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## Article

Making of rebel talent through workplace ostracism: Moderated-mediation model involving emotional intelligence, organizational conflict and knowledge sharing behavior

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## MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Making of rebel talent through workplace ostracism: A moderated-mediation model involving emotional intelligence, organizational conflict and knowledge sharing behavior

Umer Zaman<sup>1</sup>, Shahid Nawaz<sup>2\*</sup>, Owais Shafique<sup>3</sup> and Saba Rafique<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** Workplace deviant behavior (WDB) and workplace ostracism (WO) have emerged as one of the most toxic behaviors that breed self-protection and self-interest in today's organizations. However, limited evidence is available on the underlying factors, such as organizational conflict (OC), knowledge-sharing behavior (KSB) and emotional intelligence (EI), in explaining the WO-WDB relationship. Hence, the present study aims to introduce and empirically validate a moderated-mediation model of workplace deviant behavior, involving WO, OC, KSB and EI, respectively. Drawing on study data from 250 officials in the higher education public sector institutions in Pakistan, and employing structural equation modeling with partial least squares, the findings revealed a significant positive effect of WO on



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Shahid Nawaz earned his doctorate (PhD) from University Utara Malaysia in the field of management sciences. He currently works with the Department of Management Sciences, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan, as an Assistant Professor. Dr. Nawaz has interdisciplinary research interests and has published in prestigious international SSCI journals. His research pursuit also involves conducting research-based training programs, seminars, workshops and conferences. Dr. Nawaz has appeared as a chairperson at national and international academic research conferences. Dr. Umer Zaman is currently working as an Assistant Professor at the Endicott College of International Studies, Woosong University, Daejeon, Republic of Korea. He earned his doctoral degree in management studies. Dr. Zaman has recently published in top-tier SSCI journals, based on his interdisciplinary research interests, including project management, strategic HR, tourism management, CSR and marketing. He has extensive experience working in action-based research projects under various international / regional organizations and donor agencies including the UNODC (Vienna) and ADB-OECD. Dr. Zaman has chaired various academic research conferences at national and international level. He also served as a reviewer for the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, as well as the South Asian Journal of Management Sciences.

## PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Growing corporate scandals (e.g., Adelphia, Enron, HealthSouth, WorldCom, and Tyco International, etc.) have always been in the news, as the underlying factors for workplace deviant behaviors remain under-explored. The present study aimed to explore the direct and indirect effects of workplace ostracism on workplace deviant behaviors, involving multiple pathways through knowledge sharing behavior and organizational conflicts (as mediators), also under the influence of emotional intelligence (as a moderator). Drawing on a sample of 250 public officials in Pakistan and utilizing partial least squares structural equation modeling, the findings offer strategic insights for managing major causes and potential deterrents for workplace deviant behaviors. Organizational leaders, including HR executives, can avoid workplace deviant behaviors by exploring effective remedies against workplace ostracism and keeping their workforce feel more engaged and supported at the workplace.

WDB. Besides the validation of the mediating roles of OC and KSB, the findings also confirmed a significant moderating influence of EI. The study implications provide theoretical and practical insights to better interpret KSB, OI and EI in organizations that can generate effective deterrence towards WO and WDB.

**Subjects: Business, Management and Accounting; Human Resource Management; Employment Relations**

**Keywords: Workplace deviant behavior; workplace ostracism; knowledge sharing behavior; emotional intelligence; organizational conflict; social identity theory; conservation of resources theory**

## 1. Introduction

Globally, organizations have witnessed various forms of counterproductive, illegal, abhorrent, and insidious behaviors that alarmingly increase incidents of corporate frauds and scandals (Elias, 2013; X. Liu et al., 2020; Di Stefano et al., 2019). Hence, workplace deviant behavior serve as a downward spiral for many organizations today (X. Liu et al., 2020; Di Stefano et al., 2019). The nature of the work necessitates employees to share substantial time with others, enabling the modern workplace experiences as a social phenomenon that cannot be underestimated (Heerwagen et al., 2016; X. Liu et al., 2020). WDB is not only responsible for destroying the organization, but it also affects the organization-wide employees (Di Stefano et al., 2019). Due to this fact, WDB has captured more scholarly attention recently (Di Stefano et al., 2019; Ferguson et al., 2012; X. Liu et al., 2020) as researchers have examined WDB in varying degrees and forms, such as counterproductive work behaviors (Di Stefano et al., 2019; Baharom et al., 2017), antisocial work behaviors, workplace violence, and organizational misconduct (X. Liu et al., 2020; Robbins et al., 2012).

Zhao et al. (2013) examined that whenever an individual feels ostracized, he/she will be engaged in WDB that aims to harm the organization. The authors also reported that almost seventy-percent of employees indicate that they had been ostracized at the workplace. Prior studies discussed that due to ostracism, employees feel excluded and rejected from the workplace and this badly affects employees' behavior (Lyu & Zhu, 2019; Mao, He & Yang, 2020) resulting to conflicts with other employees, consequently leading to WDB (X. Liu et al., 2020; Di Stefano et al., 2019). Robinson et al. (2013) stressed that WO affects work-related relationships that may also depict workplace behaviors. Generally, ostracized individuals perceive that they have some unpleasant characteristics or feel that they are different from others (Mao, He & Yang, 2020), which is why they might be engaged in OC's (Ali Khan, 2017; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019).

In this progressive era, WDB has emerged as a potential threat for organizations (Di Stefano et al., 2019; X. Liu et al., 2020; Raza et al., 2017) across developing and advanced economies. However, fewer studies have focused on WDB and its underlying factors that lead to such dysfunctional behaviors. Moreover, limited scholarly attempts have included WO as a factor to explain WDB. The potential harm caused by WO cannot be ignored, as it undermines the quality of human interactions at the workplace (Lyu & Zhu, 2019; Robinson et al., 2013). Waldeck et al. (2017) found that a vast majority (95%) of workers experienced ostracism that raises the likelihood that corporate norms can be violated as it encourages people to engage in deviant behaviors (Chung, 2017; X. Liu et al., 2020). To overcome such challenging conditions, employees must be emotionally stable and intelligent (MacCann et al., 2020; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019). Imran (2013) argued that inappropriate behavioral patterns of employees also influence others, thereafter promoting OC (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019). Drawing from the social identity theory, when an individual experiences WO besides the limited human interaction, then he/she restrains to share resources and information with others, thus causing dysfunctional conflicts (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005). Hobfoll (1989) emphasized on conservation of resource theory that explains an individual's primary goal to build, protect, and conserve resources that are considered valuable (Hobfoll, 1989). In pursuit of such valuable resources, individuals require to express their emotions with others. However, ostracized

individuals who have a fear of losing their valuable resources develop negative emotions and resort to creating damage to their organization (Leung et al., 2011). Hence, WO reduces the availability of necessary resources to meet the work demand as well as accomplish the organizational goals (J. Liu et al., 2013).

