

## From Ostracism to Expediency: The Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion

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*The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee expediency. Additionally, investigated the mediation effects of emotional exhaustion. The conceptual framework developed in the current investigation is substantiated by affective event theory. The data was gathered from 329 employees employed in private hospitals in Pakistan. Their consent was taken to fill questionnaire related to workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion. However, the employee expediency questionnaire was completed by immediate supervisors, 67 immediate supervisors were requested to rate their employee's expediency. On average 1 supervisor rated 5 employees performing duties under them. The data collection was based on dyads. The hypotheses that were developed in this study have been confirmed by the statistical results. The direct and indirect paths were verified by the results. The theoretical and practical implications are highlighted by the research. Additionally, the limitations and direction of future research are underlined.*

## 1. Introduction

Known ethical crises all around have revealed the general frequency of unethical activity in businesses and the significant consequences these businesses suffer (Niven & Healy, 2016). Recent events, such as the debate about the Boeing 737 Max, show how frequently companies give in to budgetary constraints and short fixes (Yglesias 2019). Likewise, Wirecard AG, a financial services business, had its chief executive officer, chief operating officer, and board of directors found guilty of unethical behavior (Aziz, 2020). These events expose the great influence unethical behavior in the workplace has.

Scholars claim that methodical investigation on unethical behavior started in the 1980s (Treviño et al., 2014). The growing interest in unethical behavior over time has drawn the attention of practitioners as well as academics. This growing attention on workplace ethics over the past 39 years has generated a significant corpus of research including both qualitative and quantitative results (Ahn et al., 2018; Kalshoven et al., 2016). Experts have devoted the last three decades to investigating the causes and consequences of unethical behavior connected to employment since the negative effects of such behavior are evident (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010). But most of the current studies have concentrated on overt unethical behavior, so covert unethical behavior is rather neglected (Eissa, 2020; Greenbaum et al., 2018).

More recently, expediency has been found to be a covert unethical behavior in the workplace. At all hierarchical levels, expediency is present and can be negative (Jonason & O'Connor, 2017; Parks et al., 2010). Though often subtle, expediency hurts companies (Ren et al., 2021). Researchers have underlined that speed is understudied and needs more research even if its possible negative effects are known to exist. This study mostly focuses on employee expediency (EE) and investigates how it relates to occupational ostracism. Parks et al. (2010) did observe, though, that managers might often turn to expediency to improve company performance. Employees who use expediency are those who cut corners to finish tasks faster or manipulate performance statistics to seem more successful.

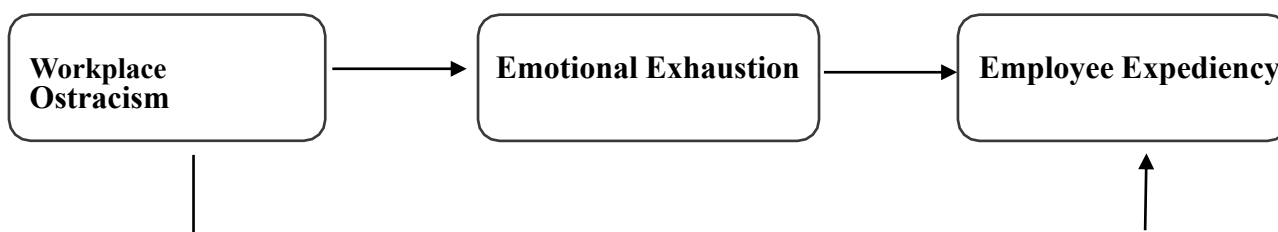
This paper investigates the link between employee expediency—less morally severe but more common than other forms of unethical behavior—and workplace ostracism. Research on employee expediency is somewhat lacking yet, therefore academics have underlined the need to look at the antecedents and effects of employee expediency (Greenbaum et al., 2018). This research answers the demand for such kind of inquiry.

