

Workplace Ostracism's Impact on New-Generation Employees' Turnover Intention

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Abstract: *Against the backdrop of generational iteration in the workforce, post-1995 and post-2000 new-generation employees have gradually become the main force in the workplace. The collision between their unique value demands and the traditional workplace interpersonal ecology has made workplace ostracism an increasingly prevalent phenomenon, which in turn has become a key factor pushing up their turnover intention. Taking small and medium-sized internet enterprises as the research objects for case studies, this paper conducts an empirical research through semi-structured interviews and internal document sorting, systematically sorts out the core manifestations and inducing causes of workplace ostracism faced by new-generation employees, deeply analyzes the internal transmission paths through which workplace ostracism acts on turnover intention, and extracts targeted management implications based on the research conclusions. The study finds that workplace ostracism experienced by new-generation employees is mainly in hidden forms such as social isolation, information blockage and task marginalization, and the main causes include generational differences in values, rigid management models and the lack of an inclusive team culture; workplace ostracism significantly strengthens employees' turnover intention through three core paths: the depletion of psychological resources, the induction of job burnout and the weakening of organizational belonging. Based on this, enterprises need to make efforts from the dimensions of cultural construction, management optimization and interpersonal coordination to alleviate the problem of workplace ostracism and stabilize the team of new-generation employees.*

Keywords: *New-generation employees; Workplace ostracism; Turnover intention*

1. Introduction

As China's labor market undergoes generational change, post-1995 and post-2000 employees have fully entered the workforce, accounting for over 52% of urban workers by 2025 and forming the core of emerging industries such as the internet and new media. Growing up in an internet-driven, affluent society with strong individual values, these young employees differ greatly from older generations. They prioritize workplace equality and respect, reject rigid hierarchies and meaningless work demands, and pursue clear work-life boundaries. They seek recognition and self-value at work, yet have weaker stress resistance and low tolerance for negative workplace conditions. Traditional workplace culture still prevails, creating conflicts with young employees' values and triggering widespread workplace ostracism. As a form of covert workplace cold violence, it includes social exclusion, information isolation and task marginalization. Hard to detect, it negatively affects employees' mental state and work performance. Sensitive young workers suffer severely from prolonged ostracism, leading to anxiety, burnout and high turnover. In SMEs, their turnover rate reaches 30-45%, with nearly 40% of departures caused by workplace exclusion. This raises corporate costs, weakens team stability, disrupts operations and hinders long-term development.

Existing studies mostly focus on the quantitative verification of the correlation between workplace ostracism and turnover intention, but there is a relative lack of in-depth research combined with specific enterprise cases in localized workplace scenarios, especially the lack of systematic disassembly of influence paths and extraction of practical management implications. Based on this, this paper takes typical small and medium-sized enterprises as the research carrier to carry out targeted case studies, and conducts research closely following the core logic of "case research - influence paths - management implications". It not only makes up for the case shortcoming of existing studies, but also provides practical references for enterprises to optimize the management of new-generation employees and resolve workplace interpersonal conflicts, thus having strong theoretical and practical significance.

2. Definition of Core Concepts

2.1. New-Generation Employees

New-generation employees refer to younger workplace groups such as the post-1980s, post-1990s and post-2000s, who are characterized by individualization, diversification and the emphasis on self-realization, and have higher expectations and requirements for work and life[1]. Combining the general definition in academia with the actual workplace situation, this paper defines new-generation employees as the workplace group aged 18-31 who have entered the workplace for a short time. This group has distinct core characteristics: first, the pursuit of diverse values, that is, they pay attention to the balance between work and life, are not limited to material rewards, and are more eager to gain respect at work; second, they have clear career demands, that is, new-generation employees have strong autonomous learning ability and innovative awareness, and attach importance to opportunities for personalized growth; third, they have an open behavioral style, resent workplace hierarchical oppression and formalistic social communication, have relatively weak psychological pressure resistance and extremely low tolerance for a negative interpersonal environment. If their core demands are not met for a long time, they will generate turnover intention.

2.2. Workplace Ostracism

An individual's behavioral choices after experiencing exclusion are largely influenced by the satisfaction of their core needs [2]. Numerous studies have shown that workplace ostracism affects employees' attitudes and behaviors in organizational contexts. Ferris et al. defined workplace ostracism as an inappropriate interpersonal behavior that causes employees to have negative feelings about interpersonal relationships in the work process, such as being undervalued or even abandoned, thus having adverse effects on employees' psychology, work attitudes and behaviors [3]. Previous studies have shown that workplace ostracism has a significant impact on employees' work attitudes and behaviors, especially on their proactive behaviors, voice behaviors, innovative behaviors, turnover intention and job performance.

