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# FEELING ABANDONED AND EXILED: TRAIT MINDFULNESS AS MODERATOR THE IMPACT OF OSTRACISM ON THE WORK MEANINGFULNESS

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#### **ABSTRACT**

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

**KEYWORDS** Meaning of Work, Workplace Optimism, Trait Mindfulness



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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Changes that often occur in the world of work, such as the shift from hierarchical structures to flatter structures, the premise to cloud technology, and the concept of working from anywhere (Forbes, 2013), pose challenges in creating meaningful work for employees. Yeoman (2014) revealed "work meaningfulness as a basic need for employees that should be pursued in order to feel the meaning of work through the development of their abilities". According to a 2013 global

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workplace report by Gallup, 80% of workers in the United States are unhappy and have little involvement in their work, with nearly twice as many unengaged employees as actively engaged. Most of the reasons for the unfulfilled usefulness of employees' work are due to disappointment with work that does not provide satisfactory goals (Kompier, 2005). Complexity in the workplace increases concerns that employees have the potential to erode meaningfulness that endangers the fulfillment of their potential (Bailey et al., 2017).

The existence of research related to the meaning of work is useful because it has been recognized as having implications for organizational practices (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009), organizations will be able to implement curative and anticipatory regulations that cause low employee work meaning. This encourages the attention of researchers to research the perception of the meaning of work of employees in diverse areas or cultures. Although there are different perspectives around work meaningfulness, the main focus of this study is to identify work meaningfulness as the level of perception of an individual's work experience that not only provides pleasure, but also focuses on specific goals and self-development (Steger et al., 2012). Job usefulness can be negatively related to employee turnover and vice versa to work motivation, work performance, and job satisfaction. The relationship results from several factors such as job skills, identity and significance of tasks, feedback, and the core job itself (Hackman and Oldham, 1976).

One of the factors that is suspected to affect the meaning of work is workplace ostracism. The treatment of ostracism means general neglect both physically and digitally (Williams, 2009). Meanwhile, ostracism in the workplace refers to the extent to which individuals feel ignored or excluded in the workplace (Ferris et al., 2008). Being isolated or excluded from individual or group interactions in the workplace is a painful experience and leads to harmful outcomes for the victim (Lieberman and Eisenberger, 2015).

Caillier's (2021) research found that respondents who reported ostracism and destruction had the potential to be 55.6% less likely to gain work meaning than respondents who were not exposed. This is assumed because the effects of ostracism in the workplace can be physically and mentally damaging (Riley, 2014). Employees will initially feel pain and negative feelings such as sadness, anger and anxiety when experiencing ostracism treatment, if experienced continuously for a long time will run out of resources to cope, feel helpless and depressed (Williams, 2011). The feeling of discomfort and helplessness that is felt will reduce the meaning of employees' work (Hackman and Oldham, 1976).

Reports of ostracism in the workplace have also been found in Indonesia. Some of these cases include a private employee who is uncomfortable because his co-workers often whisper behind him (Huda, 2012), a supermarket cashier does not enjoy his job because he is not included in the group by his colleagues (Purba, 2016) and an employee of a family company experiences exclusion when the owner gives souvenirs and food to employees other than himself (Laili, 2019). There are similarities in these three cases, namely that the victim raises feelings of resentment, discomfort, and sadness (Huda, 2012; Purba, 2016; Laili, 2019). Unfortunately, there are still few studies that follow up on negative feelings by employees who are terostrasm in Indonesia, especially no one has explored its relationship with the

meaning of work as a fundamental need of employees. Through this, the researcher aims to identify the negative assumed relationship between ostracism and the meaning of work in Indonesia.

**Hypothesis 1 (Ha 1):** Ostrasism in the workplace has a negative relationship with the meaning of employees' work.

Individual differences are thought to have a strong contribution to the relationship between ostracism in the workplace and the meaning of work. Although organizations have been seen as social entities when employees try to form and maintain positive relationships in the workplace, it is still difficult to maintain such positive relationships throughout the organization because individuals are complex and diverse (Caillier, 2017). The diversity of these individuals can have different roles in the meaning of work depending on the nature of their diversity. One of the diversity of individuals that is assumed to have a positive role in the meaning of work is mindfulness.

