Exploring the impact of Workplace Ostracism on Work Engagement: Examining the intervening role of Psychological Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

We all want to belong, fit in, and be accepted. Workplace Ostracism (WPO) is a personal recognition and judgment of employees who are banished, ignored by coworkers, or feeling ignored within the organization. The dismissive effect of workplace ostracism on employees can be witnessed in reducing employees' work performance, creativity and stimulation of negative emotional state. In order to explore the cause and effect between workplace ostracism and work engagement, this research intends to take psychological empowerment (PE) as a mediating variable to investigate management-level employees of the top 3 banks of Pakistan, namely Habib Bank Limited (HBL), National Bank of Pakistan (NBP), and United Bank Limited (UBL), and construct a research model on the association between employees' work engagement (WE) and work ostracism under the intervening effect of psychological empowerment. The study design was quantitative and carried out with a simple random sampling technique. A total of 598 responses were obtained from the management-level staff of the banks. The demographic profiles of the respondents were carried out in SPSS version 26. The correlation analysis and Structural equation model technique were used with the help of AMOS version 23. The results suggest that Workplace Ostracism is negatively linked with Work engagement and Psychological empowerment. Further, work engagement is positively correlated with Psychological empowerment. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results show that workplace ostracism negatively and significantly impacts work engagement. This negative impact was reduced after introducing Psychological empowerment as a mediator. The results of this study will be helpful to the HR department and policymakers of HBL, NBP, and UBL to understand workplace ostracism and its negativity and how to assist ostracized employees by empowering them psychologically.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace ostracism is an act of omission, which means that the actor stops talking to the victim or doesn't talk to them. Other wrongdoings are the result of an act of commission, which means that the wrongdoers do something terrible to the victim on purpose. Also, the reason for ostracism could range from having no sense (non-purposeful) to being malicious (purposeful). So, being shunned could leave the victim with a lot of questions. A person being hurt may not know why or even if it is happening. The victim will think about what happened to make sense of what happened. Attributions explain why things happen that people use to make sense of the world around them, especially when the events are important and bad. People try to tell the difference between self-explanations and explanations that come from outside themselves. Internal attributions are how much people think an internal force is behind the behavior they see. External attributions are how much people blame the behavior they see on something outside of themselves, such as the person who started the behavior (O'Reilly et al., 2015).

"A positive, fulfilling, work-related frame of mind characterized by vitality, dedication, and immersion" is how experts define Work Engagement. People that are actively working have a lot of energy, are enthusiastic about what they do, and are fully immersed in it. The majority of studies have used a "between-person" method, which demonstrates that working conditions, personality factors, and behavioral techniques all have an impact on how engaged people are at work on a mean-level basis (Bakker et al., 2014). However, ten years of research has demonstrated that a person's level of engagement at work can fluctuate over time and in various contexts. For instance, Reina-Tamayo et al. (2017) found that employees are most engaged during difficult two-hour work episodes, on days when they have gotten enough sleep the night before work, and on days when they have access to a variety of resources (Bakker et al., 2014).

The importance of the relationship of humans to their surroundings cannot be ignored. Humans highly depend on social relationships, either familial or friendship, which creates a sense of security and well-being. In contrast, ostracism negatively affects these relationships. Ostracism refers to voluntarily ignoring and excluding individuals by giving them little or no attention. Workplace ostracism is demarcated as the level by which an employee observes

that they are being excluded or ignored by other employees (Ferris et al., 2008). Workplace ostracism is known to as diverse entity from workplace harassment. Workplace ostracism is defined as "the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded by others in the workplace" (Ferris et al., 2008). The ostracized individual experiences stress, which can sometimes lead to functional and cognitive impairment (Williams, 1997; Williams & Sommer, 1997). Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Psychological empowerment is defined as understanding the particular situations in which an employee's working environment can control their feeling cognitively (Spreitzer, 2007). This specific research will be intended to understand the impact of workplace ostracism on work engagement under the mediation of psychological empowerment.

Research Problem

O'Reilly et al. (2015) led a study in which they came to the conclusion that workplace ostracism negatively influences employee well-being and work-related approaches. Employees dedicate their energy into job requirements which diminishes the negativity of workplace ostracism (Abbas et al., 2014). In the last decades, social scientists are taking more interest in the workplace ostracism variable. Various studies have revealed that the negativity of workplace ostracism brings a decline in employee's performance and turn, affects the organization's performance. Although there are multiple studies on workplace ostracism and its negative impact, very few studies are available in which psychological empowerment is taken as a mediator between workplace ostracism and work engagement. In addition, we could not find any study on a particular setup in the Pakistani baking sector. This formed a gap to be filled by conducting research. This study will discover the association between workplace ostracism and work engagement before and after the introduction of mediator psychological empowerment.

