In the Eye of the Storm: The Confluence of Change Uncertainty, Job Stress, and Ostracism

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The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between job stress, change uncertainty, and perceptions of workplace ostracism, aiming to understand how uncertainty during times of change affects the link between job stress and workplace exclusion. Using a two-wave sampling of workers across various sectors (n=396) and employing the Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) Model as the theoretical framework, the findings reveal that the combined effects of job stress and change uncertainty buffer perceptions of ostracism, with significant moderation occurring only at moderate and high levels of change uncertainty. This research enhances the understanding of workplace dynamics and their impact on employee well-being and organizational outcomes, offering valuable insights into how change uncertainty and job stress jointly predict workplace ostracism and suggesting strategies to mitigate these negative effects.

Introduction

The modern workplace is a complex and demanding environment, characterized by rapid change and increased demands. This has led to a rise in workplace tension, with nearly half of surveyed employees reporting significant stress at work (Valinsky, 2023). However, the challenges do not end there. Alongside this stress epidemic, feelings of exclusion and ostracism have become pervasive in the workplace. An alarming 66% of employees have experienced workplace ostracism (Fox & Stallworth, 2005), and job stress is a potent predictor of such feelings (Turner et al., 1995). Moreover, employees exposed to recent or impending organizational changes reported higher levels of chronic stress and physical health symptoms at work (American Psychological Association, 2017). This turmoil has far-reaching effects on employees' personal lives, including difficulties balancing work and personal life, feelings of cynicism towards coworkers, and resorting to unhealthy coping mechanisms (American Psychological Association, 2017).

Understanding the intricate web of workplace dynamics and their impact on employee well-being and organizational outcomes is crucial in today's fast-paced corporate environment. This research aims to investigate how perceptions of uncertainty during times of change can affect the relationship between job stress and instances of workplace exclusion. We seek to answer the research question of how perceptions of change uncertainty moderate the association between job stress and workplace exclusion.

The Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) Model provides an ideal theoretical framework for this study. This model posits that job stress arises from the interplay of job demands, job control, and social support. It emphasizes the importance of considering both the demands placed on employees and the resources available to them in understanding workplace

stress. The JDCS Model is particularly relevant to our study as it can help elucidate how perceptions of uncertainty, particularly during times of change, can influence the relationship between job stress and workplace exclusion.

Workplace ostracism can result in various negative outcomes, including decreased job satisfaction, decreased organizational commitment, and increased intentions to leave the organization (Ferris et al., 2008). Employees who feel stigmatized are more likely to report health problems and a decline in work performance (Leung et al., 2011). Work-related stress, especially when exacerbated by the uncertainty of organizational changes, can amplify these ramifications, leading to profound individual and organizational repercussions (Cavanaugh et al., 2000; Perrewé & Zellars, 1999).

The importance of this investigation cannot be overstated. Organizations stand to gain crucial insights by understanding how change uncertainty and job stress jointly predict workplace ostracism. This knowledge can inform strategies to mitigate these negative effects, promoting both individual health and organizational vitality (Spector, 1999; Vinokur & Van Ryn, 1993). Conversely, ignoring this nexus could result in increased employee attrition, declining morale, and suboptimal organizational performance.

To address our research question, we sampled general workers from diverse industries using a two-time survey method. Drawing on the literature related to job stress, workplace ostracism, and change uncertainty, we provide a framework to support our hypotheses and establish a theoretical model for testing. We test our hypotheses using Hayes's Process Macro and discuss our findings, managerial implications, and suggestions for implementing change in practice, along with further research directions.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) Model

The Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) Model emerges as a dominant theoretical paradigm, encompassing disciplines including occupational psychology, organizational behavior, and health sciences. Based on the pioneering works of Robert Karasek (1979), and subsequent expansions by Johnson and Hall (1988), JDCS theorizes that job demands, job control, and workplace social support influence occupational stress and health outcomes. A fundamental premise of this model is that individuals are exposed to different health hazards based on the interaction between these three work characteristics.

Several fundamental principles support the JDCS Model. According to Belkic et al. (2004), job demands refer to the physical and psychological stressors associated with job roles, such as burden, time constraints, and role ambiguity. These demands intertwine with job control, also known as "decision latitude" (Karasek, 1979; de Lange et al., 2004), representing a worker's ability to control their tasks and skill use. Then comes the aspect of social support in the workplace, which emphasizes the significance of collegial and supervisory relationships that can reduce tension (Johnson & Hall, 1988; Viswesvaran et al., 1999).

