Retreat for Defence: A Study on the Influence Mechanism of Workplace Ostracism on Employee Boundary-Spanning Behavior

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Abstract- There are limited research on antecedents of employee boundary-spanning behavior (EBSB). Based on conservation of resources (COR) theory and cognitive-affective personality system (CAPS) theory, this study depicts a chain mediation model of workplace ostracism on EBSB through emotional exhaustion and organizational self-esteem, and explores loss-focused coping orientation as a moderator. Data obtained from 372 questionnaires of enterprises in China is analyzed using bootstrapping and structural equation model. The results show that workplace ostracism negatively predicts EBSB, mediated by emotional exhaustion and organizational self-esteem. Besides, loss-focused coping orientation moderates the positive impact of workplace ostracism on emotional exhaustion, further moderating the chain mediation process. This study enriches the existing research by examining the effect of negative workplace events on EBSB and deepening scholars' understanding of the internal mechanism between workplace ostracism and EBSB. Furthermore, this paper provides practical guidance for enterprises to promote EBSB.

Keywords- employee boundary-spanning behavior; workplace ostracism; emotional exhaustion; organizational self-esteem; loss-focused coping orientation

1. Introduction

With the intensified complexity and competitiveness in the VUCA era, enterprises no longer cope with the challenges of the external environment by relying only on internal resources. Increasing enterprises encourage employees to engage in boundary-spanning activities [1]. Employee boundary-spanning behavior (EBSB) refers to a series of activities in which employees communicate with leaders to obtain decision support, interact with stakeholders, and continuously obtain external knowledge and resources to achieve work goals [2,3,4]. Previous studies shows that EBSB promotes positive work attitudes and behaviors [1,5]. Therefore, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to explore the generation mechanism of EBSB.

There is a lacking literature regarding the antecedents of EBSB [4]. The studies only include individual factors [6] and situational factors [7]. Hence, situation factors affecting EBSB needs to be explored. Among many situational factors, workplace ostracism, a common work

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stressor, exerts critical impacts on employees' behaviors, especially in the context of Chinese organizational culture emphasizing "relationships" and "circles". Based on this, this paper aims to examine whether workplace ostracism affects EBSB.

Research on the influence of workplace ostracism mainly focuses on in-role behaviors [8], etc. However, there are insufficient studies regarding extra-role behaviors, such as EBSB which represents extra-role behaviors beyond role requirements [6]. A meta-analysis of Lan (2022) shows that boundary-spanning behavior plays a double-edged sword effect. It improves organizational commitment and job satisfaction and increases emotional and cognitive resources despite causing role stress and excessive loss of emotional and psychological resources. Employees need to spend numerous resources adjusting when excluding from the workplace. Therefore, after exhausting the resources, does employees "retreats for defense" and reduces boundary-spanning activities to avoid further loss or “advances for gain" and supplements the lost resources by implementing boundary-spanning activities?

Based on COR and CAPS theory, this study explains the effects of workplace ostracism on EBSB.

Firstly, COR theory states that any potential or actual loss of resources is a threat to individuals whose behavior is affected by resources [9]. Therefore, this study explores the mechanism between workplace ostracism and the loss of individual’s resources. COR theory provides an explanatory framework for individuals’ behavior choice in stressful situations from the perspective of resource gain and loss.

Secondly, CAPS theory states that the environment influences individuals’ attitude or behavior by stimulating cognitive or affective units respectively [10]. Up to now, domestic and foreign scholars mostly discuss the mechanism of workplace ostracism based on a single path, which neglect that workplace ostracism may act on both paths at the same time; thus, affecting employees' behavioral responses. Ferris et al. (2008) also argues that the effect of workplace ostracism on employees’ behaviors is complex [11]. Besides, EBSB, a typical extra-role behavior, the voluntary nature of which does not mean spontaneity, and it is largely affected by factors such as employees’ cognition and emotion [7]. Hence, this study selects emotional exhaustion and organizational self-esteem, explores the mediating effects of emotional exhaustion and organizational self-esteem on workplace ostracism and EBSB. CAPS theory advocates that emotional unit influences individuals’ attitudes or behaviors by activating cognitive unit. Therefore, a chain intermediary model is further constructed, in which workplace ostracism leads to emotional exhaustion, which in turn affects organizational self-esteem, and finally predicts EBSB.