Research Objectives

The purposive objectives of this particular study are to understand the association between workplace ostracism, work engagement, and psychological empowerment in the Pakistani banking sector. The mediating role of psychological empowerment will be tested between workplace ostracism and work engagement in the Pakistani banking sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace Ostracism

In meek words, ostracism is defined as the exclusion of individuals or groups by others. The workplace is a physical setup where employees work for a particular period, perform assigned tasks, and receive benefits in return. Workplace ostracism seriously affects this setup, and ostracized people "tend to show maladaptive responses and are less likely to engage in pro-social activities" (Twenge et al., 2001). Workplace ostracism can negatively affect interpersonal and social behavior, impair job performance, and boost job turnover (Ferris et al., 2008).

Work Engagement

A renowned research scholar initially provided engagement philosophy (Kahn, 1990). He defined engagement as the emotional control of organization members' on themselves and their work task [by which they] express in terms of emotional, cognitive and physical and task performance (Kahn, 1990). Work engagement is the "positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Engaged employees tend to work harder and provide more productivity than others do. In addition, engaged employees make use of their skills and abilities for their accomplishments.

Workplace Ostracism and Work Engagement

People in ancient Greeks used to use ostracism as a means of punishment, and some individuals were ostracized from their communities (Williams, 1997). Similarly, Sommer et al. (2001) defined ostracism as voluntarily ignoring and deliberately distancing individuals or groups from others. Yang (2012) suggested that ostracism brings antagonistic effects on the ostracized employee, threatens the sense of belonging, and scratches the social functions that are desired needs of an employee.

Leung et al. (2011) conducted research in which they concluded ostracism diminishes the employees' resources by creating negative mental situations and thus negatively affects work engagement. Every employee needs sufficient resources to perform their tasks, but ostracism utterly affects those resources and disengages individuals from work. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H_1: There is a negative and significant impact of WO on WE

Psychological Empowerment

Thomas & Velthouse (1990) elaborated Psychological empowerment as an enhanced inherent job inspiration. The authors suggested four dimensions for measuring psychological empowerment: meaningful, competence, choice, and impact. Meaningfulness is the evaluation of an employee's work against his/her own standards. Competence can be

defined as the capability of an employee to perform a given task. The choice is the employee's recognition of which behavior to be adopted. The impact is an employee's performance level, which affects the organization's results (Ashforth, 1989).

Workplace Ostracism and Psychological Empowerment:
Psychological empowerment states to the perception of individuals about their working environment (Bandura, 1989). Psychological empowerment buffers and mediates the relationship between stress (ostracism) and stressor (employee). In contrast, the ostracized employee feels a lack of control over the work environment, which causes increased stress due to the low level of psychological empowerment affected by workplace ostracism. Thus, we hypothesize:

H_2: There is a negative and significant impact of WO on PE

Psychological Empowerment and Work Engagement:
According to May et al. (2004), work engagement is influenced by employees' psychological empowerment and potential to be engaged in their work. Olivier & Rothmann (2007) revealed the dimensions of psychological empowerment, which are related to Further, the more psychologically empowered employees are, the better they engage in their workplace. Thus, we hypothesize:

