The Effect of Workplace Ostracism on Knowledge Sharing among Audit Professionals in Sri Lanka: The Roles of Perceived Insider Status and Emotional Intelligence

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A B S T R A C T

In knowledge-intensive organisations, where collaboration and information exchange are essential, subtle interpersonal harassment such as workplace ostracism can significantly affect employee behaviour. Based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study examines workplace ostracism as an antecedent of knowledge-sharing behaviour among audit professionals in Sri Lanka. Specifically, it examines the mediating role of perceived internal status and the moderating role of emotional intelligence in this relationship. Following a hypothetical, quantitative research design, time-lagged data were collected from 215 audit professionals working in five audit firms in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Hierarchical regression and conditional process analyses revealed that workplace ostracism is negatively associated with knowledge sharing behaviour (β = −.29, p < .001). Perceived insider status partially mediates this relationship, indicating that ostracism reduces employees' sense of belonging, which also reduces their willingness to share knowledge (β = .34, p < .001). Furthermore, emotional intelligence significantly moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge-sharing behaviour (β = .15, p < .05). That is, the negative effect was weaker among employees with high emotional intelligence. The moderated mediation analysis further confirmed that the indirect effect of workplace ostracism on knowledge sharing behaviour via perceived insider status is stronger at lower levels of emotional intelligence. These findings highlight the important role of psychological resources and individual capabilities in shaping employees' responses to workplace exclusion. This study contributes to the literature by integrating mediating and moderating mechanisms within a resource-based framework and provides practical insights for fostering inclusive and knowledge-sharing work environments. However, these findings are limited to a specific sector and cultural context, pointing to the need for future research using longitudinal and multidisciplinary designs.

Keywords: Audit professionals, Emotional intelligence, Knowledge sharing behaviour, Perceived insider status, Sri Lanka, Workplace ostracism.

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1. Introduction

Intensified workplace competition fuels a growing problem: the increased prevalence of "cold" violence in professional environments. A widespread form of this, workplace ostracism, has attracted serious organisational concern due to its high frequency and negative impacts (Du et al., 2025). Workplace ostracism negatively affects employee attitudes, behaviours, performance, and innovation (Asmita et al., 2025). It subjects employees to "mental abuse," which leads to adverse physical and psychological conditions, such as stress (Du et al., 2025). This stress diminishes employee satisfaction and organisational commitment, and it ultimately hinders both proactive behaviour and organisational citizenship behaviour (Gupta et al., 2016). Employees may even adopt serious negative behaviours, such as reduced work engagement or actions extreme enough to warrant dismissal (Xu et al., 2020). Because workplace ostracism fosters feelings of neglect and exclusion, it suppresses employees' willingness to engage creatively, thereby undermining the innovative input essential for organisational efficiency (Kwan et al., 2018). Sri Lankan society possesses a profound "circle" culture, a key distinction from the Western cultural context (Sunil & Weerasinghe, 2024). This "circle" culture prioritizes deep connections within specific groups, built on core values of mutual assistance and unwavering loyalty. However, the workplace "circle" culture often fosters a division between insiders and outsiders, which makes the workplace ostracism phenomenon more probable (Song & Guo, 2022). Since traditional Sri Lankan culture prioritizes "favors," employees who experience workplace ostracism tend to blame themselves, as they view the situation as a consequence of their own shortcomings or poor interpersonal skills (Gardner et al., 2018). The resulting stress and anxiety are exacerbated by such perceptions, as workplace ostracism drains employees of crucial relational and psychological resources.

Given its broad negative consequences, workplace ostracism poses a particular threat to Knowledge Sharing Behaviour, which is vital for organisational success (Abbasi et al., 2021). The shift to the knowledge economy has made knowledge a critical organisational resource, one that is crucial for enterprises that seek a competitive advantage amid intense market competition and complexity. Knowledge-based employees are distinguished by their extensive specialized knowledge, talent for innovation, and commitment to continuous learning. These employees are central to an organisation's intellectual capital, where they play an irreplaceable role by driving innovation, supporting development, and significantly increasing the enterprise's competitiveness (Jordão & Gupta, 2020). With their deeper expertise, knowledge-based employees can offer superior, higher-quality information when they share knowledge, especially compared to ordinary employees. While ordinary employees participate in knowledge exchange, the limited depth of their contributions means their insights are often basic, which results in negligible effects on intellectual capital appreciation. Driven by powerful intrinsic motivation and an ability for self-directed learning, knowledge-based employees actively share knowledge to find and capitalize on developmental opportunities (Manuti, 2019). Due to this proactive attitude and behaviour, knowledge-based employees are positioned as the main drivers in the creation and application of organisational knowledge. Knowledge sharing forms the core of knowledge management activities, which makes it key to maintaining an enterprise's core competitiveness. A decrease in the intention to share knowledge will inevitably result in employees' silent behaviour. When knowledge sharing behaviour decreases, employees experience a drop in work engagement (Na-Nan & Arunyaphum, 2021), and this concurrently impacts the organisation by diminishing competitiveness and establishing communication barriers (Khan et al., 2025). The need to understand how to boost knowledge-based employees' knowledge sharing behaviour has thus emerged as a vital problem that enterprises and academics must address. Regrettably, little research has been conducted on the negative perspectives that explain why knowledge sharing

