

When employees are ostracised, the whole organisation suffers

blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2016/04/06/when-an-employee-is-ostracised-the-whole-organisation-suffers/

4/6/2016



Being ignored or excluded by colleagues or supervisors is always uncomfortable for an employee as it gives rise to feelings of anger, depression and unworthiness. When it occurs, it is usually regarded as an employee's social problem. The thinking is that those who are ostracised must have done something wrong, so they should figure out why they are not welcome and fix it. Managers do not think they should jump in and solve the problem, given that managing employees' social relationships at work is usually not on their mission list.

Social exclusion, unfortunately, is not only an individual's social problem, but also a managerial one. In a recent study, we indicated why this matters for employers from an organisation identification perspective. Basically, we found that social exclusion is detrimental to employees' identification with the workplace and influence their willingness and effort to contribute to the organisation, such as helping colleagues, following formal and informal rules, and offering ideas and suggestions for improvement.

Organisational identification is a person's perception of oneness with an organisation, a feeling that determines the motivation to make an extra effort to benefit the company and others within it.

Social exclusion can weaken this link as it signals a differentiation between the ostracised target and others in the group. It undermines the target employee's judgment of their own value in the workplace. Without having a strong identification with the organization, employees are less likely to make an extra effort at work, such as helping others and suggesting improvements.

We found that social exclusion matters especially when employees have higher mobility in the job market, and are thus more likely to find another "home" or belong to another organization. Mobile employees are more reactive when they feel excluded, decreasing their identification with the workplace and becoming less keen to make an extra effort to benefit colleagues or the whole firm. The same findings were obtained in two independent samples consisting of 282 and 297 employees and their direct supervisors in oil and gas companies in China.

To overcome the negative consequences of workplace social exclusion, managers can interfere directly in individual cases in order to build a positive social environment. They can also strengthen employees' organizational identification in other ways, such as building a shared organizational vision and showing organizational support to employees. That would help mitigate the ability of exclusion experiences to weaken organizational identification.

Although social exclusion happens at an interpersonal level and affects target individuals, its detrimental effect spills over into organisational effectiveness. Therefore, this is not only a social issue for individuals, but also a challenge for managers and organizations.



Notes:

- This post is based on the authors' paper [Why and when workplace ostracism inhibits organizational citizenship behaviors: An organizational identification perspective](#). *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2016, 101, 362–378.
- This post gives the views of its author, not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.
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