

## "Towards Inclusive Workplaces: The Role of Work Engagement in Mitigating The Effects of Workplace Ostracism on Social Sustainability"

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### Abstract

In recent years, a concerning trend of workplace ostracism has emerged in various sectors. These circumstances emerge when employees feel deliberately excluded or ignored by their colleagues in their workplace. This social exile situation with the individual can develop a sense of alienation, dissatisfaction, and loneliness, impacting not just the ostracised individual but the entire organisation. It has significant implications for employee morale, organisational sustainability, and productivity. Workplace ostracism decreases work engagement and negatively impacts social sustainable development in the organisation. This study examines how workplace ostracism (WO) influences social sustainability (SS) with the mediating function of work engagement (WE). The research Using a quantitative study design, data is accumulated from the manufacturing sector through validated scales. The study analyses the mediation effect of work engagement using Smart PLS 4.0 (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling). The results of hypothesis testing will contribute to organisational behaviour by emphasising the importance of fostering an inclusive workplace culture within manufacturing units. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that manufacturing firms should adopt employee support initiatives, implement effective leadership strategies, and develop engagement programmes to reduce workplace ostracism, promote strong employee commitment, and promote sustainable business practices.

**Key Words:** Workplace Ostracism, Work Engagement, Social Sustainability, Organizational Behaviour, Manufacturing Sector

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace ostracism has been the subject of many domestic studies over the last ten years, and it has been widely recognised as a significant research topic that affects both academia and business. Ostracism at work includes actions like avoiding particular people, rejecting them, or purposefully avoiding eye contact with them. In contrast to more overt types of mistreatment, such as bullying, rudeness, or abusive supervision, workplace ostracism is a more passive-aggressive type of unpleasant behaviour that occurs within organisations. (Khare & Singh 2023.)

Work Engagement. When employees are fully engaged in their work, they display higher productivity, better alignment with organizational values, and responsible behavior (Baker & Demerouti, 2008). This study sees work engagement as a key link between workplace ostracism and social sustainability. It explains how negative social experiences can affect the broader goals of an organization.

Social sustainability is a crucial part of sustainable development, aiming on human and social phases. It adds to the long-term accomplishment of organizations and communities. It promotes

values such as equality, inclusion, employee well-being, and worth of life, especially in the workplace setting. Social sustainability means creating an environment that supports fairness, employee participation, health-safety, work-life balance, and human resource development (*Missimer et al., 2017*).

In organizational research, social sustainability is generally viewed as an outcome that is highly influenced by factors such as leadership, workplace culture, employee engagement, and social mobility. It reflects how long an organization is capable to maintain and promote employee well-being, social cohesion, and ethical practices (*Eisenberg & Jabarin, 2017*).

In practice, social sustainability practices can help retain employees, promote innovation, and develop a positive image of the organization. This study shows that social stability is an important organizational outcome that can be directly affected by workplace ostracism.

Work engagement serves as a connection that relates ostracism and social stability. When employees feel isolated or ignored in the workplace, they experience a decline in their sense of belonging, motivation, and contribution. This can negatively impact outcomes such as social stability—including inclusion, trust, and collaboration. This can hinder positive social outcomes such as inclusion, trust, and engagement. This research seeks to understand and explain how workplace ostracism, through work engagement, affects social sustainability in manufacturing sectors.

This gap shows that in-depth research is needed, especially for organizations that wish to create socially sustainable environments by enhancing workplace engagement among their employees.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 Workplace Ostracism and Social Sustainability**

If an employee feels ignored or shunned by others in the office, it can have a profound impact on their mental health and the company (*Ferris et al., 2008*). Exclusion, a subtle form of abuse, can undermine employees' psychological needs such as emotional support, self-esteem, and control (*Williams, 2007*). Over a long period of time, such experiences can decrease job satisfaction, reduce motivation, and lead to mental exhaustion. Finally, this situation can disengage the employee from work. To be socially sustainable, any organization requires strong interpersonal relationships, respect, and a culture that values the contribution of every employee (*Missimer et al., 2017*).

It damages social capital (such as collaboration and networks) and trust. In addition, it weakens the company's ability to maintain a positive and inclusive environment. Understanding this is especially important when it comes to labour-intensive and stressful industries such as manufacturing, where employee interactions play a critical role in achieving the long-term goals of the organization.

