Feeling Abandoned and Exiled: Trait Mindfulness as Moderator the Impact of Ostracism on the Work Meaningfulness

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ABSTRACT

Academics have concluded that work meaningfulness is the basic need of employees that should be pursued. However, challenges arise in creating a perception of work meaningfulness caused by various factors in the workplace. Workplace ostracism is a potential factor that can affect the perception of work meaningfulness, this is because the condition of being isolated or ostracized is often categorized as an interaction that causes pain and harm to the victim. Individual differences, especially trait mindfulness, are thought to have a strong role in the relationship between the two. Researchers gathered 305 employees from various industries to give statements to the survey given online. The results of data analysis using Moderation Analysis model 1 in PROCESS macro show that workplace ostracism is negatively correlated with work meaningfulness (b = -0.5164). The results also showed that trait mindfulness can play a role as a buffer against the negative relationship between workplace ostracism and work meaningfulness (b = 0.1146). In addition, research-ers have also found that the trait mindfulness was also able to predict the employees' work meaningfulness (b = -0.2786).

INTRODUCTION

Changes that often occur in the world of work, such as the shift from hierarchical structures to flatter structures, the premise to cloud technology, and the concept of working from anywhere, pose challenges in creating meaningful work for employees. Yeoman (2014) revealed work meaningfulness as a basic need for employees that should be pursued in order to feel the meaning of work through the development of their abilities. According to a global workplace report by Gallup (2023), 80% of workers in the United States are unhappy and have little

involvement in their work, with nearly twice as many unengaged employees as actively engaged. Most of the reasons for the unfulfilled usefulness of employees' work are due to disappointment with work that does not provide satisfactory goals. Complexity in the workplace increases concerns that employees have the potential to erode meaningfulness that endangers the fulfillment of their potential (Bailey et al., 2017; Bailey & Madden, 2017).

The existence of research related to the work meaningfulness is useful because it has been recognized as having implications for organizational practices, organizations will be able to implement curative and anticipatory regulations that cause low perception of work meaningfulness. This encourages the attention of researchers to research the perception of the work meaningfulness of employees in diverse areas or cultures. Although there are different perspectives around work meaningfulness, the main focus of this study is to identify work meaningfulness as the level of perception of an individual's work experience that not only provides pleasure, but also focuses on specific goals and self-development (Steger et al., 2012). Job usefulness can be negatively related to employee turnover and vice versa to work motivation, work performance, and job satisfaction. The relationship results from several factors such as job skills, identity and significance of tasks, feedback, and the core job itself.

One of the factors that is suspected to affect the work meaningfulness is workplace ostracism. The treatment of ostracism means general neglect both physically and digitally. Meanwhile, workplace ostracism refers to the extent to which individuals feel ignored or excluded in the workplace. Being isolated or excluded from individual or group interactions in the workplace is a painful experience and leads to harmful outcomes for the victim (Lieberman & Eisenberger, 2015).

Caillier's (2021) research found that respondents who reported ostracism and destruction had the potential to be 55.6% less likely to gain work meaning than respondents who were not exposed. This is assumed because the effects of workplace ostracism can be physically and mentally damaging (Riley, 2014). Employees will initially feel pain and negative feelings such as sadness, anger and anxiety when experiencing ostracism treatment, if experienced continuously for a long time will run out of resources to cope, feel helpless and depressed (Williams & Nida, 2011). The feeling of discomfort and helplessness that is felt, will reduce employee perception of work meaningfulness.

Reports of workplace ostracism have also been found in Indonesia. Some of these cases include a private employee who is uncomfortable because his co-workers often whisper behind him (Huda, 2012), a supermarket cashier does not enjoy his job because he is not included in the group by his colleagues, and an employee of a family company experiences exclusion when the owner gives souvenirs and food to employees other than himself. There are similarities in these three cases, the victim raises feelings of resentment, discomfort, and sadness (Purba & Anggreni., 2016). Unfortunately, there are still few studies that follow up on negative feelings by employees who are ostracized in Indonesia, especially no one has explored its relationship with the work meaningfulness as a fundamental need

of employees. Through this, researchers aims to identify the relationship between workplace ostracism and work meaningfulness in Indonesia.

Hypothesis 1 (Ha 1): Workplace ostracism has a negative relationship with work meaningfulness.

Individual differences are thought to have a strong contribution to the relationship between workplace ostracism and work meaningfulness. Although organizations have been seen as social entities when employees try to form and maintain positive relationships in the workplace, it is still difficult to maintain such positive relationships throughout the organization because individuals are complex and diverse (Caillier, 2021). The diversity of these individuals can have different roles in the work meaningfulness depending on the nature of their diversity. One of the diversity of individuals that is assumed to have a positive role in the work meaningfulness is trait mindfulness.