is hindered (Du et al., 2025). Although workplace ostracism is known to negatively influence employees' knowledge-sharing intentions (Takhsha et al., 2020), the psychological reality of individuals' greater sensitivity to negative stimuli makes continued research into factors that impede knowledge sharing imperative. This kind of research is valuable because it helps organisational leaders proactively identify potential threats to knowledge sharing behaviour, which allows them to remove factors that hinder performance.

To investigate this critical threat, we adopted the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory as the general framework to analyse the relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge sharing behaviour. Since workplace ostracism leads to significant resource depletion in employees, the COR theory serves as a strong framework for explaining the mechanism through which this resource loss impacts knowledge sharing behaviour. To expand the COR theory, we proposed the mediating role of Perceived Insider Status, which Stamper and Masterson (2002) defined as the employee's self-perception of being an accepted member of the organisation. By depleting employees' cognitive and emotional resources, workplace ostracism hinders their capacity to identify clear developmental pathways and lessens their feeling of respect from the organisation. This resource depletion weakens the psychological bond between individuals and the organisation, thereby hindering their ability to form perceived insider status (Guo et al., 2022). The formation of an "outsider" identity is a likely consequence, which then reduces employees' willingness to take on additional responsibilities or engage in proactive behaviours (Kim et al., 2009). The ability to identify this link provides a new and valuable perspective on how workplace ostracism transmits its influence. As Sri Lankan employees operate within a collectivist culture that prioritizes circle-based boundaries, this environment is believed to strengthen the negative impact of low perceived insider status on their willingness to engage in knowledge sharing.

Furthermore, we explored potential interventions to reduce the harmful impact of workplace ostracism on perceived insider status. Consistent with COR theory, personality traits are believed to moderate how individuals react to resource depletion and the methods they use for resource acquisition (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Research has demonstrated that the impact of workplace "cold" violence is not uniform but varies based on individual employee characteristics (Khan et al., 2023). Scholars often use Emotional Intelligence to explain this variance, as it differentiates work attitudes and behaviours across the employee population (Sudiro et al., 2023). Differences in the ability to use, regulate, and control emotions mean that individuals in the same workplace exhibit varied work attitudes and behaviours. Consequently, we focused on establishing the moderating role of emotional intelligence in this relationship.

This study, therefore, establishes a comprehensive model grounded in COR theory. It examines the indirect effect of workplace ostracism on knowledge employees' knowledge sharing behaviour through perceived insider status, and it also tests the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between workplace ostracism and perceived insider status. The objective of this research is to fully clarify the relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge sharing behaviour thereby providing managers with the theoretical insights necessary to enhance the knowledge sharing behaviour of their knowledge employees.

2. Theoretical Perspective

2.1. Workplace Ostracism and Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour

Ostracism is not a new phenomenon; it has been present at every stage of social evolution. Historically, it has manifested itself as harsh punishments such as deportation and expulsion. However, Ostracism generally involves unspoken and implicit behaviours, such as ignoring or