**H1: “Workplace ostracism significantly influences social sustainability”**

### **2.2 Workplace Ostracism and Work Engagement**

Ostracism is when employees feel ignored or isolated by co-workers or bosses. It is a hidden but serious form of workplace abuse (*Ferris et al., 2008*). Compared to overtly negative behaviours such as bullying or harassment, ostracism is usually less visible but harder to tolerate. It has a significant impact on employees' mental health.

Ousterity disrupts employees' basic needs such as belonging and social connection. These needs are vital to maintaining their motivation and positive attitude towards work (Williams, 2007). Exclusion has a major impact on employee engagement. Work engagement means that employees involve in their work with dedication and full interest (Schaufeli et al., 2002). But when employees feel excluded, they become emotionally exhausted, their confidence decreases, and they can lose a sense of purpose in their work. These negative experiences cause employees to lose the desire to put energy and enthusiasm into their work (Howard et al., 2020). Such social isolation at the workplace further isolates them mentally. As a result, their participation and performance start decreasing, which ultimately affects the productivity of the organization as well.

## **H2: “Workplace Ostracism has positively influence Work Engagement”**

### **2.3. Work Engagement and Social Sustainability**

Work engagement means that employees are involved in their work with full energy, passion and interest. It shows how much they invest emotionally and mentally in their work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engaged employees usually adopt cooperative, ethical and socially responsible behaviours. Such behaviours can help in making the workplace inclusive, healthy and socially sustainable (Baker and Demerouti, 2008). Through social sustainability we try to ensuring fairness, equality, and long-term respect for employees' rights and needs in the workplace (Missimer et al., 2017).

Work engagement leads employees to Show improved organizational behaviour, such as cooperating and taking responsibility. This reduces turnover (the desire of employees to leave) and improves mental health (Sachs, 2006). Such outcomes are important parts of social sustainability, especially in industries such as manufacturing. In manufacturing, where employee well-being and teamwork are critical, promoting work engagement is essential for long-term success. It can become a strategic path for organizations that want to adopt socially sustainable practices

## **H3: “Work Engagement has significant affect Social Sustainability”**

### **2.4 Workplace Ostracism Work Engagement and Sustainable development**

Nowadays, researcher are focusing on how these three aspects affect the long-term success of the organization and the well-being of employees. When an individual is ignored or isolated in the workplace (Ferris et al., 2008), it has a profound impact on their mental health. They experience low self-esteem, emotional distance, and a lack of belonging (Williams, 2007).

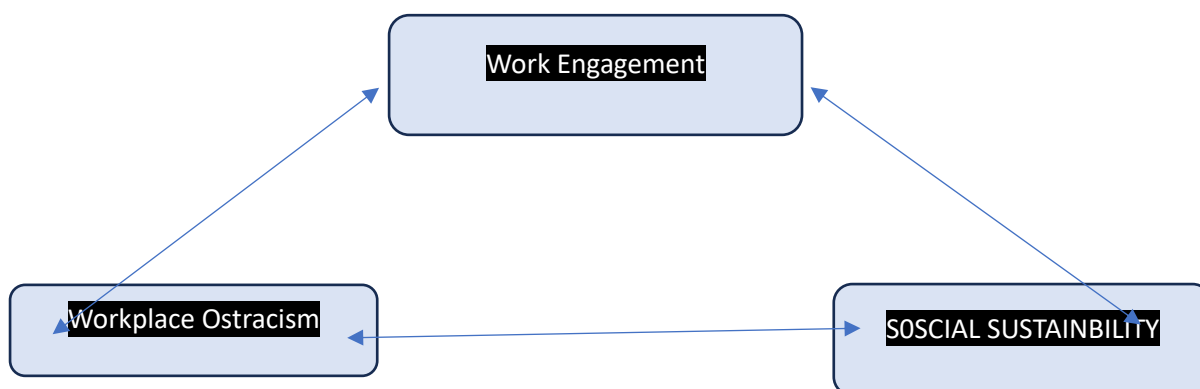
Work engagement is seen as a positive and enthusiastic state of mind in which employees are fully immersed in their work and perform it with passion and dedication (Schaufeli et al., 2002). It acts as a mediator that helps in making the workplace environment supportive and inclusive. Engaged employees execute better in their work and add to the progression of the organization.

But when there is exclusion in the workplace, work engagement decreases. This makes the employees not motivated to do more than their basic responsibilities (Howard et al., 2020). This directly impacts the productivity of the employees and environment of the organization.

When in the workplace the employees' participation is low, it negatively impacts the social aspects of sustainable development. The social dimension we are discussing here is about promoting fairness, inclusiveness, and employee well-being. It requires that organizations should adopt cultures that enhance human capital, respect diversity, and create safe, empowering environments (Missimer et al., 2017).

