EFFECT OF WORKPLACE OSTRACISM ON COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOR---PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT BREACH AS THE MEDIATOR

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Abstract

As a kind of negative behavior, Counterproductive work behavior is general and can cause great harm to the organization. Therefore, how to reduce counterproductive work behavior is of great theoretical and practical significance. To explore effective measures, this study observes the relationship between workplace ostracism and counterproductive work behavior. Based on the frustration-attack model proposed by Berkowitz and Spector, it further analyzes the mediating role of psychological contract breach. Based on the investigation of 461 employees and 172 corresponding supervisors from eight Chinese companies, the hierarchical regression analysis showed that: Workplace ostracism has significant positive effect on counterproductive work behavior, and psychological contract breach plays a mediating role in the relationship between workplace ostracism and counterproductive work behavior. The result provides a new theoretical perspective for further understanding the relationship of workplace ostracism and employees' counterproductive work behavior.

> **Keywords:** Workplace ostracism, Psychological contract breach, Counterproductive work behavior

Introduction

Counterproductive work behavior is the employee's deliberate behavior that violates organizational rules and threatens the interests of members of the organization or those of the organization (Bennett, 1995). In the past decades, counterproductive behaviors of employees in the workplace has become a focus of concern for scholars as well as for the business community. According to early research data from European and American researchers, 33% to 75% of employees have ever deceived colleagues or sabotaged public property (Harper, 1990), and nearly 50% of women have been sexually harassed in the workplace, and even 7% of employees have been threatened by colleagues in the workplace (Gruber, 1990). At the same time, such counterproductive work behaviors exert pernicious negative impact on the organization. For instance, Schneider's statistics (1994) showed that employee theft caused losses of 200 billion U.S. dollars per year.

What are the factors that cause the employee's counterproductive work behavior? By sorting out previous research literature, we found that previous researchers divided the antecedent variables causing counterproductive behavior into two categories. The first category is the difference in individual characteristics (including age, gender, position, personality, attribution preference, etc.). The second is the organizational situation (including salary system, leadership style, organizational culture, etc.). However, Peterson (2002) pointed out after research that the direct influence of differences in individual characteristics on counterproductive behavior is not so significant, so he called for researchers to explore the situational factors that influence individual counterproductive behaviors from the perspective of organizational context. Based on this conclusion, this study answer the research questions in terms of workplace ostracism. For workplace ostracism is a typical "cold violence in office" which prevails in organizations, and it directly threatens the employee's needs of individual meaningful existence, such as the needs for affiliation, self-esteem, and control, so it has a tremendous negative impact on the psychology, attitudes, and behaviors of the members of the organization. This has become a social affliction.

Second, although some scholars have pointed out that workplace ostracism may lead to counterproductive behaviors of employees, the intrinsic link between workplace ostracism and counterproductive work behavior may be complex. Therefore, the internal operating mechanism must be further examined. Based on the frustration-attack model proposed by Berkowitz (1989), we propose that psychological contract breach as a "key work attitude"

(Morrison, 1997) may be an important intervening variable linking workplace ostracism and counterproductive work behavior. Related researches have also pointed out that psychological contract breach have many negative effects on employees' work attitudes and behaviors, including reducing organizational citizenship behavior and organizational commitment, increasing conflict behavior, and even decreasing the willingness to stay (Coyle-Shapiro, 2002). Psychological contract breach is a key issue influencing organizational performance research. By constructing and verifying the theoretical model of relationship between workplace ostracism and counterproductive work behavior, this study responds to the point that workplace ostracism is the influencing factor of counterproductive behavior. It also considers the possible mediating role of psychological contract breach in the relationship between workplace ostracism and counterproductive work behavior. This is of great significance to the unveiling of the "black box" between workplace ostracism and counterproductive work behavior.

