

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and its impact on a person in the worst way mere by *'acts of omission'*. According to Williams (2001) ostracism occurs when a person is excluded, overlooked or gets ignored by members of a social group. Ostracism can occur in multiple settings, one of which is the individual's workplace (Hiltan, Cliffton, & DeSoto, 2006). The concept of ostracism is prevalent in diverse settings, with its roots embedded in sociology. Its origin is traced back to Greece where the individuals that were considered as a threat to the wellbeing of society were exiled by writing their names on clay shards named "ostraca" (Britannica, 2015). After that, the concept of ostracism gained importance in psychology, and its causes and outcomes were investigated from the perspective of human psychology (Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson, O-Reilly, & Wang,2013; Robinson & Schabram, 2019). Workplaces are an important context where ostracism occurs, so the researchers in the field of organizational psychology started investigating this concept from a business and management perspective and named it as workplace ostracism. Still, there is much room for investigating ostracism in work settings to understand its unique consequences (Al-Atwi, 2017; De Clercq, Haq, & Azeem, 2019; Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Robinson et al., 2013).

If we talk about such experiences in general and especially in organizational context i.e. not being invited in informal gatherings, being ignored in the formal meetings, and excluded from the communication of official information, it may seem that they don't carry much importance. According to research, workplace ostracism matters even more than being bullied and harassed (Robinson et al., 2013). It has been proven that being ostracized or ignored can result in a unique kind of pain that is similar to physical nuisance (Eisenberger, 2012; Riva, Wirth & Williams, 2011). Furthermore, it was revealed that workplace ostracism not only causes immense psychological distress; but it also results in attitudes that are counterproductive and decreases in the in-role performance and citizenship behaviors of ostracized individuals (Robinson et al., 2013). These findings are also supported by recent research on the topic of workplace ostracism (De Clercq et al., 2019; Yang & Treadway, 2018; Zhao & Xia, 2017). This makes it important to have a comprehensive understating of workplace ostracism concerning its consequences that are unique to organizational settings and how they uncover over the period (Mao, Liu, Jiang, & Zhang, 2018).

Research Gap

Some of the literature reviews have been conducted on ostracism and social rejection (see Table 1). Two meta-analyses have been carried out one having a focus on exclusion and self-esteem (Blackhart et al., 2009) and other elaborating behavioral responses (Gerber & Wheeler, 2009). Theoretical and narrative reviews are also undertaken that elaborate functions of social exclusion, the link of social exclusion to self-regulation (Kurzban & Leary, 2001; William, 2007; William & Nida, 2011) and consequences of social rejection depending on time and contextual factors (Richman & Leary, 2009). Although they provide a good theoretical understanding of the concept of ostracism or social rejection in general context yet none of them specifically targeted workplace ostracism as a unique construct. Till now only two integrated models of workplace ostracism have been presented

that offer propositions about its antecedents, potential mediators, moderators and impacts (Robinson et al., 2013; Mao et al., 2018). Williams (2007, 2009) devised a temporal need threat model (TNTM) of psychological responses to ostracism. We argue that the process and theoretical underpinnings that shape outcomes of workplace ostracism require similar attention and understanding.

Table 1
Summary of Review Studies on Ostracism

Type of Review	Topic	Number of Studies	Area	Authors Authors
Meta-Analysis	Social exclusion, Self-esteem, Behavioral responses	2	Psychology	Blackhart et al. (2009) Gerber & Wheeler (2009)
Narrative Reviews	Functions of social exclusion, link of social exclusion to self-regulation	4	Psychology	Kurzban & Leary (2001); Richman & Leary(2009); William(2007, 2009); William & Nida, (2011)
Systematic Review	Antecedents, outcomes, mediating and moderating mechanisms of workplace ostracism	2	Organizational Psychology	Robinson et al. (2013); Mao et al. (2018)

Source: Self-developed from the literature review

Research Aim

To fill this gap the present review aims to shed light on the comprehensive process through which workplace ostracism takes place in a series of steps and impacts work outcomes of individuals. Integrative review suggested by Torraco (2005) is a suitable method to synthesize the literature on this topic as it has contradictory findings (Mao et al., 2018), cuts across the disciplinary bounders from sociology to management sciences and it is a recently emerging concept since the past decade (Robinson et al., 2013; Robinson & Schabram, 2019). The present integrative review will not only incorporate the previous findings, but it will also further refine the models of social rejection and ostracism in light of existing theories. Devising a model of workplace ostracism that offers conceptual clarification of sequential stages in light of conservation of resource theory, social capital theory (SCT), social identity theory (SIT) and social exchange theory (SET) in pure organizational settings is the central point of this review.

