

THE PROTECTIVE ROLE OF MINDFULNESS AND JOB CRAFTING IN MITIGATING THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF LEADER OSTRACISM

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Annotation. This study seeks to investigate how within the context of the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, employees' positive traits and behaviours can mitigate the negative impacts of leader ostracism on employee innovative behaviour. Data were gathered from 300 employees across various industries through online surveys. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to study the associations between the variables. The findings revealed a negative correlation between leader ostracism and employee innovative behaviour. Employee mindfulness was found to be beneficial in reducing the adverse impacts of leader ostracism on employee innovative behaviour. In addition, job crafting, when facilitated by mindfulness, was able to further diminish the negative effect of ostracism on employee innovative behaviour and mediated the moderating role of mindfulness. Mindfulness and job crafting are significant in alleviating the negative impacts of leader ostracism on employee innovative behaviour, offering a new perspective for understanding and improving the phenomenon of leader ostracism in organisations.

Keywords: leader ostracism, employee innovative behaviour, mindfulness, job crafting.

JEL classification: M12, O3, O31, I12, J24.

Introduction

The significance of employee creativity for the survival and development of an organisation is self-evident. Numerous studies have discussed positive factors that promote employee creativity, such as personality traits of employees (Dai *et al.*, 2022), job characteristics (Kmieciak, 2021), leadership traits (Gong *et al.*, 2024; Keem *et al.*, 2023), and the role of technology, including artificial intelligence (Maiden *et al.*, 2023; Cimino *et al.*, 2024). Some scholars have also suggested that while focusing on factors that enhance employee creativity, it is important not to overlook elements within organisations that may hinder innovative behaviours, such as negative workplace behaviours (Walter, Au-Yong-Oliveira, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2019).

Workplace ostracism is a phenomenon prevalent in various types of organisations (Bedi, 2021). As a source of workplace stress, ostracism increases psychological pressure on employees (Hussain, 2024), leading to emotional exhaustion (Qian *et al.*, 2019) and reduced team cohesion (Harvey *et al.*, 2019). Predominantly, extant literature studies the adverse impacts of workplace ostracism, with some discussing the mechanisms by which ostracism affects prosocial behaviours, helping behaviours, employee creativity, and organisational learning (Howard *et al.*, 2020; Imran *et al.*, 2019). However, there is still an observable lack of consensus on the mechanisms that lead to different outcomes from workplace ostracism.

Due to the variability in employee traits, employees affected by workplace ostracism may experience different outcomes (Ma *et al.*, 2022). Thus, the research question is “What traits do employees possess that allow them to be less adversely impacted by workplace ostracism and to get involved in beneficial extra-role behaviours for the organisation?” In response to the call to differentiate sources of workplace ostracism, this study presumes that leader ostracism may have a greater impact on employees than ostracism from colleagues (Liu *et al.*, 2023), especially in terms of its negative effects on employee creativity based on organisational factors (Jahanzed *et al.*, 2021).

Mindfulness is a positive psychological trait of individuals, representing a form of focused attention (Dong *et al.*, 2024). Research has confirmed that mindfulness helps alleviate psychological stress (Bartos *et al.*, 2022; Charness *et al.*, 2024) and leads to favourable work results (Jahanzed *et al.*, 2024), including employee creativity (Gip *et al.*, 2022) and job crafting behaviours (Hur *et al.*, 2024). Specifically, job crafting represents a proactive behaviour of employees, and is positively linked to employee performance (Lee, Lee, 2018), making it an important means of improving personal and organisational outcomes (Geldenhuys *et al.*, 2024). Based on Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, Cohn, 1998), this study proposes a moderating model of how leader ostracism can buffer the undesired consequences on employee innovative behaviour, with employee mindfulness and job crafting playing significant roles.

Predominantly, most of the extant literature has focused on various factors that optimise creativity, such as personality, leadership traits, and job characteristics, although employee creativity is increasingly recognised as a vital driving force of organisational success. Nevertheless, comparatively less attention has been paid to how adverse organisational experiences, especially leader ostracism, undermine employee innovative behaviour. Although workplace ostracism is widely regarded as a prevalent, damaging phenomenon, past studies have essentially investigated its direct adverse influences, providing limited comprehension of the influential mechanisms and boundary conditions that may mitigate these impacts. Therefore, a core research gap lies in the extant literature in the lack of consensus related to individual differences that buffer the effect of leader ostracism, and the understudied interplay between psychological traits such as mindfulness and proactive behaviours, e.g. job crafting. In addition, the differentiation between leader-induced ostracism and peer-induced ostracism also remains underexplored, particularly in the context of employee creativity outcomes.

Thus, this study aims to explore the influence of leader ostracism on employee innovative behaviour while examining the mediating role of job crafting and the moderating role of employee mindfulness. By drawing on Fredrickson’s broaden-&-build theory of positive emotions, this paper attempts to identify protective psychological and behavioural mechanisms that buffer the detrimental influence of leader ostracism.

The study findings are expected to contribute to both practically and theoretically. From a theoretical perspective, this research advances the existing comprehension of boundary conditions in the ostracism-creative linkage, while, in the practical context, this study aims to offer actionable strategies for business organisations to bolster innovation and resilience among employees experiencing workplace adversity. The research contributes to the extant studies on workplace ostracism and employee innovation by identifying

boundary conditions that transform the undesired impact of workplace ostracism on employee creativity and provides intervention strategies for organisations to substantially mitigate the impact of negative workplace behaviours.

This study is structured as follows. The following section reviews the related literature and postulates the research hypotheses. Section 2 outlines the research methodology adopted in this study. Section 3 presents the study outcomes and statistical analysis, and Section 4 introduces the discussion of the previous section. The final section puts forward conclusions, proposes research implications, identifies study limitations, and sets out future research guidelines.

1. Literature Review and Hypotheses

Leader ostracism, as opposed to peer ostracism, often has a more far-reaching and destructive impact because leaders usually represent authority and the allocation of resources within an organisation. When employees experience ostracism from their leaders, they may confront a multitude of disadvantages, such as the absence of promotion opportunities, a lack of essential work resources (Chen, Sun, 2021), and the possibility of adverse performance reviews. In extreme cases, severe leader ostracism can even lead to employee resignation. Therefore, the focus of this study is on the organisational phenomenon of leader ostracism, with the aim of identifying core factors and conditions that can alleviate its adverse effects in order to offer effective intervention strategies for coping with leader ostracism.

