

# NAVIGATING WORKPLACE DYNAMICS: EXPLORING THE INTERPLAY OF OSTRACISM, INTERPERSONAL DEVIANCE, AND THE MEDIATING INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEE SILENCE, EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION WITH MODERATOR INGRATIATION AS A MITIGATING FACTOR

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**Abstract.** *This study investigates the intricate interplay of workplace dynamics, focusing on the relationships between ostracism, interpersonal deviance, and the arbitrating influences of employee silence and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, the moderating role of ingratiating behavior is explored as a potential mitigating factor. Data for this research was collected using cross-sectional survey design with a sample size of 236 academic staff from public sector universities in Quetta. To assess the association Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted in AMOS and Andrew Hays Process in SPSS was employed. Results indicate a significant association between ostracism and interpersonal deviance, shedding light on the negative consequences for employees and organizational dynamics. Furthermore, the study reveals that employee silence and emotional exhaustion serve as critical mediating mechanisms, elucidating the psychological pathways through which workplace challenges impact individuals. Notably, the inclusion of ingratiating behavior as a moderator introduces a novel perspective, suggesting that certain employee behaviors may alleviate or exacerbate the observed effects. The implications of this research are multifaceted. Practically, organizations can use these insights to inform interventions that address workplace challenges and foster a positive organizational culture. Recommendations include targeted training programs, leadership development initiatives, and continuous monitoring systems to create a supportive work environment. Findings offer practical guidance for organizations seeking to enhance employee well-being and optimize organizational performance in the face of challenging interpersonal dynamics.*

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## **Introduction**

Workplace ostracism is characterized as a dysfunctional social trait, characterized as the degree to which an individual perceives being ignored or excluded by others (Zhang et al., 2023). Experiencing brief and minor episodes of ostracism, such as being left out of activities like playing ball, causes individuals to express significant levels of psychological distress and sadness (Howard et al., 2020). Employees decide to withhold their opinions because they presume that speaking up might cause harm to others, or they believe that maintaining silence will offer them a competitive edge (Sahabuddin et al., 2023). In such circumstances, employees refrain from confronting issues, resulting in diminished work outcomes, heightened dissatisfaction, and negative emotions (Fatima et al., 2023).

Indications of interpersonal deviance within an organization include instances where certain employees engage in mistreatment, ridicule, and the infliction of physical abuse on their colleagues (Tâm et al., 2016). Burnout is identified as a stress syndrome characterized by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal achievement (Tâm et al., 2016). Emotional exhaustion, as defined by Wright and Cropanzano (1998: 486), is depicted as a "persistent state of physical and emotional depletion". This state arises from diverse stressors including excessive workloads, unclear role expectations, conflicting roles, organizational limitations, and interpersonal discord (Ju et al., 2016).

Workplace ostracism has the potential to adversely impact individual thriving, indicating a person's perceived sense of meaningful existence and development within the work environment (Zhang et al., 2023). The repercussions of ostracism are both severe and widespread. Research findings indicate that even subtle cues, such as withdrawn eye contact or interaction with a computer as the source, can evoke feelings of rejection and lead to negative outcomes (Harvey et al., 2019). Employees who experience a decrease in their state of self-esteem due to workplace ostracism may respond with retaliation against their coworkers (Peng & Zeng, 2017).

Specifically, we propose that employees can augment their roles by utilizing the expressive network resources and developmental feedback they've gathered. This can be accomplished by employing strategic, goal-oriented influence tactics, such as ingratiation. Ingratiation involves endeavors to enhance one's interpersonal appeal and solicit favors from another individual. Sibunruang and Kawai (2021) The employee employing ingratiation as a strategy may need to carefully assess the work environment to ensure the effective utilization of this approach (Asadullah et al., 2023). While both ingratiation and affective commitment highlight emotional connections, the latter places more emphasis on an individual's emotional attachment to the organization and their willingness to invest effort in pursuing organizational goals (Ding et al., 2023).