The scope of JDCS is extensive. It has played a crucial role in elucidating the psychological stress mechanisms in healthcare professions, where employees frequently encounter high demands and varying levels of control (Aiken et al., 2002; Kivimäki et al., 2006). JDCS provides insights into employee well-being, employment satisfaction, and retention in organizational research (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Häusser et al., 2010). In addition, its implications extend to public health, as workplace conditions are linked to conditions such as cardiovascular disease (Chandola et al., 2009; Eller et al., 2009).

However, just like any other theory, JDCS has its limitations. The potential oversimplification of the multifaceted nature of workplace stressors is a notable criticism. Occasionally, the model may not consider emotional demands or dynamic changes in work environments (Theorell et al., 2016; Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). In addition, its primarily Western origins may not always convey the subtleties of non-Western work cultures and values (Lu et al., 2009). Despite these criticisms, JDCS remains an indispensable instrument for comprehending the relationship between the work environment and health outcomes.

Job Stress

Job stress is often defined as emotional pressure caused by job obligations that exceed one's ability to manage (Karasek, 1979). An employee drowning in tasks and deadlines without support can envision this psychological discomfort. The JDCS Model helps explain stress by linking job demands, decision-making freedom, and workplace social support (Johnson & Hall, 1988). Numerous variables induce job stress. These include difficult job features that require psychological or organisational effort and a lack of workplace autonomy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The lack of supporting professional relationships exacerbates these pressures (Johnson & Hall, 1988), increasing stress.

Parker and DeCotiis (1983) identified job anxiety and time stress as subcomponents of job stress in their groundbreaking research. Job anxiety includes performance, safety, and interpersonal concerns. The JDCS model relates this anxiety to high job expectations and inadequate job control. Employees with too much responsibility and no decision-making power always feel anxious (Karasek, 1979). In demanding professions, employees feel increasingly isolated and unsupported, which increases anxiety (Johnson & Hall, 1988). Notably, empirical data links long-term job worry to physical issues. Cardiovascular difficulties, caused by job-

related anxiety, have been associated to demanding jobs with inadequate job control and social support (Chandola et al., 2009).

However, time stress is caused by strict deadlines and the never-ending scramble to finish duties (Parker & DeCotiis, 1983). Workplaces with high job requirements cause this tension (Karasek, 1979). According to the JDCS model, businesses where employees have significant influence over their tasks may reduce time stress. This autonomy over activities and decisions often mitigates time stress (Johnson & Hall, 1988). Even improved task management may not be enough to reduce time pressure stress in circumstances without enough social support (Karasek, 1979).

Multifaceted work stress affects individual and organizational dynamics. Repercussions include weariness, depression, cardiovascular illness, and a weaker immune system (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Chandola et al., 2009). Organizationally, stress is connected to worse job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and performance (de Lange et al., 2004). High-stress situations also erode team cohesion by deteriorating interpersonal interactions (Viswesvaran et al., 1999).

Ostracism

Ferris et al. (2008) define workplace ostracism as the perception of being sidelined, neglected, or bypassed by coworkers, resulting in a sense of alienation from the organization's social fabric. Imagine an employee whose entrance into the office cafeteria is met with conspicuous silence and averted gazes, a palpable feeling of exclusion. The Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) Model, a significant framework designed to deconstruct job-related stressors (Johnson & Hall, 1988), provides a deeper understanding of this sensation.

The JDCS Model's triad of job demands, job control, and social support provides a comprehensive lens through which to interpret workplace ostracism. Consider a worker

confronted with intense job demands, such as stringent deadlines and high-stakes projects (Karasek, 1979). In such high-pressure contexts, ostracism can be exacerbated if individuals feel outpaced or overshadowed in their pursuit of accolades (Leung et al., 2011). Add to this equation an environment in which their freedom to make decisions is constrained, and it is simple to see how feelings of isolation can increase (Spector, 2011). Professionals in this position may view themselves as an insignificant cog in an enormous corporate machine. In this context, it is impossible to overstate the significance of social support. Robinson et al. (2013) found that an empathic gesture from a peer, a reassuring conversation with a mentor, or even a simple acknowledgment can mitigate the severity of social exclusion.

Moving on to the antecedents and determinants, it has been observed that increased job demands frequently cause social exclusion. Jobs with inherent competition may cause workers to intentionally or unintentionally alienate those they view as threats (Leung et al., 2011). In addition, when individuals lack autonomy or decision-making leverage, their susceptibility to feelings of isolation and subsequent ostracism increases (Spector, 2011). This sensation of exclusion can be reinforced or protected by an unsupportive work environment. For example, a novice in an environment devoid of guidance or mentorship may experience intense feelings of alienation (Robinson et al., 2013).