avoiding eye contact with others. As a special form of boycott, workplace Ostracism specifically refers to the subjective feeling that an employee feels excluded, ignored, and isolated from his or her colleagues (Ferris et al., 2008). This expression is culturally unique; in Sri Lankan organisations, the nature of workplace Ostracism is quite different from Western contexts. Sri Lankan culture values maintaining superficial interpersonal harmony. As a result, even when Ostracism occurs, conversations tend to be subdued, and are devoid of overtly harsh or aggressive language. Instead, this conflict manifests itself as a kind of psychological cold violence; it is a subtle communication marked by nonverbal neglect, deliberate social avoidance, and emotional indifference. Workplace neglect can have profound effects on organisations and their employees alike (Kaushal et al., 2021). Common examples include a leader who dismisses a subordinate's idea or an employee who is deliberately ignored after greeting them. The effects of workplace neglect span the full spectrum of employee behaviour: it negatively impacts expected work-related behaviour such as job performance (e.g., Jahanzeb et al., 2020), reduces beneficial non-work behaviours such as organisational citizenship behaviour (e.g., Wang et al., 2021), and ultimately leads to counterproductive behaviour (Hao et al., 2022). As a recognized type of workplace bullying, workplace bullying has serious consequences that negatively affect both an individual's quality of life and well-being (Zhang & Shi, 2017).

The detrimental effects of workplace ostracism extend critically to knowledge-sharing behaviour, which constitutes the core of knowledge management and is a major area of scholarly concern (Singh, 2018). Knowledge sharing behaviour is defined as the conduct of knowledge owners that involves the transfer of their knowledge and experience to others within the organisation (Mahajan et al., 2024). For enterprises to gain a competitive edge in the knowledge economy, knowledge has become one of their most important assets. However, a significant challenge exists, as employees often view knowledge sharing negatively, fearing it will diminish their individual competitive advantage. The COR theory provides a framework for this; it suggests that individuals operate with limited resources (e.g., time, emotion, energy) and are motivated to preserve their existing resources and acquire new ones (Hobfoll et al., 2018). When resources are depleted, individuals prioritize safeguarding what they have left and refrain from activities that require further resource expenditure (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Critically, workplace ostracism presents a dual challenge that threatens employees' psychological and material resources and also necessitates the expenditure of additional resources to cope with the perceived interpersonal unfairness. Given that knowledge sharing requires effective interaction, ostracized employees are more likely to curtail their knowledge sharing activities (Takhsha et al., 2020). To preserve their remaining resources, ostracized individuals feel compelled to conserve assets, a strategy that results in a greater propensity to withhold their knowledge resources (Khalid et al., 2020). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H1: Workplace ostracism is negatively associated with the knowledge-sharing behaviour of Audit professionals.

2.2. Mediating Role of Perceived Insider Status

Perceived insider status represents an individual's perception of their status and acceptance within an organisation (Stamper & Masterson, 2002). It serves as a measure of the employee's organisational identity and their felt connection with the organisation and its members. Given this, perceived insider status is an essential metric for gauging the strength of the employee-organisation bond. Research confirms that a harmonious employee-organisation relationship is positively related to perceived insider status (Khan et al., 2025). Conversely, an employee's perception of exclusion creates a barrier that impedes their access to organisational resources. Moreover, the burden of negative workplace evaluations and emotions like powerlessness,

frustration, and dissatisfaction collectively act to significantly reduce an employee's perception of insider status (Kim et al., 2019). Under the pervasive influence of Sri Lankan "circle" culture, organisations frequently fracture into smaller groups that are unified by common bonds or shared animosities. This group dynamic increases the likelihood that workplace ostracism will evolve from individual acts into a form of group ostracism. When this occurs, the scope of ostracism broadens, its severity intensifies, and the harm to those excluded is exacerbated. The perception of isolation from the core circle fosters a deep sense of alienation, which directly undermines the employee's perception of insider status (Scott et al., 2014).

This eroded sense of insider status, in turn, has direct consequences for employee behaviour. A lack of perceived insider status prevents employees from forming strong emotional and behavioural bonds with the organisation, which inhibits their knowledge sharing behaviour. Individuals with a strong insider perception tend to invest significant effort, feel a strong sense of obligation, and work diligently to address organisational challenges (Wang et al., 2017), thereby becoming active participants in knowledge sharing. Conversely, employees who lack a strong perceived insider status often feel emotionally distant from the organisation and display little concern for its outcomes. As their intrinsic motivation for positive organisational behaviours declines, they begin to perceive knowledge sharing as an extra-role behaviour. COR theory asserts that when individuals experience resource depletion, they strive to conserve resources to avert further loss (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Accordingly, employees with low perceived insider status are more prone to curtail extra-role behaviours, including knowledge sharing behaviour. While existing research based on social identity theory demonstrates that perceived insider status mediates the relationship between workplace incivility and employee behaviour (Guo et al., 2022), this paper adopts COR theory to expand this research direction and provide a fresh perspective. Furthermore, the effect of perceived insider status is magnified in the Sri Lankan context. Due to the highly collectivist culture, Sri Lankan employees highly value specific group membership and tend to frame their organisational relationships through the lens of being a group "insider" or "outsider." A strong perceived insider status encourages employees to invest more effort in their tasks (Wang et al., 2017). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H2: Perceived insider status mediates the association between workplace ostracism and the knowledge sharing behaviour of Audit professionals.