Departing from the research of Crego et al. (2019), awareness is a significant predictor of meaningfulness. The assumption that emerges through the results of the study is that one of the factors of individual diversity that is able to predict the meaning of work is the trait mindfulness. Mindfulness is defined as maximum receptive awareness and attention with minimal involvement of evaluation of the current experience (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness trait is described as the inherent quality of providing full awareness and non-judgmental reactions to everyday experiences (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Individuals who have a high mindfulness trait will activate the dACC (dorsal anterior cingulate cortex) which is able to regulate emotions and perceptions of stimuli and coordinate information as something that does not need to be exaggerated. The activation of dACC in the mindfulness process will still direct the interpretation of the condition being experienced as a stimulus that can be regulated first (Denson et al., 2008). In other words, employees with high mindfulness traits will still define positive work meaningfulness and do not exaggerate their conscious experiences (positive or negative) as stimuli that can affect the negative assessment of their work usefulness.

Furthermore, mindfulness traits have also been proven to have a moderation role as an important personality trait that can reduce the adverse effects of workplace conflicts such as emotional fatigue and inefficient work performance (Yang et al., 2020). Mindfulness trails can be treated as a buffer in preventing more loss of resources (Anasori et al., 2020) and negative consequences of various forms of psychological stress (Baer et al., 2004). Furthermore, Yusainy et al. (2019) through their experiments found that mindfulness traits are able to counteract and deal with negative behavioral responses of virtual ostracism when negative aphrodisiacs are high. The process that can explain the buffering effect of the mindfulness trait is the neural mechanism of mindfulness regulation including the "top-down" process and the "bottom-up" process. The top-down process is located in the neocortical area, namely in the upper brain with the function of a generator of cognitive abilities (control over cognition, attention and supervision of conscious experience), while the bottom-up process is located in the subcortical area, namely affective stimuli in the form of sensory-perceptual modulation (Guendelman et al., 2017). The combination and coordination process that takes place allows

individuals in a state of mindful to integrate their negative experiences without overreacting and facilitates employees who feel ostracism to perceive the meaning of work more negatively.

Furthermore, mindfulness trait was included in this study as a moderator because of its advantage of being able to be trained (Keng et al., 2011). This advantage can be practical implications for organizations by providing mindfulness training to employees. It is also hoped that the process contained in achieving mindfulness can organize the level of employee mindfulness trait to be higher.

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

#### RESEARCH METHOD

The study participants were 305 employees from various industries or organizations with permanent employee status (having passed the probation/on the job training period), having worked for at least 12 months/1 year, and aged 18-56 years. Sampling was carried out using a convenience sampling technique that functioned to maximize the fulfillment of matches with participant criteria (Sugiyono, 2020). This study is a non-experimental quantitative research because there is no manipulation given, and includes correlational research because it aims to prove the relationship between one variable and another (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012).

There are 3 (three) variables that will be analyzed in this study, ostracism in the workplace as an independent variable, work meaning as a bound variable and trait mindfulness as a moderator variable. The ostracism variable was measured using the Workplace Ostracism Scale (WOS) by Fiset et al. (2008) which has been adapted into Indonesian Language by Viorica and Parahyanti (2020). There were a total of 10 items with a likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). and an internal reliability value of 0.931. The variable of work meaning was measured using the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) by Steger et al. (2012) which has been adapted into Indonesian Language by Afiyah and Parahyanti (2022). There are a total of 8 items with a likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and an internal reliability score of 0.929. The mindfulness trait variable was measured using the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) by Brown and Ryan (2003) which has been adapted into Indonesian Language by Yusainy et al. (2013). There are a total of 15 items with a likert scale of 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never), and an internal reliability value of 0.81. The researcher included 2 items of attention checkers that were used to ensure that participants paid good attention in working on the survey which was disseminated online through various social media.

### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The focus of this research is the in-depth identification of the meaning of work and the factors that may correlate with it. The research hypothesis was then tested using moderation analysis model 1 in PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013), because it could answer all hypotheses simultaneously, namely the relationship between free

and bound variables, and the moderation role of the moderator variable on the relationship between free variables and bound variables. In addition, other findings can also be known in the form of the role of predicting the moderator variable on the bound variable.