Consistent exclusion has numerous and significant repercussions. On an individual level, ostracized employees frequently face a variety of emotional and physiological adversities, ranging from diminishing job satisfaction and escalating feelings of despondency to tangible health issues such as cardiovascular disease (Wu et al., 2012). Organizationally, these employees may decline performance metrics, diminish allegiance to their positions, and even consider severing ties with the organization (Hitlan & Noel, 2009). In some instances, their actions could

become counterproductive, posing threats to team dynamics and larger organizational objectives (Ferris et al., 2008).

In this intricate tapestry, however, the JDCS model offers glimmers of hope. The negative effects of ostracism can be significantly mitigated when an ostracized employee is sheltered by roles that provide ample control and consistent social support. As a result, the individual remains engaged and valued (Karasek, 1979). Within the complex dynamics of contemporary workplaces, the relationship between job stress and its numerous consequences arises as a common thread. The stressor-strain-outcome model, a seminal framework in organizational behavior, provides a comprehensive lens for understanding this relationship. At its center, the model hypothesizes that workplace stressors can act as catalysts, precipitating a variety of positive and negative workplace outcomes.

As suggested by the model, stressors in the workplace, such as an excessive burden or interpersonal conflicts, translate into strain or psychological responses, which may heighten employees' sensitivity to social dynamics (Spector & Goh, 2001). Within this state of heightened awareness, even subtle signals of exclusion can be perceived more intensely, thereby increasing perceptions of workplace ostracism (Williams, 2007).

In addition, the model suggests that these strains are not endpoints. Ostracism in the workplace emerges as one of the most significant negative outcomes. Inadvertently sowing the seeds of exclusionary behavior may be the competitive nature of certain roles, particularly those with high demands (Leung et al., 2011). Such dynamics, viewed through the lens of the stressor-strain-outcome model, provide compelling evidence for the relationship between perceived job stress and social exclusion.

Turner et al. (1995) found that job stress strongly predicted perceived workplace ostracism, corroborating this theory. Compared to the stressor-strain-outcome paradigm, their research illuminates the transition from stressors to the perception of ostracism as an outcome, strengthening the connection between these concepts.

Given the distinct trajectory mapped out by the stressor-strain-outcome model and the available empirical evidence, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1: Perceptions of higher levels of job stress will positively correlate with perceptions of higher levels of workplace ostracism

Change Uncertainty

Change Uncertainty is a term used to describe the lack of clarity or predictability that employees encounter when faced with forthcoming changes in their job environment, duties, or the broader organizational context (Bordia et al., 2004). The phenomenon under consideration emerges from a multitude of origins, encompassing organizational shifts, communication by leaders, technology progress, and economic volatility (Bordia et al., 2004; DiFonzo & Bordia, 1997; Shoss, 2017; Kalleberg, 2009).

Negative consequences, such as heightened job tiredness, diminished organizational commitment, and a reduction in overall job satisfaction, are linked to heightened levels of ambiguity surrounding change. The presence of uncertainty can lead workers to consider other employment options, which in turn can heighten their inclination to depart from their current occupation (Oreg et al., 2011). The JDCS Model (Johnson & Hall, 1988) offers a conceptual framework for comprehending the interplay of job demands, control, and support. In the context of this theoretical framework, the concept of change uncertainty is conceptualized as a distinct form of occupational demand that has the potential to amplify the impact of other stress-inducing

factors. According to Karasek (1979), a high level of uncertainty over change, when not adequately mitigated by job control or social support, has the potential to result in significant stress. Nevertheless, it has been suggested by Li et al. (2020) that an organizational culture that is transparent might serve as a protective barrier, thereby reducing the adverse consequences of uncertainty associated with change.

According to a study conducted by Rafferty and Restubog (2010), it has been found that uncertainty regarding change amplifies the adverse consequences of job-related stress. This finding aligns with the theoretical framework of the JDCS Model, which posits that heightened job demands intensify the outcomes of stress, especially when accompanied by limited job control and inadequate social support. According to Knight and Eisenkraft (2015), the presence of uncertain change has the potential to diminish an individual's sense of control within their work environment, hence intensifying feelings of tension. According to the research conducted by Bordia et al. (2004), instances of economic instability or organizational restructuring often lead to heightened levels of job-related stress and uncertainty, which in turn undermine the supportive frameworks within an organization as employees prioritize their own job security over collective cohesion (Kramer, 1999). The coalescence of change uncertainty with job stress has the potential to yield adverse consequences, including a decline in job satisfaction and an elevation in turnover intentions (Schaubroeck & Merritt, 1997).