2.3. Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence

COR theory suggests that resource replenishment is key to alleviating the damaging effects of resource depletion (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Consequently, personal traits that moderate the response to resource depletion serve as a crucial means of achieving this replenishment. An individual's behaviour in response to workplace situational factors hinges on their subjective psychological assessment and emotional reaction. In any organisation, differences in these psychological and behavioural responses are shaped by an individual's capacity to identify and regulate emotions, a construct known as emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Despite its relevance, the connection between emotional intelligence and workplace ostracism has only recently emerged as a valued area of scholarly research (Sahoo et al., 2023).

This research gap is particularly significant given the growing call to integrate individual employee characteristics into studies on workplace "cold" violence (Du et al., 2025). The way an individual experiences workplace ostracism is fundamentally connected to their subjective psychological interpretation (Kwan et al., 2018). For instance, a high level of emotional intelligence enables ostracized employees to manage their emotions effectively, a capacity that

helps diminish the perceived harm of the exclusion. In contrast, those with low emotional intelligence are often overly sensitive and more susceptible to extreme psychological responses. Recent studies confirm that employees' emotional intelligence ability enables them to establish a self-regulatory process that limits the damaging impact of workplace ostracism (Amin & Wang, 2024).

Thus, emotional intelligence serves as a critical moderator that determines employee responses to workplace ostracism. Individuals with high emotional intelligence can actively control and modify their emotional experiences, which allows them to retain optimism. In contrast, those with low emotional intelligence lack this capacity and are often unable to adapt their mood to organisational shifts (Glassie & Schutte, 2024). From the perspective of COR theory, a high level of emotional intelligence provides employees with a surplus of emotional resources that allows them to counteract and restore the resources lost to negative interpersonal treatment. This resource replenishment helps to buffer the negative effect of workplace ostracism on perceived insider status. Conversely, employees with low emotional intelligence lack the emotional control to manage their resources effectively. This inability to cope exacerbates their situation and intensifies the negative influence of workplace ostracism on perceived insider status. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

The research framework and the hypothesized relationships are depicted in Figure 1.

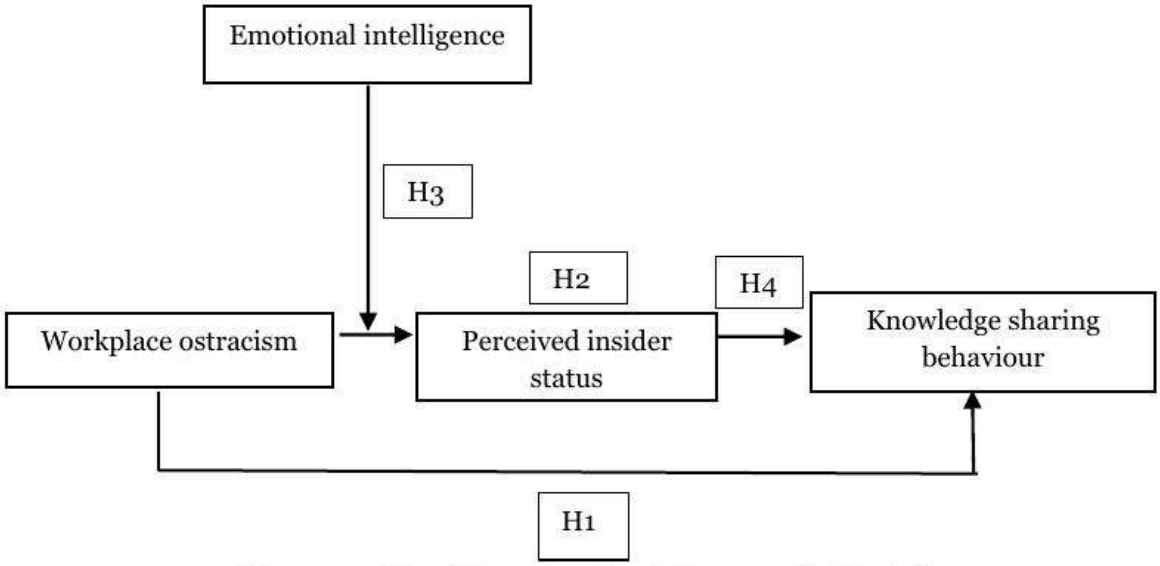


Figure 1: The Hypothesized Research Model

H3: Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and perceived insider status, such that the negative relationship is stronger for employees with low emotional intelligence.