H_3: There is a positive and significant impact of PE on WE

Mediating role of Psychological Empowerment between Workplace Ostracism and Work Engagement
Empowerment has emerged in past years as an important consideration for the organizational effectiveness of the business. Conger et al. (2000) defined psychological empowerment as a procedure of mending sentiments of self-elegance among the members of an organization formally or informally by endorsing usefulness. He found that psychologically empowered employees become more innovative and less likely to leave the organization because of the engagement in their work roles. May et al. (2004) conducted research on psychologically empowered employees and their level of engagement in the workplace. Based on that research, psychological empowerment directly impacts employees' engagement potential. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H_4: The relationship between WO and WE mediates by the PE
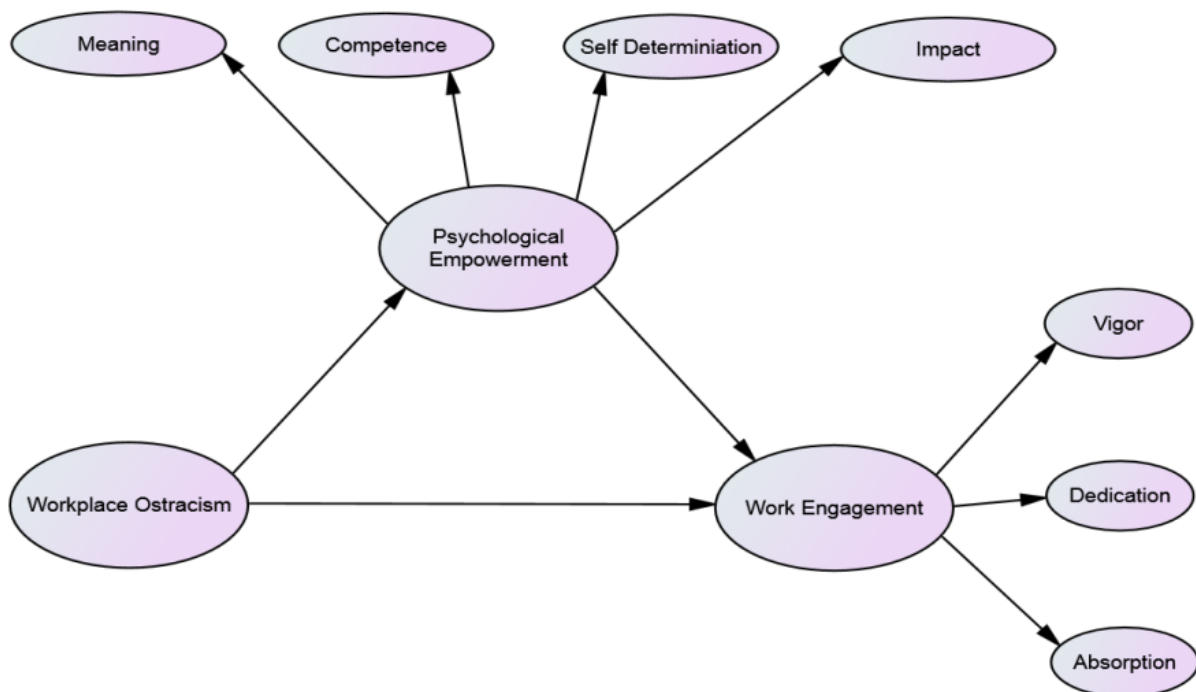
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework model can be seen in figure 1, which is based on available literature. The variable floating left side of the model represents the independent variable (Workplace Ostracism), and the variable floating right side of the model, along with its three dimensions, represents the dependent variable (Work Engagement = Vigor, Dedication, Absorption) while the top middle floating variable is the intervening variable along with its four dimensions (Psychological Empowerment = Meaning, Competence, Self Determination, Impact). Conceptual framework depicting the impact of WO on WE under the presence of PE as a mediator.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The nature of this research is casual and quantitative. Primary data collection method via a questionnaire developed by the investigators in this research. The top three banks of Pakistan in terms of financial services, namely Habib Bank Limited, National Bank of Pakistan, and United Bank Limited taken for this study, and data were collected. A simple random sampling technique was used to collect the data as a population frame was available. The data was conveniently collected from branches of banks and mostly collected using the electronically administered questionnaire. The sample size was determined as 598, which is suitable for the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique (Muthén & Muthén, 2002).

MEASURES

Workplace Ostracism
The independent variable, workplace ostracism, has been measured using a modified and adopted questionnaire (Ferris et al., 2008).

Work Engagement
The dependent variable, work engagement, has been measured using a modified and adopted questionnaire (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Workplace Ostracism
The mediating variable, psychological empowerment, has been measured using a modified and adopted questionnaire (Spreitzer, 2007).