Departing from the research of Crego et al. (2020), trait mindfulness is a significant predictor of meaningfulness. The assumption that emerges through the results of the study is that one of the factors of individual diversity that is able to predict work meaningfulness is trait mindfulness. Mindfulness is defined as maximum receptive awareness and attention with minimal involvement of evaluation of the current experience. Furthermore, trait mindfulness is described as the inherent quality of providing full awareness and non-judgmental reactions to everyday experiences. Individuals who have a high trait mindfulness will activate the dACC (dorsal Anterior Cingulate Cortex) which is able to regulate emotions and perceptions of stimuli and coordinate information as something that does not need to be exaggerated. The activation of dACC in the mindfulness process will still direct the interpretation of the condition being experienced as a stimulus that can be regulated first. In other words, employees with high trait mindfulness will still define positive work meaningfulness and do not exaggerate their conscious experiences (positive or negative) as stimuli that can affect the negative assessment of their work usefulness.

Trait mindfulness have also been proven to have a moderation role as an important personality trait that can reduce the adverse effects of workplace conflicts such as emotional fatigue and inefficient work performance (Yang & Jo, 2022). Trait mindfulness can be treated as a buffer in preventing more loss of resources (Anasori et al., 2020), and negative consequences of various forms of psychological stress. Furthermore, Yusainy et al. (2019) through their experiments found that trait mindfulness are able to counteract and deal with negative behavioral responses of virtual ostracism when negative aphrodisiacs are high.

The process that can explain the buffering effect of the trait mindfulness is the neural mechanism of mindfulness regulation including the "top-down" process and the "bottom-up" process. The top-down process is located in the neocortical area, namely in the upper brain with the function of a generator of cognitive abilities (control over cognition, attention and supervision of conscious experience), while the bottom-up process is located in the subcortical area, namely affective stimuli in the form of sensory-perceptual modulation (Guendelman et al., 2017). The combination and coordination process that takes place allows individuals in a state of mindful to integrate their negative experiences without overreacting and

facilitates employees who feel ostracized to perceive the meaning of work more negatively. Besides that, trait mindfulness was included in this study as a moderator because of its advantage of being able to be trained. This advantage can be practical implications for organizations by providing mindfulness training to employees.

Hypothesis 2 (Ha 2): High trait mindfulness can weaken the negative relationship between workplace ostracism and work meaningfulnessfulness.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study participants were 305 employees from various industries or organizations with permanent employee status (having passed the probation/on the job training period), having worked for at least 12 months/1 year, and aged 18-56 years. Sampling was carried out using a convenience sampling technique that functioned to maximize the fulfillment of matches with participant criteria (Sugiyono, 2017). This study is a non-experimental quantitative research because there is no manipulation given, and includes correlational research because it aims to prove the relationship between one variable and another.

There are 3 (three) variables that will be analyzed in this study, work meaningfulness as a dependent variable, workplace ostracism as an independent variable, and trait mindfulness as a moderator variable. The workplace ostracism was measured using the Workplace Ostracism Scale (WOS) by Fiset et al. (2017), which has been adapted into Indonesian Language by Viorica and Parahyanti (2020). There are total of 10 items with a likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with internal reliability value of 0.931. Work meaningfulness was measured using the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) by Steger et al. (2012), which has been adapted into Indonesian Language by Zharifah and Parahyanti (2022). There are total of 8 items with a likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with internal reliability score of 0.929. Trait mindfulness variable was measured using the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), which has been adapted into Indonesian Language by Yusainy et al. (2013). There are total of 15 items with a likert scale of 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never), with internal reliability value of 0.81. The researcher also included 2 items of attention checkers that were used to ensure that participants paid good attention in working on the survey.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The focus of this research is the in-depth identification of the work meaningfulness and the factors that may correlate with it. The research hypothesis was then tested using Moderation Analysis Model 1 in PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013). Based on the results of the analysis, it is known that if workplace ostracism and trait mindfulness together can predict the employee's perception of work meaningfulness, $F_{(9.295)} = 6.7464$, $p < 0.001$, there is as much as 17.07% variance from both predictors which significantly explains the employee's perception of work meaningfulness. The results of the moderation analysis are more clearly contained in Table 1.

Table 1. Moderation Analysis of Work Meaningfulness, Workplace Ostracism, and Trait Mindfulness

Model	b	t	p	LICI	ULCI
Workplace Ostracism	-0,5164	-5,9519	.0000**	-0,6872	-0,3457
Trait Mindfulness as Moderator (Interaction Effect)	0,1146	4.5243	.0000**	0,0647	0,1644
Trait Mindfulness as Predictor	-0,2786	-3,9131	.0001**	-0,4188	-0,1385

Note: the data is a regression coefficient.
** <.05

The results of the study prove that Hypothesis 1 is accepted, researchers found that workplace ostracism has a negative relationship with the work meaningfulness. The higher the feeling of being ignored by an employee, the lower the perception they give regarding work meaningfulness. This finding is consistent with various previous studies and other empirical studies including research by Yusainy et al. (2019) which stated that workplace ostracism has the potential to threaten the fulfillment of the four basic needs to belong, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence. Workplace ostracism can place an overburden on employees, and hinder their ability to maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, or good reputation in the workplace. If an employee becomes a target of ostracism, it will be difficult to return to maintaining good relationships and increasing work meaningfulness.