Workplace ostracism refers to the perception of employees being excluded, ignored or even marginalized by other members in the workplace environment [3]. Due to its non-interactivity and exclusivity, workplace ostracism will damage the basic needs of ostracized employees and seriously affect their physical and mental health[4]. It is mainly presented in hidden forms, including exclusion from social activities, blockage of work information, marginalization in task allocation, and perfunctory responses in communication. Such behaviors are highly concealed and difficult to detect, but they will continuously consume employees' psychological resources and bring in-depth emotional harm.

2.3. Turnover Intention

Turnover refers to the behavior of individuals choosing to leave their current positions, and turnover intention is the subjective psychological willingness of employees to take the initiative to leave the current organization and seek external employment opportunities before implementing the actual turnover behavior, which is a core leading indicator for predicting employees' actual turnover behavior. Employee turnover is a consumption of human resources for enterprises and will increase their recruitment costs. The strength of turnover intention directly reflects employees' satisfaction with the current work environment and their organizational belonging.

Factors affecting employee turnover can be roughly divided into subjective and objective factors. From the perspective of subjective factors, Li Xianyin et al. pointed out that job satisfaction has a significant negative effect on turnover intention[5], and Xiao Yao et al. indicated that perceived organizational support has a significant negative correlation with employees' turnover intention[6]. Some scholars proposed that a poor objective environment will make employees generate turnover intention and accelerate their turnover behavior. At the same time, employees with low satisfaction will have behaviors such as being late, leaving early, engaging in violence and resigning. Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forward: as a negative interpersonal stress factor, workplace ostracism is a key variable triggering the turnover intention of new-generation employees, and there is a significant positive correlation between the two.

3. Design and Implementation of Case Research

3.1. Selection of Research Objects

The core of the case study method lies in the scientificity of research design, the representativeness of research objects and the reliability of data sources. To accurately explore the internal correlation between workplace ostracism and turnover intention of new-generation employees, this paper selects a single enterprise for in-depth case research in accordance with the three principles of "representativeness, feasibility and pertinence". The research process is standardized in the whole process, data collection and analysis methods are clarified, and the authenticity and effectiveness of research results are guaranteed. The details of the specific research design and implementation are as follows.

This paper selects a small and medium-sized internet new media enterprise in China (hereinafter referred to as Enterprise M) as the research object for the case study. Headquartered in a new first-tier city, the enterprise was founded in 2020, mainly engaged in short video content creation, new media agency operation, brand online promotion and other businesses, with a total of 82 employees. It is a typical start-up small and medium-sized internet enterprise with a flat team structure and a flexible but imperfect management model, which is fully in line with the characteristics of enterprises with a concentrated number of new-generation employees.

The detailed basis for case selection is as follows: first, group matching. Enterprise M has a relatively young age structure of employees, among which 62 are post-1995 and post-2000 new-generation employees, accounting for as high as 75.6%. The positions cover content operation, video editing, copywriting planning, customer connection and other core positions with a concentrated number of new-generation employees, which perfectly conforms to the group definition of the research object in this paper; second, problem representativeness. The management of Enterprise M is mainly composed of post-1980s and early post-1990s employees, who follow the traditional experience-based management model and have not established a management mechanism adapted to new-generation employees. The internal generational conflicts are prominent and workplace ostracism occurs frequently. Statistics from the human resources department show that a total of 35 employees left the enterprise in the past year, including 31 new-generation employees, with an annual turnover rate of 42.5% for new-generation employees, far exceeding the average turnover rate of the internet industry. Among the reasons for resignation, "interpersonal incompatibility and isolation" accounts for 38.7%, making the case highly representative; third, research feasibility. Through the connection of internal contacts of the enterprise, the research permission of the enterprise management and on-the-job employees is obtained, one-on-one in-depth interviews can be carried out, and second-hand data such as resignation registration, internal attendance and work allocation records can be obtained, so that the accessibility and authenticity of data can be fully guaranteed.

3.2. Research Methods and Data Sources

The case study method relies on rigorous design, representative samples and reliable data. To explore workplace ostracism and young employees' turnover intention, this study adopts standardized procedures and selects a targeted enterprise based on representativeness, feasibility and relevance.

The research subject is M Company, a Chinese internet and new media SME. Founded in 2020, it focuses on short video production and brand promotion, with 82 employees and a flexible yet immature management system, typical for young-focused start-ups.

The selection criteria include three aspects. First, employee matching: 75.6% of its staff are post-1995 and post-2000 employees, covering core operational positions. Second, typical issues: traditional management leads to frequent generational conflicts and workplace ostracism. Its youth turnover rate is 42.5%, and nearly 40% of resignations stem from interpersonal isolation. Third, research accessibility: access to interviews and internal data ensures reliable and credible research results.