Fewer studies have explored the role of mediating variables (e.g., KSB and OI) in the relationship between WO and WDB. Moreover, when employees undergo some form of work-related conflict, the adverse outcomes may also include increased violence (Chung, 2015). Al-Atwi (2017) highlighted that the employees perceived ostracism might lead them to a situation where pragmatic resources (e.g., information and opportunity derived from interacting with organizational members) will be depleted. Consequently, the employee tries to retain these resources with him/her self to deal with aggressive situations later (Di Stefano et al., 2019). Hence, KSB may be compromised when employees are exposed to WO as well as engaging in WDB. In contrast to the private sector, the employees in public sector institutions have been flagged as more prone to harmful behaviors at their workplace. Hence, the identification of causes and outcomes of employee's WDB in public organizations has become more critical (Dar, 2017; Di Stefano et al., 2019). Based on the identified research gap and theoretically grounded support from the social identity theory and conservation of resource theory, the present study aims to examine the mediating role of OC and KSB in the relationship between WO and WDB. Moreover, the present study also explores the moderating role of employees' EI in influencing these relationships.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Workplace deviant behavior

The phenomenon of workplace deviant behavior is not novel in times of increasing globalization, flexible technological environments, workplace stress, competition, and frequency of WDB's (Yadav & Rai, 2020; Benavides et al., 2000). Bennett and Robinson (2000) defined WDB as "the voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and, in doing so, this is perceived as threatening the well-being of an organization or its members". Litzky et al. (2006) workplace deviance definition includes "an antisocial behavior of an individual towards organization". Workplace deviance is described in different terms by researchers in their studies like workplace aggression, antisocial behavior, counterproductive behavior, and workplace incivility (Chung, 2018). Workplace deviance behavior is positive and negative, but the present study focused on negative deviance.

Adeoti et al. (2017) highlighted two major deviance types, namely, interpersonal deviance and organizational deviance. Interpersonal deviance means those deviant actions whose victims are individuals and colleagues in the organization and includes behaviors such as making fun of someone at work and saying something hateful. On the other hand, organizational behavior means those actions directed at the organization, its production schedules, and properties those actions include such as taking the organization's property from work without permission and discussing the organization's secret information with someone else who is not working in the organization. Ahmad et al. (2017) also said that due to WDB, employees are involved in stress-related problems. Whereas WDB also impacts organizations in different ways like decreased employee commitment and increased absenteeism (Rahman et al., 2013). Kidwell and Martin (2004) discussed that such kind of deviant behavior at work had received much broadcast attention and media coverage over the past several years and this disrepute is due to the negative consequences coupled with inappropriate behavior in organizations. A study conducted by Lewis (2004) on the western context said that mostly WDB is occurred in public sector organizations as compared to the private sector. Gallus et al. (2014) conducted a survey on the employees of public sector organization of United states explored that 71% of respondents reported experience of workplace incivility and deviant behavior at least some extent from the previous 5 years, and almost 6% said that they experienced such kind of actions several times.

Shahid and Ahmad (2016) said that employees or employers who have a tendency to experience moral disengagement and aggressive behavior are more likely to be involved in WDB, for example, cheating,

theft, and fraud. According to Nasir et al., (2012) working environment exists in the public sector organization of Pakistan is injustice, preferential treatments, un-standard procedures and political pressures due to this behavior study argue that these kinds of working environment activate the negative emotions in employees that automatically enhance the aggressive behavior, corruption, and moral disconnection. Due to this unpleasant behavior in the workplace, the health of Pakistan's public sector is harshly fading. Blau (1986) developed the Social exchange theory, and it is as cited in Omar et al. (2014) in his study, which discussed that social behavior is the outcome of an exchange process. Social exchange theory explains the reciprocity that happens between the context and the individual. There are two types of reciprocity: negative reciprocity and positive reciprocity. It is considered that reciprocity is frequently positive; however, negative reciprocity is also possible. Jiang et al. (2021), Cropanzano et al. (2002) and Colbert et al. (2004) discussed that "the negative norm of reciprocity means employees who notice that they are treated with unfairness may reciprocate in kind by engaging in deviant behavior."

## **2.2. Workplace ostracism**

Gruter and Masters (1986) defined "ostracism as a universal process of social rejection or exclusion". Ostracism is defined as a deliberate ignorance of the individual by the other or others (Sommer et al., 2001). WO means "an individual or group is ignoring or excluding by another individual or group" (Williams, 2001). In previous literature, ostracism is defined in different terms by different researchers, such as rejection, social exclusion, out of the loop and abandonment, etc. (Jones et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2012; Twenge et al., 2002). Prior study of Yang (2012) discussed that ostracism has unfavorable effects on the societal and psychological functions of the employees and intimidate the sense of belonging that is a basic need. Balliet and Ferris (2013) said that employees might ostracize in different ways, such as co-workers may not ask their colleagues about lunch together, ignoring recommendations made by their colleagues at meetings, etc. Research conducted on WO by many scholars explored that it is a common and widespread phenomenon that occurs in all organizations.

Chung (2018) discussed that many studies conducted on WO that have found many negative organizational outcomes, for instance, decreased level of job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, person-organization fit, and decreasing organizational commitment and increased levels of conflicts, counterproductive work behavior, harassment and aggression in the workplace. Previous studies reported that WO is discussed with direct effects, as well as mediated variables such as organizational recognition used as a mediator by C. Wu et al. (2016). In their study of WO (Ferris et al., 2015) the authors checked the mediating effect of self-esteem between the relationship of work performance and WO. Chung (2015, 2017) in his studies used person-organizational fit as a mediator between organizational citizenship, WO and deviant behavior.

Chung (2015) reported that ostracism could affect four fundamental needs that belong to humans. According to first need, individuals feel something wrong has been done by them and have some unfavorable traits due to which their self-esteem is negatively affected. Second, when an individual is removed from a group that they want to be a part of, their need for belongingness is negatively affected. Thirdly, the sense of control of the individual is damaged because others do not pay attention to their actions, which is why the individual is ultimately impacted by ostracism. Lastly, ostracism affects individuals' sense of expressive existence because it represents a structure of societal death and explains to individuals how life would be if one does not exist. Victoria Bellou (2016) conducted a study in which he concluded that WO is an organizational discouragement behavior that has been described in different forms, such as direct actions and withholding behaviors. He also said that it is a painful experience for its targets individual that can significantly influence the behavioral attitudinal responses. One of the studies conducted by Grandey et al. (2005) reported that ostracism causes work-family conflict because an employee who is facing stress at the workplace is probably engaged in life distress. Previous studies discussed that with the passage of time, interaction of people at the workplace is decreased due to WO, it harms the employees physical and mental health negatively, and also affects the attitude and behavior of employees towards work (Ferris et al., 2015).