Based on the preceding hypotheses, we advance the following moderated mediation hypothesis. Employees with high emotional intelligence possess skilled emotional regulation, which enables them to rapidly stabilize their feelings. This capacity mitigates the adverse effects of workplace ostracism on perceived insider status, a process that subsequently results in increased knowledge-sharing behaviour.

H4: Emotional intelligence moderates the mediating effect of perceived insider status on the relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge sharing behaviour. Specifically, the indirect effect is stronger when emotional intelligence is low.

3. Methodology

This time-lagged study collected data from employees of non-big audit firms in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The setting was chosen for its relevance as a knowledge-intensive sector. Audit firms are organisations where competition and service quality essentially depend on specialized expertise, interpretive skills, and the application of professional standards. Thus, knowledge sharing among employees becomes crucial to maintaining quality, solving complex problems, and fostering innovation. Five firms were randomly selected from 90 audit firms listed on the Sri Lanka Accounting and Auditing Standards Monitoring Board (SLAASMB, 2024). The sample was drawn from their total workforce of approximately 1,700 employees. This setting provides an appropriate context to examine how workplace ostracism impacts knowledge sharing behaviour among knowledge workers operating within Sri Lanka's unique collaborative "circle" culture. Data was collected from audit professionals through a structured questionnaire, with access to participant firms facilitated through professional social networks. After obtaining institutional approval from human resources departments that approved the voluntary participation of the employee, the research team coordinated with designated HR liaisons in each firm. These liaisons managed questionnaire distribution to audit professionals, and HR departments provided the necessary employee contact information. All participants were given strict data confidentiality assurances, and the data collection process began once formal approval from the HR department was obtained.

In line with the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2003) to reduce general method bias, we used a time-lagged design that separated the measurement of the independent and dependent variables. An online data collection method was used to effectively reach the participant group, which consisted of audit professionals who are frequently employed in various client sites and remote work arrangements. The questionnaire was administered in English, reflecting the high level of English language proficiency required for professional training in Sri Lankan audit firms. Data were collected using a two-wave design (T1 and T2) with a one-month interval. At T1, we distributed 475 questionnaires and received 249 complete responses, achieving a response rate of 52.4%. At this initial stage, participants were asked to provide demographic data and information about their experiences of workplace bullying. One month later, at T2, participants provided data on their internal status perception, emotional intelligence, and knowledge sharing behaviour. A total of 219 responses were received at T2, representing an 88% response rate for this wave. After removing four responses due to missing values or non-participants, the final sample consisted of 215 individuals.

3.1. Demographic Analysis

The final sample consisted of 215 audit professionals selected from five audit firms in Colombo, Sri Lanka. In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents were in the 30-39 age group (44.7%), followed by the 21-29 age group (28.4%) and the 40-49 age group (19.1%). Meanwhile, a small proportion were in the 50 years and above age group (7.8%). In terms of gender, 52.1% of respondents were male and 47.9% were female, indicating a fairly balanced gender representation. In terms of educational qualifications, 41.9% of participants had professional certificates, 35.3% had bachelor's degrees, and 22.8% had diplomas or other qualifications. In terms of job titles, the largest proportion of participants were junior auditors (49.3%), followed by senior auditors (34.0%), while the smallest percentage were in management positions (16.7%).

3.2. Measures

Unless otherwise noted, the measures in this study used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.2.1. Workplace ostracism

Workplace ostracism was measured with a ten-item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008). A sample item is: "Others always ignore me at work." This scale showed high internal consistency, with $\alpha = 0.89$.

3.2.2. Knowledge sharing behaviour

Knowledge sharing behaviour was assessed using a four-item scale adapted from Chen and Aryee (2007). A sample item was: "I am willing to share work reports and company information with my colleagues." This scale showed good internal consistency with $\alpha = 0.79$.

3.2.3. Perceived insider status

Perceived insider status was measured using a six-item scale developed by Stamper and Masterson (2002). A sample item is "I feel strongly that I am an insider of the organisation". This scale showed high internal consistency, with $\alpha = 0.88$.