## Theoretical Background and Hypothetical Foundation

A review of the extant literature reveals that workplace ostracism contributes to psychosomatic distress among academic staff, with the mediating influences of employee silence and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, this relationship is subject to moderation by ingratiation. The hypotheses presented in this study are based on the transactional theory of stress and coping. Transactional frameworks of stress focus on the cognitive-phenomenological processes through which individuals assign significance to their surroundings, underscoring the interpersonal and self-directed nature of the transaction where stress can arise (Dillard, 2019). Anticipating that these coping processes remain somewhat consistent across various stressful situations, they exert an impact on adjustment outcomes over time (Hulbert-Williams et al., 2013).

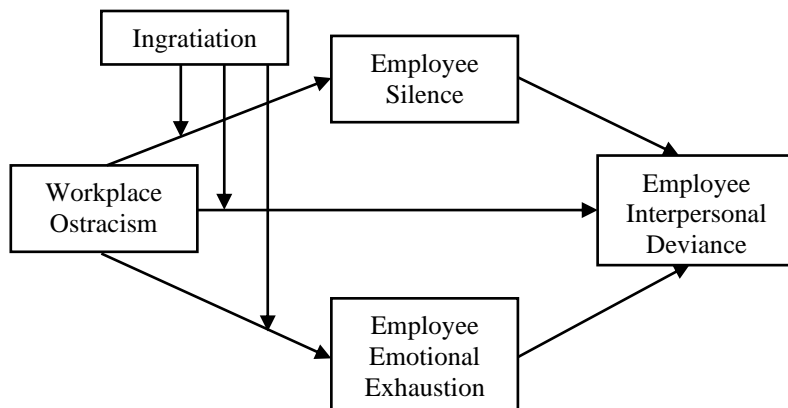


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

### Workplace Ostracism and Employee Interpersonal Deviance

Engaging with team members, colleagues, and other group associates is often a gratifying endeavor that addresses various human needs, contributing to overall happiness, well-being, and functionality. Regrettably, for certain individuals, these interpersonal interactions may fall short of providing satisfaction and could, instead, result in an unpleasant and stressful experience. Ostracism, characterized by the "The act of disregarding and excluding individuals or groups by other individuals or groups" as described by Williams (2007: p. 427), constitutes a subtle yet detrimental form of incivility that has the potential to undermine these social interactions (Ramsey & Jones, 2015).

The limited theoretical focus on ostracism as a distinct concept could stem from the unfounded assumption that excluding and ignoring individuals within organizational settings is a comparatively harmless or inconsequential form of treatment, especially when compared to the various other negative behaviors that

individuals might encounter in a workplace (Robinson et al., 2013). Based on the above discussion the following hypothesis is put to empirical testing:

Hypothesis 1: Workplace ostracism has a positive relationship with employee interpersonal deviance.

### **Mediating Role of Employee Silence**

Employee silence denotes the deliberate act of employees withholding their ideas, information, concerns, and opinions regarding matters related to their job and the organization (Agarwal, 2018). The concept of ostracism involves the sense of being isolated and overlooked by either an individual or a group (Imran, 2017). The absence of communication is linked to various negative consequences for employees, such as diminished commitment, lower motivation, job dissatisfaction, reduced innovation, and increased cynicism (Agarwal, 2018).

The silence of employees can have a direct impact on work by limiting managerial access to crucial information, and it can also indirectly affect work by influencing the well-being of employees (Prouska & Psychogios, 2016). Ostracism jeopardizes employees' sense of efficacy, triggering defensive silence and ultimately resulting in a form of psychological distress specifically, emotional exhaustion (Jahanzeb et al., 2018). Employees may hesitate to express themselves when they recognize that their input could pose risks or affect their interpersonal relationship (Wu et al., 2018). Based on the above discussion the following hypothesis is put to empirical testing:

Hypothesis 2: Workplace ostracism and employee interpersonal deviance was mediated by employee silence.

### **Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion**

Workplace ostracism can significantly harm employees' psychological well-being and work-related results, as it may result in increased levels of job stress and emotional exhaustion (Lyu & Zhu, 2019).

Emotional exhaustion signifies a condition of depleted resources (Ju et al., 2016). Ostracism also signifies a type of 'social death,' indicating a threat to the sense of meaningful existence. In this context, ostracism constitutes a loss of resources (Qian et al., 2019). In a workplace marked by ostracism or social exclusion, employees experience frustration or obstruction of their psychological needs, impeding the process of psychological internalization (Wu et al., 2019). Based on the above discussion the following hypothesis is put to empirical testing:

Hypothesis 3 Workplace ostracism is associated with an increase in employee interpersonal deviance.