Mlika et al. (2017) in public sector organization examined that about 82.9% of individuals engage in ostracism with other employees in the organization without any purpose, and about 58.5% of the participants said that ostracism could hurt and isolate them in the organization. Gould (1979) noted that in accordance with social exchange theory (SET), ostracized individuals are not motivated to exchange positive behavior towards other members of the organization. Past studies by L. Wu et al. (2012) discussed that pragmatic resources such as information and opportunity that are derived from interacting with other members in the organization are depleted, and to deal it in the threatening condition, employees would try to conserve these resources. This attempt produces negative outcomes as employee's ability to access the information is reduced due to WO and due to this employee's job performance is negatively affected. According to the conservation of resource theory, individuals try to protect, conserve, and build valued personal resources and job resources (Hobfoll, 1989). To protect and build these particular resources, employees need to share their emotions and built an expressive relationship with others. Unfavorably ostracism reduces those resources required for the completion of work demand (J. Liu et al., 2013). The researcher also discussed that ostracized individuals who lose their valuable resources would face negative emotions that lead individuals to damage their organization (Leung et al., 2011). A previous study has shown a positive relationship between ostracism at work and deviant behavior (Ali Khan, 2017). Research by Yan et al. (2014) showed that ostracism has a significant positive association with deviant behavior in the workplace. The study of Zhao et al. (2013) discussed that ostracism has a considerable impact on the behavior of the employee such as the deviant behavior of the employee. Hence, the first-hypothesis for this study is presented as:

**H<sub>1</sub>** WO has a significant and positive effect on WDB.

### **2.3. Mediating effect of organizational conflict**

Wall and Callister (1995) defined "conflict as a process in which one party observes that its interests are being opposed and negatively affected by another party". "OC occurs when members engage in activities that are incompatible with those of other colleagues within their network, members of other collectivities, or unaffiliated individuals who utilize the services or products of the organization" (Roloff, 1987). Previous literature discusses various types and causes of conflict. Falconer (2004) examined that OC categorizes into six types. Jehn and Jehn (1995) discussed that only two types of OCs which are relationship and task conflict. Medina et al. (2005) defined relationship conflict as an issue of hostility and tensions between people because members of an organization come with different backgrounds, attitudes, opinions, needs, cultures, beliefs, roles, values, expectations, perceptions, and behaviors. A study conducted by Jehn and Jehn (1995) discussed the relationship conflict in terms of negative emotional reactions, for instance, nervousness, fear, distrust, and anger. Task conflict issues arise when tasks are carried out in a different manner such as division of work among the organization individuals and coordination of activities are not in accordance with the organizational goals and objectives.

Moreover, the past study of Friedman et al. (2000) also reported that an immense level of relationship conflict could cause organizational dysfunctions and increase the stress level in the individual. On the other hand, task conflict is considered advantageous because it is associated with better quality ideas and expanded discussion over issues; it also facilitates the efficient use of resources. Prior studies analyze that task-related conflict harm the self-respect of an individual and to protect their self-respect, individual reacts defensively and aggressively and thus, this type of defensive behavior activates hostility in others that generate relationship conflicts (Choi & Cho, 2011; De Wit et al., 2012). Almutairi and AL-Shammeri (2014) discussed the causes of OCs in the public institution (social insurance). The study shows that continuing the significant impact on work pressure, the commitment of senior management, and role ambiguity creates a high OC level. OC is detrimental in different ways like it decreases productivity, decreases employee satisfaction (De Dreu & Beersma, 2005; Jehn, 1994). Abiodun (2014) reported that conflicts harm both the individual and organizational performance, and due to the intense level of

conflict, employees are physically and emotionally affected and also create morale problems of the employees' work disruption.

According to social identity theory (SIT), different groups of individuals exist in an organization, and due to this reason, the occurrence of conflict is usually because these different groups of individuals have different viewpoints. When there is a discrepancy in attitudes, interest needs, goals, and values, people tend to deviate between themselves, which affects the interpersonal relationship negatively (Ashforth & Mael, 1986; Jehn, 1994). According to Brewer and Miller (1996) people are socially different from each other, and individuals if they consider themselves as a part of one group, they perceive shared identity. Due to a strong shared identity, people will have a propensity of being trusted and faithful. While in the absence of shared identity, people will evaluate other's behavior negatively.

From the social identity theory, it is concluded that when an individual is ostracized, he perceives that he is not a part of the group and it is possible to engage him in harmful conflicts with other members of the organization. In addition to that, ostracized individuals have a lack of interaction that restrain them from sharing resources and information with other members of the organization (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005). Studies of past researchers examined that due to conflict, negative emotions occur in the workplace, an individual is directed to engage in deviant behavior (Bies et al., 1997; Deustch, 1996). Chung (2015) studied the relationship between OC, in-role behavior, and WO. His research findings indicate that ostracism in the workforce is linked to the conflict within organizations and ostracism in the workplace has a significant effect on deviant behavior. Hence, the second-hypothesis for this study is presented as:

**H<sub>2</sub>** OC significantly mediates the relationship between WO and WDB.

#### **2.4. Mediating effect of KSB**

Lee (2001) defined KSB "as the actions of distributing and transferring knowledge from individuals, groups, or organizations to others, requiring the cooperation of persons and groups for mutual benefits". Ling et al. (2009) said that to circulate knowledge and information within the organization is known as the sharing of knowledge. The aim of KSB is to create new ideas and knowledge by converting and transferring the existing ideas and knowledge among the people to help an organization to achieve its objectives (Shah Alam et al., 2009). When people willingly collaborate, it leads to the creation of new knowledge, which is considered as an important source of competitive advantage for the organization. Sometimes people think that their knowledge is important and precious and that is why they will not share their knowledge as some people argue that KSB is unnatural (Bock & Kim, 2002). Most of the researchers investigated different types of counterproductive behavior of KSB in their studies, such as knowledge hoarding, knowledge-sharing hostility, partial knowledge, knowledge withholding, KSB ignorance, disengagement from KSB, information exchange delay, KSB deterrent and barrier, and knowledge protection.

The prior study explains that organizational factors such as the perception of employees, management support for sharing knowledge, size of the organization, and applied technology can affect the employee's perception about the culture of KSB as similarly as the individual factors such as gender, age, and position (Connelly & Kelloway, 2003). Tao and Bing (2005) examined that employees share knowledge when they have an affiliation with the organization and its members. The study concludes that knowledge workers only share knowledge when it is associated with an increased level of productivity, while knowledge gaining is accompanied by both task quality and productivity. Past studies concluded that employees hide their knowledge due to ostracism in the workplace. The study of Leung et al. (2011) supported the aforementioned argument; it reported that ostracism at the workplace is a universal phenomenon that reduces employee engagement in sharing knowledge, that is why employees usually involve in knowledge hiding.