1.1 Leader Ostracism and Employee Innovative Behaviour

To date, the academic community has not yet reached a unified definition of leader ostracism. Ferris *et al.* (2008) define leader ostracism from the subordinate's perspective as the individual's perception of neglect, exclusion, and rejection from leaders (Zhao *et al.*, 2019; Einarsen *et al.*, 2007). Einarsen *et al.* (2007) define leader ostracism from an outcome perspective as behaviours by leaders that undermine organisational goals and tasks, and reduce organisational performance (Zhao *et al.*, 2019; Einarsen *et al.*, 2007). Le Jia' *et al.* (2012) define leader ostracism from the leader's perspective as the act of superiors using their authority to hinder subordinates from fulfilling their duties and career development in the workplace. Integrating the aforementioned viewpoints, this paper defines leader ostracism as the individual's perception in the workplace of intentional or unintentional, overt or covert neglect, rejection, and exclusion from leaders, which are negative behaviours. These behaviours emerge from the interaction between leaders, subordinates, and the organisational environment, affecting not only the subordinates' work emotions and attitudes but also the organisation's long-term interests.

Leader ostracism, as a subjective experience for employees, affects their innovative behaviour mainly in the following three aspects. First, workplace ostracism weakens employees' sense of interactional fairness (Ferris *et al.*, 2008). When employees perceive organisational ostracism, they may feel unfairly treated, which may lead to a reduction in innovative behaviour (Xie, Yan, 2016; Moorman, 1991). Second, leader ostracism may exacerbate employees' work stress (Ferris *et al.*, 2008). Such exclusionary behaviour can damage employees' control, self-esteem, and the pursuit of meaningful presence, while also disrupting normal interpersonal communication within the organisation, thereby imposing significant psychological pressure and work stress on employees, hindering them from generating innovative ideas and thoughts (Williams, 2001; Williams, 2007). Lastly, according to the principle of reciprocity, employees will spontaneously engage in behaviours that go beyond their duties and benefit organisational performance when they perceive organisational support and assistance. However, when employees experience organisational ostracism, they may be unwilling to spontaneously engage in those extra-role behaviours that can enhance organisational performance (Zhao, 2017).

Furthermore, research by Kwan *et al.* (2018) indicates that workplace ostracism may harm employees' creativity by reducing task engagement and investment in the creative process. It is also believed that employees who suffer from leader ostracism may lack effective methods to identify and solve career problems, showing a decline in creativity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Leader ostracism exerts an adverse impact on employees' innovative behaviour.

1.2 The Moderating Role of Mindfulness

Mindfulness, as a concept originating from positive psychology, has received widespread emphasis in the organisational behaviour domain. It represents a form of focused attention that can assist subordinates in tackling strain, promote innovation, and bring about numerous positive outcomes. Mindfulness can buffer the negative consequences of workplace ostracism (Jahanzeb *et al.*, 2020). Reportedly, subordinates with high mindfulness levels can effectively tackle hostile work conditions by observing internal and external events through an accepting state of consciousness (Hülshager *et al.*, 2013). This ability helps personnel contend with the undesirable consequences of workplace ostracism and promotes their effective adaptation to such an environment (Molet *et al.*, 2013). Mindfulness enables subordinates to effectively tackle the self-defeating tendencies brought about by workplace ostracism (Hyland *et al.*, 2015), thereby reducing the need to exhibit negative resignation. In contrast, employees with lower levels of mindfulness may struggle to shield themselves from the undesired impacts of workplace ostracism, as they are more susceptible to the impact of stress and unsatisfactory working conditions (Bazarko *et al.*, 2013). These employees may be more inclined to react to feelings of ostracism with passive behaviour, as they feel powerless and/or believe that their thoughts will not be valued or lead to substantial change.

Existing research indicates that mindfulness may affect employees' innovative behaviour through different mechanisms. First, boundary-spanning behaviours can positively influence employees' innovative behaviour (Yang, 2022). Boundary-spanning behaviours refer to the interactions and collaborations between employees in different work roles, teams, or organisations. Mindful employees are more likely to openly accept new information and more effectively handle the complexities of cross-boundary situations, thereby promoting the generation and implementation of innovative thinking. Second, trait mindfulness can positively influence employees' proactive innovative behaviour through occupational identity and work vigor (Zhu, 2022). This type of mindfulness refers to the tendency of individuals to exhibit mindfulness as a personality trait. This tendency can enhance employees' sense of identification with their professional roles, increase work engagement and vitality, and thereby inspire employees to actively seek innovation and improvement in their work. Third, mindfulness can enhance employees' creativity by increasing creative self-efficacy (Peng, 2022). Creative self-efficacy refers to employees' self-assurance in their innovative capabilities. Mindful employees are more inclined to hold positive beliefs about their innovative capabilities, which can motivate them to face challenges with more confidence and to try new methods and solutions.

Research conducted by other scholars has also pointed out that mindfulness may influence innovative behaviour through intermediary mechanisms such as cognitive flexibility. In particular, cognitive flexibility denotes a person's capability to adjust thinking and behaviour flexibly when faced with different situations. Mindful employees often possess higher cognitive flexibility, which enables them to adapt better to changes and view problems from diverse perspectives, augmenting the formation of innovative thinking. Given the due role of mindfulness in mitigating the negative effects of workplace ostracism and promoting innovative behaviour, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The negative linkage between employees' perceived leader ostracism and innovative behaviour is moderated by their level of mindfulness, i.e. the higher the mindfulness level, the weaker the negative association.

1.3 The Connection between Mindfulness and Job Crafting

Existing research has illuminated that mindfulness, as a positive emotional state, can promote job crafting from multiple dimensions. Mindful attention, as a cognitive style of individuals being open to new things, covers three core dimensions: seeking novelty, creating novelty, and absorption. Seeking novelty reflects an individual's curiosity and open attitude towards the environment and themselves; creating novelty embodies the individual's ability and tendency to create new things without relying on old patterns; and absorption describes the individual's positive interaction with the setting, making them more likely to observe details and alternations in the environment (Moafian, Pagnini, Khoshima, 2017). Mindful attention is closely related to an individual's cognitive approach to work events, thereby affecting emotions, attitudes, and behavioural outcomes (Pirson *et al.*, 2012). Studies have found that mindful attention demonstrates a noticeable positive linkage with job satisfaction, subjective well-being, and psychological capital, while it shows a significant negative correlation with physical and psychological stress (Jing *et al.*, 2014). Even facing the same work content, individuals with different levels of mindful attention will exhibit different work behaviours and outcomes (Crum, Langer, 2007; Crum, 2016). Employees with high levels of mindful attention tend to view work with an open and pluralistic perspective, not seeing work as static and unchanging, thus being more proactive in job crafting. For example, they may be more willing to explore job content to increase challenging job demands or strive to learn new knowledge from work to increase structural job resources. In addition, employees with high levels of mindful attention are usually alert to changes around them and are willing to seek work advice from colleagues and superiors to increase social job resources, while taking measures to avoid negative factors that may affect work emotions (reducing hindrance job demands).