## **Moderation Role of Ingratiation**

When individuals are the recipients of ingratiating behavior, their self-esteem is bolstered by accepting the flattery without scrutiny. Conversely, when they are observers, their own ego is not on the line, allowing them to scrutinize the ingratiator's actions more objectively (Vonk, 2002). Ingratiation involves employing strategies, such as praising others, downplaying oneself, conforming to others' views, and more, with the aim of influencing others and creating a favorable impression (Ding et al., 2023). Employees have confidence in the effectiveness of influence tactics to fulfill their objectives, as they anticipate that the positive regard and assessments of their character and competence by management will rise (Asadullah et al., 2023). Having a strategy is crucial for employees to sustain the robust connections established with their supervisors. Constructive relationships with supervisors not only yield expressive network resources centered on supervisors but also provide developmental feedback from supervisors (Sibunruang & Kawai, 2021). Based on the above discussion the following hypothesis is put to empirical testing:

Hypothesis 4    Ingratiation moderated the relationship between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviance.

## **Research Approach**

### ***Participants and procedures***

Quota sampling was employed to gather information from academic staff members in Quetta city's universities. Questionnaires based on surveys were handed out to educators. Some studies (e.g., Imran, 2017) underscore the need for further investigation in academia and employed a similar sampling approach. The study distributed 250 questionnaires to academic staff across all public universities in Quetta, but only received 200 completed questionnaires. Fifty of them were deemed inadequate and remained unused.

The present investigation gathered responses through both personal interactions and Google Forms, as well as receiving replies via email. Participants were asked to furnish their individual details, including gender, age, education, work experience, and organization affiliation. The overall response rate was 56%. The study gathered data for the variables using adapted measurement scales. In terms of sampling, educational staff were carefully chosen, with quotas assigned to each university through a meticulous quota sampling process. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality during the data collection process.

## **Dimensional Analysis**

### ***Workplace ostracism***

A workplace ostracism scale developed by Ferris et al. in 2008 consists of ten items to measure the extent of workplace ostracism. Examples of these items include statements like "Colleagues ignored you in the workplace", "Your greetings were disregarded by others at work", "People avoided interacting with you at your workplace", "You observed others purposely avoiding eye contact with you at work", and "You experienced being treated as if you weren't present by colleagues at work". Respondents indicate their agreement on a scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (7).

### ***Employee silence***

Employee silence was assessed through a set of five items created by Brinsfield in 2009. Examples of these items include statements such as "I opted to stay quiet when I had reservations about the work", "Even though I had suggestions for enhancing work, I refrained from expressing them", "I refrained from discussing potential safety issues among colleagues", and "I chose not to share information that could have prevented an incident in our workgroup". Participants indicated their responses on a scale ranging from Never (1) to Always (5).

### ***Emotional exhaustion***

The assessment of emotional exhaustion employed a five-item scale developed by Leiter and Schaufeli (1996). Exemplary items from the scale encompass statements such as "I experience emotional drain from my work", "I sense being used up by the end of the workday", "I feel fatigued when starting a new workday in the morning", "Sustaining work throughout the day is demanding for me", and "I perceive burnout from my job". Respondents conveyed their responses on a scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

### ***Interpersonal deviance***

Interpersonal deviance was gauged using a five-item scale introduced by Spector et al. (2006). Examples of the items include statements such as "I have exhibited rudeness or nastiness towards a client, customer, or citizen", "I have mocked or insulted someone in the workplace", "I have deliberately ignored someone at work", and "I have verbally abused someone in the workplace". Respondents provided their answers on a scale ranging from Never (1) to Almost always (5).

### ***Ingratiation***

Ingratiation was assessed using a four-item subscale derived from the work of Kumar and Beyerlein (1991). Example items from the scale include statements such as "Conveying to your supervisor that only he/she can provide assistance in a specific situation, primarily to boost his/her self-esteem", "Highlighting accomp-

ishments under your supervisor's leadership in a meeting when he/she is not present", "Expressing a desire to learn from your supervisor's experience", and "Emphasizing your supervisor's admirable qualities to create the impression of high regard". Respondents indicated their responses on a scale ranging from 1 'Never behave this way (1) to Often behave this way (5).