According to Bordia et al. (2011), the presence of ambiguity might contribute to the development of negative conduct among colleagues, hence creating a conducive climate for the occurrence of workplace exclusion. During periods of substantial organizational transformation, employees may encounter emotions of marginalization as a result of shifting job responsibilities or defensive conduct exhibited by their peers (Rafferty & Restubog, 2010). According to van den

Bos and Lind (2002), the association between change uncertainty and workplace exclusion could be influenced by organizational support and interpersonal trust. The experience of prolonged ambiguity regarding changes in one's job can give rise to emotions of uneasiness about one's employment, which in turn can lead to a reduced level of engagement in social relationships and an elevated likelihood of perceiving or experiencing exclusion (Ferrie et al., 2005; Knoll & van Dick, 2013).

In order to develop a more comprehensive comprehension of the interplay between change uncertainty and its impact on workplace behaviors and perceptions, it is imperative to differentiate the immediate implications of this uncertainty and the possible moderating influences it may have. The inclusion of change uncertainty as a moderating variable can contribute to a more comprehensive comprehension of its role, emphasizing its multifaceted characteristics (Ashford et al., 1989). Through the process of analysis, it is possible to deconstruct the circumstances in which the presence of change uncertainty either intensifies or alleviates the impact of stresses in the workplace, with a specific focus on ostracism (Williams & Sommer, 1997; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

When examining the relationship between job stress, ostracism, and change uncertainty, it is important to analyze the potential moderating effects of change uncertainty. This includes considering both its ability to mitigate the negative impact of job stress and exacerbate its effects. According to Knight and Eisenkraft (2015), certain studies propose that experiencing shared adversity can foster stronger bonds among employees. However, a comprehensive body of evidence suggests that uncertainty surrounding organizational changes tends to amplify the adverse consequences of job stress and ostracism (Schaubroeck & Merritt, 1997; Rafferty &

Restubog, 2010; Kramer, 1999; van den Bos & Lind, 2002). Hence, we posit the following hypothesis:

> *H2: Perceptions of change uncertainty will moderate the relation between job stress and ostracism, such that the association will be exacerbated at different levels of change uncertainty.*

Hypothesized Model

In order to help answer the research question, "How do perceptions of change uncertainty moderate the relationship between job stress and workplace ostracism? "we will examine the relationships using the model depicted in Figure 1.

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

Our model includes the antecedent variable of perceptions of job stress, the sole outcome variable of workplace ostracism, and change uncertainty as a potential moderator of the relationship between the antecedent and outcome variables. In other words, our model theorizes how change uncertainty will moderate the association between employee perceptions of job stress and workplace ostracism.

In light of the reality that our hypothesized model can be generally applied to nearly all work environments and no previous studies have used our proposed model, we argued that a general population of employees would be most suitable for evaluating the broad aspects and relationships between each variable. A more targeted approach may be merited if existing qualitative studies indicate a nuanced characteristic of specific organizational populations. However, since our hypothesized model is exploratory and the first of its kind, collecting data from the general workforce is most appropriate.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Our sample consisted of individuals who met the following criteria: (a) they were at least 18 years old, (b) they were employed in the United States, (c) they had at least one year of work experience, and (d) they consented to participate in a Qualtrics Panel. After receiving sanction from an institutional review board (IRB), we commenced data collection. We collected data through the third-party company Qualtrics because internet vendor-based sampling typically produces more consistent composition, respondent integrity, data quality, data structure, and substantive results (Smith et al., 2016). Between October 24 and November 24, 2021, we surveyed our participants twice (with a minimum one-week interval between each sampling), with each participant responding to each scale/questionnaire only once. In addition to the variables required by our model, additional variables were collected. The first sample was collected in an average of 22.57 minutes, whereas the second sample required an average of 31.65 minutes. The total and average response time of survey participants was 54.08 minutes. After completing the exams, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Our initial sample consisted of 396 responses from U.S.-based workers aged 30–87 (M = 59.01, SD = 10.722) with varying levels of education and between 5 and 70 years of work experience (M = 35.60, SD = 11.12). Individuals aged 30–81 (M = 59.01, SD = 10.722) with varying levels of education and between 5 and 70 years of work experience (M = 35.600, SD = 11.8900) who were currently employed in the United States comprised our sample for analysis. With 91.162% of participants identifying as White/Caucasian, the racial/ethnic composition of the sample was skewed toward homogeneity. See Table 1 for more details.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

Variables

Workplace Ostracism. Using the scale for Workplace Ostracism by Ferris et al. (2008), we evaluated our participants' self-perceptions of workplace ostracism (10 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale unified as a single variable.) The literature supports the reliability and construct validity of this measure's representation of participant's self-reported perception of workplace ostracism associated with their work (e.g., Ferris et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2012).