RESULTS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Demographic Profile of the Banks
The management level staff of HBL, NBP, and UBL has been taken for this research. The respondents were informed about using collected data for this research study. They were assured about the confidentiality of this data.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variable	Options	Count	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	358	60
	Female	240	40
	Total	598	100
Age	21-30	247	41
	31-40	156	26
	41-50	130	22
	51-60	65	11
	Total	598	100
Level of Education	Graduate	216	36
	Post-Graduate	382	64
	Total	598	100
Experience	1-10 Years	278	46
	11-20 Years	194	32
	20 Years+	126	21
	Total	598	100

Descriptive and Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Standard Deviation, Mean and Correlation Analysis

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	WPO	WE	PE
WPO	3.8	0.60	1.0	-.52*	-.62**
WE	4.0	0.51		1.0	.51*
PE	4.1	0.53			1.0

WPO=Workplace Ostracism, WE=Work Engagement, PE= Psychological Empowerment

Firstly, the outcomes of correlation analysis revealed that WPO and WE are significantly and negatively correlated (r=-.52, *P*-value>.05). Secondly, the outcomes of correlation analysis revealed that WPO and PE are negatively and significantly correlated (r=-.62, *P*-Value>.05). Lastly, the outcomes of correlation analysis demonstrated that WE and PE are positively and significantly correlated (r=.51, *P*-Value>.05).

Structural Equation Modelling
SEM technique is used for confirmatory factor analysis and development of a structural model.
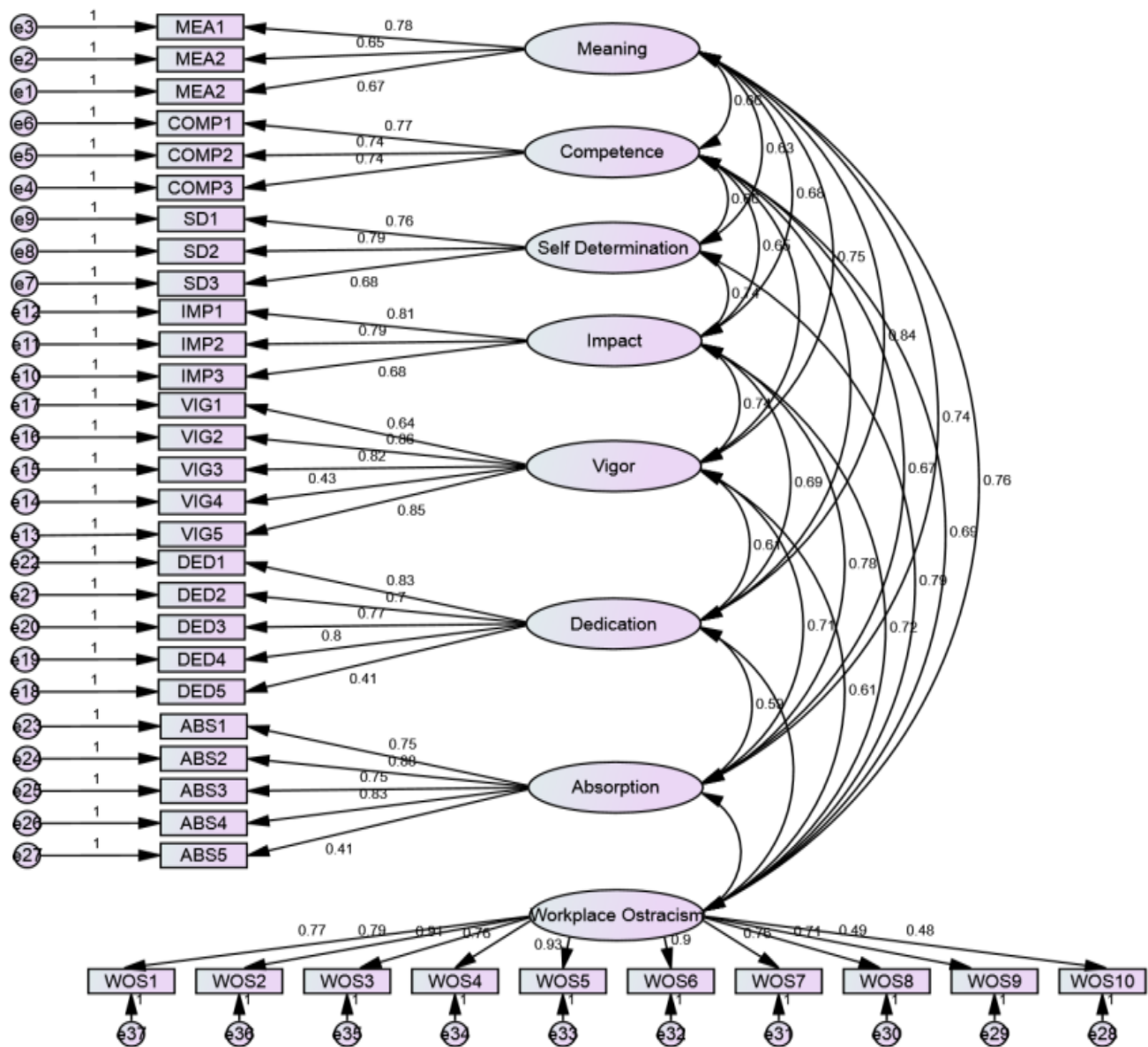
Confirmatory factor analysis for Measurement Model