Methodology

Research Design

The study relies on integrative literature review as a process of synthesizing and integrating the literature that is *"a distinctive form of research that generates new knowledge"* (Torraco,2005,

p.356). The integrative review is deemed to be a suitable method to synthesize the available literature on real-life emergent topics that have inconsistent findings, have cut across the disciplinary bounders and apply to multiple situations (Torraco, 2004, 2005). As the idea of ostracism is applicable to more than a limited, restricted situation and encompasses the disciplines of sociology, psychology and management science, it is an emerging concept that has gained recognition in past decade along with having relevance to life and real behavior (Williams, 2009; Robinson et al., 2013). That is why the concept of workplace ostracism is suitable for integration and synthesis given its limited theoretical foundation and conceptual models; it is multidisciplinary in nature and context-dependent disposition. The rationale of the selected methodology is shown in Figure 1.
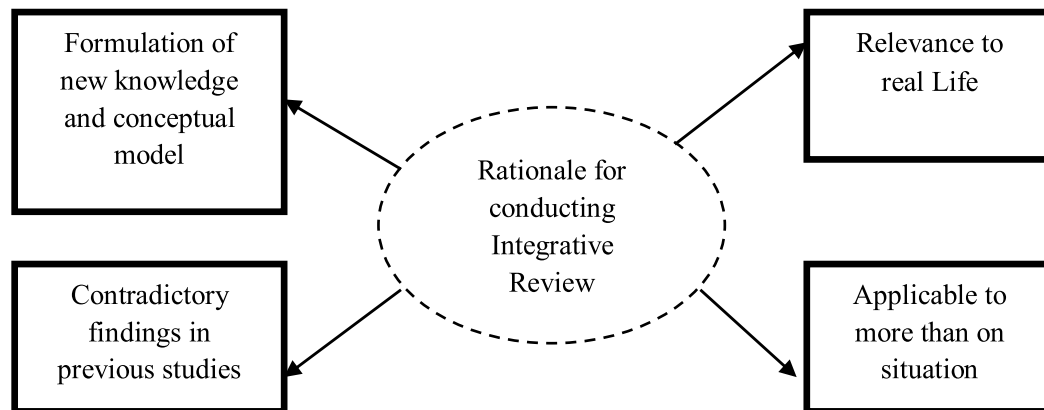

Figure 1: The Rationale for Selecting Review Approach
Source: Adapted from Toracco (2005)

Data Collection and Inclusion Strategy

The multidisciplinary approach was adopted (see Figure 2) and the articles on ostracism were reviewed from the fields of sociology, psychology, and management. The articles were searched based on keywords of ostracism, workplace ostracism, social exclusion, rejection, social exchange theory, social capital theory, social identity theory and conservation of resource theory. The electronic databases were used to search the relevant research papers namely *PsycINFO, ProQuest, Elsevier, Science Direct, Database of Academy of Management, Sage, Willey Black well, Taylor and Frances* along with the use of *Google scholar.* The relevancy of articles was ensured by reviewing the abstracts of all articles as per the recommendations of (Torraco, 2005). After that, the important points and contributions from all the articles were noted down and they were divided into sequential stages. After critically reviewing the literature it was synthesized into a coherent model that is presented at the end of the research.
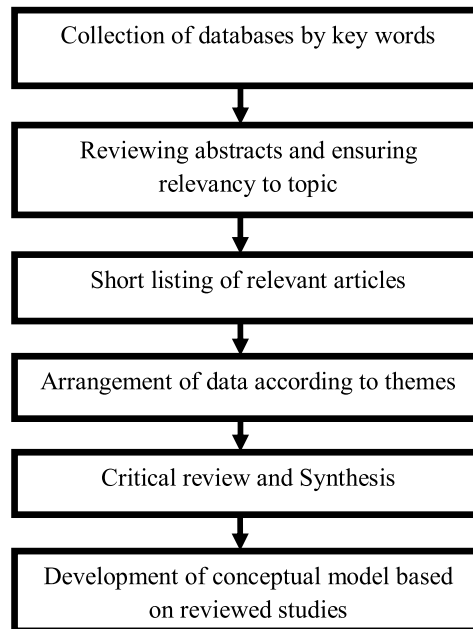
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Figure 2: Phases in Selection, Inclusion, and Synthesis of Data

Integration of Literature on Workplace Ostracism

What is Workplace Ostracism?