Job Stress. Using Parker's Job Stress Scale (Parker & DeCotiis, 1983), we evaluated our participants' self-perception of stress caused by work (13 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale unified as a single variable.) The literature supports the reliability and construct validity of this measure's representation of participants' self-reported perception of anxiety associated with their work (e.g., Abbas & Raja, 2015; Jamal, 1990; Jandaghi et al., 2011).

Change Uncertainty. Using the questions associated with the factor for change uncertainty in Rafferty and Griffin's (2006) multi-item measure for job-based change perceptions, we evaluated our participants' self-reported perceptions of uncertainty surrounding aspects of their job (four items on a 5- point Likert-type scale unified as a single variable.)

Control Variables. To eliminate alternative explanations for the hypothesized relationships in this study, we followed Bernerth and Aguinis (2016) and included control variables. Initially, we controlled for our participants' job satisfaction to account for the impact of varying levels of job satisfaction on workplace ostracism (Spector, 1999). Using Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) measure for job satisfaction, we evaluated our participants' self-reported job satisfaction (six items on a 5- point Likert-type scale unified as a single variable.) Additionally, we controlled for age, gender, and organizational tenure because these demographic elements are the most

commonly used demographic control variables in the motivation and performance literature (Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016).

Missing Data

In our sampling of the 396 participants, we captured data associated with the items in variables during two waves of sampling. During the first time of sampling, we captured data related to demographics (age, gender, race, organization tenure, and education level). Additionally, we gathered scale items associated with our focal variables (change uncertainty and job stress). The missing values with the first sampling were minimal. Demographic missing values included zero cases for gender, race, education level, and organization tenure. Only one case contained missing values for age (0.300%). Our variable items each had one case missing (0.300%). In the first sampling, the missing case was the same participant among the items.

The second sampling contained no demographics measures, our dependent variable for workplace ostracism, and the control measure job satisfaction. Both measures each had 146 cases with missing values accounting for 36.900% of missingness. Similarly to the first sampling, all cases containing missing values overlapped in the second sampling.

To determine if the items were Missing Completely at Random (MCAR), we analyzed the data with SPSS via Little's MCAR test $X^2(15) = 13.742$, $p = 0.545$. Considering that we found a non-significant p-value, we determined that the values were missing at random. Accordingly, we used the expectation maximization (EM) method to impute the missing values for the 147 cases of missing values (Shortreed & Forbes, 2010). For the variables that contained 36.900% of missing values, there was less than 0.12 value shift of difference between the means of items when compared to cases with non-imputed values. Therefore, we determined that our imputation method appropriately imputed values for further analysis efforts.

Power Analysis

Using the G*Power statistical tool (Faul et al., 2007, 2009), we evaluated our sample and potential effect size for this study. With a proposed .80 as a convention for 'general use' when performing this power analysis (Cohen, 1988, 1992), we determined that a modest sample size of n = 222 or more with 80% power will be of statistical significance given the number of proposed variables in our study. Considering that our sample size was n = 396, we determined that our sample size was adequate for our intended analysis method.

Reliability and Correlation Analysis.

To test the reliability of the constructs, we used the minimum value of 0.6 for Cronbach's alpha scores for the inclusion of the measures in the analysis (Pallant, 2001). All measures met these criteria. The descriptive statistics and correlations among variables are presented in Table 2.

(Inset Table 2 about here)

Additionally, we tested correlations of all constructs with the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015). Considering that all values in question were less than Henseler et al.'s threshold (0.9), we determined that discriminant validity was established (see Table 3 for more details).

(Inset Table 3 about here)

Analysis and Results

In our study, we set forth two primary hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 (H1) posited a direct effect of job stress on workplace ostracism. Hypothesis 2 (H2) proposed an interactive effect between job stress and change uncertainty on workplace ostracism.

Using a sample of 396 participants, the relationship between job stress, change uncertainty, and their interaction with workplace ostracism was assessed, with age, gender, years in the organization, and job satisfaction acting as covariates.

The overall model was statistically significant, accounting for approximately 33.6% of the variance in workplace ostracism ($R^2 = .336$, $F(7, 388) = 28.110$, $p < .001$). Supporting H1, job stress was found to significantly and positively influence workplace ostracism ($\beta = .271$, $p < .001$). Additionally, change uncertainty was also positively associated with workplace ostracism ($\beta = .181$, $p < .001$).