Figure 2: Confirmatory factor analysis for Measurement Model

CM1N/DF	*P*-VALUE	GFI	AGFI	TLI	CFI	PCFI	RMSEA	P-CLOSE
3.47	.061	.782	.780	.812	.813	.799	.059	.043

CFA of the measurement model of the study can be seen in figure 2. According to Jackson et al. (2009), researchers must retain the significant factor items with factor loadings >.5 and exclude insignificant items with <.5 factor loadings. Following this procedure, all the significant items with loadings >.5 and excluded these four insignificant items, DED-5, VIG-3, WOS-9, and WOS-10, which have low loadings.
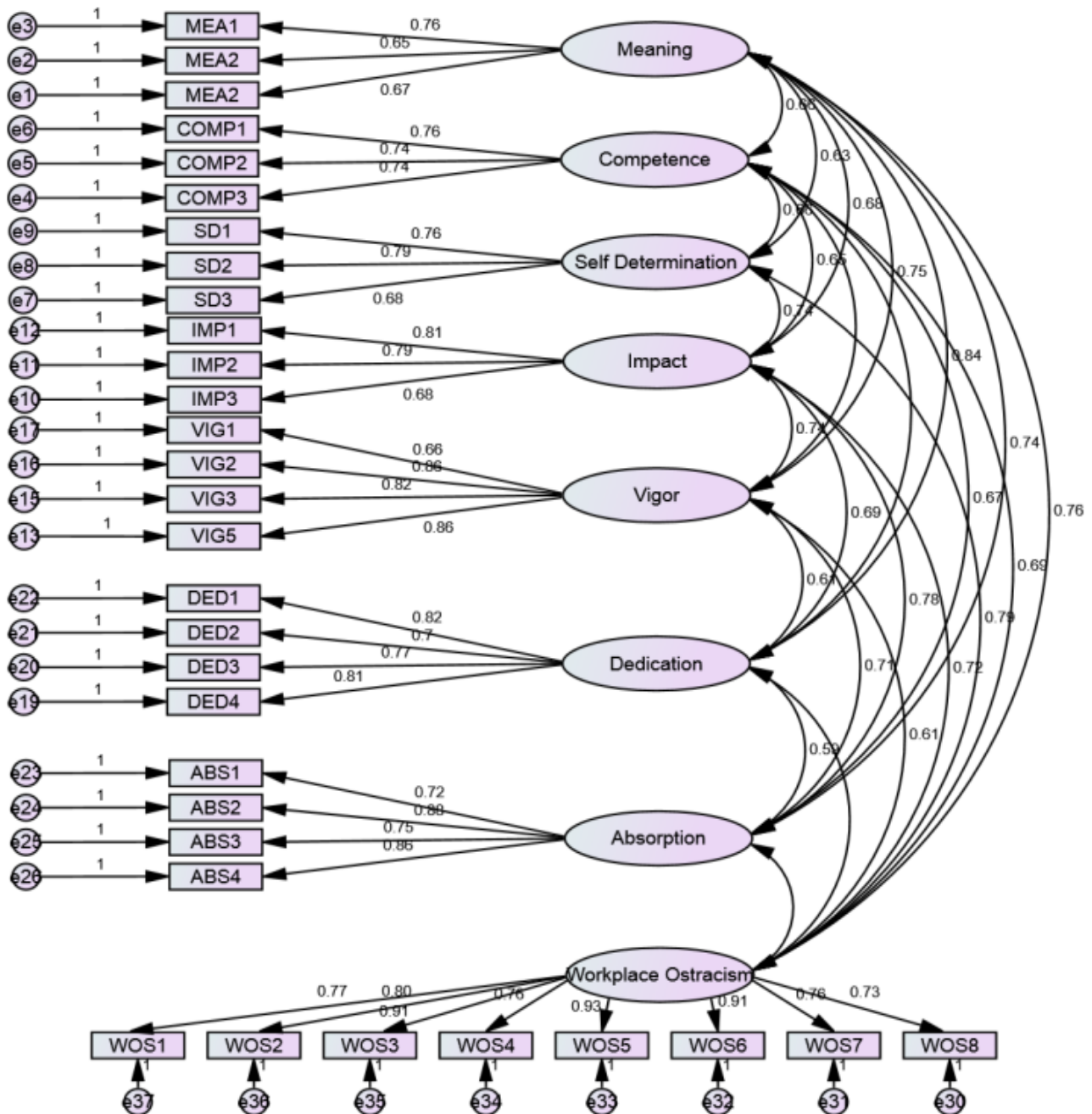
Confirmatory factor analysis for Modified Model