Past researchers found that KSB is affected by WO (Connelly et al., 2012). Also recommended that ostracism affects the KSB of employees when someone requested for knowledge, then ostracized employees do not involve in sharing knowledge and tend to be uncooperative. Gouldner (1960) supported the finding of Connelly by stating that, according to social exchange theory; Norms of reciprocity mean people treat individuals in the same manner as they are treated by others. It is called negative reciprocity. The study explored that ostracism activates negative reciprocity belief in ostracized employees and employees engaged in knowledge hiding and counterproductive behavior.

The intention of employees to share knowledge is related negatively to ostracism in the workplace, according to (Xiaocong et al., 2014). Zhao et al. (2016) studied ostracism and the hiding of knowledge at the workplace. He concluded that ostracism affects the sharing of knowledge that can cause the organization a serious financial loss. Hormozi and Naeini (2017) investigated the relationship between work engagement, deviant behavior, and knowledge management. The findings of this analysis indicated that knowledge management dimensions (knowledge transfer, knowledge maintaining, knowledge-creating, and knowledge usage) and deviant behavior of employees have a significant and negative relationship. Hence, the third-hypothesis for this study is presented as:

**H<sub>3</sub>** KSB significantly mediates the relationship between WO and WDB.

### **2.5. Moderating effect of EI**

According to Bar-On (1997), emotional intelligence (EI) is “a collection of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in managing with environmental demands and pressures”. Zhang et al. (2015) defined EI as the ability of an individual to deal with his or her emotions. Ashkanasy and Daus (2005) wrote in their study that emotional quotient is considered an important predictor of workplace behavior in the organization. Emotional quotient defined as “the ability to organize our feelings and those of others, to motivate ourselves and to manage our emotions and relationships well”. The study by Imran (2013) examined that to hire the best available talents EI and technical skills may help an organization and emotional quotient help to reach the uppermost ladder of success. According to O’Neil (1996), only 20% of intelligence contributes to one’s success in a professional career and 80% is related to management skills.

Day and Carroll (2004) discussed in their study that the former admitted that EI as a scary set of affective skills, readiness, motivation, and characteristics that influence the individual’s capacity to deal with various environmental problems. While the latter depicted EI as a set of abilities that help to understand and regulate emotions, appearance, perception, assimilation, and promote emotional and intellectual growth. The study of Williams (2009), Kelly and Barsade (2001) explains that high EI affects the reaction of individuals towards WO, it may have significantly influenced the coworkers or subordinates’ ability to work effectively in the organization. Zhang and Shi (2017) reported that employees can deal with the perceptions that are emerging from the WO effectively when they are highly emotionally intelligent because an employee may experience a range of emotions such as distress, anger, depression, and frustration in WO and EI facilitates an employee to understand the emotions and determine whether these emotions are rational in this particular situation.

Zhang et al., (2017) said that if employees have high EI and satisfaction with life, then they are more likely to manage their emotions and less likely to be affected by WO. Therefore, the finding of this study concludes that EI is negatively correlated with WO. According to Brackett et al. (2005) high level of EI stops the individual from contributing to misconduct that is harmful to the organization. Prior research (Eisenberg, 2000) found that a low level of EI may engage individuals in deviant behavior. Hence, the fourth-hypothesis for this study is presented as:

**H<sub>4</sub>** EI significantly moderates the relationship between WO and WDB.

Prior research reveals that a high level of EI develops problem-solving and collaborative behavior in individuals (Jordan & Troth, 2002; Schlaerth et al., 2013). Additionally, EI is considered essential for a constructive solution as these solutions require the ability of an individual to identify and control emotions. Conflict can be managed only when individuals have skills and abilities that help to find productive (constructive) solutions. Goleman (1998) stated that EI is composed of five components; one of the components is social skills. Social competencies are related to the capacity of the person to solve issues so that others cannot impede communication through negative feelings. This whole process helps to manage the conflict properly. Empirically, Jordan and Troth (2002) establish that employees with the highest level of EI are better in conflict resolution than the employees with the lowest level of EI. Salovey and Mayer (1990) explained that employees can keep away from the cycle of negativity that is initiated by the perception of WO when they have a higher level of EI. Hence, the fifth-hypothesis for this study is presented as:

**H<sub>5</sub>** EI significantly moderates the relationship between WO and OC.

According to Arabshahia et al. (2013), strong EI is positively correlated with KSB. Karkoulian et al. (2010) recommended that for effective KSB, top management first understand their own emotions and then try to understand the emotions of other employees. Turnispeed and Vandewaa (2012) explored that EI is positively linked to helping behavior towards co-workers; therefore, finding of this study reveals that EI has a positive effect on KSB. Higher EI reduces the knowledge hiding that occurs due to ostracism in the workplace, as ostracize individuals are excluded and rejected by others in the organization that is why they do not share knowledge with others to reciprocate the ostracism in the workplace. This statement is supported by the study of Geofroy and Max Evans (2017) when individuals are highly emotionally intelligent, they trust others and understand the emotions of others to the perception of ostracism and share knowledge with others in the organization. Hence, the sixth-hypothesis for this study is presented as:

**H<sub>6</sub>** EI significantly moderates the negative relationship between WO and KSB.

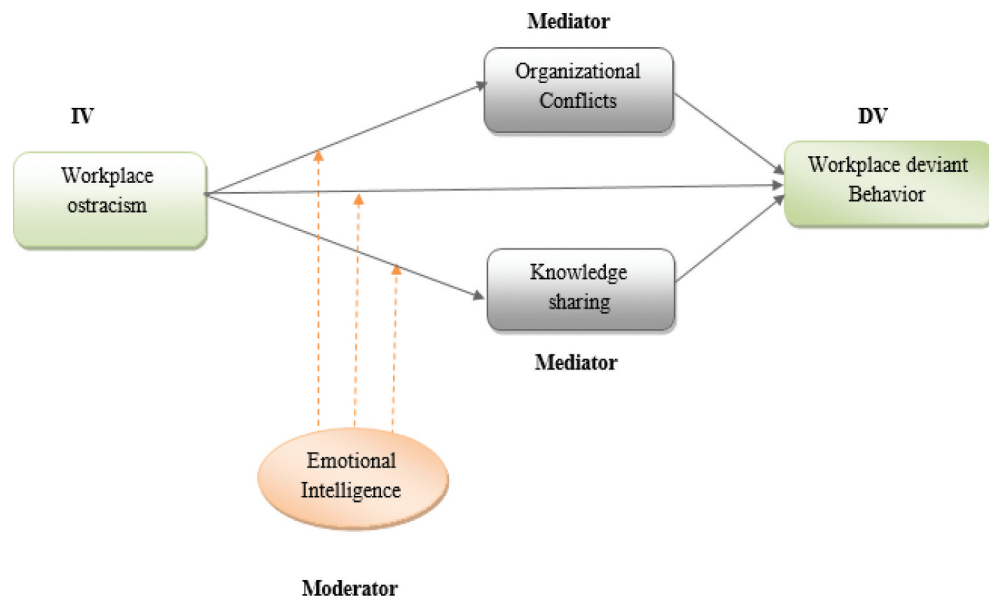
### **3. Research design and methodology**

