



THE IMPACT OF TASK CONFLICT, COWORKER CONFLICT AND SUPERVISOR CONFLICT ON WORKPLACE OSTRACISM

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Abstract

Researchers agree that workplace ostracism has a negative impact on employees' psychological wellbeing which in turn can reduce one's ability to effectively contribute to the organization. Therefore, it is important to determine the factors that lead to ostracism. The current paper proposes that three sources of conflict in a workplace such as task conflict, coworker conflict and supervisor conflict will positively influence workplace ostracism. The results provide empirical evidence in support of the positive relationship among supervisor conflict and workplace ostracism. On the other hand, the results provide no empirical result for the support of the positive relationship among task conflict, coworker conflict and workplace ostracism.

Keywords: Workplace Ostracism, Task conflict, Coworker Conflict, Supervisor Conflict, Impact

INTRODUCTION

The most commonly quoted definition describes workplace ostracism (WO) as the extent to which a person perceives that he or she is ignored, rejected or excluded by others in the workplace (Ferris et al., 2008; Williams, 2001). According to Sommer et al. (2001, p.229) ostracism is the purposeful ignoring or shunning of an individual by others. Ostracism definitions generally include the terms exclusion, shunning, ignoring, and rejecting. Thus, Robinson et al. (2013, p.206) stated that identifying the core features shared by all of these behaviors will help to understand the logic of agglomerating them under a general construct named "ostracism". They offered an expanded definition as "workplace ostracism is when an individual or group omits to take actions that engage another organizational member when it is socially appropriate to do so that". This definition indicates a distinguishing feature as the experience of ostracism occurs only when another violates norms that suggest one should acknowledge at the workplace.

The exclusionary behavior of co-workers may take many forms such as avoiding eye contact, leaving the room when an individual enters, and failing to respond to coworkers' greetings. Ostracism may create a threat because it is an exclusion mechanism, and thus is linked to social separation anxiety. Ostracised individuals experience pain, feel sadness and anger, threats to belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence. Their resources are depleted, which leads to internalized feelings of alienation, depression, helplessness, and worthlessness. (Yaakobi and Williams, 2016:163-164). Hitlan and his colleagues indicate workplace ostracism hinders one's ability to establish or maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, or favorable reputation within one's place of work (Hitlan, 2006: 2017). Being ostracized at work, a place where people seek to form friendships, social

connections, and inclusion with others can be extremely hurtful and result in undesirable organizational outcomes.

Consequently, previous research has shown that workplace ostracism has significant impact on the employees' attitudes and behaviors such as increased deviant behaviors, (Zhao et al., 2013, Hitlan and Noel 2009) turnover intention anxiety and emotional exhaustion, (Ferris et al., 2008; Hitlan et al., 2006) as well as decreased job performance, (Hitlan et al., 2006; Wu et al., 2012), satisfaction, (Ferris et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2013) and organizational citizenship behaviors (Ferris et al., 2008). In general, past studies have mainly focused on the direct consequences of workplace ostracism. Different from them, this study investigates the underlying mechanism that results in workplace ostracism. Consequently, this study predicts that workplace ostracism may be the consequences of three sources of conflict such as task, co-worker and supervisor

Types of Conflict

Conflict is a dynamic process that occurs between individuals and/or groups. Jameson (1999: 270) described conflict as "situations that occur when two or more people working within the same organization perceive differences in beliefs, values, or goals which impact their ability to work together and/or affect the work environment." According to Roloff (1987: 496) "organizational conflict occurs when members engage in activities that are incompatible with those of colleagues within their network, members of other collectivities, or unaffiliated individuals who utilize the services or products of the organization". People may have difficulty working together, even when they generally agree on goals and believe they should be working together, and that conflict develops primarily from people's normal attempts to cooperate or coordinate their efforts (Kabanoff, 1985: 114).

Researchers discriminated between task conflicts (disagreements about task content) and social-emotional conflicts (relationship conflicts) characterized by interpersonal disagreements not directly related to the task (Wall and Nolan, 1986; Priem and Price, 1991). The former one focuses on the different perspectives and opinions about how the task should be done whereas the latter one refers to interpersonal incompatibilities such as values, needs, interests and norms (Wall and Callister, 1995). In other words task conflict refers to the disagreements "about the content of tasks being performed, including differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions" and social-emotional conflicts refers to "interpersonal incompatibilities among group members, which typically includes tension, animosity, and annoyance" (Jehn, 1995; 258). However, it is possible that task conflicts may transform into relationship conflicts. For instance, if group members cannot agree on task issues, they may begin to dislike other members and attribute this task-related conflict to personality issues (Jehn, 1995; 532).