Understanding the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between workplace ostracism and sustainable development is especially relevant in sectors like manufacturing, where teamwork, morale, and workforce stability are essential for long-term sustainability. This study seeks to fill a research gap by investigating how mitigating ostracism and promoting engagement can help organizations achieve sustainable development outcomes.

**H4: “Work Engagement mediates the relationship between and Sustainable development and Workplace Ostracism”**



**Figure 1- Research Framework**

### 3.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied a convenience sampling approach and utilized a descriptive research methodology. The statistical population comprised employee of manufacturing units of Haridwar district. A structured electronic questionnaire was distributed to 150 employees, out of which 100 responses were received. The study applied a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to determine participants' reactions to each item. According to the research conceptual model, there is one dependent variable associated with Social Sustainability, one independent variable associated with workplace ostracism and mediating variable associated with work engagement. Ten items of workplace ostracism adapted from *Ferris et al (2008)*. Ten items of work engagement adapted from “*Utrecht Work Engagement Scale: vigor, dedication and absorption was assessed by Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli, Martinez, Marques-Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002; Schaufeli, Salanova, et al., 2002; Storm & Rothman, 2003.*” Nine items of social sustainability adapted from (*Sharma & Henriques, 2005; Kleine & von Hauff, 2009*). The data analysis was done using Smart PLS version 4.0. And Followed the two-step SEM approach defined by *Anderson and Gerbing (1988)*, the examination comprised both the measurement model and the structural model. Smart PLS-SEM was employed to evaluate both components of the model.

**Table 1: Samples Characteristics**

Classification	Frequency	Composition Ratio (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	58	58%
Female	42	42%

## 4.RESULTS

### Fitting measurement models

The PLS-SEM approach has been used to evaluate the measurement models by assessing reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

#### 4.1 Reliability Analysis

According to *Hair et al. (2020)*, an outer loading of 0.60 is considered the minimum acceptable threshold. Upon reviewing the outer loadings, a few items were found to fall below this benchmark. Consequently, these items were removed—specifically, two items Workplace ostracism influences social sustainability through the mediating effect of work engagement. The research findings account for 62.2% of the variance in the dependent variable. from Workplace Ostracism (WO 1 = 0.581, WO 4 = 0.585). After their removal, the composite reliability for all constructs exceeded 0.65, aligning with the standards recommended by *Hair et al. (2020)*.

#### 4.2 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was evaluated using the Smart PLS approach by assessing outer loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR). According to the criteria suggested by *Hair et al. (2020)*, convergent validity is established when AVE values exceed 0.50, factor loadings are greater than 0.60, and CR values surpass 0.70. The results of this assessment are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: “Outer loadings, Reliability analysis and AVE”**

Variable	Items	Factor loadings	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Workplace Ostracism	WO2	0.685	0.864	0.894	0.514
	WO3	0.652			
	WO5	0.632			
	WO6	0.765			
	WO7	0.750			
	WO8	0.758			
	WO9	0.783			
	WO10	0.692			

Work Engagement	WE1	0.599	0.892	0.912	0.511
	WE2	0.725			
	WE3	0.618			
	WE4	0.737			
	WE5	0.694			
	WE6	0.702			
	WE7	0.746			
	WE8	0.729			
	WE9	0.801			
	WE10	0.774			
Social Sustainability	SS1	0.620	0.874	0.899	0.502
	SS2	0.695			
	SS3	0.767			
	SS4	0.706			
	SS5	0.647			
	SS6	0.796			
	SS7	0.674			
	SS8	0.743			
	SS9	0.693			

### 4.3 Discriminant Validity

The study applied the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (FLC) to assess discriminant validity. According to *Fornell et al. (1981)*, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each latent construct should exceed its correlations with any other latent constructs. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3- “Discriminant Validity Test (FLC test)**

	SS	WE	WO
SS	0.707		
WE	0.795	0.715	
WO	0.713	0.754	0.717

### Fitting structural research model

After the measurement models are fitted, which includes fitting the study's structural model (conceptual model), the research's hypotheses will be put to the test. Multicollinearity, F square, R square and T-values were utilised to ensure that the conceptual model for the study fit the data.