## Results

### *Descriptive statistics*

Table1: Mean, SD, skewness, kurtosis and correlation of the model (N=236)

	Mean	Sd.	Skew- ness	Kurto- sis	WO	ES	EE	ID	Ing.
WO	27.33	13.725	0.50	-1.23	1.00				
ES	15.28	6.263	0.20	-1.23	0.67**	1.00			
EE	15.24	6.751	0.09	-1.33	0.66**	0.64**	1.00		
ID	11.38	5.582	0.27	-1.31	0.73**	0.62**	0.61**	1.00	
Ing.	32.97	11.843	-0.11	-1.13	0.56**	0.69**	0.59**	0.60**	1.00

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.00 level (2-tailed)

The current investigation uncovers connections among various factors. Specifically, it's found that workplace ostracism is significantly correlated with employee silence, emotional exhaustion, interpersonal deviance, and ingratiation with values ( $r=.67^{**}$ ,  $p.00$ ), ( $r=.66^{**}$ ,  $p.00$ ), ( $r=.73^{**}$ ,  $p.00$ ), and ( $r=.56^{**}$ ,  $p.00$ ), respectively. Additionally, there is a positive relationship between workplace ostracism and ingratiation, as well as interpersonal deviance ( $r=.61^{**}$ ,  $p.00$ ) and ( $r=.59^{**}$ ,  $p.00$ ), respectively. Moreover, there's a supportive correlation between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviance ( $r=.60^{**}$ ,  $p.00$ ).

### **CFA of the Proposed Model**



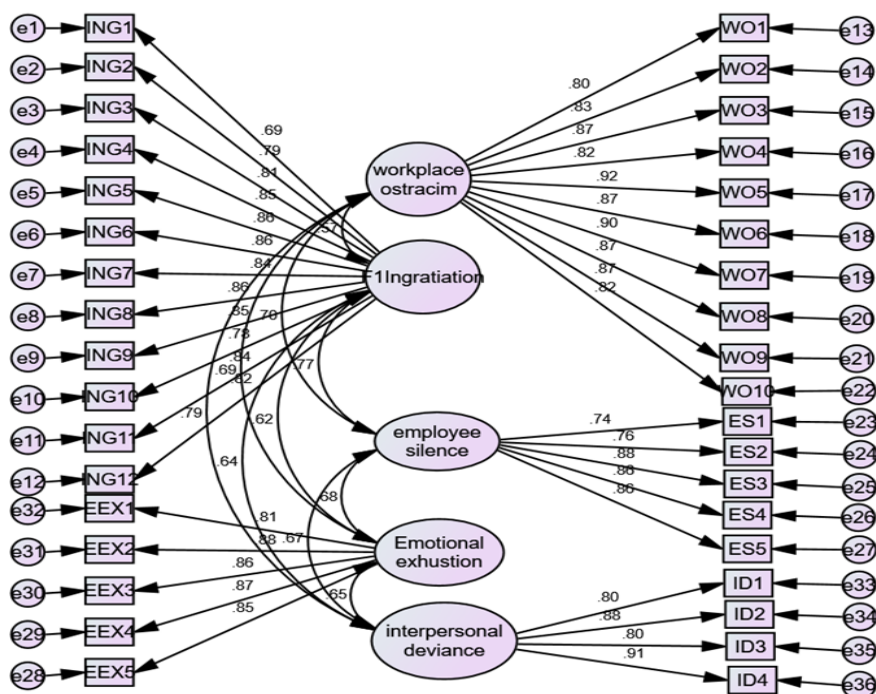


Figure 2: CFA of the Study Model

Table 2 Measurement Statistics of the Study Model

Goodness of fit	Standard level	Intended measseures	status	Remarks
$\chi^2$	p-value > 0.05		Average	
Df		584	Average	
$\chi^2/df$	Should be positive		Average	
Sig	$\leq 0.05$	0.00	Average	Acknowledged
CFI	$0.95 < CFI < 0.97$	0.90	Average	
TLI	Should be positive	0.89	Average	
NFI	$0.90 < NFI < 0.95$	0.85	Average	
RMSEA	Excellent fit when = 0.05, acceptable when < 0.08	0.07	Average	

The outcomes derived from Table 2 and Figure 2 indicate that the measurement model applied to assess workplace ostracism is notably significant and falls well within the acceptable fit range. Employing a 10-item 1-factor model to evaluate comparative fit among variables yielded the following results: ( $p=0.000$ ; CFI=.903; TLI=.890; NFI=.847; RMSEA=.07).