Figure 3: Modified Model of CFA

CM1N/DF	*P*-VALUE	GFI	AGFI	TLI	CFI	PCFI	RMSEA	P-CLOSE
2.86	.001	.901	.892	.902	.903	.911	.041	.055

The CFA model can be seen in figure 3, and those factors were retained, having loadings >.5, and were significant. The fit indices have also improved significantly after excluding items with low loadings.

Structural Model for Path "C"
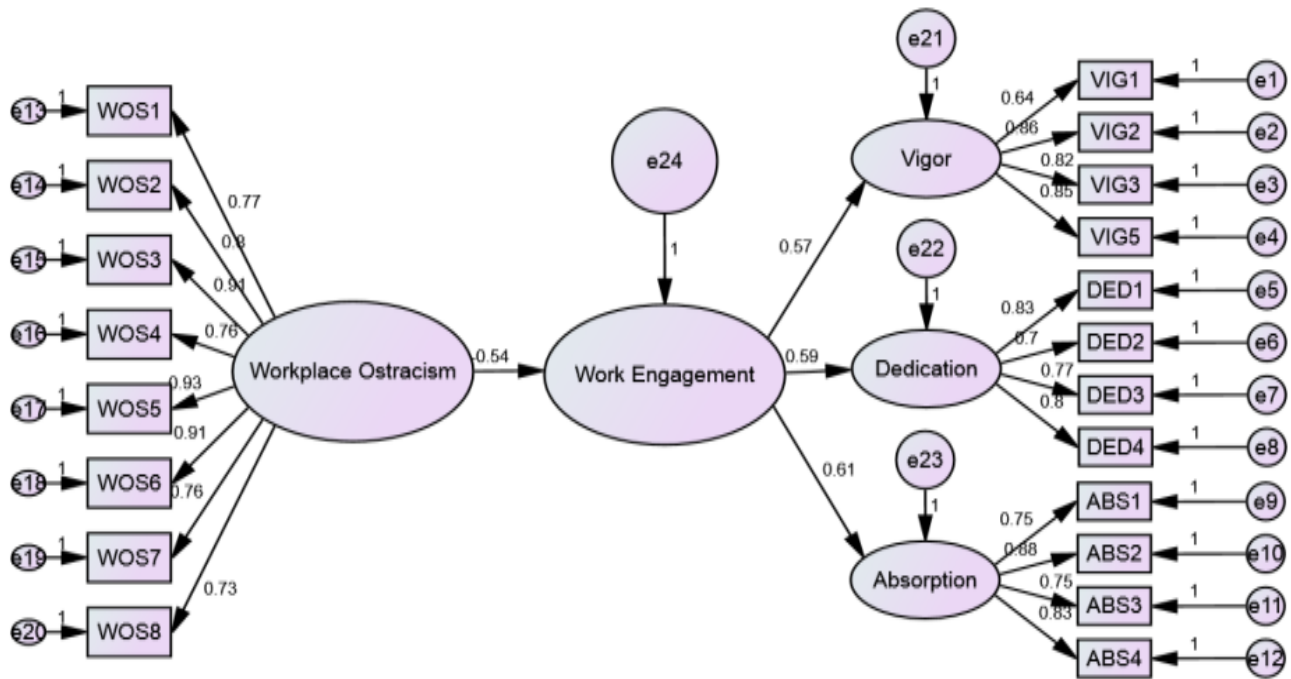
Figure 4: Path "C" Structural Model

CM1N/DF	*P*-VALUE	GFI	AGFI	TLI	CFI	PCFI	RMSEA	P-CLOSE
2.68	.00O	.902	.893	.905	.915	.913	.035	.058

Variables	Estimate	*P*-Value
WE<- WPO	-.54	.032

The path "c" structure of the model in figure 4 demonstrates the path analysis. All significant items have been retained which have loadings greater than >.5. The score of fit indices has improved significantly after excluding items with low loadings, as suggested by (Jackson et al., 2009). Further, the results of path (c) analysis (β=-54, *P*-Value>.05) revealed that there is a negative and significant impact of workplace ostracism on work engagement.