Furthermore, additional resources including personal resources reduces the impact of negative events on resource loss. CAPS theory states that individuals’ characteristics, cognition and affective interact on individual behavioral choices. Loss-focused coping orientation (LFCO), as a positive individual trait, refers to directing thoughts and efforts to negative stress events to change disturbing situations [12]. Individuals with a high-level of LFCO most often reflect on the causes of negative events and actively respond to them, weakening emotional connection with the loss object, making workplace ostracism less effective in causing emotional exhaustion, afterward adjusting behaviors. Therefore, this paper regard LFCO as the moderator between workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion.

In addition, CAPS theory states that individuals evaluate the impact of situational factors on their own resources, in which different cognitive or emotional units are activated, finally affecting individual's behaviors. However, it is unclear how situational factors affect individual resources and subsequent behaviors. The COR theory considers that situational factors exert gain or loss effects on resources; thus, individuals adjust behaviors according to this potential influence to save or acquire valuable resources. In short, COR theory effectively makes up for the above defects of CAPS theoretical framework, and helps to explain the mechanism under this framework.

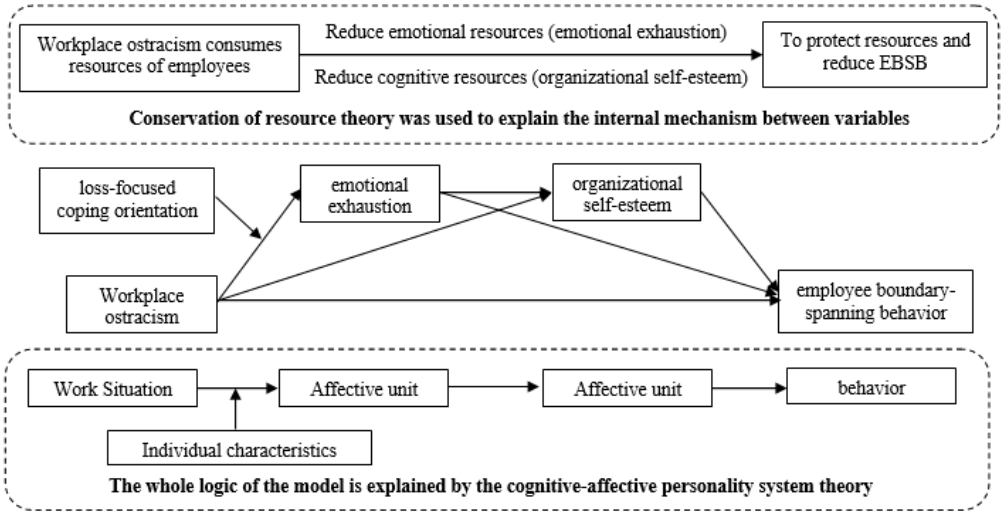

Figure 1. Theoretical model

To sum up, combined with COR theory and CAPS theory (see Figure 1), this study constructs a chain intermediary model of workplace ostracism on EBSB, and deeply explores the internal mechanism and boundary condition. This paper not only expands the antecedents of EBSB but also reveals the "black box" between workplace ostracism and EBSB, enriching relevant theories and providing guidance for management practice.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1 Workplace ostracism and employee boundary-spanning behavior

Ferris et al. (2008) asserts that workplace ostracism (WO) is the degree to which an individual feels neglected, isolated, or rejected by others in the workplace [11]. Although boundary-spanning activities brings some resources supplement to employees, it is difficult for excluded employees to gain recognition from colleagues and superiors causing the uncertainty of resource acquisition. From the perspective of COR theory, an individual possesses limited resources including time and energy. Individuals try best to protect existing resources and minimize the threat of loss when faced with resource loss. Workplace ostracism requires employees to consume a lot of resources to deal with the negative effects, while limited resources are occupied; thus, employees evaluate the own resources. Compared with the uncertainty of re-

source acquisition causing by boundary-spanning activities, employees tend to maintain the own "resource pool" by reducing boundary-spanning activities.

Hypothesis 1. workplace ostracism negatively affects EBSB.