Crucially, the interaction between job stress and change uncertainty was statistically significant ($\beta = .195$, $p < .001$). This interaction led to a noteworthy change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .060$, $F(1, 388) = 35.144$, $p < .001$), signifying the combined effect of job stress and change uncertainty on workplace ostracism. Technically, this supports our H2. However, further probing of this interaction revealed unexpected patterns.

At low levels of change uncertainty (-1.758), the effect of job stress on workplace ostracism was non-significant ($\beta = -.072$, $p = .452$). Yet, at mean (-.258) and high levels (1.742) of change uncertainty, job stress showed significant positive associations with workplace ostracism ($\beta = .221$, $p = .002$ and $\beta = .610$, $p < .001$, respectfully). These findings, especially the attenuation of the relationship at moderate to high levels of change uncertainty, were contrary to our original expectations for H2. Please see Figure 2 for a visual representation of the simple slopes.

(Insert Figure 2. about here)

Among the covariates, gender was significantly and negatively associated with workplace ostracism ($\beta = -.292$, $p < .001$), indicating the importance of gender differences in ostracism

perceptions. The variable 'years in the organization' also had a negative, albeit small, impact on workplace ostracism ($\beta = -.008$, $p = .040$). Age was not a significant predictor ($\beta = -.004$, $p = .302$), while job satisfaction presented a borderline positive relationship with workplace ostracism ($\beta = .119$, $p = .052$).

Discussion

This study's primary objective was to investigate the direct and moderating effects of job stress and change uncertainty on workplace ostracism. As such, our findings provide important insights into the connection between workplace demands, such as job stress and change uncertainty, and the experience of exclusion. As explained by the JDCS Model (Johnson & Hall, 1988), the results indicate that the coexistence of these job demands can intensify feelings of exclusion.

Consistent with prior scholastic research, our study's findings supported the positive correlation between job stress and workplace ostracism, thereby validating Hypothesis 1. Numerous prior studies have shed light on the negative effects of job-related stress, particularly its potential to undermine interpersonal dynamics within the organizational context (Rafferty & Restubog, 2010; Schaubroeck & Merritt, 1997). This assertion is supported by the findings of our research, which indicate that elevated levels of work-related stress exacerbate feelings of ostracism.

Previous research has demonstrated a correlation between change uncertainty and workplace ostracism. According to the study conducted by Bordia et al. (2011), instances of economic instability or organizational restructuring that are characterized by a lack of clarity on changes have the potential to result in increased levels of poor behavior among coworkers. This occurrence has the potential to aggravate occupational stigmatization. Our study's data

corroborates the aforementioned findings, suggesting that the presence of change uncertainty plays a significant role in fostering sentiments of exclusion in the workplace.

The results of the present investigation add to the existing understanding and knowledge of the Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT: Lind & Van den Bos, 2002) which posits that individuals exhibit a variety of responses to uncertainty. Considering that our research sought to shed light on the manner in which job stress and change-related uncertainty interact to influence coping mechanisms and workplace behaviors, we argue that in situations characterized by high levels of uncertainty regarding change, job stress arises as a stronger predictor of individuals' experiences of exclusion. In accordance with the findings of Kramer (1999) and van den Bos and Lind (2002), the above-mentioned amplification, particularly when confronted with significant levels of change uncertainty, represents the cumulative effect of these stressors. These scholars have highlighted the exacerbated negative effects that result from the simultaneous occurrence of these variables.

Significant predictors of ostracism in the workplace were found to be gender and organizational tenure. The observed gender effect is consistent with previous scholarly research (Williams & Sommer, 1997) that examined gender differences in ostracism encounters and interpretations. Existing literature on this topic has produced inconsistent results. However, our research indicates that gender disparities substantially impact the perception of exclusion, necessitating further investigation. The negative effect of organizational tenure on ostracism emphasizes the importance of tenure and familiarity within the organizational context. According to Kramer (1999), when employees assimilate and become acquainted with the company's culture, their perceptions of exclusion may diminish. The intricate interaction between occupational stress and uncertainty highlights the significance of contextual factors. Our study

provides additional support for the fundamental principles enumerated in the existing literature on job stress, change uncertainty, and workplace exclusion.

Limitations and Future Research

In reflecting on the present study, we identify several limitations which present prospective avenues for future research. Addressing these limitations will facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships we have examined.