## 2. Literature Review

This study's conceptual framework is based on Affective Event theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) which suggests the associations between employees' internal influences, and their responses in the workplace. Although the main literature on emotions believes that events cause changes in emotional states, personalities and views on how good or negative events are understood may vary (Weiss & Beal, 2005). Based on the theory, the researcher contends in this study that workplace ostracism is an event that will cause an emotional reaction in the form of

emotional exhaustion and would therefore influence personal behavior. Those who experience ostracism and feel emotionally worn out will begin to show employee expediency at work. Furthermore, emotional intelligence can help to balance the relationship between emotional tiredness and workplace ostracism since elements that define the personality of the employee will determine how the event at work is seen by them (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

**Figure No 1: Conceptual Framework**



## 2.1 Workplace Ostracism and Employee Expediency

Workplace ostracism can lead to employees engaging in deviant behavior. Deviant behavior in the workplace refers to voluntary actions that go against important organizational norms, posing a threat to the organization and its members (Robinson & Bennett, 1995, p. 556). This behavior is typically seen as negative (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Workplace ostracism acts as a stressor that disrupts normal communication among coworkers (Downey and Feldman, 1996; Ferris et al., 2008; Matt et al., 2020), causing employees to exhibit deviant behavior as a way to alleviate stress and conserve their resources (Koeske et al., 1993; Cui et al., 2021).

Through deviant behaviors, employees not only express dissatisfaction with the organization but also relieve workplace pressures for self-protection. Furthermore, since workplace ostracism can be seen as a form of "cold violence" within the organization, employees may retaliate through negative reciprocity (Ferris et al., 2008), engaging in tit-for-tat behaviors. Employee expediency is also a form of deviant/ unethical behavior thus we hypothesize following

***H1: Workplace ostracism positively and significantly affects employee expediency***

## 2.2 Workplace Ostracism and Emotional Exhaustion

Workplace ostracism serves as a significant interpersonal stressor that undermines cognitive, psychological, and emotional resources. It diminishes employees' self-worth, control, sense of belonging, and sense of purpose, thereby impeding their ability to navigate potentially hostile environments (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009). In response, employees often resort to cognitive avoidant coping behaviors to mitigate the discomfort caused by threatening individuals and situations (Tepper et al., 2007, p. 1171). This coping mechanism involves accepting the situation

as unchangeable and deciding that the basic circumstances cannot be altered (Cronkite & Moos, 1995, p. 578). Such coping strategies impose cognitive, emotional, or behavioral demands on employees and are associated with high levels of exhaustion and cynicism, leading to the symptoms of burnout (Chen & Cunradi, 2008). Based on this understanding, it is hypothesized

***H2: Workplace ostracism positively and significantly affects emotional exhaustion***

### **2.3 Emotional Exhaustion and Employee Expediency**

This study tries to suggest that emotional exhaustion can predict an individual's expedient behavior. When employees experience social exclusion in the workplace, they often hesitate to speak up due to the potential risks and threats to their perceived safety of voice. Instead, they may engage in intentional and proactive behaviors aimed at self-protection, known as defensive silence (Schlenker & Weigold, 1989). This involves carefully considering alternatives and consciously choosing to withhold ideas, information, and opinions as a personal strategy.

However, employees face a dilemma as workplace norms typically encourage information sharing, conflicting with their safety concerns that prompt defensive silence (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). The presence of defensive silence indicates that employees' needs for safety and belongingness are not adequately met. Such behavior creates significant strain, requiring active inhibition to shield oneself from potential harm. This process consumes valuable psychological and emotional resources, contributing to feelings of emotional overextension, commonly known as emotional exhaustion (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Ultimately, emotionally exhausted employees adopt an avoidant stance to distance themselves from job demands, which can lead to interpersonal deviance (Van der Linden et al., 2005). Thus, it is hypothesized

***H3: Emotional exhaustion positively influences employee expediency***

### **2.4 Emotional Exhaustion as a Mediator**

Emotionally exhausted employees experience diminished cognitive, psychological, and emotional resources, impairing their ability to effectively manage interpersonal and work demands. This state may lead them to intentionally slow down their work pace, damage company property, tarnish their reputations, incur financial costs, or share confidential company information. Such employees employ an avoidance coping strategy to distance themselves from job demands, often resulting in deviant behaviors (Van der Linden et al., 2005). Existing research also suggests that emotional exhaustion contributes to interpersonal dysfunction in the workplace, such as interpersonal deviance and counterproductive work behaviors (Jaarsveld et al., 2010).