Although task conflict and relational conflict are correlated, they can be differentiated because task conflict appears to be less harmful and even have positive consequences such as better group decisions, greater likelihood of using integration styles of conflict management, increased satisfaction with group decision and desire to remain in the group (Van de Vliert and De Dreu, 1994; Sandberg, and Rechner, 1989; Janssen et al., 1999; Amason, 1996). Recent research suggests that moderate levels of task conflict are constructive, since they stimulate discussion of ideas that help groups perform better. Groups with an absence of task conflict may miss new ways to enhance their performance, while very high levels of task conflict may interfere with task completion (Jehn, 1995; 1997). On the other hand, some studies have reported strong negative correlations between task conflict and team performance (Wall & Nolan, 1986; Earley and Van Dyne, 1993; Lovelace et al., 2001) because it produces tension, antagonism, and distracts team members from performing the task.

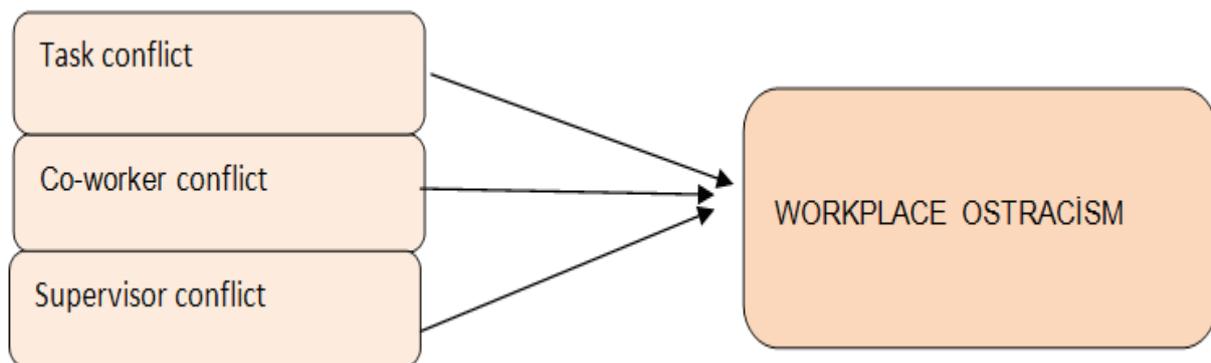
On the other hand the literature on conflict suggests that social-emotional conflicts (relationship conflicts) involves more personal issues and emotions such as annoyance, frustration, irritation and other negative feelings (Pelled et al., 1999). Negative emotions have been closely related with conflict. Research has frequently associated conflict with negative emotions such as anger, frustration. When organizational members are in this emotional state, they tend to oversimplify rational and instrumental reasoning (Thomas, 1992). Emotion research suggests that the anger and frustration associated with interpersonal conflict can promote verbal (e.g., yelling at others) and behavioral (e.g., theft, sabotage, violence) aggression toward those who stimulate the conflict (e.g., Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002). In this aspect, organizational conflict may be a potent source of workplace ostracism. Because, individuals may avoid a particular person or group because they believe that their values and beliefs are different which results in decreased interaction with other organizational members. Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Task conflict will be positively related to workplace ostracism.

H2: Co-worker conflict will be positively related to workplace ostracism.

H3: Supervisor conflict will be positively related to workplace ostracism.

THE ORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH MODEL



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from 121 employees of hotels in Kocaeli, Turkey. A majority of the respondents (52,9%) were female. As to the educational qualification, 32,2% had obtained a high school degree, and (28,1%) held a graduate degree. 33,9% of the participants were aged between (26-34) years and the majority of the participants (38,0%) with job tenure between (1–5) years. Finally, the majority of the participants (20,7) work in Front Office.

Measures

To test the above hypotheses, multi-item scales adopted from prior studies for the measurement of constructs were used. All items were measured on a five point Likert-type scale where (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

Task conflict was measured with Jehn's (1995) three-item measure. Sample items included: "There are frequent conflicts about ideas in my work unit"; "There is much conflict about the work I do with others in the work unit". Coworker conflict was measured with Spector and Jex's (1998) four-item measure. Sample items included: "I often get into arguments with my coworkers"; "I often yell at my coworkers at work". Supervisor conflict was also measured

with Spector and Jex's (1998) four-item measure, but there was a shift of the referent from coworker to supervisor. Sample items included: "I often get into arguments with my supervisor"; "I often yell at my supervisor at work". The reliability of this scale was 0.96.