The present study is based on a quantitative and deductive-research approach. In line with the suggestion of Cooper et al. (2006), the quantitative research design has been argued as the most appropriate method to investigate relationships between latent constructs (see Figure 1), applying theories, testing models as well as hypotheses. Likewise, Cooper et al. (2006) also recommend that quantitative research design is more appropriate to analyze association among groups and rationalization of dependencies while testing the hypotheses. In order to meet the study objectives, the employed survey method utilized a questionnaire as the main source of data collection for statistical analysis. Moreover, the cross-sectional strategy was considered most suitable for collecting survey data and seeking answers to the research questions. The present study assessed the permanent faculty members of higher education public institutions in Pakistan as the unit of analysis.

#### **3.1. Population and sampling technique**

The target population of this study was full-time knowledge workers of public sector universities in Pakistan. The present study examines how permanent employees of public sector universities were influenced by WO. The study included only full-time knowledge workers working at various public universities, which were mainly located in Punjab, Pakistan. The selection of knowledge workers as the respondents was most suitable due to many reasons. First, knowledge workers in public sector universities in Pakistan are more ostracized as compared to private universities because there is more politics in the public organization. Second, as jobs in the public sector are permanent, so that

**Figure 1. Conceptual Model of WDB.**



is why ostracized employees have more chances to engage in deviant behavior (Ali Khan, 2017). As for this study, the cluster sampling method was considered more appropriate based on the following reasons. First, the simple random sampling was not possible because of the non-availability of the updated list of faculty members of each public sector and private sector universities on the official website of HEC (Higher Education Commission) Pakistan or from the registrar office of the universities. Second, due to some political factors, such as instability and/or inefficiencies of the local government and security concerns, it was difficult to visit all of the universities scattered in Punjab and the KPK province. Therefore, the survey was limited to specific areas that were selected randomly.

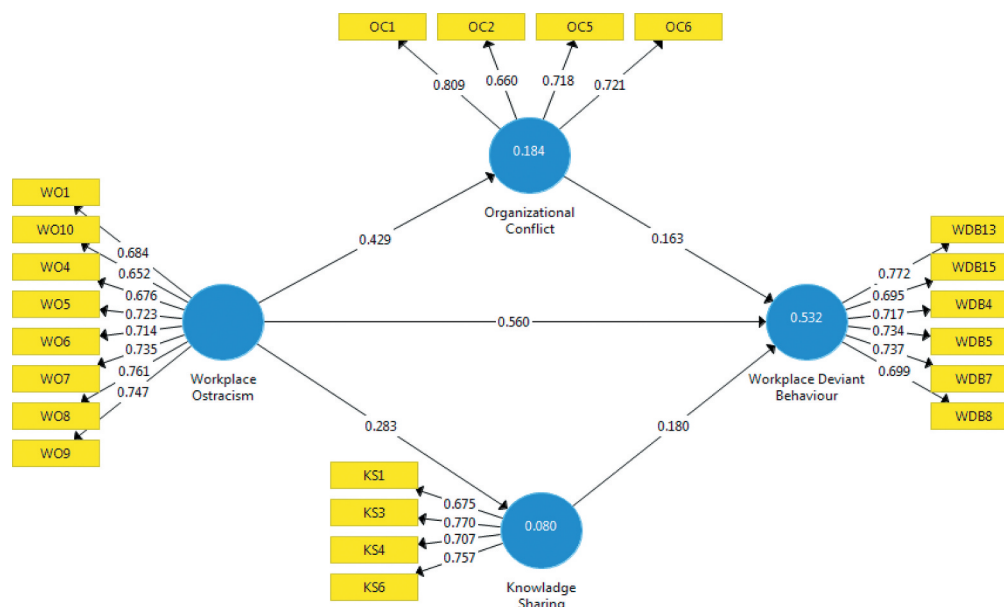
### 3.2. Sample size

According to Hair et al. (2011); (2014), the appropriate study sample size can range between 10 and 20 times the number of latent constructs. Therefore, the required study sample size was considered as 100, which seem to be more appropriate for statistical analysis as the five latent constructs included one independent variable (i.e., workplace ostracism), one dependent variable (i.e., workplace deviant behavior), two mediators (i.e., organizational conflict and knowledge sharing behavior), and one moderating variable (i.e., emotional intelligence), respectively. Moreover, a large sample size is always preferable to remove the chances of non-response bias (Sekaran, 2003). Hence, 300 questionnaires were circulated among the target respondents and to achieve the desired sample size. Finally, a total of 250 completed survey forms were used for the statistical analysis.

### 3.3. Design of questionnaire

The scales used to measure all latent constructs included adapted instruments from prominent studies with the appropriate modification that was better suited for the sample (Hair et al., 2016). According to Sekaran (2003), the Likert scale is devised to study how strongly the respondents (knowledge workers) will agree or disagree with a particular statement. The main purpose of a five-point Likert scale is to offer respondents more options and to capture the improved variability in respondent's mind-set and position as well (Hinkin, 1995). To measure WO 10- items scale by Ferris et al. (2008) was adapted. WDB was measured with a 16-item scale (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). OC (task & relationship conflict) was measured with 8-items scale adapted from Jehn and Jehn (1995) and Spector and Jex (1998). KSB was measured with an 8-item scale developed by De Vries et al. (2006). EI was measured on the 10-item EI Scale (EIS) developed by Wong and Law (2002).

**Figure 2. Measurement Model of WDB.**



#### 4. Data analysis and results

This research used the Smart PLS version 3 software (ver. 3.2.8) to analyze the PLS route model (Figure 2). The outcome explanation includes two stages: the evaluation of the measurement model and the evaluation of the structural model. In the measurement model, the researchers find out the reliability and validity of the model, while the measurement model shows the analysis of path coefficients.