3.2.4. Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence was assessed using a four-item scale developed by Wong and Law (2002). An example item is "I can control my temper when I meet difficulties". This scale showed high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82.

3.2.5. Control variables

We controlled gender, age, and organisational tenure at the organisation, because previous research has shown that these demographic factors can significantly influence knowledge sharing behaviour (e.g., Nesafati et al., 2023). Gender was coded as a binary variable (0 = female, 1 = male). Age was categorized into five groups: 21 to 30 (code 0), 31 to 40 (1), 41 to 50 (2), 51 to 60 (3), and 61 or older (4). Organisational tenure was categorized into four groups: less than 2 years (coded 1), 2 to 5 years (2), 6 to 10 years (3), and more than 10 years (4).

4. Data Analysis

Before hypothesis testing, preliminary analyses were performed to assess the fit of the data. Normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values. All the study variables, namely, workplace ostracism, perceived insider status, emotional intelligence, and knowledge sharing behaviour were found to be within acceptable limits, as their mean and median values did not exceed the recommended limits. This indicates that the data have an approximately normal distribution, with no extreme outliers.

In addition, multivariate linearity was assessed using variance inflation factor (VIF) values, and all variables were below the recommended cutoff value of 5. This indicates that there is no significant overlap or hyperbola between the variables.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients among the main variables of the study, namely workplace ostracism, perceived insider status, emotional intelligence, and knowledge sharing behaviour.

The mean value for workplace ostracism was 3.45 (SD = 0.88), indicating a moderate level of perceived exclusion among employees. Perceived internal state recorded a mean of 3.62 (SD = 0.91), indicating that employees consider themselves moderately internalized within their organisations. Emotional intelligence showed a relatively high mean value (M = 3.78, SD =

0.85), while knowledge sharing behaviour recorded the highest mean (M = 3.95, SD = 0.79), reflecting a generally positive tendency to share knowledge among employees.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
Workplace Ostracism	3.45	0.88	—			
Perceived Insider Status	3.62	0.91	-0.41***	—		
Emotional Intelligence	3.78	0.85	-0.28**	0.36***	—	
Knowledge Sharing Behaviour	3.95	0.79	-0.33***	0.45***	0.39***	—

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, **$p < .001$

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The correlation analysis revealed several significant relationships, consistent with the theoretical expectations of the study. Workplace ostracism was negatively and significantly related to perceived internal status (r = -0.41, $p < .001$). This indicates that employees who experience greater levels of exclusion perceive themselves as less of an insider in the organisation. Similarly, workplace exclusion was negatively related to emotional intelligence (r = -0.28, $p < .01$) and knowledge sharing behaviour (r = -0.33, $p < .001$). This indicates that employees who are excluded have less emotional capacity to cope with workplace challenges and are less likely to engage in knowledge sharing.

In contrast, perceived internal status showed a strong positive relationship with knowledge sharing behaviour (r = 0.45, $p < .001$). This suggests that employees who feel valued and included are more willing to share knowledge. Emotional intelligence was positively correlated with both perceived internal status (r = 0.36, $p < .001$) and knowledge sharing behaviour (r = 0.39, $p < .001$), highlighting its important role in fostering positive attitudes and behaviours in the workplace.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing (Regression Analysis)

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis conducted to test the direct, mediating, and moderating effects proposed in the study are presented in Table 2.

4.2.1. Direct effect (Model 1)

In Model 1, workplace ostracism was entered as an independent variable predicting knowledge-sharing behaviour. The results indicate that workplace ostracism has a significant negative effect on knowledge sharing behaviour (β = -0.29, t = -4.42, $p < .001$). This suggests that employees who experience higher levels of workplace ostracism are less likely to engage in knowledge sharing activities. Therefore, these findings provide strong support for H1.

4.2.2 Mediating effect (Model 2)

In Model 2, perceived internal status was introduced as a mediator. Although the effect of workplace ostracism on knowledge sharing behaviour was reduced, it remained significant (β = -0.17, t = -2.95, p = .003), indicating a decrease in the strength of the relationship. At the same time, perceived internal status showed a significant positive effect on knowledge sharing behaviour (β = 0.34, t = 4.50, $p < .001$). This suggests that employees who consider themselves insiders are more likely to share knowledge. The reduction in the coefficient of workplace

ostracism, along with the significance of the mediator, indicates partial mediation, thereby supporting H2.