Literature review

Workplace ostracism

The concept of "workplace ostracism" originates from social ostracism. Sliver (1994) uses the concept of "social

ostracism" in studying unemployment and poverty in France. He pointed out that social ostracism refers to the rupture of the relationship between the individual and the society as a whole, namely, the process in which an individual is rejected by others or a social group. Based on the concept of social ostracism, Ferris (2008) puts forward "workplace ostracism". He proposes that workplace ostracism is the manifestation of social ostracism in the organization. The concept refers to perceived neglect, indifference, refusal, and exclusion from others. Such behaviors include one's being neglected by others, one's requests being treated with indifference, others' avoid from contact with them (including eye contact and language exchange), being excluded from group activities, and hidden by others. Robinson et al. (2013) defined workplace ostracism as individuals or groups being neglected or forgotten by others and unable to participate in working relationships. This concept contains the following two meanings: first, workplace ostracism is a subjective personal perception and experience. Whether being excluded or not in actual work and how the level it is depends on the individual's subjective evaluation. Second, workplace ostracism is a cold violence that generally does not involve verbal abuse and physical assault. Recent research shows that workplace ostracism has a significant impact on the attitudes, behaviors of the individual and organizational

performance. Twenge (2009) pointed out that individuals who are excluded from others may have aggressive behaviors and even less involved in helping behaviors or prosocial behaviors. Zadro (2013) found that individuals who experience ostracism in the workplace have negative emotions such as sadness and disappointment because their basic needs such as belonging and self-esteem are not met. Hitlan (2014) showed that employees' workplace ostracism and mental health were negatively correlated. The response of the activation area of cerebral cortex of the ostracized individuals was consistent with that of physical pain, and it caused depression, loneliness, sadness and other negative emotions.

Counterproductive work behavior

Taylor (1911), he has noticed counterproductive behaviors in a study on productivity improvement, such as the phenomenon of workers' dawdling on the job and the threatening of colleagues to absenteeism. Bennett (1995) defines it as a deliberate act that violates organizational rules and threatens the interests of members of the organization or of the organization. Gruys (1999) summarizes counterproductive behavior into 11 categories: destruction of property, absenteeism, alcohol abuse, poor quality of work, abuse of time and resources, drug abuse, attacking colleagues, unsafe behaviors, information abuse, theft, misconduct, etc. After 2000, due to the rapid changes of the economy and society, enterprises are facing more and more problems, and researches related to counterproductive behaviors appear in large numbers. Many empirical studies have found that organizational contextual factors are important source of counterproductive behaviors. Hershcovis (2010) pointed out that organizational contextual constraints are linked to organizational violations, and interpersonal conflicts are linked to interpersonal violations.

Psychological contract breach

The psychological contract is the psychological basis for the social exchange between employees and the organization, and it is often used to describe and explain the most important analytical framework for employee-organization relationships (Taylor, 2005).However, with the changes in the business environment of enterprises, the competition between enterprises has become increasingly intensified. Many companies have to reform their organizations in order to survive and develop, which increases much uncertainty (such as work safety, career development uncertainty, etc.). Traditional employment relationship in which working hard can gain stable job has changed, while now employees think from their own point of view that the responsibility of the company is not

fulfilled. In such context, psychological contract breaches frequently (Robinson & Morrison), 1995).Psychological contract breach has many negative effects on employees' work attitudes and behaviors, including reducing organizational citizenship behavior, decreasing organizational commitment, increasing conflict behaviors, and even reducing the willingness to stay at work (Coyle-Shapiro, 2002). Therefore, psychological contract breach is one of the key issues in the research of organizational performance (Gues, 2004).