It is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of workplace ostracism to clarify what is considered as ostracism and what is not. Various authors have given definitions of this concept in different contexts. They have grouped various kinds of behaviors that set a person apart from the group or excludes him from the group (Dotan-Eliaz, Sommer, & Rubin 2009; Blackhart et al., 2009; Anderson, 2009). Robinson et al. (2013) summarized the major conceptualizations of ostracism and related constructs and gave the most comprehensive definition as presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Definitions of Ostracism

Author	Year	Main Theme
Gruter & Masters	1986	Rejection in social connection (Ostracism)
Sommer et al.	2001	Being intentionally ignored and overlooked by a person or entire group (Ostracism)
Williams	2001	Acts by a person or entire group that ignores and reject another a person or entire group (Ostracism)
Hitlan, Cliffton & DeSoto	2006	Overlooked, rejected and excluded that impacts in terms of being stressed, bad relationships and associations at the workplace (Ostracism)
Ferris, Brown, Berry & Lain	2008	Perception of being overlooked or excluded (Ostracism)
Anderson	2009	Being excluded deliberately (Organizational shunning)
Blackhart et al.	2009	Loneliness and refusal of making social connections (Social Exclusion and Rejection)
Dotan-Eliaz, Sommer & Rubin	2009	Exclusion due to communication in a language that rest of people in a group don't comprehend (Language ostracism)
Robinson et al.	2013	The omission of acts that engage another member of the organization when it was socially expected (Workplace ostracism).

Source: Adapted from Robinson et al. (2013)

Distinctive Features of Ostracism

The features that make ostracism a distinct construct from other mistreatments taking place in the organization are its dependency on context (Robinson et al., 2013), its occurrence with or without intention (Williams, 1997) and is the omission of an act (Cortina & Magley, 2009). Other mistreatments such as harassment, bullying, aggression, and undermining are done with purpose, they are the commission of acts and they vary less according to the context.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The most prevalent theories that dominated research in examining the concept of ostracism and workplace ostracism include Conservation of resource theory (COR) (e.g. Haq, 2014; Leung et al., 2011; Sommer & Yoon, 2013; Zhao & Xia, 2017), Social identity theory (SIT) (e.g.Chung, 2017; Gómez et al., 2011; Wu, Yim, Kwan, & Zhang, 2012) Social exchange theory (SET) (e.g., Chung & Kim, 2017; Hitlan & Noel, 2009; Scott et al., 2013; Zhang & Dai, 2015) and rarely used Social capital theory (SCT) (e.g., Bilal, Fatima, & Akoorie, 2017; Keefer & Knack, 2008; Taleny,

2014). SET, SIT, SCT give the social perspective of being ostracized. People in organizations are embedded in social networks (friendship and advice networks) that offer them valuable resources and information known as social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002). When an individual is ostracized his social image is considered less favorable forming a poor social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the quality of reciprocation with other colleagues decline, resulting in reduced social exchanges (West & Turner, 2010) that reduces the level of employees' performance (Chung & Kim, 2017). COR explains the process of ostracism based on valuable emotional and organizational resources possessed by employees at the job (Wright & Hobfoll, 2004) that are depleted by being ostracized and consequently decline performance (De Clercq et al., 2019).

Sequential Stage Model of Workplace Ostracism

In light of the theoretical perspective of the above-mentioned paradigms, the sequential process of ostracism was found to comprise of following major steps in the context of the workplace by the integration of available literature.

Exclusion Stage

People identify with specific groups to maintain a distinct and positive identity and they view the members of their groups as more favorable than others. As per SIT, any threat to identity i.e. inclusion of opposite gender, competence, ability, and contribution reduces the commonality among group members (Chung, 2017). In every organization, formal professional networks are established that are known as advice networks (Castilla, 2005). Advice network is the association with other members of the organization who assist, advise, provide information, and guidance on work-related matters that is important for efficient task performance (Sparrowe, Liden, Wayne, & Kraimer, 2001). In contrast, the concept of friendship networks refers to voluntary informal relations in the workplace that offer emotional and social support (Tortoriello & Krackhardt, 2010). The favorable members are included in group interactions of these networks and those viewed unfavorably are treated as out-group and ostracized which results in their exclusion from friendship and advice networks (Venkataramani, Labianca, & Grosser, 2013; Mitteness, DeJordy, Ahuja, & Sudek, 2016).

Disassociation Stage

After being excluded from friendship and advice networks, ostracized individuals are detached from other members of the organization (Venkataramani et al., 2013). The basic assumption in this theoretical perspective is that the behavior of people is dependent on the association and exchange in actors. In SET the physical things like equipment and resources and non-physical things like information, approval, support, trust, and status are exchanged (Dabos & Rousseau, 2004). Ostracized individuals that are sent in out-group have poor social work-related as well as emotional exchanges (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964; Sparrowe et al., 2001).