This result created a base for the 1st state of the mediation procedure of path (c) as suggested by (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

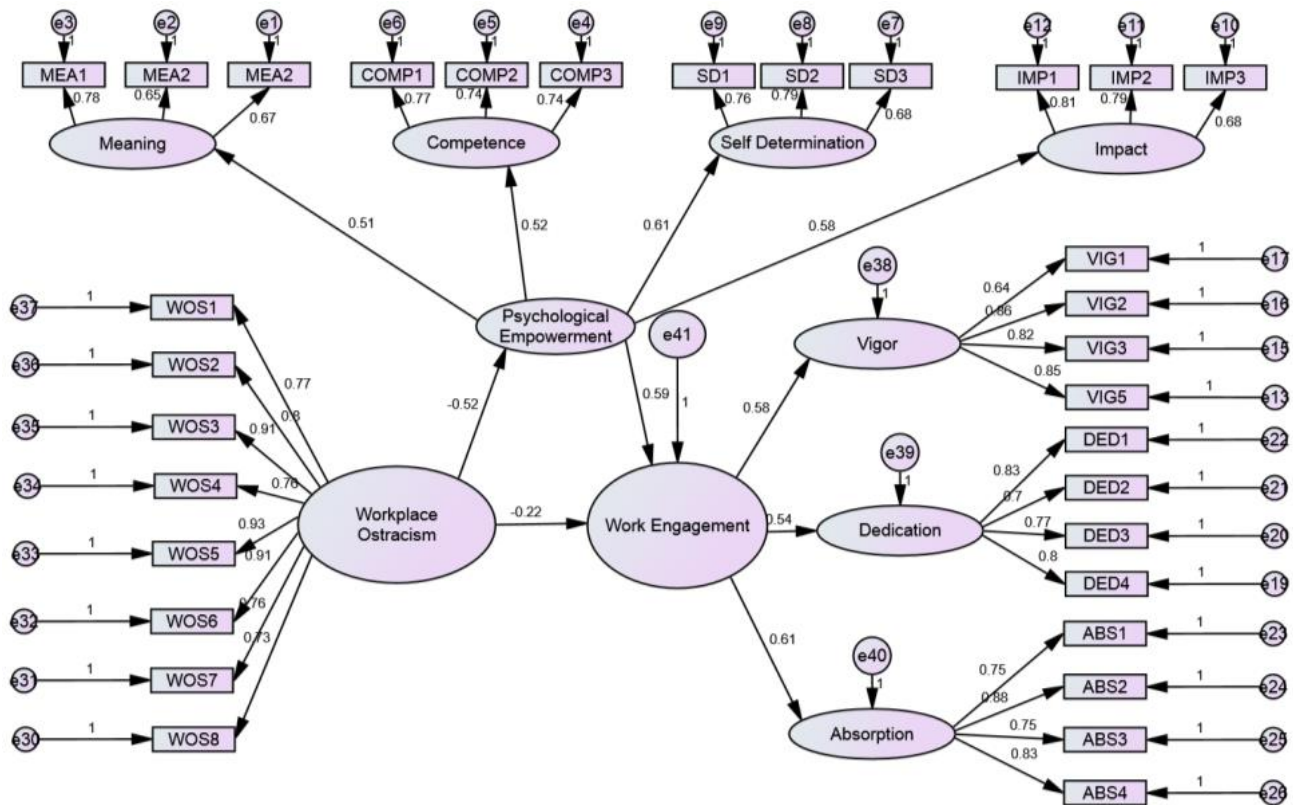**Final (a, b, and c') Path for Structural Model**

Figure 5: Final (a, b, and c') Path for Structural Model

CM1N/DF	*P*-VALUE	GFI	AGFI	TLI	CFI	PCFI	RMSEA	PCLOSE
2.78	.000	.912	.904	.917	.917	.921	.043	.062

Variables	Estimate	*P* Value
PE<- WPO	-.52	.040
WE <- PE	.59	.035
WE <- WPO	-.22	.071