### Structural Model Assessment and Hypothesis Testing



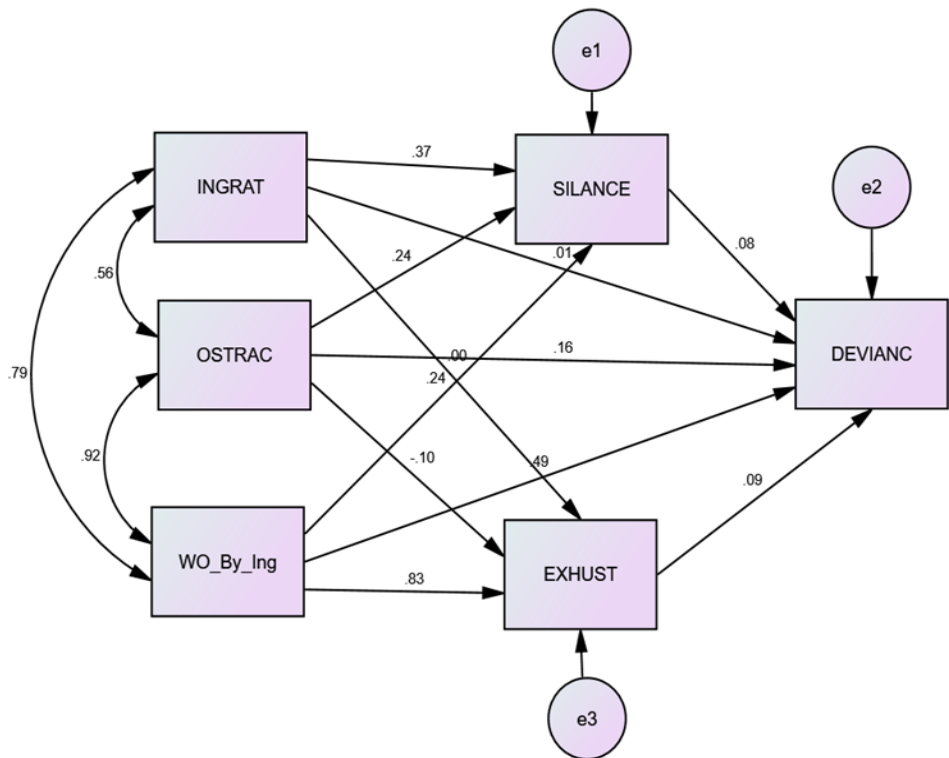


Figure 3 Statistical Model of the Study

Table 3 Bootstrapped Parallel Mediated Moderation Model

Direct effect	Coefficient	S.E	P	Hypothesis	(LLCI-ULCI)
H1: Indirect effect WO=ID	14.745	0.33	0.00	Supported	(14.09-15.38)
H2: Mediation (1) WO=ED=ID	0.275	0.07	0.00	Supported	(0.143-0.407)
H3: Mediation (2) WO=EX=ID	0.403	0.08	0.00	Supported	(0.245-0.561)
H4: Moderation	0.286	0.03	0.00	Supoorted	(0.228-0.344)
Interation Term (WO*ING)	0.014	0.00	0.00	Supported	(0.005-0.023)

P stands for the p-value, LLCI represents the lower limit of the confidence interval, ULCI denotes the upper limit of the confidence interval, and P = 0.01 signifies a p-value of 0.01.

All confidence intervals in the output have a level of confidence of 95. The bootstrapped sample estimates for percentile bootstrapped confidence intervals in 2000.

H1. Our pragmatic confirmation demonstrated that workplace ostracism has a substantial impression on interpersonal deviance ( $=14.74$ ;  $p.00$ ). H2 (a) A similar test for indirect effect was carried out to confirm the mediating effects were significant and H2 (b) ( $=0.403$ ;  $p.00$ ). according to the bootstrapped analysis, indirect relationship was significant ( $=0.275$ ;  $p.00$ ). Findings show that ingratiation considerably moderates the association between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviance which is statically sustained by our H4 ( $=0.0137$ ;  $p.00$ ) and interaction term confirmed the moderating role.