Keeping with the line of discussion, the researcher suggests that emotional exhaustion will be that affective reaction, which develops the bridge between employee expediency and workplace ostracism. We thus hypothesize the following:

***H 4: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee expediency***

### 3. Methodology

The data was collected from the private sector hospitals located in the major cities of Pakistan. The sample size was 329 employees working in these private hospitals. The data was in the form of dyads because employee expediency was rated by employees in supervisory positions. More specifically 67 supervisors were requested to rate their employee's expediency. On average one supervisor rated five employees performing duties under their supervision thus the ratio of 1:5.

First of all the concerned authorities in the listed top hospitals were contacted and after seeking permission the data collection process started. Few private hospitals regrated to grant permission for data collection. Therefore, they were removed from the sample. Most of the hospitals supported data collection. The sample was from private healthcare because Private hospitals in Pakistan improve healthcare by offering high-quality care, innovative equipment, and specialty therapies that governmental hospitals may not offer. However, they also pose issues including increasing costs, access inequities, and ethical lapses.

#### 3.1 Measures

##### 3.2 Workplace Ostracism

Workplace ostracism was assessed using a ten-item scale created by Ferris et al. (2008).

##### 3.3 Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion was measured using a seven-item scale developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981).

##### 3.4 Employee Expediency

Employee expediency was assessed using a four-item scale developed by Greenbaum et al. (2018). Supervisors assessed the subordinate's expediency. All scale items were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

### 4. Results

The current study used SmartPLS 4.1.0.1 for data analysis. Hari et al., (2017) recommended a two-step approach to data analysis in SmartPLS i.e. (i) assessment of the measurement model and (ii) assessment of the structural model.

#### 4.1 Assessment of Measurement Model

The measurement model evaluation involved analyzing the (i) factor loading, with a threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2021); (ii) internal consistency through composite reliability (CR) to assure reliability, with values above 0.70 being considered acceptable (Gefen et al., 2000); (iii) measure of convergent validity was determined using the average variance extracted (AVE), with a minimum threshold value of 0.50 (Bagozzi et al., 1991) and (iv) discriminant validity using the Heterotrait and Monotrait ratio (HTMT) method (Henseler et al., 2015). The recommended threshold value is 0.9. It is suggested that the value of the rest variable should be lower than 0.9.