3.3. Data Sorting and Reliability and Validity Control

To ensure the validity of research data and the accuracy of analysis results, this paper conducts standardized sorting and reliability and validity tests on the collected interview and internal documents. First, open coding is carried out on the interview transcribed texts to extract initial concepts such as

"social isolation, information blockage, task marginalization, psychological depression, and idea of leaving", then core categories are summarized through axial coding, and finally four core coding modules are formed: manifestations, causes, impacts of workplace ostracism and turnover intention. Second, reliability and validity tests are carried out. The triangulation method is used to compare the consistency of three types of data: interview content, resignation records and work ledgers, and contradictory and invalid information is eliminated. At the same time, the interviewee review method is adopted, and the coded core content is fed back to 3 interviewees for confirmation to ensure no deviation in data interpretation. Finally, 126 valid coding entries are screened out to form a complete research database, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent case analysis.

3.4. Core Research Findings: Manifestations and Causes of Workplace Ostracism

3.4.1. Core Manifestations of Workplace Ostracism Faced by New-Generation Employees

Through data analysis and verification, workplace ostracism in Company M is entirely covert, with no direct verbal hostility or deliberate mistreatment. Nevertheless, its persistent and hidden nature causes severe psychological harm, manifested in three key aspects:

First, social isolation. Senior staff and management form exclusive groups and exclude young employees from daily interactions, team events and collective activities. Young workers are often ignored or rebuffed when seeking to integrate. Most remain socially isolated for long periods after joining.

Second, information blocking. Critical work information is restricted to senior employees. New staff are rarely informed of key details and are frequently denied support when seeking help. Limited information leads to frequent errors, followed by unfair criticism, creating a harmful cycle.

Third, task marginalization. Work allocation favours long-tenured employees, who receive high-value, developmental tasks. New recruits are confined to routine, repetitive work and are denied opportunities for advancement. Denied participation in key projects, they suffer from low motivation and poor job satisfaction.

3.4.2. In-Depth Inducing Causes of Workplace Ostracism

Based on interview data, analysis and company conditions, workplace ostracism in Company M stems from four interrelated factors: generational differences, outdated management, inadequate corporate culture and employee individuality, among which value conflicts are the core cause.

First, generational value conflicts. Senior staff and managers adhere to traditional workplace norms that prioritize seniority and compliance. They hold biased views on young employees' demand for equality, work boundaries and individual expression, regarding them as rebellious, and thus create exclusionary behaviour.

Second, rigid management. The company adopts a rigid, performance-driven management style, ignoring employees' emotional needs. Management disregards workplace exclusion, tolerates senior staff's negative behaviour and lacks conflict mediation, allowing ostracism to spread.

Third, inadequate inclusive culture. The company lacks an equal, supportive team atmosphere and has no regulations or complaint channels for workplace exclusion. This leads to deep intergenerational divisions and isolated group boundaries.

Fourth, poor individual adaptability of new employees. Inexperienced in the workplace, some young employees are overly assertive and rigid in communication. Their resistance to traditional workplace norms provokes tensions with senior staff and further exacerbates exclusion.

4. Influence Paths of Workplace Ostracism on Turnover Intention

Combined with the Conservation of Resources Theory and the Self-Determination Theory, and based on the case research results, this paper sorts out three core transmission paths through which workplace ostracism acts on the turnover intention of new-generation employees. These paths are interrelated and jointly strengthen employees' turnover intention.

4.1. Path 1: Sustained Depletion of Psychological Resources, Spawning Negative Emotions

Existing studies have confirmed that in organizational contexts, workplace ostracism can trigger employees' negative emotions through job insecurity. Basic survival needs, such as an individual's self-esteem and survival value, are greatly affected by workplace ostracism, leading to negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, worry and loneliness in employees, and ultimately resulting in the instability of employees' work state. The Conservation of Resources Theory holds that resource loss will make individuals adopt a series of strategies to protect the existing resource base and ensure the stability and safety of resources. As a negative workplace resource, workplace ostracism will lead to the consumption of employees' resources.

New-generation employees have strong emotional needs. When experiencing workplace ostracism and long-term social isolation and neglect, their psychological and emotional resources will be continuously consumed, and negative emotions such as loneliness, anxiety, depression and self-doubt will gradually arise. The research shows that 80% of on-the-job new-generation employees said that they have a psychological resistance to going to work due to long-term isolation and are in a state of mental internal friction every day. This sustained psychological pain makes employees have the idea of escaping from the current negative work environment, which becomes the initial inducement for the generation of turnover intention.