### **Theoretical Contribution**

The theoretical contribution of the titled research lies in its exploration of complex workplace dynamics, specifically focusing on the interplay between ostracism, interpersonal deviance, and the mediating influences of employee silence and emotional exhaustion. The addition of a moderator, in this case, ingratiating behavior, enhances the depth of understanding. By investigating these elements, the study aims to provide insights into the intricate relationships within organizational environments. By delving into the dynamics of ostracism and interpersonal deviance, the research contributes to the theoretical understanding of how social exclusion and deviant behavior intersect in the workplace. This exploration sheds light on the nuanced ways these factors influence organizational dynamics.

The inclusion of employee silence and emotional exhaustion as mediating variables adds theoretical depth by examining the psychological mechanisms through which ostracism and interpersonal deviance impact individuals. Understanding how these mediating factors operate can provide valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners in managing workplace dynamic. The introduction of ingratiating behavior as a moderator introduces a novel perspective. This aspect contributes to the theoretical framework by suggesting that certain mitigating factors can influence the strength or nature of the relationship between ostracism, interpersonal deviance, employee silence, and emotional exhaustion.

The introduction of ingratiating behavior as a moderating factor represents a theoretical advancement. This addition suggests that certain employee behaviors may act as mitigating factors, influencing the strength or direction of the relationships between ostracism, interpersonal deviance, employee silence, and emotional exhaustion. This expands the theoretical understanding of factors that can buffer or exacerbate the impact of negative workplace experiences.

In summary, the theoretical contribution of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of workplace dynamics, incorporating multiple constructs and exploring the mediating and moderating influences that shape employee experiences. This integrative approach enhances our theoretical understanding of the complexities inherent in the modern workplace.

## **Research Recommendations**

Highlighted any patterns or dynamics that emerged from the data, emphasizing the significance of these connections within the workplace context. Reflect on the complexity of workplace dynamics as revealed by the interplay of multiple constructs. Discussed how these complexities align with or challenge existing theories and literature, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of organizational behavior. Based on the study's findings, recommend specific interventions or strategies to address ostracism in the workplace.

- This may include training programs, awareness campaigns, or policies that promote a more inclusive and respectful work environment.
- Suggest practical approaches for addressing the mediating factors of employee silence and emotional exhaustion. This might involve mental health support, communication channels for voicing concerns, or stress management programs.
- Recommend leadership training programs that emphasize the importance of fostering a positive workplace culture, effective communication, and conflict resolution skills. Effective leadership holds significant potential in alleviating the adverse impacts of workplace obstacles.
- Propose the implementation of continuous monitoring systems and feedback mechanisms to track workplace dynamics. Regular assessments can help identify early signs of issues and allow for timely interventions.
- Future Direction
- When discussing future directions in the context of research on workplace dynamics, consider areas where further investigation or development could contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Here are some potential future directions.
- Conduct longitudinal studies to explore how the relationships identified in research evolve over time. Understanding the dynamics over an extended period can provide insights into the persistence or change in workplace behaviors and their effects.
- Investigate the cross-cultural implications of workplace dynamics. Explore how cultural differences may influence the impact of ostracism, interpersonal deviance, and ingratiating behavior on employee experiences and outcomes.
- Balance the focus on negative workplace behaviors by exploring positive behaviors that contribute to a healthy work environment. Investigate the impact of pro-social behaviors, teamwork, and positive leadership styles on employee well-being and performance.

- Develop and test interventions or training programs aimed at addressing the identified issues. Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies such as conflict resolution training, leadership development programs, or interventions to promote a positive organizational culture.
- Explore initiatives that empower employees to have a more active role in shaping their work environment. This could involve participatory decision-making processes, employee feedback systems, or initiatives that promote a sense of ownership and agency.
- Investigate how organizational policies and practices influence workplace dynamics. Assess the impact of HR policies, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and performance management systems on the occurrence of negative and positive workplace behaviors.
- Identify and explore additional factors that may moderate or mediate the relationships studied. This could involve personal characteristics, team dynamics, or organizational factors that may influence the outcomes observed in your research.

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