Figure No 2: Measurement Model

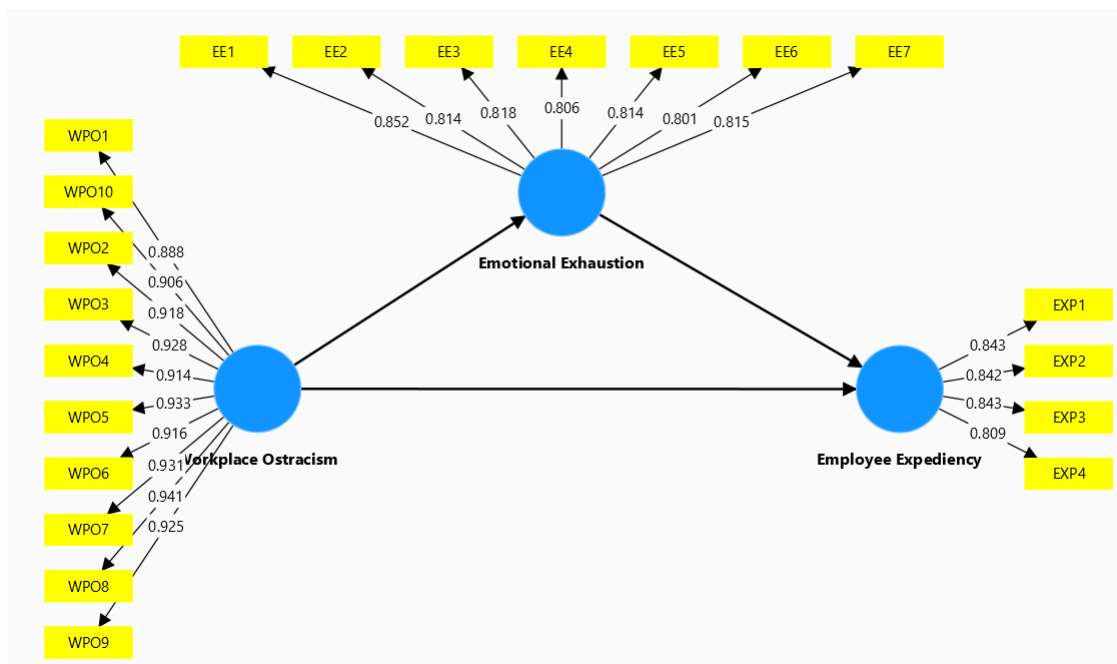


Figure 2 demonstrates a measurement model indicating factor loading. All the values are above 0.7.

Table 1 demonstrates factor loading, AVE, and CR all the values are meeting the threshold values suggested by scholars. Moreover, Table 2 represents the HTMT Ratio which confirms the discriminant validity. Thus, statistical analysis ensures the reliability and validity of the measurement model.

Table No 1: Factor Loading, AVE, and CR

Variables	Items	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
WO	WO1	0.888	0.847	0.982
	WO2	0.918		
	WO3	0.928		
	WO4	0.914		
	WO5	0.933		
	WO6	0.916		
	WO7	0.931		
	WO8	0.941		
	WO9	0.925		
	WO10	0.906		
EE	EE1	0.852	0.668	0.934
	EE2	0.814		
	EE3	0.818		
	EE4	0.806		
	EE5	0.814		

	EE6	0.801		
	EE7	0.815		
<b>Emp Exp</b>	Emp Exp1	0.843		
	Emp Exp2	0.842		
	Emp Exp3	0.843	0.696	0.902
	Emp Exp4	0.809		