#### 4.4 R square

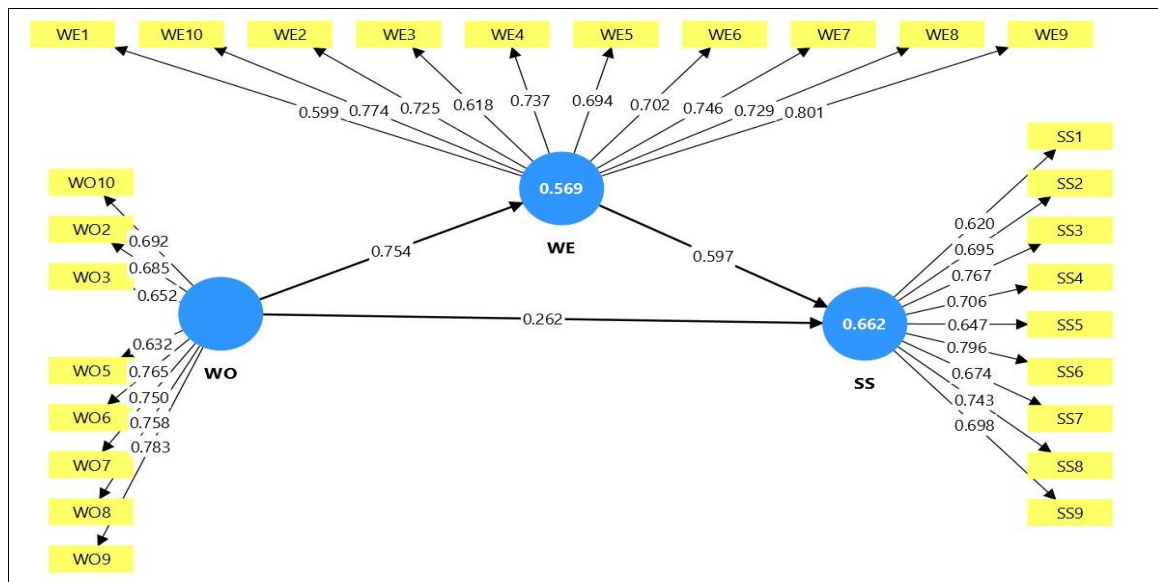
To assess the feasibility of the study's conceptual model, it is important to consider this criterion. Based on Cohen's recommendation, an R<sup>2</sup> value exceeding 0.26 (26%) is considered acceptable for explained variance. The results of this evaluation are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: R Square Results**

	R square
SS	0.662
WE	0.569

#### 4.5 Hypothesis Results

At this stage, the study's hypotheses are evaluated based on the *t-values* and *p-values* generated through the partial least squares (PLS) algorithm used for data analysis. A path coefficient is considered statistically significant at the 95% confidence level if its corresponding *t-value* exceeds 1.96.



**Table : 5 Hypothesis Results**

Hypothesis	T-values	P-values	Results
WE→SS	0.199	0.000	Supported
WO→SS	0.115	0.023	Supported

WO→WE	0.060	0.000	Supported
WO→WE→SS	4.829	0.000	Supported

## 5. Discussion

This study investigated the consequences of workplace ostracism on social sustainability, with work engagement serving as a mediating factor, within the manufacturing sector. The findings indicate that workplace ostracism notably reduces work engagement, which in turn weakens efforts toward building a socially sustainable workplace. This aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which suggests that negative social conditions at work—like exclusion—can drain employees' psychological resources, reducing their engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Work Engagement, defined by vigor, devotion, and engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002), was found to be a key mechanism in this relationship. Lower engagement among ostracized employees likely results in decreased collaboration, participation, and morale—core components of social sustainability (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017). These results emphasize that fostering inclusivity and positive interpersonal dynamics is essential for sustaining both employee well-being and organizational progress.

This study supports existing research highlighting the destructive causes of ostracism (Ferris et al., 2008; Williams, 2007) and extends it by linking these effects to social sustainability—a relatively underexplored area. The findings suggest that efforts to reduce workplace exclusion and enhance engagement are critical to building resilient and socially responsible organizations.

## 6. Conclusion

This study explored how workplace ostracism affects social sustainability in the organization, emphasizing the facilitating role of work engagement. Results show that workplace ostracism reduces employee engagement, which negatively affect socially sustainable practices. The research highlights the need to address social exclusion to support employee well-being and organizational social sustainability.

## 7. Limitations and Future scope

The research is limited to employees working in manufacturing firms, and the data is collected using structured questionnaires based on validated scales. Future research could build on these findings by exploring contextual or cultural factors that influence the ostracism–engagement–sustainability relationship or by employing longitudinal designs to capture changes over time. Overall, this study reinforces the need for organizations to prioritize inclusive work environments as a pathway to achieving sustainable development goals.

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