Workplace Ostracism was measured using the ten-item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008). Sample items included 'Others ignored me at work', 'Others left the area when I entered', and 'My greetings have gone unanswered at work'. Cronbach's alpha for this measure was 0.74. The reliability of this scale was 0.82.

Data Analysis and Results

In order to identify the underlying structure of various measures exploratory factor analysis using principle components of factor extraction and varimax rotation techniques was performed. As a cut-off loading was used 0.40. Most factor loadings were above 0.50 which can be assumed a high level of significance. The results from our factor analysis of the measurement items for each of the subscales (Table 1) imply that measures used in this study have construct validity (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 1: Factor Loading of Scale Items

Task Conflict	Coworker Conflict	Supervisor Conflict	Workplace Ostracism
,861	,633	,825	,901
,743	,887	,868	,899
,852	,870	,793	,888
			,879
			,863
			,862
			,765
			,695
			,683
			,556

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations for all of the variables in this study. The results indicate that there is a positive correlation among employees' perception of conflict and workplace ostracism.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistic and correlations of the measures

Variables		Mean	Std D.	1	2	3	4
<i>1.Task Conflict</i>	1	2.68	2.57	-	,663**	,560**	,544**
<i>2.Co-Worker Conflict</i>	2	3.20	1.99	-	-	,791**	,699**
<i>3.Supervisor Conflict</i>	3	3.78	1.09	-	-	-	,800**
<i>4-Workplace Ostracism</i>	4	3.15	2.21	-	-	-	-

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Model Testing Results

A regression analysis was performed to examine the effects of conflict on workplace ostracism (Table 3). The results revealed that perceived supervisor conflict has a significant positive effect on workplace ostracism and therefore the third hypothesis of the study is supported ($\beta = .650^*$). The results did not show any significant relationship among task conflict,

co-worker conflict and workplace ostracism and therefore the first and second hypothesis of the study is rejected.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Results

VARIABLES				
Independents	Dependent	β	t	p
<i>Task Conflict</i>	<i>Workplace Ostracism</i>	,102	1,410	,161
<i>Co-Worker Conflict</i>	<i>Workplace Ostracism</i>	,117	1,190	,236
<i>Supervisor Conflict</i>	<i>Workplace Ostracism</i>	,650**	7,326	,000

****Significant at 0,01 (one tailed)**

Conclusion, Discussions and Suggestions

The workplace is a significant social context where ostracism occurs because the quality of working relationships and communication can greatly affect an individual's workplace attitudes and behaviors. Supportive and collaborative working relationships are a pertinent factor for increased job performance and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship, creativity and innovation and work-group and family cohesion (Amabile et al., 1996; Scott and Bruce 2004; Beehr et al., 2000; Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve and Tsai 2004; Ladd and Henry, 2000). On the contrary, when an individual experiences some form of organizational conflict, it can result in negative organizational outcomes such as reduced performance and satisfaction levels and reductions in citizenship behaviors and thus workplace ostracism.

The results of this study which investigates the influence of conflict on workplace ostracism indicates that supervisor conflict has a significant positive effect on workplace ostracism. However, the findings did not show any significant relationship among task conflict, co-worker conflict and workplace ostracism. This result may be explained by power difference or unequal legitimate power levels in Turkey. Employee conflicts with supervisors (vertical conflicts) may have different consequences from conflicts with coworkers (horizontal conflicts). When employees are aware of disagreements, tension or difficulties between a subordinate and a supervisor, they are more likely to ignore or exclude the employee in the workplace. Maybe conflict leads to more psychological distress if it comes from supervisors than from peers and subordinates, as people in low power roles are more sensitive to other individuals' thoughts than high power ones (Lee and Tiedens, 2001) and thus creating an escalating cycle of conflict. Moreover, an individual may actively avoid an organizational member after a conflict with a supervisor because s/he believe that collaboration will be hurtful to them. To sum up, the findings of the current study support that when an individual experiences supervisor conflict, it can result in negative organizational outcomes such as workplace ostracism.

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