##### 4.1. Construct reliability and validity

The measurement model's reliability can be accessed using two values that are the alpha coefficient of the Cronbach above 0.6 and composite reliability, where the value ranging from 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Table 1 shows that the composite metric values of the system varied from 0.708 to 0.861 for the Alpha value of Cronbach and 0.819–0.892 for composite reliability. The values show that consistent measurement of the instruments is acceptable. While the test of validity is to measure the designed test's theories of fitness (Sekaran & Bougie 2013). It can be verified by a convergent validity check or selective validity test. Convergent validity can be assessed by looking at the results of the factor loading, composite reliability of the measuring model, and also its extracted average variance (AVE) of more than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2014). Table 1 subsequently described the model's validity by indicating the model's value of composite reliability that exceeded the recommended value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010).

**Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity**

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Emotional Intelligence	0.850	0.892	0.624
Knowledge Sharing	0.708	0.819	0.531
Organizational Conflict	0.712	0.819	0.532
Workplace Deviant Behavior	0.820	0.870	0.527
Workplace Ostracism	0.861	0.892	0.508

**Table 2. Discriminant validity (HTMT)**

Construct	EI	KS	OC	WDB	WO
Emotional Intelligence (EI)					
Knowledge Sharing (KS)	0.205				
Organizational Conflict (OC)	0.548	0.545			
Workplace Deviant Behavior (WDB)	0.283	0.521	0.588		
Workplace Ostracism (WO)	0.247	0.333	0.521	0.809	

#### 4.2. Discriminant validity

As suggested by Henseler et al. (2015), it is best to evaluate the discriminating validity in PLS-SEM to further examine the status of the model discriminating validity. This is done by looking at the HTMT criterion value to confirm that different constructs in the model are measured by the items across the construct. It is defined by looking at the fact that the positive interval value of HTMT statistics does not include the value of 1 for a full build mixture and by measuring the value of HTMT under 0.90 (Hair et al., 2014) as shown in Table 2. Consequently, Table 2 reveals that the HTMT value of the whole system is less than 0.90 suggesting the model's minimally discriminating validity.

#### 4.3. Direct hypothesis

The analysis of structural model relations explains that ostracism in the workplace has a strong positive relationship ( $\beta=0.560$ ) with deviant behavior in the workplace. The meaning level was checked using the bootstrapping routine to verify the above relationship, that is, p-value (0.000). The findings of all the theories tested are shown in Table 3 below. From the below table results, the R2 value of 0.532 shows that 53.2% variation in the dependent variable, that is, WDB is explained by independent variables, that is, WO, KSB, and OC. As a result, it can be concluded that the test model has a moderate level of predictive quality and accuracy (Hair et al., 2011).

#### 4.4. Mediation analysis

Bootstrapping is used to test the indirect effect of potential variables. Bootstrapping is one of the most rigorous and powerful methods for testing the mediation effect that is gaining more attention from the perspective of researchers (Hayes, 2009, Zhao et al., 2010). Bootstrapping is best suited for negotiation analysis in PLS-SEM, as it can be used for small sample sizes (Hair et al., 2014). The experts should follow Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008) and bootstrap the sampling distribution of the indirect effects, which function for basic and different systems, according to the advice of Hair et al. (2014) while evaluating the intercession impacts.

The current study tested the effect of KSB and OC mediating variables with Smart PLS 3.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005) using the 500-re-sample bootstrapping and demonstrated the t-values. For the resolution of OC and the sharing of knowledge, both direct and indirect results are tested. There was a significant direct effect of ostracism in the workforce and deviant behavior in the workplace ( $\beta = 0.560$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The association between WO and workplace deviant conduct was still important but decreases after the addition of mediating factors that are KSB and OC.

**Table 3. SEM path coefficients of direct hypothesis**

Hypothesis	Path Relation	Beta	S.D	t values	p values	Decision
H1	WO -> WDB	0.560	0.054	11.388	0.000	Supported

**Table 4. Mediation assessments of OC and KSB**

Hypothesis	Path Relation	Beta	S.D	t values	p values	VAF
H2	WO -> OC -> WDB	0.170	0.026	2.708	0.007	0.300
H3	WO -> KS -> WDB	0.151	0.019	2.736	0.006	0.269

( $\beta = 0.170$ ,  $p = 0.007$ ), ( $\beta = 0.151$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ). These results demonstrated that OC and sharing of knowledge partially mediate the relationship between WO and WDB that supports our H2 and H3 hypotheses (see Table 4).

#### 4.5. Moderation analysis

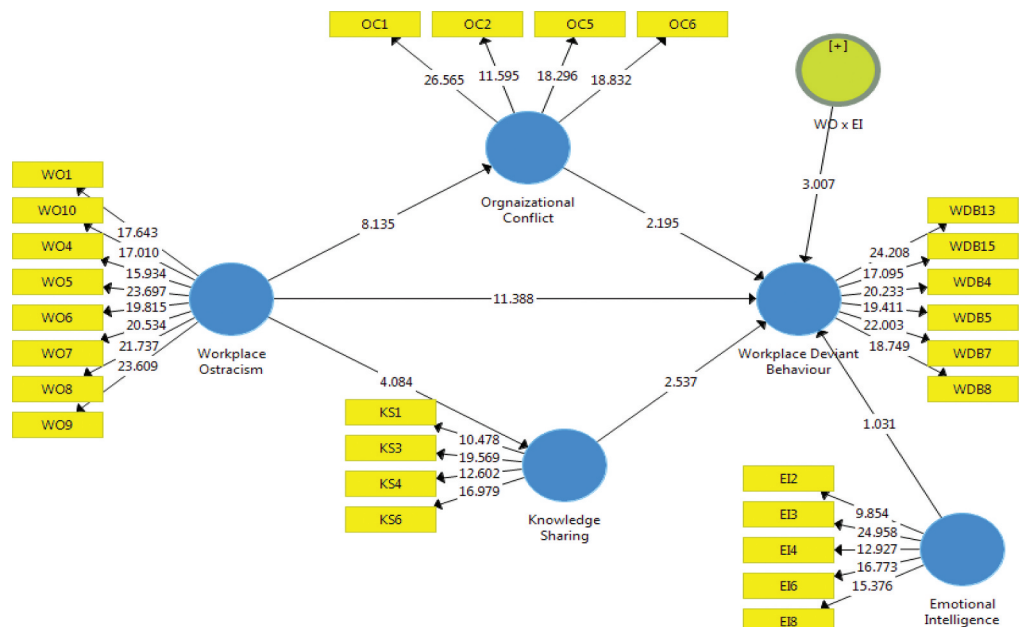
Partial least squares–the functional equation simulation methodology proposed by Rigdon et al. (2010) has tested the moderation influence of EI (see Figures 3–5). Table 5 indicates that there is a strong association between occupational ostracism and WDB confirmed by our first hypothesis ( $\beta = 0.560$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Our fourth hypothesis claimed that EI substantially reduces the association between ostracism and deviant activity in the workplace. Table 5 results showed that the relationship between WO and WDB is significantly moderated by EI ( $\beta = 0.185$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ).