First, a significant limitation of our sample pertains to the age demographic. Specifically, our sample only comprised individuals aged 30 and above. Although age did not emerge as a significant predictor in our model, the absence of the 18-29 age bracket means our findings might not be directly pertinent to this younger demographic. While the significance of considering age-based nuances in organizational research has been noted in the literature (Twenge & Campbell, 2008), our study must capture this spectrum comprehensively. Despite our attempts, the younger demographic did not participate in significant numbers. Future researchers need to include this age group, as the experiences and perceptions of younger employees can considerably differ due to their unique challenges, expectations, and workplace dynamics (Ng et al., 2010). Hence, we urge subsequent studies to apply our model or a similar one to determine if the same relationships hold true for the younger workforce.

Secondly, juxtaposed with the broader literature, the borderline significance of job satisfaction in our model suggests the nuanced relationship it shares with workplace ostracism. Historically, job satisfaction has been identified as a significant predictor of numerous workplace outcomes (Judge & Larsen, 2001). Though not conclusively significant, our findings align with the corpus of research suggesting a linkage. A deeper dive into this variable, exploring its

multifaceted nature and its potential interactions with other variables, would be a promising area for future research.

Lastly, our sampling methodology did not target a specific industry or worker population. This was intentional, as our research question sought to understand generalizable patterns across diverse work contexts. However, by aiming for generalization, we might have neglected industry-specific nuances. Different industries often come with their unique stressors, cultures, and challenges (Hoffman & Stetzer, 1996). As such, the dynamics of job stress, change uncertainty, and ostracism might vary across sectors. Future research should delve into specific industries to uncover these nuances and ascertain if industry-specific dynamics modulate the relationships we observed.

Managerial implications

Our study's findings offer valuable lessons for organizational leaders and managers seeking to foster more inclusive workplaces, particularly in environments where high job stress intertwines with change uncertainty. Our results show that the detrimental impacts of job stress on perceptions of workplace ostracism become more pronounced as change uncertainty increases. This suggests that the adverse feelings deriving from job stress might be exacerbated in situations characterized by notable changes. Considering antecedent studies have shown that feelings of ostracism can deteriorate job performance, diminish organizational commitment, and dampen job satisfaction (Ferris et al., 2008), managers cannot afford to overlook the combination of job stress and change uncertainty.

The heightened relationship between job stress and ostracism during periods of significant change underscores the significance of transparent communication from organizational leaders. It is well-documented that while organizational change is inescapable, its

uncertainties can be curtailed (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Thus, employing a communication-centric approach characterized by regular updates, open dialogues, and opportunities for feedback can prove invaluable in minimizing feelings of ostracism.

Furthermore, our findings emphasize the role of professional stress as a predictor of perceived ostracism. With insights from Lazarus's (1984) adaptive coping strategies, organizations can benefit immensely from stress management initiatives. Managers can create a more resilient workforce by equipping employees with the tools to handle stress, particularly during tumultuous periods of change. Flexible work schedules and equitable workload distribution also aid in this endeavor.

Additionally, the pronounced influence of job stress on ostracism perceptions under high change uncertainty makes a compelling case for managers to prioritize resilience-building measures. Research by Luthans and Church (2002) supports the notion that resilience can function as a formidable buffer against the harmful effects of change-induced uncertainty. By fostering resilience, organizations can ensure that their employees traverse change more seamlessly, diminishing the possibility of them feeling marginalized.

Lastly, our study also discussed the implications of gender and tenure concerning ostracism perceptions. It is paramount for managers to appreciate and address the unique challenges and experiences of various demographic groups within the organization. Implementing mentorship programs, particularly for those newer to the organization, can play a pivotal role in ensuring every employee feels integrated, valued, and supported. In synthesizing all these insights, it becomes apparent that organizational leaders have a golden opportunity to nurture a more cohesive, understanding, and resilient workplace culture by recognizing and addressing the interplay of job stress and change uncertainty.