Based on the results of the analysis, it is known that if ostracism in the workplace and trait mindfulness together can predict the employee's work meaning, F(9.295) = 6.7464, p < 0.001, there is as much as 17.07% variance from both predictors which significantly explains the employee's work meaning. The results of the moderation analysis are more clearly contained in table 1.

Table 1. The results of the Moderation Analysis test the correlation with employee

job performance.

Model	b	t	p	LICI	ULCI
Ostrasism in the workplace	-0,5164	-5,9519	.0000**	-0,6872	-0,3457
Moderation interactions	0,1146	4.5243	.0000**	0,0647	0,1644
Trait Mindfulness	-0,2786	-3,9131	.0001**	-0,4188	-0,1385

Note: the data is a regression coefficient. Interaction is a test of *mindfulness trait* as a moderator.

The results of the study prove that Hypothesis 1 is accepted, namely ostracism in the workplace has a negative relationship with the meaning of work of employees, so that the higher the feeling of being ignored by an employee, the lower the meaning of work he feels. Ostrasism in the workplace in general has been found to have a negative effect on the meaning of employees' work. This finding is consistent with various previous studies and other empirical studies including research by Yusainy et al. (2023) which stated that ostracism has the potential to threaten the fulfillment of the four basic needs to belong and belong, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence). Workplace ostritism can place an overburden on employees, and hinder their ability to maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, or good reputation in the workplace (Hitlan et al., 2006). If an employee becomes a target of ostracism, it will be difficult for him to return to maintaining good relationships and increasing the meaning of his work.

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

<sup>\*\* &</sup>lt; .05

Through the results of data analysis, it is also known that hypothesis 2 in the study is accepted. These results indicate that mindfulness trait can be a moderator in the relationship between ostracism and work meaning. The role of the moderator that the mindfulness trait has is as a buffer, that is, a high mindfulness trait can weaken the negative relationship between ostracism in the workplace and the meaning of the employee's work. This means that the meaning of employees' work will not be too low even if they are affected by ostracism, when employees have a high trait of mindfulness. This is supported by research by Chen (2022) which states that employees with mindfulness traits will be more likely to feel part of the organization and develop a sense of how their work relates to others such as colleagues, work teams, customers, or society. Therefore, if employees experience exclusion at work, with a high trait of mindfulness, employees will tend to continue to feel part of the organization, thereby reducing negative feelings on the meaning of work. Those who have a high mindfulness trait will be able to overcome fatigue in the face of bullying, and the individual's resilience will also be reduced in the face of bullying (Anasori, 2019).

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

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

The usefulness of the role of mindfulness trait is estimated because of the "here-and-now" function of the mindfulness trait itself. Trait mindfulness will give full attention to the situation he is currently experiencing to make changes to the sensations of the body, thoughts, and affinities present. Chen et al., (2022) found that mindfulness traits raise employees' awareness of the meaning of their work. In

another article, it was also found that mindfulness traits can improve employees' experience of work meaning through the fulfillment of their two important needs, namely to thrive (Niemiec et al., 2010) and transcendence (Piccolo and Colquitt, 2006). This can be explained because mindfulness traits are able to direct the affective to neutral, that is, the individual does not shy away from or maintain what he feels excessively (Hayes and Feldman, 2013). The combination of top-down (neocortical area) and bottom-up (subcortical area) processes in the mindfulness trait results in the integration of the individual's emotional experience without overreacting (Gendelman et al., 2017). This means that mindfulness trait can be expressed as an effort to regulate emotions (Dan-Glauser & Gross, 2015), because the absence of a change in response to emotional experiences can reduce the habit of negative acceptance and reactive ways of responding (Baer, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2006). Individuals with high mindfulness traits will actually pay full attention to their current condition, so that individuals will be very aware of the condition they are experiencing whether it is "good or bad" when perceived as a working individual. This indicates that mindfulness traits can contribute to predicting the meaning of employee work. Individuals with high mindfulness traits will not exaggerate the condition to be a good thing, in fact they will be aware if the condition they currently have is as they feel even though it indicates a negative perception of the meaning of work.

## **CONCLUSION**

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

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