The fifth study hypothesis stated that the relationship between WO and OC is moderated by EI. This interpretation was confirmed by data from Table 5 ( $\beta = 0.244$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ). The sixth study hypothesis stated that the relationship between WO and KSB is significantly moderated by EI ( $\beta = 0.415$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

#### 5. Discussion and conclusions

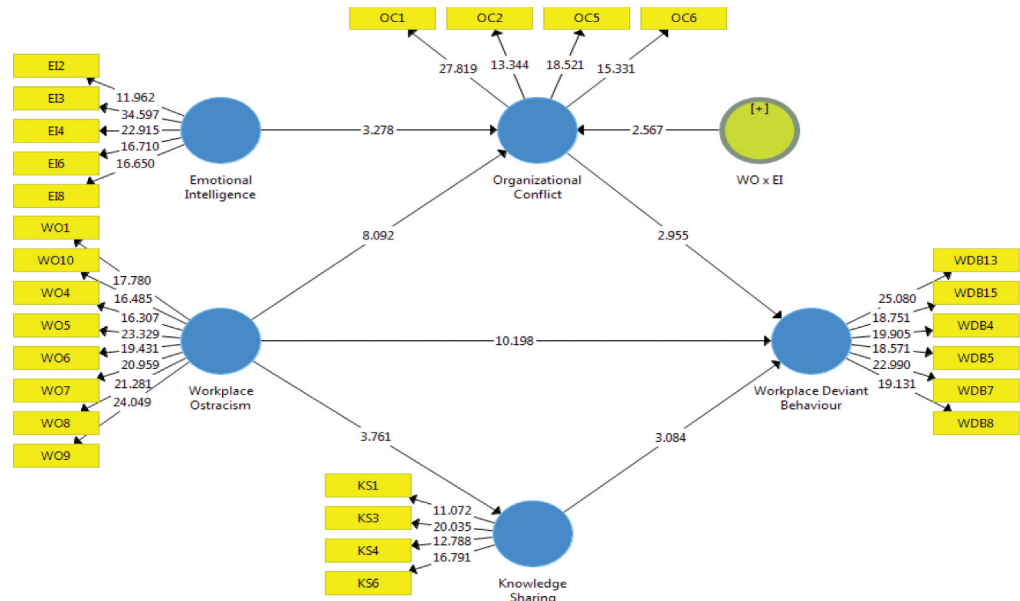
The current study objective was to investigate the effect of WO on WDB in public universities in Pakistan. The findings of the study showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between WO and WDB (Di Stefano et al., 2019; Mao, He & Yang, 2020). The study of Yan et al. (2014) provided support for the first hypothesis that WO has a positive and significant

**Figure 3. Moderator between WO and WDB.**

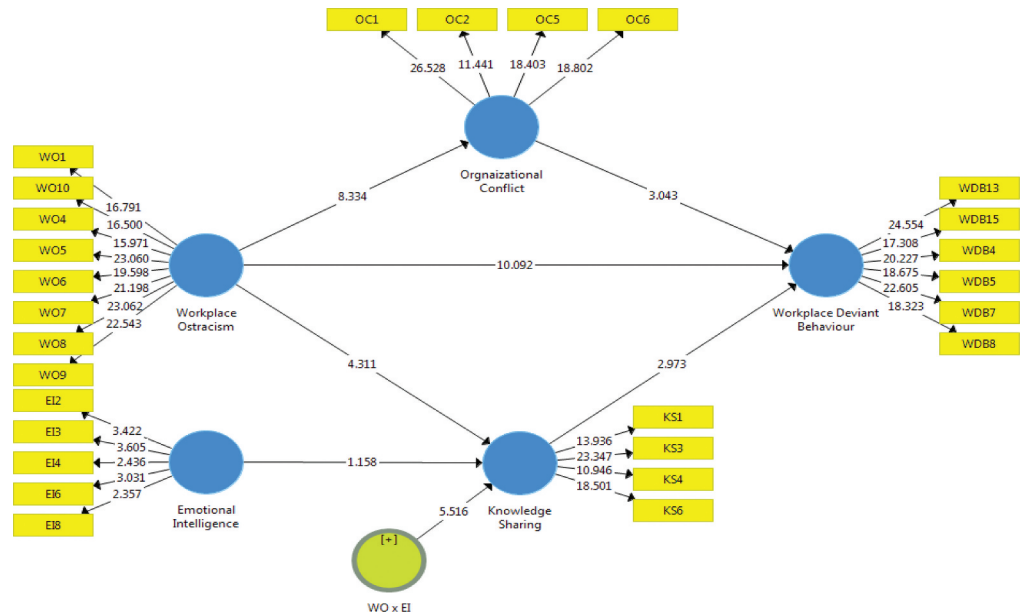




**Figure 4. Moderator between WO and OC .**



**Figure 5. Moderator between WO and KS.**



relationship with WDB. Results conclude that when knowledge workers of a public sector educational institutions are ostracized by their colleagues or co-workers, they are engaged in WDB (X. Liu et al., 2020; Lyu & Zhu, 2019).

Mediation analysis showed that OC has a partial mediating effect on the relationship between WO and WDB (Di Stefano et al., 2019; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019; Lyu & Zhu, 2019). Chung's (2015) study supports the result of the current study that WO is positively related to OC, and that OC has a positive effect on WDB. KS also has a positive and partial mediation effect on the association between WO and WDB (Cugueró-Escofet et al., 2019; Houston & Tritsch, 2019; X. Liu et al., 2020). From the results, it is concluded that knowledge workers of public universities

**Table 5. Moderation assessments of EI**

Hypothesis	Path Relation	Beta	S.D	t values	p values	Decision
H4	WO x EI -> WDB	0.185	0.061	3.007	0.003	Accepted
H5	WO x EI -> OC	0.244	0.095	2.567	0.011	Accepted
H6	WO x EI -> KS	-0.415	0.075	5.516	0.000	Accepted

share knowledge when they are ostracized by other knowledge workers in the universities (Ogunmokun et al., 2020). Also, they engage in WDB because when knowledge workers share their knowledge; then, they have less interaction with other members of the organization and due to less interaction, they have engaged in WDB within their organizations (Cugueró-Escofet et al., 2019; Di Stefano et al., 2019; Singh, 2019).

The present study findings confirmed that EI significantly moderates the relationship between WO and WDB (X. Liu et al., 2020; Lyu & Zhu, 2019; MacCann et al., 2020). The study of Yadav and Rai (2020) and Brackett et al. (2005) support the result of the current study that a high level of EI stops the individuals from contributing to misconduct that is harmful to the organization (MacCann et al., 2020). The research found that a high level of EI related to the high-quality relationship of employees with other members of the organization supported by (Jordan & Troth, 2002; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019). Prior research by Eisenberg (2000) highlighted that a low level of EI might engage individuals in deviant behavior. This implies that knowledge workers with low EI are more likely to engage in WDB (Di Stefano et al., 2019; MacCann et al., 2020).