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Figure 1. Theoretical Model

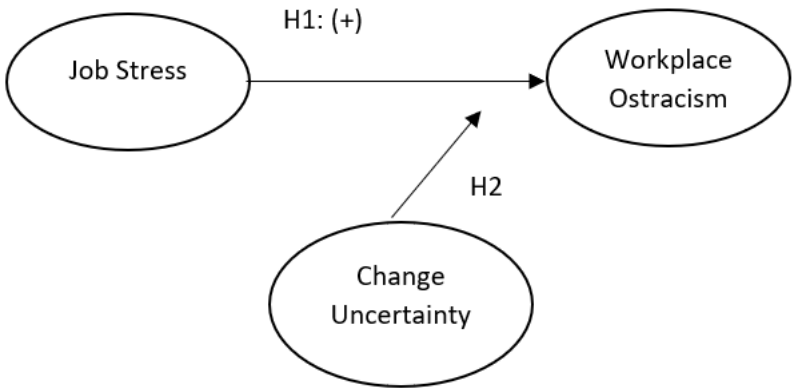

Figure 2. Simple Slope Anlysis

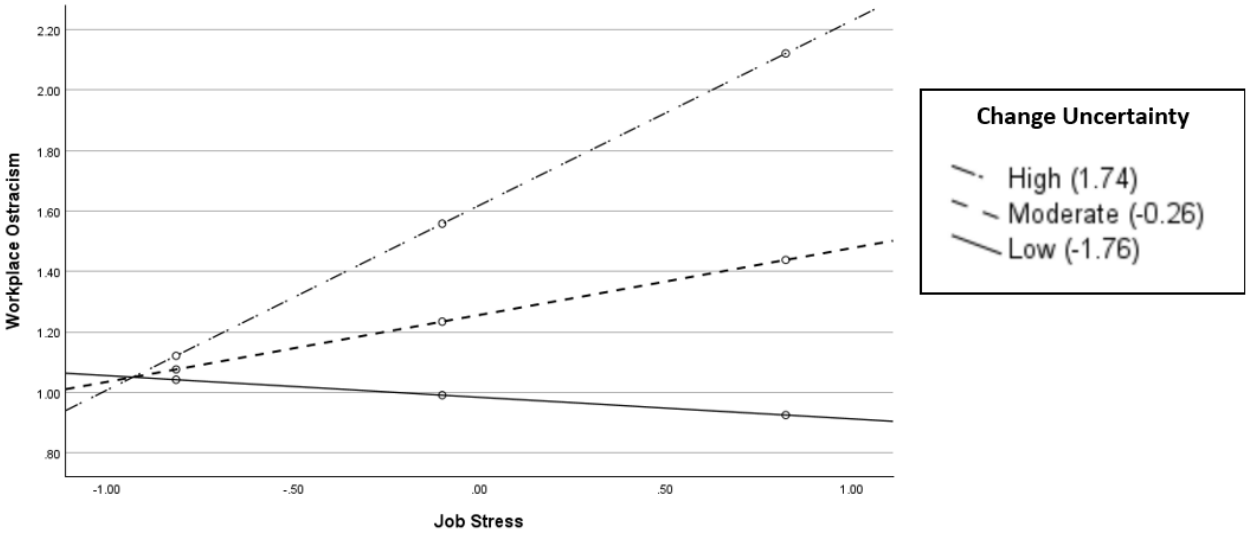

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Age		*n*	%
30-35		14	3.534
36-40		16	4.040
41-45		31	7.828
46-50		22	5.556
51-55		34	8.871
56-60		71	17.929
61-65		81	20.455
66-70		93	23.485
71-75		23	5.808
76-80		9	2.273
81		2	0.505
Education		*n*	%
High School		27	6.818
Vocational Training		9	2.273
Some College		43	10.859
Associates Degree		37	9.343
Bachelor's Degree		169	42.677
Master's Degree		82	20.707
Doctorate Degree		27	6.818
Other		2	0.505
Race		*n*	%
Asian		18	4.545
Black or African American		5	1.263
Hispanic/Latino		2	0.505
White or Caucasian		361	91.162
Multiracial or other		6	1.515
Prefer not to answer		4	1.010
Industry with SIC code		*n*	%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	*01-09*	5	1.263
Mining	*10-14*	4	1.010
Construction	*15-17*	18	4.545
Manufacturing	*20-39*	55	13.889
Transportation and Public Utilities	*40-49*	72	18.182
Wholesale Trade	*50-51*	15	3.788
Retail Trade	*53-59*	41	10.354
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	*60-67*	37	9.343
Services	*70-89*	100	25.253
Public Administration	*91-99*	49	12.374

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for All Variables

	M	SD	1	2
1. Job Stress	2.177	0.788	(.947)	
2. Change Uncertainty	3.008	1.454	.641**	(0.895)
3. Workplace Ostracism	1.454	0.951	.429**	.434**
4. Job Satisfaction	3.611	0.782	-.491**	-.474**

Table 3. Heterotrait-monotrait Ratio

	1	2	3	4
1. Job Stress				
2. Change Uncertainty	0.685			
3. Workplace Ostracism	0.463	0.462		
4. Job Satisfaction	0.489	0.496	0.181	