



DOES INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP BREAK THE SILENCE? HOW PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT EXPLAINS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AND WORKPLACE OSTRACISM

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ABSTRACT

Workplace ostracism, an employee's perception of being ignored or excluded by others at work, remains a pervasive and organisationally costly form of mistreatment in Nigerian federal public sector research institutions, where hierarchical structures and weak feedback pathways may be associated with exclusion. This study investigates the relationships among inclusive leadership, perceived organisational support, and workplace ostracism among employees of the National Metallurgical Development Centre (NMDC), Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. Drawing on Inclusive Leadership Theory, Organisational Support Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Belongingness Theory, the study hypothesises that inclusive leadership is negatively associated with workplace ostracism, positively associated with perceived organisational support, and that perceived organisational support is negatively associated with workplace ostracism. Data were collected from 211 valid respondents across the Centre's seven functional offices using a cross-sectional census survey design, and analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS Version 4 with bootstrapping of 5,000 subsamples. The results show that inclusive leadership is significantly and negatively associated with workplace ostracism, significantly and positively associated with perceived organisational support, and that perceived organisational support is significantly and negatively associated with workplace ostracism. Perceived organisational support also partially mediates the statistical relationship between inclusive leadership and workplace ostracism. The study offers a theoretically integrated account of the statistical pathway linking relational leadership, organisational support perceptions, and workplace ostracism, with implications for leadership development and human resource policy in hierarchical public sector research institutions.

Introduction

Workplace ostracism, an individual's perception of being ignored, excluded, or isolated by others in the workplace (Ferris, Brown, Berry, and Lian, 2008), has emerged as an important form of workplace

mistreatment in contemporary organisations. Unlike overt aggression such as harassment or bullying, ostracism operates through omission rather than commission: unreturned greetings, exclusion from meetings and informal gatherings, withheld information, and social invisibility (Howard, Cogswell, and Smith, 2020). Globally, the scale of the phenomenon is notable. O'Reilly, Robinson, Berdahl, and Banki (2015) reported that 71.0 percent of participants in Study 2 had experienced some degree of workplace ostracism during the preceding six months. In China, Wang, Lu, Wu, and Luo (2023) report that a month-long Zhaopin survey of more than 10,000 employees found that nearly half believed they had experienced workplace ostracism. These figures are reported survey findings rather than population prevalence estimates, and they provide context for the broader study of workplace ostracism. Meta-analytic evidence further shows that workplace ostracism is consistently associated with a range of employee attitudes, wellbeing indicators, and behaviours (Li, Xu, and Kwan, 2021).

In Nigeria specifically, workplace exclusion and related forms of interpersonal mistreatment have received comparatively limited empirical attention. This is particularly relevant to public research and development organisations such as the National Metallurgical Development Centre (NMDC), where knowledge sharing, innovation, and collaborative problem-solving are important to institutional functioning. The present study therefore examines employees' reported perceptions of workplace ostracism and their statistical relationships with inclusive leadership and perceived organisational support within the NMDC context.

Despite the breadth and formal ambition of international and national policy frameworks addressing workplace dignity and inclusion, workplace ostracism remains a subtle and often difficult-to-detect form of workplace mistreatment. Scholars note that formal workplace conduct policies may focus more readily on overt, legally actionable behaviours, leaving subtle and relational forms of exclusion less visible (Wu, Wei, and Hui, 2021). This context warrants research that examines the leadership and organisational conditions statistically associated with employees' experiences of inclusion and ostracism.

Inclusive leadership, leadership that exhibits openness, accessibility, and availability in interactions with followers (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv, 2010), has attracted growing scholarly attention as a relational leadership approach relevant to employee inclusion. Prior evidence indicates that inclusive leadership is positively associated with perceived organisational support (Qi, Liu, Wei, and Hu, 2019), while perceived organisational support has been examined as a relevant organisational resource in studies of workplace ostracism (Sarfraz et al., 2019; Chung, 2017). Perceived organisational support (POS), the degree to which employees believe their organisation values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa, 1986), therefore provides a theoretically plausible organisational pathway linking leadership perceptions with workplace ostracism.