4.2. Path 2: Continuous Deterioration of Work Experience, Inducing Severe Job Burnout

The Conservation of Resources Theory holds that individuals preserve the resources they currently have, and even expect to obtain more resources after suffering resource loss[7]. Individuals with more resources are more likely to obtain new resources than others and are more willing to invest resources. In the context of workplace ostracism, individuals perceive being ignored or even excluded by colleagues or superiors, which not only damages their social resources and reduces their sense of organizational belonging, but also may indirectly affect the stability of their psychological resource status, resulting in the consumption of self-esteem and the reduction of self-efficacy. Workplace ostracism forces employees to invest a lot of time and energy to alleviate and cope with negative workplace attitudes, leading to a reduction in the time and energy invested in work and an increase in work burden. Information blockage and task marginalization make it difficult for new-generation employees to carry out their work without necessary support, leading to frequent work setbacks and difficulty in gaining work accomplishment and a sense of value. This further makes them resist work in attitude and engage in passive work in behavior, and ultimately induces severe job burnout. When employees develop a sense of aversion to work itself and see no hope for career development, their turnover intention will be further strengthened, and finding a new work platform will be listed as a core goal.

4.3. Path 3: Complete Loss of Organizational Belonging, Weakening the Connection between Employees and Enterprises

Workplace ostracism makes it impossible for new-generation employees to integrate into the team, feel the respect and warmth of the enterprise, and completely lose their sense of belonging and loyalty to the enterprise, breaking the mutually beneficial social exchange relationship between employees and the enterprise. Employees no longer recognize the enterprise's management philosophy and culture, and the emotional and interest connection with the enterprise is continuously weakened. Once there are better external employment opportunities, they will not hesitate to choose to resign, which is also the core reason for the high active turnover rate of new-generation employees in Enterprise M.

5. Management Implications

Based on the case research results and the analysis of influence paths, this paper extracts four core management implications from the perspective of joint efforts of enterprises, managers and employees, providing practical directions for enterprises to alleviate workplace ostracism of new-generation employees and reduce their turnover intention.

5.1. Build an Inclusive and Equal Workplace Culture to Eliminate Generational Prejudices

Enterprises should abandon the traditional workplace bad habits of hierarchy and seniority,

incorporate "respecting differences and equality and mutual assistance" into the core of corporate culture construction, reverse the stereotypes of senior employees and managers towards new-generation employees through internal training and publicity guidance, and create an inclusive and diverse workplace atmosphere. At the same time, enterprises should establish clear anti-workplace ostracism rules and regulations, define the judgment standards and punishment measures for ostracizing behaviors, open anonymous complaint channels, and detect and handle workplace ostracism behaviors early, putting an end to the breeding of ostracism phenomenon from the institutional level.

5.2. Optimize the Management Model and Strengthen Managers' Intergenerational Communication Ability

Managers need to take the initiative to change the traditional patriarchal management thinking, abandon the management concept of "emphasizing performance over humanity", systematically learn the management knowledge and communication skills for new-generation employees, and adopt an equal, respectful and encouraging communication method to interact with employees. For workplace interpersonal conflicts, managers should take the initiative to intervene in mediation, handle problems in accordance with the principle of fairness and impartiality, and put an end to favoring senior employees; reasonably allocate work tasks, provide new-generation employees with opportunities to show their abilities, pay attention to their career growth and psychological state, and enhance employees' sense of organizational belonging.

5.3. Guide New-Generation Employees to Improve Workplace Adaptability and Optimize Communication Methods

Enterprises can carry out training on workplace communication skills, guide new-generation employees to adjust their workplace mentality, learn to respect the interaction modes of different generations, avoid an overly self-centered and rebellious attitude in doing things, and integrate into the team in a modest and gentle way. At the same time, enterprises can encourage new-generation employees to improve their professional abilities, gain the recognition of colleagues and managers with excellent work strength, and take the initiative to establish a positive workplace interpersonal relationship; if they encounter serious workplace ostracism, guide employees to feedback problems through formal channels and safeguard their legitimate rights and interests.

6. Conclusions and Prospects

This study examines workplace ostracism and turnover intention among young employees in internet SMEs. It finds that covert ostracism, manifested as social isolation, information blocking and task marginalization, is driven by generational value differences, outdated management, poor corporate culture and individual factors. Such exclusion triggers psychological stress, burnout and low loyalty, significantly increasing turnover intention.

To mitigate this issue, targeted measures from cultural, institutional, managerial and individual perspectives are needed. This research is limited to a single case; future studies may expand samples and combine quantitative methods to improve results generality, providing better guidance for young employee management.

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