2.2 The mediating effect of emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion (EE), as a typical reaction caused by work stress, is a fatigue state because of employees' excessive use of psychological and emotional resources [13]. On the one hand, workplace ostracism causes employees' interpersonal pressure, resulting in a series of negative emotions that consume employees' emotional resources; On the other hand, COR theory states that employees are inclined to protect resources from further losses when personal resources are in short supply [9]. Employees actively take measures to deal with interpersonal relationships including adjusting mentality or easing attitudes, which consumes psychological resources.

Emotional exhaustion affects employees' work engagement and behaviors. On the one hand, employees' awareness of resource protection is enhanced when suffering from ostracism and emotional exhaustion, under which they tend to adopt defensive strategies, rationally allocate surplus resources, reduce boundary-spanning activities. On the other hand, compared with in-role behavior, individuals' extra-role behavior is most often affected by emotions. Therefore, employees tend to reduce EBSB to protect existing resources when resources are nearly exhausted.

Hypothesis 2. Emotional exhaustion mediates workplace ostracism and EBSB.

2.3 The mediating effect of organizational self-esteem

Organizational self-esteem (OE) refers to the awareness of organizational members of abilities, importance, and self-worth [14]. Workplace ostracism, as a kind of negative feedback, sends negative signals to employees and leads to the increase of employees' negative self-cognition, finally leading to self-doubt and self-denial. Moreover, negative information makes employees feel that their value does not meet the organizations' expectations and is belittled; thus, reducing OE.

Organizational self-esteem affects individual's organizational attitudes and behaviors. COR theory states that individuals with more resources tend to get more resources while those with less resources are inclined to fall into a loss spiral. Therefore, employees' behaviors are conservative when workplace ostracism brings the decrease of organizational self-esteem. Employees reduces extra inputs and efforts to organizations and the possibility of implementing EBSB to avoid further loss of self-esteem.

Hypothesis 3. Organizational self-esteem mediates workplace ostracism and EBSB.

2.4 The chain mediating effect

According to CAPS theory, individuals' some cognitive-affective units are activated in a certain situation, subsequently leading to cognition, emotion, and behaviors. CSPA theory also asserts that individual cognitive-affective units influence with each other. Situation activates cognitive units by stimulating affective units, and ultimately affecting individuals' behaviors [10]. Such negative events greatly consume employees' emotional resources when excluded in the workplace. Individuals who lack resources tend to fall into a loss spiral once resources are

consumed. The excessive consumption of emotional resources and the breakdown of interpersonal relationships leads to employees' negative self-cognition, belittle value in the organization; thus, reduce organizational self-esteem. Based on COR theory, employees' behaviors are conservative to prevent the further loss of emotional and cognitive resources. Compared with the resource depletion of boundary-spanning behavior and the uncertainty of resource acquisition, employees are inclined to "retreat for defense" and reduce EBSB.

Hypothesis 4. Emotional exhaustion and organizational self-esteem have a chain-mediating role between workplace ostracism and EBSB.

2.5 The moderating effect of loss-focused coping orientation

Loss-focused coping orientation refers to directing thoughts and efforts to negative stress events to change disturbing situations [12]. CAPS theory states that a variable effectively regulates the effects of events on employees' behaviors if it transforms emotional processing system into cognitive processing system [10]. LFCO alleviates the emotional resource loss brought by workplace ostracism, and encourages employees to rationally analyze and reflect on the causes of ostracism and efforts in the future, thinking about the value to organizations Therefore, the "hot" processing system of emotional impulse are transformed into the "cold" processing system of rational cognition, and finally self-control and adjustment of cognition and behavior are realized. Hence, employees' high level of LFCO weakens the positive effect of workplace ostracism on emotional exhaustion, and subsequently weaken the chain mediation between emotional exhaustion and organizational self-esteem.

Hypothesis 5. Loss-focused coping orientation moderates the positive impact of workplace ostracism on emotional exhaustion, further moderating the chain mediation process.

3. Methods

3.1 Samples and procedures

Data obtained through questionnaire from full-time employees working in technology, manufacturing, and service industries in Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Anhui provinces. 420 questionnaires are distributed and 372 valid questionnaires are obtained, with an effective recovery rate of 88.6%.

3.2 Measures

Workplace ostracism. It is measured by a ten-item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008). Cronbach’s alpha is 0.892.