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Results

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p
Model 1 (Dependent: Knowledge Sharing Behaviour)					
Workplace Ostracism	-0.31	0.07	-0.29	-4.42	< .001
Model 2 (Mediator)					
Workplace Ostracism	-0.18	0.06	-0.17	-2.95	.003
Perceived Insider Status	0.36	0.08	0.34	4.50	< .001
Model 3 (Moderation)					
Workplace Ostracism	-0.15	0.06	-0.14	-2.50	.013
Emotional Intelligence	0.29	0.07	0.28	4.14	< .001
Ostracism × Emotional Intelligence	0.12	0.05	0.15	2.40	.017

4.2.3. Moderating effect (Model 3)

Model 3 tested the moderating role of emotional intelligence. Workplace ostracism consistently had a significant negative effect on knowledge sharing behaviour (β = -0.14, t = -2.50, p = .013). Emotional intelligence exhibited a significant positive effect (β = 0.28, t = 4.14, p < .001), indicating that employees with emotional intelligence are more likely to engage in knowledge sharing. Importantly, the interaction term between workplace neglect and emotional intelligence was positive and statistically significant (β = 0.15, t = 2.40, p = .017). This indicates that emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge sharing behaviour.

Specifically, the negative effect of workplace ostracism on knowledge-sharing behaviour is weaker among employees with high emotional intelligence. Therefore, H3 is supported.

4.2.4. Moderated mediation analysis

To test the moderated mediation hypothesis (H4), a conditional process analysis was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples to estimate the indirect effects at different levels of emotional intelligence. The results revealed that the indirect effect of workplace ostracism on knowledge sharing behaviour via perceived insider status was conditional on emotional intelligence. Specifically, the indirect effect was significant and stronger at low levels of emotional intelligence (β = -0.21, BootSE = 0.06, 95% CI [-0.33, -0.10]), whereas the effect was weaker but still significant at high levels of emotional intelligence (β = -0.08, BootSE = 0.04, 95% CI [-0.16, -0.02]). Importantly, the index of moderated mediation was significant (Index = 0.13, BootSE = 0.05, 95% CI [0.04, 0.23]), as the confidence interval did not include zero. This confirms that the indirect effect of workplace ostracism on knowledge sharing behaviour via perceived insider status varies significantly depending on emotional intelligence. These findings indicate that employees with low emotional intelligence experience a strong negative indirect effect, as workplace ostracism significantly reduces their perceived insider status and, consequently, knowledge sharing behaviour. In contrast, employees with high emotional intelligence are able to better mitigate this negative path, thereby weakening the indirect effect.

Therefore, these results provide strong statistical support for H4 and also confirm the existence of a significant moderated mediation effect.

5. Discussion

This study proposed and tested a resource-based model that links workplace ostracism to knowledge sharing behaviour, with perceived insider status serving as the mediating

mechanism and emotional intelligence acting as a crucial moderating variable. Consistent with our theoretical framework, the results confirm an inverse relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge sharing behaviour. These findings corroborate previous work by Takhsha et al. (2020), thereby strengthening the empirical evidence that workplace ostracism diminishes employees' knowledge sharing behaviour.

Beyond replicating this core relationship, our study provides deeper mechanistic insight. We empirically established perceived insider status as a significant mediator, demonstrating that workplace ostracism consumes psychological resources necessary for daily work demands. This resource depletion subsequently diminishes employees' perceived insider status. Consequently, employees with low perceived insider status become more prone to knowledge hiding as a resource conservation tactic. Importantly, our findings reveal that emotional intelligence mitigates this adverse effect; specifically, emotional intelligence moderates the indirect relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge sharing behaviour through perceived insider status. This suggests that employees with high emotional intelligence can leverage self-regulation to restore their resources, which buffers their sensitivity to workplace ostracism and helps them maintain knowledge sharing behaviour, thereby fostering a more positive environment for knowledge sharing.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

First, this research explores the internal dynamics of workplace ostracism through the lens of resource depletion. While previous studies relied on social identity (Guo et al., 2022) and social capital (Abbasi et al., 2021) theories, this investigation adopts COR theory to uniquely establish workplace ostracism as an antecedent to knowledge sharing behaviour. According to this framework, workplace ostracism constitutes a negative interpersonal treatment that forces ostracized employees to dedicate vital resources to managing the unfairness, which in turn compels them to withhold resources from knowledge sharing behaviour. Thus, this study addresses a theoretical gap and offers a more profound understanding of how workplace ostracism influences employees' knowledge sharing behaviour.