Research indicates that mindfulness, not only as a positive emotional state, can significantly enhance an individual's sense of self-efficacy, thereby promoting job crafting. Langer (2000) proposed that mindfulness is a state of psychological resilience that emphasises focusing attention on the present to discover new things and their developmental trajectories. He emphasised that if individuals can keenly perceive external information, they can find ways to deal with things differently than before. In the increasingly complex work environment, employees gradually realise that traditional job design can no longer meet their needs, and they can change the job content to match their personal interests, values, and goals (Rousseau *et al.*, 2006), a process known as job crafting. Studies show that an individual's belief in changing work or the work environment can motivate them to choose job crafting (Tims, Bakker, 2010), and this belief is a manifestation of self-efficacy. Therefore, it can be inferred that high self-efficacy exhibits a considerable effect on job crafting and is a key driving force for individual development.

The question arises whether individuals should view new choices as opportunities or pitfalls when faced with them. If individuals believe they can successfully complete job crafting and consider the reshaped work to be more in line with personal needs, they will exceed expectations and persist to the end (Tims *et al.*, 2012). On the contrary, if individuals do not highly rate their ability to complete job crafting, they may choose to avoid it and maintain the status quo. In the process of job crafting, individuals will continuously adjust their self-efficacy based on feedback and improve behavioural strategies. Mindfulness also requires individuals to use current awareness to break old cognitive evaluations (Sauer *et al.*, 2013). To propose new solutions, individuals need to objectively and calmly examine the problem, avoiding reliance on preconceived knowledge. This process of

breaking old work ideas and constructing new work design plans is a direct reflection of job crafting. Based on the above research findings, considering the positive effects of mindfulness in enhancing self-efficacy, increasing cognitive flexibility, and promoting positive emotions, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H3: Employee mindfulness positively affects job crafting behavior.

1.4 Job Crafting as a Moderator between Leader Ostracism and Innovative Behaviour

Job crafting can mitigate the negative effect of leader ostracism on innovative work behaviour. The core objective of job crafting is to adjust the boundaries of an individual's work to better align with their skills (Berg *et al.*, 2013). In the job crafting process, employees are able to change the nature of tasks, social relationships, and redefine their overall understanding of work (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, 2001). This transformation not only endows employees with a stronger sense of purpose and autonomy but also promotes reciprocal supportive interpersonal relationships, enhancing the meaning and identification with work (Berg *et al.*, 2013). In this way, even when perceiving leader ostracism, employees can foster the novel ideas and the application of new solutions by adjusting cognitions, relationships, and work tasks, thereby supporting the development of innovative work behaviour.

According to the theory developed by Wheeler *et al.* (2013), job crafting can stimulate and create new resources, such as work meaning, that can elevate employees' expectations, making them believe that they can gain rewards from their investment in work and feel more confident and comfortable in their jobs. Through job crafting strategies, a motivational work environment can be established, helping employees cope with work demands and reducing the negative impact of leader ostracism. Such an environment makes employees more likely to believe they have sufficient psychological resources to control their behaviour, thereby increasing self-efficacy and the match between skills and work demands. This not only helps employees gain new resources but also prevents the spiral of resource loss triggered by leader ostracism. This process plays a significant constructive role in stimulating creativity and promoting innovative behaviour. Therefore, it is hypothesised:

H4: Job crafting performs a positive moderating role between leader ostracism and employee innovative behaviour, i.e. the stronger the job crafting, the weaker the adverse impact of leader ostracism on employee innovative behaviour.

1.5 Mindfulness' Moderation of the Relationship between Leader Ostracism and Employee Innovative Behaviour through Job Crafting

Employees with positive emotions, such as mindfulness, can spontaneously change work demands and resource allocation through job crafting behaviours, e.g. proactively increasing challenging job demands and various work resources. This behaviour not only promotes personal growth, improves their adaptability and competitiveness of employees (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2003; Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012), but also provides them with the resources, confidence, and capabilities needed for innovative work behaviours. In other words, job crafting can be perceived as part of the expansion process of positive emotions, serving as a regulatory mechanism that buffers negative short-term stress in the workplace and transforms these pressures into long-term motivation for innovative work behaviours (i.e. constructive outcomes of positive emotions).

The proposed hypotheses indicate that mindfulness can promote employees to engage in job crafting behaviours, meaning that under the guidance of mindfulness, employees are more likely to actively adjust their

work tasks and environment to better fit their personal interests and skills (H3). Job crafting can also mitigate the adverse effect of a leader's ostracism on innovative behaviour, allowing employees to maintain or enhance their innovation capabilities even in the face of leader ostracism (H4). This hypothesis system aligns with the type II mediated moderation model proposed by Liu *et al.* (2012), which includes three key conditions: (1) mindfulness as the first-stage moderator affecting the connection between leader ostracism and employee innovative behavior, (2) mindfulness as the second-stage moderator promoting employees' job crafting behaviours, (3) job crafting as the third-stage moderator regulating the linkage between leader ostracism and employee innovative behaviour, thereby conveying the moderating influence of mindfulness. Integrating these hypotheses, it is further proposed:

H5: Job crafting mediates the moderating effect of mindfulness between leader ostracism and employee innovative behaviour.

2. Methods

2.1 Sample and Procedure

To validate the proposed theoretical model, the research team undertook a questionnaire approach using the Credamo Intelligent Data Research Platform in October 2023. The platform has over 3 million registered users, with a broad representativeness of samples and data quality that meets the standards of top international academic journals. The platform has the capability to distribute questionnaires based on specific sample characteristics, including gender, occupation, and region, and has implemented multiple quality control measures. The research team distributed questionnaires at different times to ensure the independence of the samples. After the questionnaires were collected, manual data review was conducted, with reverse questions and system filters used to exclude respondents deemed to be unserious. In addition, questionnaires from the same time zone and IP address (e.g., within a 10-kilometer range) were reviewed, and nine questionable questionnaires were discarded. For questionnaires that passed the quality review, the research team automatically distributed a cash incentive of five Chinese yuan through the system.

A total of 300 valid questionnaires were collected. With regard to gender distribution, males accounted for 39%, and their counterparts (females) accounted for 61%. Regarding age distribution, the highest proportion was the young group aged 20 to 30, constituting 45.7% of the total, followed by the group aged 31 to 40, at 42.3%, and the group aged 41 and above, at 12%. In terms of the nature of the job, workers from private enterprises accounted for the highest proportion, reaching 64.7%, followed by SOE workers at 19.7%; workers from public institutions and government departments, at 9.6%; and workers from foreign-funded enterprises, at 6%. In the context of educational level, workers with a bachelor's degree accounted for the highest ratio, at 67.3%, followed by workers with a master's and doctoral degree at 19.3%, and workers with a junior college degree or below at 13.3%. The distribution of work experience showed that workers with 1 to 3 years of work experience accounted for 31%, those with 4 to 6 years of work experience accounted for the highest proportion, at 34.7%, those with 7 to 9 years of work experience accounted for 15.7%, and workers with more than 10 years of work experience accounted for 18.7%. From the job level's perspective, grassroots managers accounted for 25.7%, ordinary workers accounted for 43%, senior managers accounted for 12.3%, and middle-level managers accounted for 18.7%.