Emotional exhaustion. It is measured through the five-item scale devised by Schaufeli et al. (1996) t. Cronbach’s alpha is 0.800.

Organizational self-esteem. It is scaled by the ten-item scale from Pierce et al. (1989). Cronbach’s alpha is 0.863.

Employee boundary-spanning behavior. It is ascertained through a six-item scale developed by Marrone et al. (2007). Cronbach’s alpha is 0.755.

Loss-focused coping orientation. It is measured by a six-item scale adopted by Shepherd et al. (2011). Cronbach's alpha is 0.801.

4. Results

4.1 Common Method Bias Test

Adopting Harman single-factor method, study findings show that the first principal component explained 26.09% variance variation, which is less than 50% of the reference standard value. Thus, CMV is not a serious concern.

4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analyses

This paper uses Mplus7.4 to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (Table 1). The results shows that the fitting degree of the five-factor model (χ^2=900.238, df=619, χ^2/df=1.454，IFI=0.940, CFI=0.939, TLI=0.935, RMSEA=0.035) is significantly better than that of other models, indicating the good discriminant validity of the variables.

Table 1. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Model	χ^2	*df*	χ^2/*df*	*CFI*	*TLI*	*RMSEA*
Five factor model	900.238	619	1.454	0.939	0.935	0.035
Four factor model	1147.091	623	1.841	0.887	0.879	0.048
Three factor model	1544.421	626	2.467	0.802	0.790	0.063
Two factor model	1758.309	628	2.800	0.757	0.742	0.070
One factor model	2350.546	629	3.737	0.629	0.608	0.086

Notes: N=372; Five factor model: WO, LFCO, EE, OE, EBSB; Four factor model: WO+LFCO, EE, OE, EBSB; Three factor model: WO+LFCO, EE+OE, EBSB; Two factor model: WO+LFCO, EE+OE+EBSB; One factor model: WO+LFCO+EE+OE+EBSB.

4.3 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Means, standard deviations and correlations analysis are presented in the results. As expected, WO is positively correlated with emotional exhaustion (r=0.354, p <0.01) while negatively correlated with OE (r=-0.494, p<0.01) and EBSB (r=-0.372, p<0.01). Emotional exhaustion is negatively associated with OE (r=-0.335, p<0.01) and EBSB (r=-0.314, p<0.01). OE is positively correlated with EBSB (r=0.428, p<0.01). This provides a basis for further analysis.

4.4 Hypotheses testing

4.4.1 Mediating effect test

PROCESS and Bootstrap method are used to test the mediating effects. Specifically, model 6 is selected from the PROCESS. The results are shown in Table 2 and Figure 2, respectively.

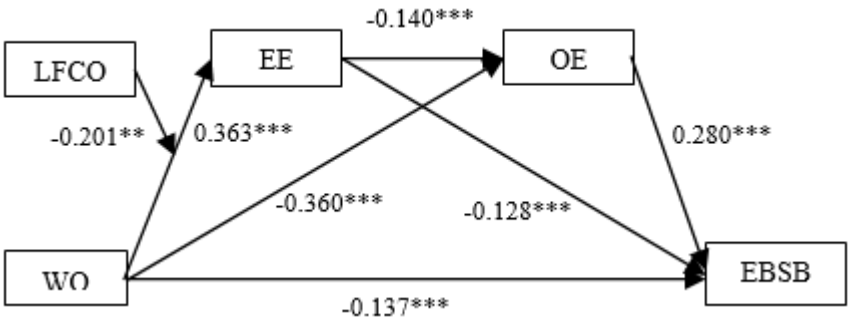

Figure 2. Mediating-Moderating Model Estimation

WO exerts a significant negative impact on EBSB (b=-0.137, p<0.01). The 95% CI = [-0.222, -0.051] without zero, supporting Hypothesis 1. The indirect effect of WO on EBSB through EE is -0.047, and the 95% CI = [-0.083, -0.014] without zero. The indirect effect of WO on EBSB through OE is -0.101, and the 95% CI = [-0.150, -0.056] without zero. The chain mediation effect of WO to EBSB through EE and OE is -0.014, and the 95% CI = [-0.026, -0.005] without zero. Therefore, hypothesis 2, 3, 4 is supported.