Second, this study refines the established mediation of perceived insider status by applying it to a specific behavioural outcome. While past studies establish that perceived insider status mediates the effect of workplace ostracism on general work attitudes (Guo et al., 2022), our empirical results demonstrate a specific chain reaction: workplace ostracism negatively affects perceived insider status, which subsequently diminishes knowledge sharing behaviour. This finding elucidates the hidden psychological pathway between interpersonal mistreatment and behavioural outcomes, thereby contributing a novel theoretical perspective on the internal process that governs knowledge sharing.

Third, this research extends the current understanding by introducing a crucial individual-level boundary condition. While prior research has primarily examined contextual influences on perceived insider status (e.g., Wang et al., 2017), it has largely overlooked the role of individual characteristics. This study addresses this gap by integrating emotional intelligence as a moderator, thereby demonstrating that personal resources interact with the work environment to shape employee reactions. This finding helps to clarify the theoretical boundaries of the workplace ostracism-knowledge sharing relationship, which constitutes a valuable contribution that enriches the broader research field on workplace ostracism.

6.2. Practical Implications

Workplace ostracism poses a serious threat to both employee well-being and organisational performance. Companies that ignore this phenomenon fail to cultivate employee loyalty or maximize operational efficiency, instead creating an environment of isolation. This dynamic ultimately compromises the mutual interests of organisations and their employees. The findings from this study provide managers in knowledge-intensive sectors, particularly audit firms, with actionable strategies to enhance employee performance by addressing this issue.

First, organisations should cultivate a culture that is founded on respect, understanding, cooperation, and inclusion. Managers can mitigate the risk of workplace ostracism by promoting open and frequent communication, which builds mutual understanding. Additionally, companies must maintain objective and transparent performance evaluation systems to prevent biased appraisals from exacerbating ostracism. Complementing these efforts, organisations should invest in targeted training programs against workplace ostracism, supported by psychological counseling services to alleviate staff stress. Together, these measures strengthen employee belonging and effectively counter the negative effects of ostracism.

Second, since workplace ostracism diminishes knowledge sharing behaviour through reduced perceived insider status, organisations should focus on strengthening employees' perceived insider status. Specifically, they should enhance leader-member relationships through delegated authority, inclusive decision-making, and consistently equitable treatment. Furthermore, establishing transparent communication channels that facilitate the open sharing of organisational information helps build trust and reinforce perceived insider status. Finally, improving working conditions and providing competitive benefits are essential for boosting both employee motivation and their sense of organisational inclusion.

Third, the distinctive Sri Lankan cultural values of "circle" and "favor" can intensify workplace ostracism. This culturally embedded dynamic worsens perceived insider status and suppresses knowledge sharing behaviour. To counter this, managers should actively promote inclusive teamwork to counteract divisive group mentalities. Firms need to enforce a non-discriminatory culture that encourages collaboration across all organisational boundaries. Implementing a regular job rotation system would provide structured opportunities for employees to build relationships across different teams, thereby expanding social networks and reducing the insular behaviour that fuels workplace ostracism.

6.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study acknowledges several inherent limitations. First, the multi-wave design should be distinguished from a strictly longitudinal approach. In particular, the failure to measure workplace ostracism at each time point may bias the study's results and prevent a firm establishment of causality. Future research should utilize longitudinal or experimental designs to address this limitation. Second, the sample may lack full representativeness of the broader population. Therefore, we recommend that subsequent studies expand their scope to include knowledge workers across various industries and regions to validate these findings. A third limitation concerns the generalizability of the results, which is restricted because the study examined only knowledge workers. To address this limitation, future studies should use longitudinal or experimental designs. Second, the sample may not be fully representative of the broader population. Therefore, we suggest that subsequent studies should expand their scope to include knowledge workers across different industries and regions to verify these results. The third limitation concerns the generalizability of the results; this study is limited because it only examined knowledge workers. Future studies should expand their scope to include the

general employee population. Finally, this study only had perceived internal status as a mediator and emotional intelligence as a moderator. Future studies should include other relevant variables to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the workplace ostracism-knowledge sharing relationship. Organisational management studies often deal with related concepts such as knowledge hoarding and knowledge hiding; these behaviours deserve careful examination by both scholars and practitioners.

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