The "frustration-attack" theory

The "frustration-attack" theory of American psychologists Bollard et al. (1939) argued that attacks are usually the result of setbacks. The production of attacks is usually premised on occurring of setbacks. Therefore, when a person encounters setbacks in an attempt to achieve a goal, it is possible to launch an attack.Berkowitz (1989) supplemented on this view and believed that frustration produces aggressive behaviors only when it reaches a level at which negative emotion appears. Berkowitz (1989) revealed the implicit affective agent in the "frustration-attack" model and drew a new cognitive connection model of "frustration event-negative emotion-aggressive behavior". Therefore, it is not the frustration event that really works. It is the state of mind to deal with frustration that does. Miles et al. (2002) believed that the difference between counterproductive work behavior and organizational citizenship behavior lies in whether the individual faces organizational conditions with negative emotions or positive emotions. Positive emotions generate organizational citizenship behaviors, while negative emotions are important factors leading to counterproductive behaviors (Spector and Fox, 2002). And Bolin and Heatherly (2001) specifically studied the correspondence between negative emotions and various counterproductive behaviors. According to the "frustration-attack" model, this study holds that workplace ostracism, as a contextual factor of experiencing setbacks by employees, can influence the perception and emotion (such as psychological contract breach) of employees and ultimately affect the employee's behavior (counterproductive work behavior).

Research hypothesis

The relation between workplace ostracism and counterproductive work behavior

Workplace ostracism is a negative form of interpersonal interaction. It is a painful experience for the ostracized.

Ferris (2008) believes that workplace ostracism is the feeling that employees are rejected and ignored by others in the workplace. For example, the employee is neglected, treated indifferently, or excluded from collective activities, avoided from contact, and hided from public affairs. This definition contains threefold meanings: first, workplace ostracism is a kind of subjective perception and experience of the individual. The level of ostracism in practical work depends on the subjective evaluation by the individual. Second, workplace ostracism is a form of cold violence. It does not generally involve verbal abuse and physical attacks. Third, the source of ostracism is multiple. It can be a colleague or a superior leader.

Previous research results have shown that workplace ostracism can lead employees to show a series of non-adaptive behaviors. Twenge (2001) found through empirical research that ostracized employees tend to have aggressive behaviors. But Baumeister's (2007) study found that employees who were ostracized from the workplace showed less prosocial behavior or helping behavior and were more inclined to have self-defeating behavior. Hitlan & Noel (2009) conducted a questionnaire survey of 105 employees in a public service in the Midwestern United States and found that there was significant positive correlation between peer ostracism and interpersonal counterproductive behavior, and there was positive correlation between superior ostracism and organizational counterproductive behavior.

Workplace ostracism, as a negative interpersonal interaction experience, directly affects the employee's perception of interactive fairness. Unfairness is an important predictive variable leading to the employee's counterproductive behavior, which has been confirmed by empirical research (Fox, 2001). The social exchange theory holds that all social activities of people aims at exchanging. Social exchange includes material exchange and spiritual exchange. The exchange between people follows the principle of reciprocity and fairness. Therefore, people always hope to get reciprocal emotional respect, trust, and commitment in the process of social interaction and interaction. If others are friendly, they will also return goodwill and vice versa. Therefore, if the employee is ostracized by others in the workplace, such ostracism will destroy the social exchange relationship between the employee and his/her colleagues or that between he/she and the organization, which will inevitably lead to the sense of fairness and imbalance, and finally bring about counterproductive work behavior. Thus the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1: workplace ostracism is positively related to employee counterproductive work behavior.

The effect of workplace ostracism on psychological contract breach

Psychological contract refers to a series of unexpressed mutual expectations affecting the relationship between the employee and the organization (Levinson, 1962) Schein (1965) defines psychological contract as the sum of mutual expectations between the individual and the organization. Psychological contract does not only refer to expectations, but also includes the commitment and reciprocity of responsibilities and obligations. It contains what employees believe they deserve (Li Yuan & Guo Dejun, 2002). When joining an organization or being at work, the employee has expectations for the organization. When an disappointed event occurs in the organization, psychological contract breach is inevitable. Generally, the employee's expectations for the organization include: (1) Expectation for belonging. Since humans have social attributes, they expect to belong to a specific organization or group, and to maintain social connections. However, workplace ostracism cuts off the social relations between the employee and others, thus undermining the expectation of belonging. (2) Expectation for self-esteem. Self-esteem is an important factor for maintaining and generating positive emotions (sense of achievement, sense of well-being, self-confidence,