2.2 Measurement of Variables

In the selection and application of scales for this study, internationally recognised and mature scales were adopted, or appropriate revisions were made based on these scales to ensure the research's validity and reliability. To confirm the cross-cultural applicability and measurement accuracy of the scales, the research team followed the standard translation-back-translation procedure (Cushner, Brislin, 1995; Brislin, 1980). In terms of scale scoring, this study used the Likert 5-point scale, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree". Respondents were required to choose an option that best fit their views between these two extremes based on their actual situation and feelings.

Leader Ostracism. From the Chinese culture's standpoint, distinguishing ostracism from different sources has significant research implications. Unlike the more open and equal cultural atmosphere in Western culture, the influence of the hierarchical system in traditional Chinese culture is profound, and the relationship between superiors and subordinates often manifests as a clear authority and subordination relationship. This cultural characteristic leads to significant differences in the behaviour patterns of employees when interacting with colleagues and supervisors, which may result in different manifestations of supervisor ostracism and peer ostracism. By contrast, the effect of ostracism from different sources on individuals and organisations may also differ significantly. The leader ostracism gauged by Jiang *et al.* (2011) was adopted, with a Cronbach's α reliability coefficient of 0.841.

Employee Innovative Behaviour. The 9-item Work Innovation Behaviour Scale (WIB scale) launched by Janssen (2000) was applied, and was chosen based on considerations of the dynamic process of creativity. This process is not just a reflection of static outcomes, but it also involves the cultivation and development of creativity itself. In this study, creativity is regarded as the ability to apply new methods or ideas in the process of achieving goals to solve challenging problems. The process of employee innovation includes three stages: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea realisation (Kanter, 1988), and the Cronbach's α reliability coefficient for this scale in this study was 0.783.

Mindfulness. Mindfulness, as a concept, was introduced by Ellen Langer (1989), who defined it as a way individuals process information. This approach requires individuals to maintain a high level of attention and sensitivity to the objects of their current experiences, while accepting everything they experience in a non-judgmental manner. Langer and Pirson (2012) and other scholars developed the mindfulness scale based on this theory, which includes three dimensions, namely novelty producing, novelty seeking, and engagement. The overall Cronbach's α reliability coefficient for the mindfulness scale was 0.855.

Job Crafting. In measuring job crafting, this study adopted the 15-item scale developed by Slemp and Vella-Brodrick (2013), which was specifically designed to assess the three dimensions of task crafting, relationship crafting, and cognitive crafting. Each dimension consists of five items, with an overall Cronbach's α reliability coefficient of 0.854.

Control Variables. This research acknowledges that factors such as employees' years of service in the organisation, gender, and age may affect their innovative behaviour. In order to ensure the research results' accuracy, this paper carefully controlled for these demographic variables.

2.3 Common Method Bias (CMB) Test

To test for the presence of CMB, this paper adopted the approach proposed by Podsakoff *et al.* (2003). The Harman's single-factor test was also applied in this study. This method involves merging all scale items (mindfulness, leadership exclusion, innovative work behaviour, job crafting) and conducting factor analysis to detect whether a single factor explains the majority of the variance. After performing an unrotated principal component analysis, the researchers extracted 11 factors with eigenvalues higher than 1. Among them, Factor 1 contributed 27.01% of the variance, which is lower than the standard threshold of 50%. Thus, the data did not display a severe CMB phenomenon.

3. Results

The scales' internal consistency is measured by estimating the Cronbach's α coefficients to ensure the scales' reliability. CFA is also employed to evaluate the scales' structural validity, testing whether the scales' structure corresponds with theoretical expectations. Then, the correlation estimation was undertaken to explore the correlations between different variables, revealing the degree of interaction and influence between them. Finally, hierarchical regression was applied to ascertain the research hypotheses, verifying the rationality of the theoretical model and the correctness of the hypotheses.

3.1 Reliability and Validity Testing

During the factor analysis process, the eigenvalue method was used, which resulted in a successful extraction of eight common factors, which cumulatively explained 63% of the variance, exceeding the ideal standard of 60%. However, considering that the factor loadings were all between 0.6 and 0.9, and above the standard value of 0.6, this indicates that each dimension can be effectively reflected by the corresponding measurement indicators. Furthermore, the Cronbach's α values for each dimension all exceeded the standard value of 0.7, further confirming the excellent internal consistency of the scales (Nunnally, 1978).

In the context of convergent validity, the values of AVE and CR both exceeded the standard values of 0.5 and 0.7, respectively. This confirms that the scales possess good convergent validity. Consistent with Fornell and Larcker (1981), when the square root of an AVE of a construct is higher than the correlation coefficient between that construct and other constructs, it can be considered that the constructs have sound discriminant validity. In this study, the square root of the AVE values for all constructs was greater than their correlation coefficients with other constructs, thereby ensuring the discriminant validity between constructs (see *Table 1*).

Table 1. Discriminant Validity of Core Variables

	IWB	MF	JC	LO
IWB	0.733			
MF	0.607***	0.619		
JC	0.535***	0.579***	0.604	
LO	-0.435***	-0.573***	-0.362***	0.787

Notes: N=300, LO=Leader Ostracism, MF=Mindfulness, JC=Job Crafting; IWB=Employee innovative behaviour; the bold font on the diagonal is the root value of AVE, and the lower triangle on the diagonal is the Pearson correlation of each dimension; *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.

Source: created by the authors.

In *Table 1*, the discriminant validity and intercorrelations among the four key constructs are outlined, including employee innovative behaviour (IWB), job crafting (JC), mindfulness (MF), and leader ostracism (LO). The bold values on the diagonal present the square root of AVE for each construct, while the values in the lower triangle reflect the correlation coefficients between the constructs. Notably, all diagonal values exceed the relevant inter-construct correlations, confirming a satisfactory discriminant validity in line with Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion. In this model, the square root of AVE for IWB (0.733), JC (0.604), MF (0.619), and LO (0.787) are all higher than these constructs' correlations with any other variable. This indicates that each construct is empirically distinct from other variables.

Mindfulness is significantly and positively related to both job crafting and employee innovation behaviour. This establishes that higher levels of mindfulness are associated with an uplift in job crafting behaviour and innovative performance. Job crafting is also positively associated with employee innovative behaviour, confirming its possible mediating role in the association between mindfulness and innovation performance. On the contrary, leader ostracism demonstrates substantial negative associations with all three variables, namely job crafting, mindfulness, and employee innovation performance. Based on this, the perceptions of ostracism from leadership may undermine the proactive work behaviours and psychological states of employees. Thus, these findings support the structural integrity of the adopted theoretical model, affirm the constructs' distinctiveness, and accentuate meaningful associations that warrant further testing in the succeeding structural modeling.