Depletion Stage

The concept of social capital states that the network of people shares and provides information and support to members of the group (Burt, 1992) and works collaboratively to attain the goals of individuals and organizations (Fukuyama, 1995)**.** Putnam (2006) asserted that social capital is build up by employing social networks. The people in the organizational networks socialize and interact with each other resulting in trust, cooperation and enhanced motivation to take part in the activates taking place in the group. People in the network share the personal resources, information, influence, and reinforcement that results in better performance (Darmasetiawan et al., 2013). This causes access to the resources that are present in the network and the opportunity to use them (Coleman, 1990). So we argue that when an individual is ostracized the social resources that are obtained from being a part of friendship and advice networks are depleted hereby undermining their social capital.

Repercussion Stage

After resource depletion, the person comes in the repercussion stage in which the consequences of workplace ostracism occur as per COR. The loss and subsequent quest to conserve the resources of resources caused by workplace ostracism makes a person unable to perform effectively (Sommer & Yoon, 2013). Sparrowe et al. (2001) stated that when advice from connecting informally to a group is missing, it causes poor employee performance. Furthermore, it is stated that lack of support from social connections at the workplace and absence of social connection with peers in the organization declines the ability to perform work-related tasks (Gkorezis & Bellou, 2016; Yang & Treadway, 2018). In addition to reduced performance due to lack of resources, a person tries to conserve the remaining resources by withdrawal from engaging in extra-role behaviors (Haq, 2014). The link between being ostracized and lower performance related to work as well as discretionary behaviors have been well established (Robinson et al., 2013). To conclude, the most prominent harmful results of ostracism are lower in-role and extra-role performance (see Table 3).

Table 3

In-Role Performance vs. Extra-Role Performance in Workplace Ostracism

Factors of Difference	In-Role Performance	Extra-Role Performance
Origin	George (1968) From the Concept of Role in Theaters	Organ (1988) Also known as OCB (organizational citizenship behavior) First introduced in the Research between job satisfaction and Performance
Main Features	Related to core Job	Behaviors that are not included in the core job description
Compensation	Rewarded officially	No official reward
Nature	Required by Job	Voluntary
Impact	Direct	In-direct
Relation to Ostracism	Exclusion from formal advice/ friendship network Miss out task-related information Task performance suffers	Exclusion from formal advice/friendship network Miss out non-task related information Contextual performance suffers
Examples	Formal job duties mentioned in Job Description	Developing a better reputation, behaving in a cooperative manner with others, giving suggestions, sharing information and helping others for the betterment of the organization.

Source: Self-Developed from Literature

On the basis of the above synthesis and integration of literature the sequential model of the workplace ostracism is proposed in Figure 3:
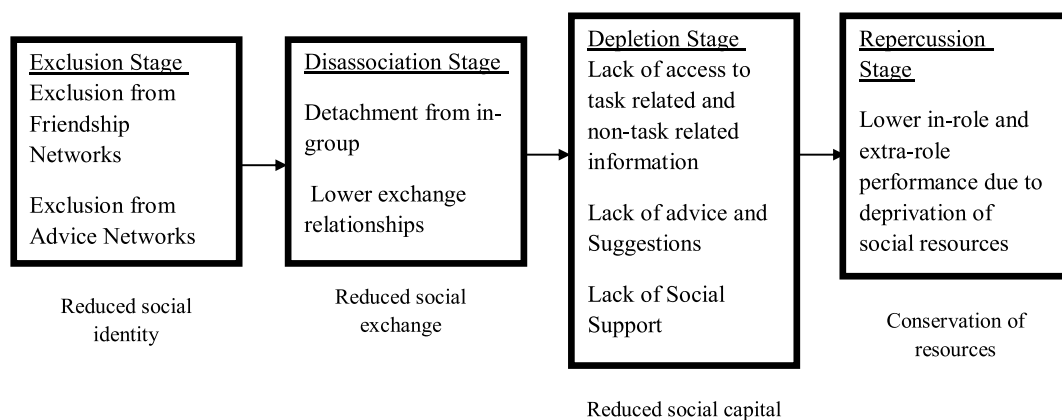

Figure 3: Sequential Stage Model of Workplace Ostracism

Conclusion

The above mentioned literature implies that the process of workplace ostracism occurs in four sequential steps i.e. exclusion stage (exclusion from friendship and advice networks-based on SIT), disassociation stage (detachment from in-group and lower exchange relationship-based on SET), depletion stage (lack of access to task-related and non-task related information, advice and support-based on SCT) and finally repercussion stage (lower in-role and extra-role performance due to depletion of resources-based on COR).

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