etc.). Workplace ostracism hurts the self-esteem of the ostracized employee, because ostracism in the workplace implies that the ostracized person is unpopular or insignificant. (3) Expectation for control. All of men want to maintain control of the circumstances around to reduce the influence of the surrounding uncertainty. Workplace ostracism undermines the employee's sense of control in interpersonal interaction, for no matter what the ostracized has said or done, there is no response from others. (4) Expectation for meaningful existence. Workplace ostracism deprives the ostracized person of the meaning of existence in the organization, because ostracism often means "social death" in the organization (Solomon, 1991). The above analysis indicates that workplace ostracism makes the excluded feel no concern, support, and approval from colleagues or leaders. As a result, individuals in the organization are unable to establish good interpersonal relationships with colleagues or supervisors, and cannot find value of self-existence. Without opportunities for mutual care, employees' emotional needs are not met and their own values are not recognized. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2 : workplace ostracism is positively related to the psychological contract breach of employees.

The effect of psychological contract breach on counterproductive work behavior.

Psychological contract is the foundation of employment relationship (Schein, 1965). It consists of employees' expectations and beliefs. Psychological contract breach means that the individual believes hat something less than expected occurs in the organization. A large number of studies have found that if an individual perceives psychological contract breach, the sense of unfairness is produced (Morrison, 1997), and the sense of mutual benefit between the employee and the organization will significantly decline (Turnley, 1999). According to Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) and Fairness Theory (Greensberg, 1990), employees will compare their input to the organization with their own income. If they are unreasonable, they will take corresponding actions to balance themselves. Robert and Schalk (2007) explained psychological contract from the perspective of cognitive model and pointed out that it can be measured by two indicators: acceptable limit and tolerance limit. If the disappointing event happening in the organization exceeds the limit of the individual's tolerance, the psychological contract breaks down, negative emotions and behaviors follows, and even the employee may abandon the employment relationship with the organization, namely, the employee may resolve to dismission. Rousseau's (1995) empirical study proves that after psychological contract breach occurs, it will change the previous interaction between the employee and the organization. The research of Chiu & Peng (2008) shows that when psychological contract breach occurs, it will increase hostile behaviors and organizational deviant behaviors. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Perception of psychological contract breach is positively related to employee's counterproductive work behavior.

The mediating role of psychological contract breach

Psychological contract refers to the sum of a series of unexpressed mutual expectations affecting the relationship between the individual and the organization. To some extent, the individual's perceived organizational support meets the individual's social and emotional needs (compliment, recognition, support, etc.). This helps individuals to incorporate organizational identity into self-cognition and to embed themselves in the organization, and they are willing to make extra efforts for the achievement of organizational goals. When employees feel that the organization recognize their values and care about their welfare, they will do

their best to help the organization accomplish the organizational goals. However, workplace ostracism sabotages the reciprocal relationship of mutual benefit between the organization and the employee. Ostracized employees are ignored, marginalized and isolated by others in the organization. Their emotional needs are not satisfied, resulting in cognitive misunderstanding of their identity in the organization, loss of sense of belonging and sense of identity. Furthermore, it will cause the reduction of sense of support from the organization, and the impediment to employees' willingness to contribute to the organization. On contrary, the ostracized employees do not get the support and value recognition from their supervisors and colleagues in their work, and even do not acquire their legitimate interests. As a result, they do not feel the support, care and recognition from the organization. The employee will alienate from the organization, They are no longer concerned about the organization's goals and lose the motivation to contribute to the development of the organization as they lose organizational citizenship. Wei Feng (2015) also pointed out that when employees are ostracized, it shatters their expectations. In order to balance the emotional damage, they will revenge on the organization by the principle of "reciprocating teeth" and of negative reciprocity, which may lead to counterproductive work behaviors.Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4: Psychological contract breach plays a mediating role between workplace ostracism and counterproductive work behavior.
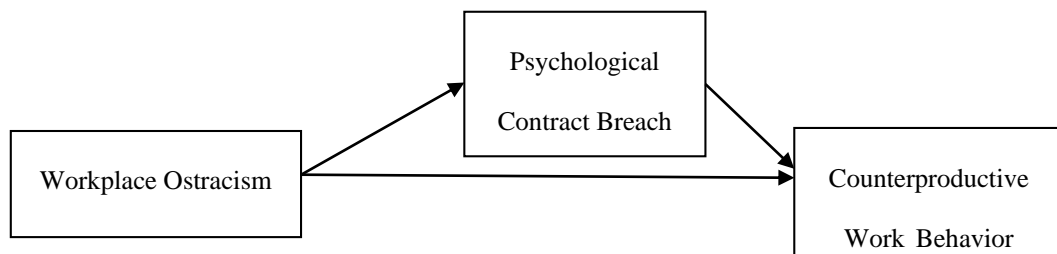