3.2 Goodness-of-Fit Test

This study used AMOS 24 software to meticulously examine the model's fitness. When analysing the factor model fit of core variables such as mindfulness, including novelty seeking, novelty producing, and engagement, employee innovative behaviour, leadership exclusion, and job crafting, including task crafting, cognitive crafting, and relation-al crafting, the fit indices for the single-factor model were found to be: $\chi^2/df = 3.795$, GFI = 0.839, AGFI = 0.786, TLI = 0.736, CFI = 0.774, RMSEA = 0.097, SRMR = 0.0839. In addition, the fit of the two-factor, three-factor model 1, three-factor model 2, and four-factor models were compared. The results indicated that the four-factor model had the most ideal fit indices (see *Table 2*). Considering both the goodness-of-fit and the principle of model parsimony, this study ultimately selected the four-factor model.

Table 2. Goodness-of-Fit Indices

Number of Factors	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	IFI	CFI	TLI
Four Factors	1.319	0.033	0.954	0.976	0.976	0.97
Three Factors1	1.735	0.05	0.935	0.943	0.942	0.931
Three Factors2	1.636	0.046	0.938	0.951	0.95	0.94
Two Factors	2.364	0.068	0.905	0.892	0.891	0.871
Single Factors	3.795	0.097	0.839	0.777	0.774	0.736

Notes: Three factor1=IWB+JC, Three factor2=IWB+MF; Two factor=IWB+MF+JC.

Source: created by the authors.

A series of CFA were performed in order to explore the discriminant validity of the measurement model. The goodness-of-fit indices for estimating models are presented in *Table 2*. Evidently, the proposed four-factor model encompassing employee innovative behaviour, mindfulness, job crafting, and leader ostracism as separate constructs exhibits the best overall model fit, with $\chi^2/df = 1.319$, RMSEA = 0.033, IFI = 0.976, GFI = 0.954, CFI = 0.976, and TLI = 0.970. All aforementioned indices fulfill the widely accepted criteria for good model fit, affirming a significant correspondence between the model and the observed data ($\chi^2/df < 2$, RMSEA < 0.06, and all incremental fit indices > 0.90). Conversely, the alternative models that combine constructs display a significant decline in model fit. In particular, the three-factor models exhibit moderate fit, with χ^2/df values of 1.735 and 1.636, and RMSEA values of 0.050 and 0.046, respectively. Although these models remain within acceptable ranges, their relative fit indices (TLI = 0.931 and 0.940; CFI = 0.942 and 0.950) are persistently lower than those of the four-factor solution, revealing a reduction in model performance when constructs are merged over the course.

Additionally, the two-factor model produces a poorer fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.364$, RMSEA = 0.068, CFI = 0.891), whereas the single-factor model, which considers all indicators to load onto a single underlying construct, performs the worst across all indices, falling below acceptable thresholds. Thus, these results not only offer significant empirical support for the distinctiveness of the four key constructs but also validate the proposed measurement structure. As a consequence, the significantly better fit of the four-factor model over all other models further affirms the core variables' discriminant validity, thereby strengthening the robustness of the adopted theoretical framework.

3.3 Hypothesis Testing

In order to thoroughly explore the relationships among leadership exclusion, employee innovative behaviour, mindfulness, and job crafting, these variables were centred and hierarchical regression analysis was used to observe the changes in R-squared to test the significance of the model. In Model 1, only the dependent variable and control variables were considered, therefore Model 2 added independent variables and moderating variables. Model 3 further included the explained, control, explanatory and, moderating variables, and their interaction terms.

According to the regression analysis results presented in *Table 3*, there is a noticeable negative linkage between leadership exclusion and employee innovative behaviour ($B=-0.146$, $p<0.001$) in Model 4, which supports H1. In Model 5, when leadership exclusion and mindfulness are introduced as independent variables, their interaction term has a significantly positive correlation with employee innovative behaviour ($B=0.222$, $p<0.001$), which validates H2. Model 2 indicates a positive association between mindfulness and job crafting ($B=0.659$, $p<0.001$), which confirms H3. In addition, Model 7 shows that the interaction term of leadership exclusion and job crafting also exerts a considerably positive effect on employee innovative behaviour ($B=0.413$, $p<0.001$), thus supporting H4.

In Model 8, when the interaction term of leadership exclusion and job crafting was included, the influence coefficient of the interaction term between leadership exclusion and mindfulness on employee innovative behaviour declined from $B=0.222$ and $p<0.001$ to $B=0.126$ and $p<0.001$. This change indicates that job crafting plays a mediating role in the linkage between mindfulness moderating the leadership exclusion's effect on employee innovative behaviour, thus supporting H5.

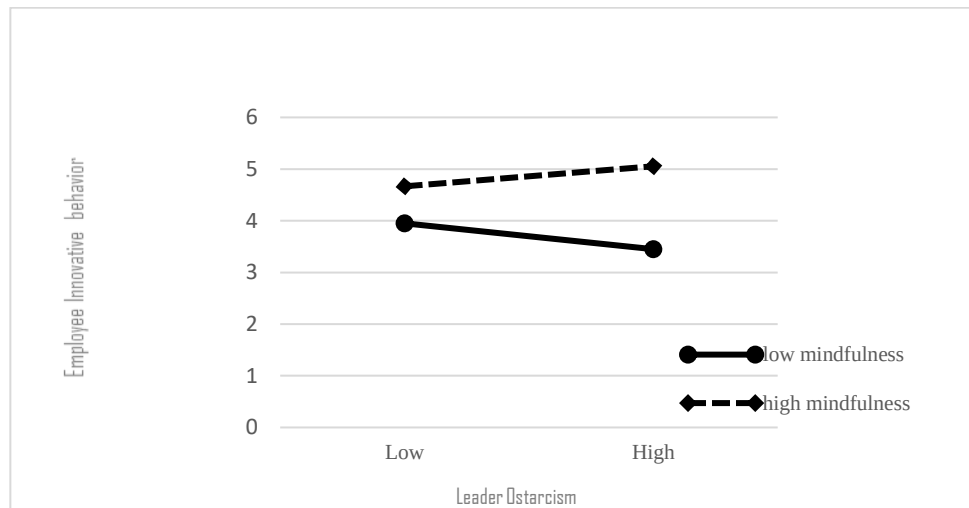
Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis

	Job Crafting		Employee Innovative Behaviour					
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
(Constant)	-0.472	-0.195	3.983	4.271	4.28	4.331	4.358	2.738
Gender	0.023	0.008	-0.009	-0.026	-0.028	-0.031	-0.023	-0.026
Age	0.114	0.081	0.046	0.01	0.016	-0.034	-0.032	-0.019
Edu	0.064	0.012	0.024	-0.026	-0.02	-0.019	-0.019	-0.027
Tenure	0.023	0.004	0.052	0.031	0.028	0.03	0.032	0.029
LO		-0.032		-	-0.028	-	-0.103**	0.008
				0.146***		0.246**		
						*		
MF		0.659**		0.614***	0.58***			0.304***
		*						
JC						0.6***	0.564***	0.397***
LO×MF					0.222***			0.126**
LO×JC							0.413***	0.237**
R ²	0.063	0.515**	0.048*	0.617***	0.643***	0.643**	0.693***	0.745***
		*	*			*		
ΔF	6.671	274.571	3.695*	217.481*	21.085**	270.307	46.779**	58.479**
		***	*	**	*	***	*	*
ΔR ²	0.063	0.452**	0.048*	0.569***	0.026***	0.329**	0.049***	0.103***
		*	*			*		

Notes: N=300, LO=Leadership Ostracism, MF=Mindfulness, JC=Job Crafting; All regression coefficients are unstandardised results; * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$.