The findings in this study are also consistent with Caillier's (2021) research, which stated that workplace ostracism as a type of workplace aggression, has been proven to have a negative relationship with work meaningfulness. The existence of a feeling being neglected in the workplace also reduces the sense of involvement, which involvement is one of the parts that form work meaningfulness (Geldenhuys et al., 2014). This is because there is a gap in the relationship between employees and the organization which basically has a certain meaning in the workplace. Although workplace ostracism is more oriented towards social relationships outside of work, this sense of neglect can have an impact on relationships with organizations and reduce the work meaningfulness that employee percieve.

Through the results of data analysis, it is also known that hypothesis 2 in the study is accepted. These results indicate that trait mindfulness can be a moderator in the relationship between workplace ostracism and work meaningfulness. The role of the moderator that trait mindfulness has is as a buffer. Furthermore, high trait mindfulness can weaken the negative relationship between workplace ostracism and the work meaningfulness. This means that the work meaningfulness will not be too low even if they are affected by ostracism, when employees have a high trait of mindfulness. This is supported by research by Chen (2022) which states that, employees who have the trait of high mindfulness will be more likely to feel part of the organization and develop a sense of how their work relates to others such as colleagues, work teams, customers, or society. Therefore, if employees experience

exclusion at work, with a high trait of mindfulness, employees will tend to continue to feel part of the organization, thereby reducing negative feelings on work meanngfulness. Those who have a high trait mindfulness, will be able to overcome fatigue in the face of bullying and the individual's resilience will also be reduced in the face of bullying.

In the study of Yusainy et al. (2019), it was found that trait mindfulness significantly moderated the relationship between the negative influence after receiving ostracism treatment and aggressive behavior among participants who received ostracism treatment. Participants who were ostracized and had a high trait mindfulness would show lower aggressive behavior, this is because participants with a high trait mindfulness responded less aggressively after the negative influence of high ostracism. That is, the benefits of trait mindfulness function in a manner similar to the threshold to changes in negative influence post-exclusion.

Sutcliffe's (2016) research also shows that trait mindfulness tend not only to improve physical and mental health, but also to improve behavioral regulation and the quality of interpersonal relationships, two characteristics that are important for performance in the workplace. Glomb, et al. (2011) argue that the main processes underlying trait mindfulness (detachment from experience/emotion, flexibility of response, decreased rumination, empathy, improvement of working memory, etc.) drive improved decision-making, communication, problem-solving, continuous effort towards goals, ability to work under pressure, creativity, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and interactional fairness, all of which should be contribute to the successful functioning of the workplace. These processes are also likely to promote positive subjective well-being in the form of improved physical and mental health, self-confidence, and life satisfaction, outcomes that are likely to have a positive impact on functioning in the workplace. With the result, even though they experienced exclusion or ostracism in the workplace, individuals can still regulate their behavior and maintain their interpersonal relationships well, and reduce the negative effects on their work meaning.

The usefulness of trait mindfulness as a buffer is because there is a process that contanied in minfulness, specifically the "here-and-now" function of the mindfulness trait itself. Trait mindfulness will give full attention to the situation is currently experiencing to make changes to the sensations of the body, thoughts, and affinities present. Chen et al., (2022) also found that trait mindfulness raise employees' awareness of the work meaningfulness. In another article, it was also found that trait mindfulness can improve employees' experience of meaningfulness through the fulfillment of their two important needs, namely to thrive and transcendence. This can be explained because trait mindfulness are able to direct the affective to neutral, the individual does not shy away from or maintain what he feels excessively (Hayes, 2013). The combination of top-down (neocortical area) and bottom-up (subcortical area) processes in the trait mindfulness results in the integration of the individual's emotional experience without overreacting. This means that, trait mindfulness can be expressed as an effort to regulate emotions (Dan-Glauser & Gross, 2015), because the absence of a change in response to emotional experiences can reduce the habit of negative acceptance and reactive ways of responding. Individuals with high trait mindfulness will actually pay full

attention to their current condition, so that employees will be very aware of the condition they are experiencing whether it is "good or bad", when perceived as a working individual. Through this research, we could indicate that trait mindfulness can also contribute to predicting the work meaningfulness. Individuals with high trait mindfulness will not exaggerate the condition to be a good thing, in fact they will be aware if the condition they currently have is as they feel even though it indicates a negative perception of the work meaningfulness.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the perception of employees' work meaningfulness, especially when it is associated with workplace ostracism, as well as the role of trait mindfulness in the relationship between the two. Researchers found that employees who felt ostracized in the workplace had a low perception of work meaningfulness, and vice versa. This can be anticipated through the aspect of individual diversity in the form of trait mindfulness. Trait mindfulness, through the process, can function as a buffer. The role of trait mindfulness is to weakening employees' negative perception of the work meaningfulness even though being ostracism at the workplace.

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