Table 2. Bootstrapping Mediation Effect Test

Path	effect	Confidence interval of bias-corrected 95%	
		Lower	Upper
WO→EBSB	-0.137	-0.222	-0.051
WO→EE→EBSB	-0.047	-0.083	-0.014
WO→OE→EBSB	-0.101	-0.150	-0.056
WO→EE→OE→EBSB	-0.014	-0.026	-0.005
Total indirect effect	-0.161	-0.218	-0.112
Total effect	-0.298	-0.375	-0.222

4.4.2 Moderating effect test

Latent Moderated Structural Equations is used to test the Moderating effect (Figure 3). The interaction between WO and LFCO significantly affects EE (b=-0.201, p＜0.01). Afterword, a simple slope test is conducted. Figure 3 shows that the effect of WO on EE is not significant (b=0.151, t=1.855, p=0.064) when the LFCO is high (mean+1 SD) while WO positively affects EE (b=0.464, t=5.951, p<0.001) when the LFCO is low (mean-1 SD). Therefore, the relationship between WO and EE is stronger when LFCO is low.

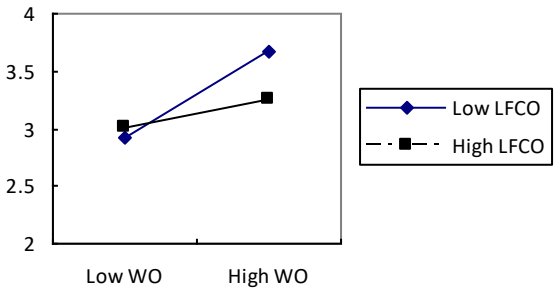

Figure 3. The moderating effect of the LFCO

4.4.3 Moderated the chain mediating effect test

As shown in Table 3, the chain mediating effect of EE and OE on WO and EBSB is -0.006 (95% CI = [-0.016, 0.001], including zero) in a high level of LFCO (mean+1SD), and it is -0.018 (95% CI = [-0.034, -0.007], without zero) in a low level of it (mean-1SD). The difference between conditional indirect effects is also significant (difference=0.012, 95% CI = [0.003, 0.027], without zero). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is supported.

Table 3. Moderated Chain Mediation Effect Analysis

Moderator	Path: WO→EE→OE→EBSB		
	Indirect effect	LLCI	ULCI
Low LFCO	-0.018	-0.034	-0.007
High LFCO	-0.006	-0.016	0.001
Discrepancy	0.012	0.003	0.027

5. Conclusions

5.1 Discussion

This study focuses on the situational factors of EBSB: selecting WO as the antecedent variable of EBSB, and focusing on "whether employees ‘retreat' (reduce EBSB to protect existing resources) or ‘advance' (increase EBSB to supplement depleted resources) when suffering from WO and consuming lots of resources". Based on the COR theory and CAPS theory, this paper discusses the influence mechanism of WO on EBSB. The results shows that WO negatively predicts EBSB; EE and OE play a chain mediation role between WO and EBSB. Besides, LFCO moderates the positive impact of WO on EE, further moderates the chain mediation role of EE and OE.

5.2 Theoretical implications

First, this study extends the literature regarding the antecedents of EBSB, responding to the call of strengthening the research on situational factors of EBSB.

Second, this study constructs a chain mediation model to reveal the internal mechanism of WO on EBSB, and reveals the "black box" between WO and EBSB.

Finally, this study verifies the moderating effect of LFCO.

5.3 Practical implications

First, enterprises should pay attention to the negative impact of WO on EBSB, pay attention to the factors inducing WO and improve the organizational environment.

Second, measures should be taken to help employees replenish emotional and cognitive resources in time. For example, leaders or other members need to encourage and help employees when they feel depressed.

Finally, managers should be aware of the buffering effect of LFCO. Managers can take LFCO as an important indicator when they recruit, promote, and assess employees.

5.4 Limitations and future research

First, all data are derived from subjective reports of employees, which may lead to the problem of common method bias and affect the reliability of the results. Future research can use multiple data sources to obtain data.

Second, this study mainly explores the mechanism between WO and EBSB from the individual level. We can explore from the team or organization level, such as interpersonal trust.

Finally, other boundary conditions need to be discovered, such as emotional stability, organizational culture, leadership style, etc.

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