Figure 1 Theoretical model of the relationship between workplace ostracism and counterproductive work behavior

Research design

Study samples

In this study, I adopted survey approach to investigate more than 8 enterprises in the province where the researcher was located. In order to avoid homologous error and the subjectivity of work Behavior, the questionnaire is divided into 2 types: leadership questionnaire and employee questionnaire. The leadership questionnaire is filled out by the leader for evaluation of employee' work Behavior, and the employee questionnaire is filled out by the employee. Through the leadership questionnaires, the dependent variable data, i.e., the data of employees' counterproductive work behavior, are mainly collected, which can reflect the counterproductive work behavior of employees more authentically than the self-assessment of employees. In order to improve the quality of the questionnaires and reduce the deviation of the respondents' understanding of the questions, the researchers contacted the subjects before issuing the questionnaires, prepared the list of interviewees' information and coded the list to ensure the one-to-one matching between the leadership questionnaires and the employee questionnaires. Then, the staff will guide the completion of questionnaires on site and collect them on the spot. In this survey, 517 sets of questionnaires were issued, 493sets were completed, 32 sets of invalid questionnaires were eliminated, and 461 sets were finally valid, and the validity rate is 93.5%.

Scale selection

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs in the questionnaire, all mature measurement scales were chosen. Workplace Ostracism were measured by the scale of Jiang Jiang, Lu Zhengrong& Zhang Wen (2011) with 10-items.In this scale, self-evaluation (T1) was performed by the employees, such as the item "Leaders don't care about me". The items were scored by the 5-point Likert scale. The internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) of the scale reached 0.86 (greater than 0.70 which was commonly used in management studies).

Psychological Contract BreachThis study adopted the 8-item scale designed by Guo Yuan An (2002) to measure the psychological contract breach of employees. In the scale, self-evaluated was performed by employees (T1), such as the item "The company create harmonious interpersonal relationship". And the coefficient of internal consistency reliability (Cronbach alpha) reached 0.89.

Counterproductive Work BehaviorIn this study, the 18-item scale developed by

Yang & Diefendorff (2009) was used to measure counterproductive work behavior. The supervisor gave the evaluation (T2) in items such as "He intends to slow down the work". The items were scored by 5‑point Ranker scale. The internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) of the scale reached 0.92.

Control variablesThe control variables of this study mainly include age, gender, education background and duration with the current superior.

Data analysis and results

Correlation analysis of variables

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficients of the variables.From the results given in Table 1, there is a positive correlation between workplace ostracism and employees' psychological contract breach (r=0.351, P<0.01) and workplace ostracism is positively related with counterproductive work behavior (r=0.406, P<0.01). There is also a positive correlation between psychological contract breach and counterproductive work behavior (r = 0.418, p < 0.01). These results preliminarily support the hypothesis of this study.