Source: created by the authors.

To further understand the moderating role of mindfulness, we illustrate in Figure 1 how mindfulness moderates the connection between leader ostracism and employee innovative behaviour. Simple slope analysis shows that at lower levels of mindfulness (-0.473), a substantial negative association exists between leader ostracism and employee innovative behaviour ($B=-1.47$, $SE=0.039$, $t=-3.737$, $p<0.001$), indicating that leader ostracism significantly negatively affects innovative behaviour. However, at higher levels of mindfulness (+0.473), the influence of leader ostracism on employee innovative behaviour weakens and becomes insignificant ($B=0.064$, $SE=0.063$, $t=1.0217$, $p > ns$), suggesting that employees with higher mindfulness levels are less negatively impacted in their innovative behaviour when they experience leader ostracism.

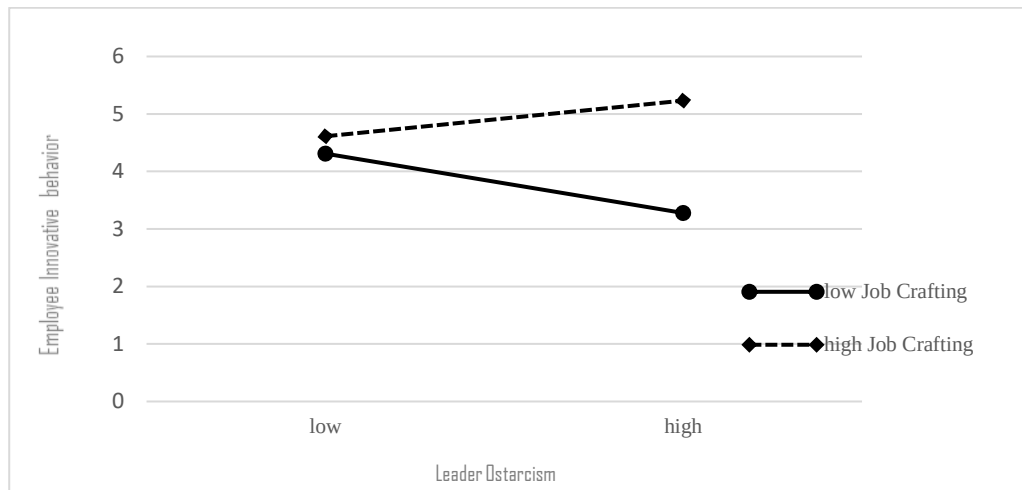


Source: created by the authors.

Figure 1. The Moderating Effect of Mindfulness between Leader Ostracism and Employee Innovative Behaviour

Figure 1 depicts the interaction effect between leader ostracism and employee innovation behaviour at two levels of mindfulness in order to explore the moderating role of mindfulness. The x-axis reveals the levels of perceived leader ostracism, while the y-axis represents the anticipated values of employee innovative behaviour. Simple slope analysis indicates that leader ostracism shows a noticeable and negative relationship with employee innovation behaviour at low levels of mindfulness. Thus, when faced with ostracism by their leaders, employees with low mindfulness encounter a sharp decline in innovative behaviour. On the contrary, the connection between leader ostracism and innovative behaviour is insignificant at low levels of mindfulness. Consequently, subordinates with low mindfulness encounter a sharp decline in terms of innovative behaviour when faced with ostracism by their organisational leaders. As a result, a proactive role of mindfulness is highlighted in this study, which emphasises the adverse interpersonal experiences' adverse impact on the proactive work behaviour.

Figure 2 visually demonstrates the moderating role of job crafting in the connection between leader ostracism and innovative behaviour. The depicted figure shows that under low levels of job crafting, leader ostracism demonstrates a considerable negative effect on innovative behaviour. However, as the level of job crafting increases, the adverse impact of leader ostracism on innovative behaviour gradually diminishes until it becomes non-significant. This result indicates that job crafting can effectively mitigate the adverse impacts of leader ostracism and promote more active, innovative behaviour among employees.

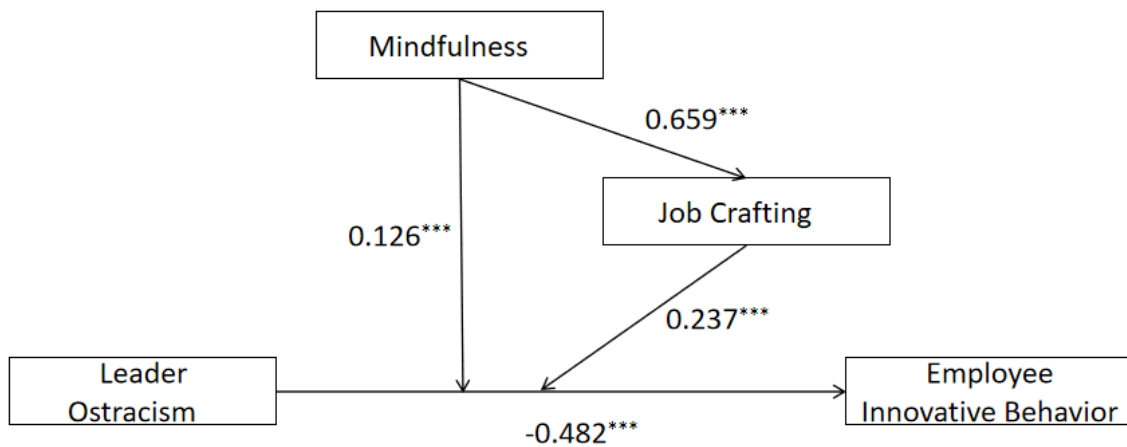


Source: created by the authors.