WPO= Workplace Ostracism, PE= Psychological Empowerment, WE= Work Engagement

The final structure of the model depicts in figure 5 demonstrates the path analysis of all the sides a, b, and c'. All significant items have been retained which have loadings greater than >.5. The score of fit indices has improved significantly after excluding items with low loadings, as suggested by (Jackson et al., 2009). Additionally, the results of path (a) analysis (β= -.52, *P*-Value<.05) revealed that there is a negative; and significant impact of workplace ostracism on psychological empowerment. This result confirms the 2nd state of the mediation procedure of path (a) as suggested by (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Subsequently, the results of path (b) analysis (β=.59, *P*-Value<.05) revealed that there is a positive and significant impact of psychological empowerment on work engagement. This result confirms the 3rd state of the mediation procedure of path (b) as suggested by (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Consequently, The results of path "c" analysis (β=-.59, *P*-Value>.05) revealed that the beta value was -.59 and *P*-value was >.05, which refers to the negative and significant impact of workplace ostracism on work engagement. After the addition of psychological empowerment as a mediator, the results of prime (c') analysis (β=-.22, *P*-Value<.05) depict the decreased estimate and impact of an independent variable over a dependent variable significantly reduced. This result confirms the last state of the full mediation procedure of path (b) as suggested by (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

HYPOTHESES OUTCOMES

Hypothesis 1: There is a negative and significant impact of WPO on WE
The presupposed hypothesis suggests that workplace ostracism negatively and significantly affects work engagement in the Pakistani banking sector. The results of path "c" analysis (-.54, *P*-value>.05) revealed that the beta value is -.54 and *P*-Value is >.05 which confirms that there is a negative; and significant impact of workplace ostracism on psychological empowerment in the Pakistani banking sector. Thus, the hypothesis is retained.

Hypothesis 2: There is a negative and significant impact of WPO on PE

The supposed hypothesis suggests that workplace ostracism negatively and significantly affects psychological empowerment in the Pakistani banking sector. The results of the path "a" analysis (-.52, *P*-value>.05) revealed that the beta value is -.52 and *P*-Value is >.05, which confirms that there is a negative; and significant impact of workplace ostracism on psychological empowerment in Pakistani banking sector. Thus, the hypothesis is retained.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive and significant impact of PE on WE

The presumed hypothesis suggests that psychological empowerment positively and significantly affects work engagement in the Pakistani banking sector. The results of path "b" analysis (.59, *P*-value>.05) revealed that the beta value is .59 and *P*-Value is >.05, which confirms that psychological empowerment positively and significantly affects work engagement in the Pakistani banking sector. Thus, the hypothesis is retained.

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between WPO and WE mediates by the PE

The proposed hypothesis advocates that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and work engagement in the banking sector of Pakistan. The results of path "c" analysis (β=-.59, *P*-Value>.05) revealed that the beta value was -.59 and *P*-value was >.05, which was denoting to that psychological empowerment negatively and significantly affected work engagement. The tested model with the addition of mediator psychological empowerment's results of prime (c') analysis (β=-.22, *P*-Value<.05) demonstrate the decreased estimate and impact of an independent variable over dependent variable significantly reduced and converted into insignificant which in turn satisfied the full mediation condition suggested by (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study was to examine the effects of workplace ostracism on work engagement complemented by psychological empowerment in the Pakistani banking sector. All proposed hypotheses were accepted according to the structural equation model results. Thus, this study showed that workplace expulsion significantly negatively impacts work engagement in Pakistan's banking sector. It has also been demonstrated that workplace ostracism significantly negatively impacts psychological empowerment in Pakistan's banking sector; the findings of a similar study conducted by (Javed et al., 2018) parallel the results. This study confirms that psychological empowerment significantly and positively affects staff's work engagement in the Pakistani banking sector, and the results are similar to those conducted by Meng & Sun (2019). Conclusively, the research verified that mediator psychological empowerment fully mediates the negative effect of workplace ostracism on staff's work engagement in the Pakistani banking sector. The results are parallel with the results of a similar type of research conducted by Qatrunnada & Parahyanti (2019). This research is useful for the Human resources department and policymakers of HBL, NBP, and UBL banks in order to understand the important psychological construct of workplace ostracism and its negative impacts on employees' performance and engagement. Furthermore, the results of this study may help increase bankers' engagement in their work by psychologically strengthening them.

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