Table 1 Description of statistics and correlation analysis

Variables	Var1	Var2	Var3	Var4	Var5	Var6	Var7
1. Age							
2. Gender	.005						
3. Education Background	-.223*	-.133*					
4. Duration with the current superior	-.135**	-.010	.199**				
5.Workplace Ostracism	.021**	.043	-.174*	-.010			
6.Counterproductive Work Behavior	.043	.012	-.216*	.050	.406**		
7.Psychological Contract Breach	.075	.082	-.109*	.020	.351**	.418**	
Mean	35.57	1.43	2.84	3.18	2.65	2.27	3.35
SD	5.35	0.51	0.78	1.23	0.88	0.64	0.75

Note: The correlations of **at level 0.01 (double endings) and *at grade 0.05 (double endings) are significant. Var1: Age, Var2: Gender, Var3: Education Background, Var4: Duration with the current superior, Var5: Workplace Ostracism, Var6: Counterproductive Work Behavior, Var7: Psychological Contract Breach

Hypothesis testing

According to the paired data received by the leadership questionnaire and the employee questionnaire, this study used the method of hierarchical regression analysis to perform linear regression analysis using SPSS23.0. The results of the regression are shown in Table 2.

The principal effect

H1 suggests that workplace ostracism has a positive effect on employees' counterproductive work Behavior. In order to verify this hypothesis, the counterproductive work Behavior was regarded as the dependent variable, and the control variables (gender, age, educational background, duration of working with current superiors) were added successively to the regression equation. According to Model 4, Workplace ostracism was significantly and positively correlated with employees' counterproductive work behavior ($r = 0.479$, $p < 0.01$), so hypothesis H1 is verified.

Mediation effect

In order to verify the mediation effect of psychological contract breach between workplace ostracism and employees' counterproductive work Behavior, the four steps verifying mediation effect proposed by Baron & Kenny (1986) was adopted in this study. According to Model 2 in Table 2, the positive correlation between workplace ostracism and psychological contract breach was significant ($\beta=0.279$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported. In Model 5, psychological contract breach is significantly and positively correlated with the employees' counterproductive work Behavior ($\beta=0.436$, $P<0.01$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 is verified. When psychological contract breach was introduced on the basis of Model 4, it was found that the influence of workplace ostracism on employees' counterproductive work Behavior was weakened in Model 6 (The value of β decreased from 0.479 to 0.323, $p < 0.05$). That is to say, psychological contract breach played a partial role in mediating the relationship between workplace ostracism and employees' counterproductive work Behavior. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Table 2 Hierarchical regression results

Variable	psychological contract breach		counterproductive work behavior			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Controlled Variable						
Age	.045	.054	.006*	.008*	-.025	.003
Gender	.071*	.059*	.021	-.040	.052*	.034*
Education Background	-.048**	-.014*	-.118*	-.060	-.097	.057
Duration with the current superior	.021	.018	.005	.012	.014	.015
Independent Variable						
workplace ostracism		.279**		.479**		.323**
Intervening Variable						
psychological contract breach					.436**	.315**
R^2	.020**	.178**	.047**	.420**	.207**	.448**
ΔR^2	.020**	.158**	.047**	.173**	.160**	.028**
F	2.302**	16.355**	5.653**	45.736**	23.723**	42.571**
ΔF	2.302**	43.601**	5.653**	54.740**	91.514**	23.372**

*Note: correlations of **at level 0.01 (double endings) and *at grade 0.05 (double endings) are significant. M1-6 represents 6 different regression models.*

Conclusion and discussion

Counterproductive behavior is an emerging research topic in recent years, and it has attracted the attention of scholars because of its widespread existence in the organization and its harm to the performance of the organization. Recent researches in this field focus on the individual level. There are few studies on organizational contextual factors that cause counterproductive behaviors. To this end, this study took 461 employees and 172 leaders from 8 Chinese companies as the research objects to explore the effect of workplace ostracism on employees' counterproductive behaviors.

This study first verifies that workplace ostracism has a significant positive effect on employees' counterproductive work behavior. The results of this study show that ostracism from the workplace can predict counterproductive behavior. From the perspective of social exchange, maintenance of exchanges between two parties is based on mutual benefits to

both parties. When employees encounter ostracism, they will feel being marginalized by the organization, and the good exchange relationship between the employee and the organization is broken. The employee usually chooses retaliation of counterproductive behavior in order to reduce the sense of imbalance.