Figure 2. The Moderating Effect of Job Crafting between Leader Ostracism and Employee Innovative Behaviour

The moderating influence of job crafting on the linkage between leader ostracism and employee innovative behaviour is illustrated in *Figure 2*. The x-axis demonstrates the levels of perceived leader ostracism, while the y-axis plots the innovative behaviour of employees, with two lines representing the simple slopes for both low and high levels of job crafting. As illustrated, leader ostracism considerably lowers innovative behaviour when job crafting is low, illuminating that employees who lack proactive role redesign competencies are more adversely influenced by social exclusion from leaders. In contrast, the adverse effect of leader ostracism is weakened and eventually becomes insignificant at high levels of job crafting. Therefore, employees involved in job crafting are in a better position to buffer the detrimental influence of ostracism, maintaining comparatively higher innovation levels even in undesired social consequences. Hence, these findings affirm the moderating role of job crafting as an adaptive and self-initiated behaviour that protects employees from the adverse interpersonal dynamics in the workplace.

The present study explored how mindfulness moderates the connection between leader ostracism and innovative behaviour through job crafting. On the basis of *Table 3*, *Figure 3* was plotted to visually display the direct and indirect moderating effects of mindfulness. The numerical results indicate that the moderating influence of mindfulness on the linkage between leader ostracism and innovative behaviour includes both direct and indirect pathways. The direct moderating effect value is 0.126, while the indirect moderating effect value is 0.156. The total moderating effect value is 0.282, which is reflected in *Table 4*.



Source: created by the authors.

Figure 3. The Moderating Effect of Mindfulness on the Relationship between Leader Ostracism and Employee Innovative Behaviour, Mediated by Job Crafting

These results indicate that job crafting plays a partial mediating role in the process of mindfulness moderating the relationship between leader ostracism and innovative behaviour. This postulates that mindfulness not only directly affects innovative behaviour but also indirectly mitigates the adverse effect of leader ostracism on employee innovative behaviour by promoting job crafting. This finding supports H5, which posits that job crafting mediates the linkage between mindfulness and the impact of leader ostracism on innovative behaviour.

Table 4. The Indirect, Direct, and Total Effects of Leader Exclusion and Mindfulness on Employee Innovative Behaviour through Job Crafting

P _{ZM}	P _{XM}	DE	IE	Total effects
		P _{XZ}	P _{ZM} *P _{XM}	P _{XZ} +P _{ZM} *P _{XM}
0.659	0.237	0.126	0.156	0.282

Notes: DE refers to the direct effect; IE refers to the indirect effect through job crafting; P_{ZM} represents the path from mindfulness to job crafting; P_{XM} represents the regression coefficient of the interaction between leader exclusion and job crafting; P_{XZ} represents the coefficient of the interaction between leader exclusion and mindfulness.

Source: created by the authors.

Table 4 represents the analysis of the indirect effect, direct effect, and total effect of mindfulness and leader exclusion on employee innovation behaviour, taking interaction terms as moderators and job crafting as a mediating mechanism. The proposed model adopts three core paths, including the influence of mindfulness on job crafting, the moderating effect of leader exclusion on the job crafting-innovative behaviour association, and the interaction between leader exclusion and mindfulness in anticipating innovative behaviour. The direct effect

of the interaction between leader exclusion and mindfulness on innovation behaviour reflects a statistically significant positive contribution. This implies that employees with a higher level of mindfulness are more inclined to directly engage in innovation behaviour even in the presence of leader exclusion. Moreover, the indirect effect represents the mindfulness's influence on innovation behaviour through the mediating role of job crafting, subject to the interaction with leader exclusion. Reportedly, the positive indirect impact reveals that mindfulness facilitates job crafting, which eventually positively leads to innovation behaviour, particularly when we consider the moderating impact of leader exclusion.

The total effect depicts a robust and significant combined impact of the mindfulness and leader exclusion interaction on employee innovative behaviour. This confirms the narrative that mindfulness not only directly bolsters innovative behaviour but also indirectly optimises it by fostering proactive job crafting behaviors, which are further formed by the extent of leader exclusion perceived by employees. At large, the above findings stress the moderating role of leader exclusion and the mediating role of job crafting in formulating how mindfulness affects employee innovative behaviour. Even under socially challenging circumstances, such as leader exclusion, a moderated mediation mechanism is confirmed, wherein mindfulness promotes employees in crafting their work roles and remaining innovative.

4. Discussion

In the present complex and ever-changing professional environment, the phenomenon of leader ostracism is prevalent and may trigger a range of adverse workplace behaviours among employees. To address this challenge, this study proposes a leader ostracism coping model based on the conservation of resources theory and positive affect theory. The study findings reveal a negative linkage between leader ostracism and innovative behaviour, and that employees' trait mindfulness and job crafting strategies can effectively mitigate the adverse impact of leader ostracism on employee innovation. Further research discoveries indicate that employee mindfulness can not only directly alleviate the adverse effects of leader ostracism but also further buffer the linkage between leader ostracism and employee innovation by promoting job crafting. Based on these findings, managers can take corresponding measures to help employees who suffer from leader ostracism to better adapt to the work environment, such as helping employees reshape their work with a more positive attitude through mindfulness training. Concurrently, this research inspires future research to further explore workplace ostracism issues and provide more effective strategies for improving negative employee behaviours within organisations.

Previous studies on employee creativity and innovative behavior have often focused on positive factors such as leader support, innovation climate, self-efficacy, and involvement in innovation, while relatively neglecting the potential hindrance of negative factors on innovative behaviour. In particular, the phenomenon of leader ostracism, due to its widespread presence in organisations, has become an urgent issue due to its negative impact on employee innovative behaviour. This study adopts the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001) and the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions to reveal that employees, when encountering the stressor of leader ostracism, may adopt negative behaviours, such as defensive silence and knowledge hiding, due to resource loss, leading to low levels of innovative performance. The research results are consistent with our expectations, finding a significant negative correlation between leader ostracism and employee innovative behaviour. This study not only provides theoretical support for understanding how leader ostracism affects employee work outcomes (Chen, Sun, 2021), but also responds to the academic call for in-depth analysis on workplace negative behaviour coping strategies.

The study further confirms the moderating role of mindfulness in the linkage between leader ostracism and innovative behaviour. In the field of workplace ostracism research, existing literature mainly focuses on exploring the adverse impact of ostracism on creativity and innovative behaviour, and identifying some factors that can alleviate these negative effects (Jahanzeb *et al.*, 2021; Kwan *et al.*, 2018; Follmer *et al.*, 2018). This study, through empirical analysis, demonstrates that mindfulness, as a positive psychological state, can effectively mitigate the adverse effects of leader ostracism on employees (Jahanzeb *et al.*, 2020), thereby compensating for the lack of attention to individual psychological trait factors in previous research. As Wheeler *et al.* (2013) pointed out, employees can use resource support in the work environment to adopt positive adaptive behaviours to cope with resource loss. As a result, the study findings echo the results of Follmer *et al.* (2018) and others, emphasising the key role of individual psychological traits in organisational responses to workplace adverse factors.