**Table No 2: Discriminant Validity**

	<b>EE</b>	<b>Emp Exp</b>
<b>Emp Exp</b>	0.868	
<b>WO</b>	0.567	0.62

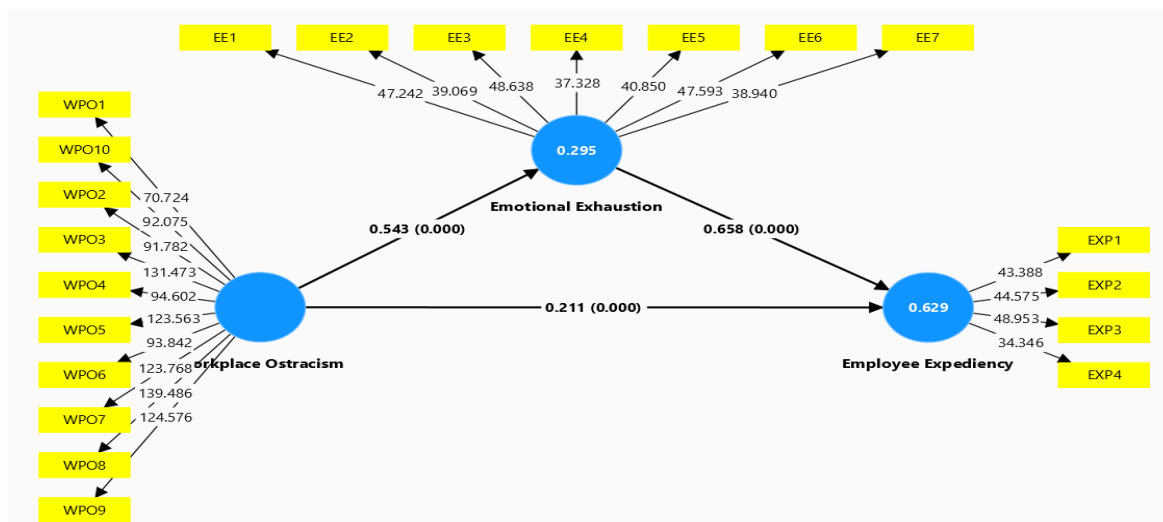
### 4.2 Assessment of Structural Model

The assessment of the structural model included (i) multicollinearity analysis through Variance Inflation Factor (VIF); (ii) hypotheses analysis that includes both direct and indirect paths; (iii) effect size; and, (iv) explanatory Power.

Figure 3 demonstrates the structural model. It determines the t-statistics, R-square, path coefficients, and significance.

**Figure No 3: Structural Model**

Referring to Table 3 which signifies VIF values that are below 5 confirms the absence of



multicollinearity.

**Table No 3: VIF**

	<b>EE</b>	<b>Emp Exp</b>
<b>EE</b>		1.418
<b>WO</b>	1	1.418



Table 4 represents direct paths. To test hypotheses 10000 bootstrapping procedure was employed.

Referring to Table 4 all the direct paths are significant thus H1, H2, and H3 are supported by statistical results.

**Table No 4: Direct Paths**

	Hyp	$\beta$	SD	T statistics	P values
<b>Emotional Exhaustion -&gt; Employee Expediency</b>	<b>H3</b>	0.658	0.046	14.39	0.000
<b>Workplace Ostracism -&gt; Emotional Exhaustion</b>	<b>H2</b>	0.543	0.041	13.163	0.000
<b>Workplace Ostracism -&gt; Employee Expediency</b>	<b>H1</b>	0.211	0.045	12.583	0.000

Table 5 highlights the indirect path. H4 is confirmed by statistical findings, the indirect path is statistically significant along with the direct path proving partial mediation.

**Table No 5: Indirect Path**

Relationship	$\beta$	T stats	P	Relationship	Hyp	$\beta$	T stats	P
Workplace Ostracism -> Employee Expediency	0.569	12.583	0.000	Workplace Ostracism -> Emotional Exhaustion -> Employee Expediency	<b>H4</b>	0.35	7	0.00

Table 6 denotes the effect size. The Research Scholar offers criteria for calculating effect size ( $f^2$ ), which ranges from 0.02 (identifying a minor influence) to 0.15 (suggesting a medium effect) to 0.35 (marking a strong effect). Cohen (1988) defines any result below 0.02 as indicating the absence of the impact. EE impact on Emp Exp is strong; WO effect on EE and Emp Exp is also strong.

**Table No 6: Effect Size**

	EE	Emp Exp
<b>EE</b>		0.824
<b>WO</b>	0.418	0.385

Table 7 demonstrates the values of R-square (coefficient of determination) which refers to the explanatory power of the model. Researchers for instance Hair et al. (2021) have determined that the range of R<sup>2</sup> is between 0 and 1. However, when it comes to primary data, it is recommended that the R<sup>2</sup> is equal to or greater than 0.2. Table 7 shows greater values than 0.2.



Table No 7: Explanatory Power of Model

	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
EE	0.295
<b>Emp Exp</b>	<b>0.629</b>

## 5. Discussion & Conclusion

This study explored ostracism, a concept that has recently attracted considerable interest, and its effects on a significant organizational outcome, i.e., expediency at work. Our first hypothesis was workplace ostracism has a positive and significant relationship with employee expediency based on previous research we hypothesized that workplace ostracism will lead to employee expediency because previous research has indicated that workplace ostracism has negative outcomes and various scholars have identified that workplace ostracism has a positive relationship with unethical behavior. Employee expediency is also a form of unethical behavior. Therefore, our research aligns with prior studies.