Secondly, this study reveals that workplace ostracism has a significant positive effect on employees' psychological contract breach. When employees encounter repulsive behaviors, their sense of psychological contract will increase. Compared with the previous antecedent study of psychological contract breach, this paper is innovative since it explores effect of workplace ostracism on employees' psychological contract breach by taking workplace ostracism as negative interpersonal behavior. Finally, the study reveals that psychological contract breach plays a partial mediating role between workplace ostracism and employees' counterproductive work behavior.

Contribution and implications

This research is based on predecessors and has some innovations. First, even if workplace Ostracism、Psychological contract breach and counterproductive work behavior have been separately studied in the past, but their relationship is still a research gap, which is focused in

this paper, it might contribute to the theory of their relationship. Second, the introduction of workplace Ostracism as a predictor of employee counterproductive work behavior into the existing research system enriches the cognitive path that affects the causes of counterproductive work behavior for us to explore the causes of counterproductive work behavior of employees from the perspective of organizational context.

Workplace ostracism is a kind of workplace "cold" violence. Although it may not cause apparent physical harm to the employee as the "hot" violence in the workplace, its psychological harm to the ostracized employees may be more serious than the physical harm to some extent. Recent research shows that ostracized employees tend to have negative emotions such as perturbation, irritability, and depression (Wu Longzeng et al., 2012). Workplace ostracism can lead to the cognitive burden and self-negation of the ostracized, and prolonged interpersonal loneliness can lead the ostracized to form a self-centered "defense shell" in order to prevent further hurt. And lack of sense of belonging and identity, the ostracized will alienate from the organization and become indifferent to it, and even do something not conducive to the development of the organization. Therefore, companies should pay full attention to the harm caused by workplace ostracism, and actively prevent workplace ostracism or take

measures to reduce the negative impact of workplace ostracism. The specific measures are as follows: first, companies can restrict ostracizing employees' repulsive behaviors by explicit rules and regulations to reduce the ostracizing behaviors, and punish those who have severely sabotaged the harmonious working atmosphere of the organization according to rules and regulations. Second, companies should encourage fair competition, advocate teamwork, oppose circle culture and small cliquism, promote win-win cooperation, and foster a harmonious ethical atmosphere in the organization. Such practice will not only increase corporate cohesion, but also strengthen employees' sense of belonging and loyalty. The most important is that it can effectively prevent ostracism in the workplace. Thirdly, for those employees who have already been ostracized by the workplace, companies should implement programs of psychological assistance for employees in a timely manner, employ professional psychotherapists to offer psychological counseling and psychological treatment for the ostracized employees, help employees eliminate psychological concerns and doubts, and reorganize their identities in the organization. Furthermore, they should give employees care and recognition, reduce the psychological pressure on employees and help them out of the shadow of being ostracized as soon as possible.

Research limitations and outlook

Compared with other studies, this study has the advantage of rigor in research design. The paired sample design and multi-source data collection has effectively reduced the influence of common method variance and made the results more relevant to reality. However, it should also be noted that this study inevitably has certain limitations due to human and material constraints.

First, the problem of sample distribution. Due to the vast territory and limited research time and funds, the geographical distribution of samples was not very reasonable though the subjects of this study met the statistical requirements in terms of sample size. The sample data of this study is only from Guangxi, China. If the coverage of sample selection is larger, the research results obtained may be more persuasive. Future research can increase sample coverage and conduct cross-regional comparative analysis, which brings new research ideas to study of workplace ostracism.

Second, this study does not have a fine division of staff groups. In fact, different groups of people have different impact from counterproductive work behavior. The values of the new employees represented by the post-1980s generation and the post-1990s generation are significantly different from those of the old ones. These factors may influence

the emergence of counterproductive work behavior, which also remained to be verified. Future research can add the counterproductive work behavior caused by differences in culture and values to the structural research framework.

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