The study delves into the role of job crafting as a moderating mechanism. It confirms that job crafting can lessen the negative impact of leader ostracism on innovative behaviour. Similarly, this study reveals how trait mindfulness motivates employees who feel leader ostracism to invest resources in job crafting. Specifically, empirical analysis indicates that mindfulness is a favourable factor in promoting employee job crafting, which is consistent with previous research that higher levels of employee mindfulness can stimulate their intrinsic motivational resources, thereby supporting job crafting behaviour (Cushner, Brislin, 1995). This paper also finds that job crafting behaviour driven by mindfulness can effectively alleviate the negative effect of leader ostracism on innovative behaviour.

Thus, this study has achieved multiple breakthroughs at the theoretical level. Firstly, the goal was to confirm that the influence of leader ostracism on innovative behaviour is moderated by individual coping strategies. This finding brings a new perspective to the field of leader ostracism research, filling the gap in existing literature regarding how targeted employees can control the impact of leader ostracism through ineffective or effective coping strategies. Secondly, although past research has shown that individuals with high mindfulness possess greater psychological resilience in stressful environments and are less susceptible to negative influences (Bowling, Eschleman, 2010), the psychological mechanisms behind these interactive effects often lack empirical validation (Grant, Langan-Fox, 2007; Korotkov, 2008). This study fills this research gap through empirical analysis, providing a new empirical foundation for mindfulness research, and emphasises the importance of introducing positive psychological elements in the workplace. Thirdly, while existing studies have investigated the independent influences of mindfulness and job crafting on employee innovative behaviour, research on their interactive effects is relatively scarce.

This study reveals how mindfulness mitigates the adverse effect of leader ostracism on innovative behaviour under different circumstances by examining coping strategies as a mediating mechanism, thus providing a new theoretical perspective on the role of mindfulness in the workplace. It not only enriches the theoretical understanding of the relationship between leader ostracism, mindfulness, job crafting, and employee innovative behaviour, but also provides strategies and methods for organisations to cope with leader ostracism and enhance employee innovation capabilities. These findings have important guiding significance for both organisational managers and individual employees.

Conclusions

In the context of the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, this study analysed how positive traits and behaviours of employees mitigate the negative impact of leader ostracism on employee innovative behaviour. Using data from 300 employees across various industries through online surveys, hierarchical regression analyses were carried out to explore the associations between the variables. The study findings confirmed a negative linkage between leader ostracism and innovative behaviour. Employee mindfulness was also found to be beneficial in lowering the adverse influences of leader ostracism on employee innovative behaviour. In addition, when facilitated by mindfulness, job crafting was found to further diminish the adverse impact of ostracism on employee innovative behaviour while mediating the moderating role of mindfulness. Thus, both mindfulness and job crafting are significant in alleviating the negative influences of leader ostracism on employee innovative behaviour, providing a novel perspective for comprehending and improving the phenomenon of leader ostracism.

This research proposes a variety of implications. Firstly, this paper emphasises recruiting and cultivating employees with positive psychological traits, focusing on enhancing employee psychological resilience, guiding employees to actively cope with work pressure, and striving to improve individual innovative performance. Organisations then should incorporate effective intervention measures to mitigate the negative influence of leader ostracism on employee innovative behaviour by enhancing the level of employee mindfulness. Secondly, in an unfavourable work environment, employees can use positive emotions to actively adjust work tasks, interpersonal relationships, and cognitive abilities to reshape a more favourable work environment. Therefore, employees can overcome negative pressures in the workplace by actively creating opportunities, shaping a more positive and meaningful work experience. Thirdly, business entities should strive to create a harmonious working atmosphere and regulate the behaviour and exercise of power by leaders to prevent employees from being harmed by improper leadership actions. Consequently, employees will enhance their sense of organisational identification and trust. Lastly, this study emphasises the importance of positive psychological resources for employees facing leader ostracism and provides valuable guidance on how organisations can conduct effective positive psychological interventions (Hülshager *et al.*, 2018; Hyland *et al.*, 2015; Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). Based on the leader replacement theory, even in the absence of effective leadership, individual traits, job characteristics, and organisational environments can play a substitutive role in leadership.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations associated with this study. This study gathered questionnaires through online channels, which may limit the sample representativeness. In future studies, it is hoped to combine online and offline methods to distribute questionnaires over a broader range, obtaining a more diverse sample and enhancing the research findings' generalisability. In addition, this study adopted a self-assessment questionnaire method, which may carry the risk of common method bias. In future studies, third-party evaluations or diversified assessment methods can be employed to more objectively capture the true feelings of employees. Since the questionnaire data are cross-sectional, it is not possible to infer causal relationships between variables. Future studies could consider incorporating experimental methods to enhance the internal validity of the variables. The measurement of variables may impact the research outcomes. Future studies should attempt to compare different measurement methods and dimensions, which may reveal more interesting findings and contribute new insights to theory and practice. Lastly, this study explored the connection between leader ostracism and work attitudes and behaviours within the cultural context of China. Further studies should delve into the mechanisms and contingency relationships between leader ostracism and employee innovative behaviour across different cultural contexts, offering a multicultural perspective on workplace ostracism and employee innovation practices.

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DĖMESINGO ĮSISĄMONINIMO IR MEISTRIŠKUMO DIRBTI TEIKIAMA APSAUGA MAŽINANT NEIGIAMĄ VADOVŲ OSTRAKIZMO ĮTAKĄ

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Santrauka. Šio tyrimo tikslas – išanalizuoti, kaip, remiantis teigiamų emocijų „plėsk ir kurk“ teorija, teigiamos darbuotojų savybės ir elgesys gali susilpninti neigiamą vadovų ostrakizmo poveikį novatoriškam darbuotojų elgesiui. Duomenys surinkti iš 300 įvairių pramonės šakų darbuotojų, taikyta internetinė apklausa. Siekiant ištirti kintamųjų tarpusavio ryšius, atlikta hierarchinės regresijos analizė. Rezultatai atskleidė neigiamą koreliaciją tarp vadovų ostrakizmo ir novatoriško darbuotojų elgesio. Nustatyta, kad dėmesingas darbuotojų įsisąmoninimas yra naudingas mažinant neigiamą vadovų ostrakizmo poveikį novatoriškam darbuotojų elgesiui. Be to, dėmesingo įsisąmoninimo skatinamas meistriškumas dirbti galėjo dar labiau sumažinti neigiamą ostrakizmo reikšmę novatoriškam darbuotojų elgesiui ir sušvelninti moderuojantį įsisąmoninimo vaidmenį. Įsisąmoninimas ir darbo meistriškumas yra reikšmingi veiksniai mažinant vadovų ostrakizmą ir jo neigiamą poveikį darbuotojų novatoriškam elgesiui, sykiu suteikiant naują perspektyvą šio reiškinio supratimui ir jo valdymui organizacijose.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: vadovų ostrakizmas; novatoriškas darbuotojų elgesys; dėmesingas įsisąmoninimas; meistriškumas dirbti.