Our second hypothesis was that workplace ostracism is positively related to emotional exhaustion. Previous research conducted in various countries supports this notion that workplace ostracism has negative consequences and yields negative emotions in employees. Hypothesis three postulated that emotional exhaustion positively influences employee expediency. When socially excluded at work, employees often engage in defensive silence to protect themselves, consuming psychological and emotional resources and leading to emotional exhaustion (Schlenker & Weigold, 1989; Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Therefore, our research is in line with previous research.

Hypothesis four suggested that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee expediency. Existing literature indicates that job stressors affect counterproductive work behavior (Penney & Spector, 2005). Our study thus conforms to earlier studies.

### 5.1 Theoretical Implications

Our study contributes to understanding covert unethical behavior by discussing expediency, a common workplace phenomenon that has received limited empirical study. Aligning with previous scholars, we emphasize the need for a thorough investigation into this behavior, given its significant role in unethical practices within organizations. Previous conceptual work suggests that employees prioritize quick and efficient execution, making expediency a convenient method of operation in work contexts (Parks et al., 2010). However, practical research on expediency remains scarce despite theoretical interest.

Greenbaum et al. (2018) were among the first to conduct empirical research on supervisor and employee expediency, aiming to analyze and emphasize the importance of studying this specific type of unethical behavior in workplaces. They argue that when organizational employees

engage in or accept expedient behaviors, it not only becomes prevalent within the organization but also suggests that unethical practices are tolerated.

Thus, our study contributes uniquely to the literature by demonstrating how workplace ostracism predicts employee expediency. We developed a comprehensive framework that examines the predictors and underlying mechanisms that prompt expedient behavior in the workplace.

## 5.2 Practical Implications

Parks et al. (2010) observed that "due to increased competitive pressures in the global economy and limited resources ... expedience is prevalent in organizations" (721). In today's competitive organizations, employees face significant pressures (Mitchell et al., 2018). Employees are expected to exceed their duties and work harder to ensure organizational efficiency (Bolino & Turnley, 2005).

Expediency, a widely overlooked workplace phenomenon (Eissa, 2020), undermines organizational morality and ethics (Greenbaum et al., 2018). This study offers insights to practitioners on why supervisors and employees engage in expedient behaviors. Despite causing organizational catastrophes, the costs and circumstances of expedience are often overlooked by managers. Factors triggering expedience, such as workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion, were identified. Organizations can monitor and manage individuals by understanding cultural differences and promoting inclusion to mitigate expedient behavior. Practitioners can develop ethical programs to prevent expedience.

This study focused on the private healthcare sector in Pakistan, where healthcare professionals have been extensively studied worldwide. However, research on Pakistan remains limited compared to European countries (Aslam et al., 2014). The healthcare industry often faces criticism for ethical lapses and challenges with expedience and adherence to standards (Glickel, 2009). This study aims to educate healthcare practitioners on the factors triggering expedience and promote internal ethical programs to curb employee expedient behaviors. Additionally, it advises healthcare policymakers to develop policies guiding individuals in the private healthcare sector to prevent expedience.

## 5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Every research has certain limitations, and ours is no exception. This study overlooked several alternative explanations for the investigated relationships, such as individual differences like personality traits and attitudes. Future research could benefit from testing this framework in different sectors. Individual differences as moderators can be studied for a more comprehensive understanding of expediency phenomena.

This research represents progress in understanding expediency by offering insights to scholars and practitioners about the contextual factors driving expedient behavior in the workplace. We aim for this research to stimulate further exploration into expediency. As highlighted by Zhu

et al. (2022), organizations should closely monitor whether employees' resort to unethical or short-term tactics to achieve performance targets, as these actions can lead to significant costs for the company. We have designed this conceptual framework to lay the groundwork for future research, which will test this model across various sectors such as the banking sector, telecommunications, healthcare, hospitality, and tourism.

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