Results also showed that EI significantly moderates the relationship between WO and OC, which shows that high EI weakens the effect of WO on OC (Blank, 2019; Lyu & Zhu, 2019; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019). This implies that highly EI knowledge workers can deal with the emotion that they have perceived as being ostracized by others; therefore, they try to keep away from OC (Blank, 2019; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019). Jordan and Troth (2002) and Rahim (2001) also supported that EI plays a vital role in dealing with interpersonal conflicts. Also, employees who control their emotions efficiently can attain success in the organization. Highly EI knowledge workers can suppress their feelings of WO for their interest and they have a greater ability to cope with problems that are associated with withdrawal intention than their colleagues who have a lower level of EI (Yadav & Rai, 2020).

EI also significantly moderated the relationship between WO and KSB. It revealed that higher the EI, the higher will be the KSB by knowledge workers. On the contrary, lower EI means ostracized knowledge workers do not share their knowledge with their coworkers (Cugueró-Escofet et al., 2019; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019; Lyu & Zhu, 2019). This result is also supported by Singh (2019) and Geofroy and Max Evans (2017), who stated that higher EI reduces the knowledge hiding that occurs due to ostracism in the workplace as ostracizing individuals are excluded and rejected by others in the organization. That is why they do not share knowledge with others to reciprocate the ostracism in the workplace. Studies conclude that when an individual is being ostracized, it will lead them towards WDBs (Ahmad et al., 2017). The study also concludes that WDB could be mitigated by introducing KSB practices in the organization because due to KSB social interaction of employees is increasing, which prevent them from engaging in WDB (Hormozi & Naeini, 2017). This study is generally beneficial for public-sector higher education institutions to identify the effects of WO on WDB of knowledge workers. It is concluded that by developing policies and procedures, WO might be reduced in the workplace, such as organizations should introduce work that is totally interdependent because when more knowledge workers are dependent upon their co-workers, the less likely they are ignored or excluded by their co-workers.

### **5.1. Theoretical and managerial implications**

There are several theoretical contributions offered by the present study. First, we used the theory of social identity and resource conservation, which provides an appropriate framework to explain the relationship between ostracism and deviant behaviors in the workplace. Our research reveals that the relationship between workplace ostracism and workplace deviant behavior is significantly mediated by organizational conflict and knowledge sharing behavior. To our knowledge, fewer studies have attempted to examine the influential role of organizational conflict and knowledge sharing behavior in the context of workplace ostracism and workplace deviant behavior, whereas the mediating effects of OC and KSB have been rarely researched. Moreover, this study is the first to apply the theory of social identity and resource conservation theory in the domain of workplace ostracism to extend understanding on how workplace ostracism relates to workplace deviant behavior. In addition, the findings are consistent with previous studies that confirm the relationship between workplace ostracism, organization conflict and knowledge sharing behavior (e.g., Chung, 2015; Hormozi & Naeini, 2017) and the potential associations between organization conflict, knowledge sharing behavior and workplace deviant behavior (Cugueró-Escofet et al., 2019; Houston & Tritsch, 2019; X. Liu et al., 2020).

The study findings also showed that ostracism in the workplace is too much costly because WO forces the knowledge workers not to share knowledge, also leading them towards WDB. In order to manage WO in the public sector institutions, it is vital to make policies and develop procedures that prevent knowledge workers from being ostracized (Jiang et al., 2020). For instance, giving a chance to every knowledge worker to express opinions and/or give suggestions about problems and/or engaging them into collective decision-making (Zulfadil, Hendriani, & Machasin, 2020). The study findings also place emphasis on the top management at the higher education institutions to foster high-performance work practices that improve the knowledge worker's performance and help to eliminate WO. Moreover, organizations should promote a strong culture of creative performance that fosters trust, unity, cooperation, and inclusion that aims to improve social interaction among knowledge workers as well as increase information access. Consequently, the workplace deviant behaviors of knowledge workers in public-sector higher education institutions can be reduced.

Second, our study enriches the ideas of social identity theory by introducing the moderating role of emotional intelligence. Based on the social identity theory and the foregoing research, our study findings confirm that emotional intelligence significantly moderates WO and KSB. This implies that the higher the EI, the higher will be the KSB by knowledge workers. On the contrary, lower EI would allow ostracized knowledge workers not to share their knowledge with their co-workers (Cugueró-Escofet et al., 2019; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019; Lyu & Zhu, 2019). This finding is also consistent with the conclusions drawn by Singh (2019) and Geofroy and Max Evans (2017) that higher EI reduces the knowledge hiding behaviors that transpire individuals feel ostracized and remain excluded and/or rejected by others. As a reaction, such individuals limit their knowledge sharing with others and reciprocate their felt ostracism at the workplace. Prior research also concluded that when an individual is being ostracized, it will lead them towards WDBs (Ahmad et al., 2017). The present study findings also highlighted that WDB could be mitigated through KSB practices in the organization as it would improve social interaction among employees while preventing them from engaging into WDB (Hormozi & Naeini, 2017). The study findings are, however, more beneficial for the public-sector higher education institutions in gaining a deeper examination of the effects of WO on WDB of knowledge workers. It can be concluded that policy and procedural interventions might reduce WO especially when organizations introduce work that is totally interdependent, and the knowledge workers are more reliant on their co-workers, making it less likely to feel being excluded or ignored at the workplace.

## 5.2. Limitations and future recommendations

The current study focused on WO as a predictor of WDB; however, other factors (e.g., gender differences, locus of control and abusive supervision) can also be considered as potential predictors of WDB. Also, the current study specifically focused on the ostracized knowledge workers of selected public sector universities in Pakistan as it would have been extremely difficult and time-consuming to gather data from all public universities. The cross-sectional nature of the present study captures the knowledge workers' behavior and perceptions at a single point of time, which may change from time to time. Hence, a longitudinal approach for assessing WDB is recommended for future research. A comparative assessment of public and private universities can also provide detailed information about the multi-sector's perspectives of knowledge workers that are more likely to demonstrate WDB when they feel ostracized from other knowledge workers. The findings of present study can also be used by future researchers to examine knowledge workers' behaviors in other industries and/or sectors (e.g., software companies, financial institutions and banks). Furthermore, researchers may also use other moderators and mediators to examine the direct and indirect links between WO and WDB (e.g., locus of control, personality traits, and belongingness, etc.). The study also recommends that future researchers may examine the effect of WO on other outcome variables, e.g., turnover intention, organizational performance, and employee productivity.

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