The present study examines inclusive leadership and perceived organisational support within a single statistical mediation framework applied to a Nigerian federal research institution. It addresses the gap by investigating the relationships among inclusive leadership, perceived organisational support, and workplace ostracism among employees of the National Metallurgical Development Centre, Nigeria, hence the research question:

RQ1: To what extent does inclusive leadership relate with workplace ostracism, and to what extent does perceived organisational support mediate this relationship?

Theoretical Foundation and Hypotheses Development

This study draws on Inclusive Leadership Theory, Organisational Support Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Belongingness Theory to justify the hypothesised relationships. Inclusive Leadership Theory (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006; Randel et al., 2018) conceptualises openness, accessibility, and availability as leadership behaviours relevant to employee inclusion and voice. Organisational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) provide a basis for understanding how employees may generalise relational signals from leaders into broader perceptions of organisational care. Belongingness Theory (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) highlights the importance of interpersonal acceptance and belonging in employees' workplace experiences. Taken together, these perspectives provide a theoretical basis for examining whether inclusive leadership is statistically associated with workplace ostracism and perceived organisational support, and whether perceived organisational support forms an indirect statistical pathway in the relationship between inclusive leadership and workplace ostracism.

Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership refers to leaders who exhibit openness, accessibility, and availability in their interactions with followers (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv, 2010). Openness reflects willingness to listen to and involve employees in problem solving; availability reflects the extent to which leaders are present and willing to provide guidance and support; and accessibility captures the ease with which employees can approach their leader for discussion or help. These behaviours may signal that employees' presence, voice, and contribution are valued. Carmeli et al. (2010) found that inclusive leadership was positively related to psychological safety, while the present study extends this literature by examining workplace ostracism as an outcome. Accordingly, the first hypothesis is:

H1: Inclusive leadership is significantly associated with workplace ostracism among employees of the National Metallurgical Development Centre, Nigeria.

Beyond its relationship with workplace ostracism, inclusive leadership is theoretically relevant to perceived organisational support. When leaders are open to employee input, accessible for consultation, and available to acknowledge contributions, employees may generalise these relational signals into broader perceptions of organisational care. This proposition is consistent with Organisational Support Theory and Social Exchange Theory and is supported by Qi, Liu, Wei, and Hu (2019), whose multi-wave, multi-source study reported a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived organisational support. Accordingly, the second hypothesis is:

H2: Inclusive leadership is significantly associated with perceived organisational support among employees of the National Metallurgical Development Centre, Nigeria.

Perceived Organisational Support

Perceived organisational support is the degree to which employees believe that their organisation values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa, 1986). It represents a broad perception of organisational care that may be relevant to employees' experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Sarfraz et al. (2019) examined perceived organisational support in relation to workplace ostracism among nurses, while Chung (2017) reported evidence involving perceived organisational support and behavioural outcomes in the workplace ostracism literature. These studies

provide a basis for examining whether perceived organisational support is statistically associated with workplace ostracism in the present context. Accordingly, the third hypothesis is:

H3: Perceived organisational support is significantly associated with workplace ostracism among employees of the National Metallurgical Development Centre, Nigeria.

The preceding arguments provide a basis for testing perceived organisational support as an intervening statistical pathway between inclusive leadership and workplace ostracism. Inclusive leadership is expected to be associated with perceived organisational support, while perceived organisational support is expected to be associated with workplace ostracism. The combined pattern can therefore be examined as an indirect statistical association without implying that the cross-sectional design establishes causal direction. Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis is:

H4: Perceived organisational support significantly mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and workplace ostracism among employees of the National Metallurgical Development Centre, Nigeria.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework

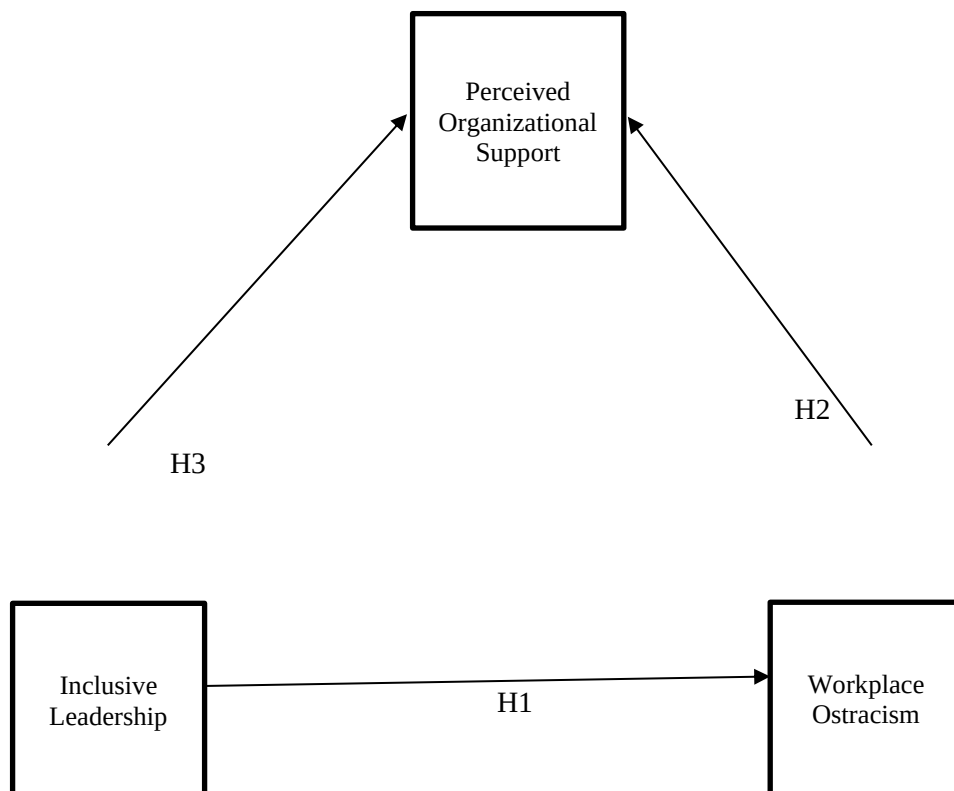


Figure 1

Conceptual Framework.

Source: Adapted from Nembhard and Edmondson (2006), Eisenberger et al. (1986), Ferris et al. (2008), and Baumeister and Leary (1995); Researcher's Synthesis (2025)

Methodology

Population and Sample

The target population comprised all 240 staff of the National Metallurgical Development Centre (NMDC), distributed across its seven functional offices in Abuja, Kogi, Jos, Kwara, Benue, Nasarawa, and Niger (NMDC Staff Nominal Role and Departmental Records, 2025). Since the population was small and entirely accessible, a census approach was adopted, targeting all 240 registered staff rather than drawing a probability sample, consistent with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) guidance that a census eliminates sampling error and provides more accurate results when a population can be fully reached. Employees were adopted as the unit of analysis, and data collection took place in a natural, non-contrived organisational setting with no interference in participants' expected behaviour. Of the questionnaires administered, 211 valid responses were retained for analysis after data screening, representing a response rate of 87.9 percent. Because the randomness of non-response could not be established, non-response bias remains a potential source of bias in the findings.

Common Method Bias

Procedural safeguards were implemented to minimise common method bias (CMB), including respondent anonymity assurance, clear and unambiguous item wording, physical separation of scale sections, and explicit instructions that there were no right or wrong answers (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff, 2003; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2012). Harman's single-factor test, conducted by loading all 26 scale items into an unrotated principal components analysis in IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26, showed that the single largest factor accounted for 24.7 percent of total variance, well below the 50 percent threshold that would indicate a CMB concern. Following Kock's (2015) recommendation, a full collinearity test was also conducted as a post-hoc statistical assessment; all variance inflation factor values fell below the 3.3 threshold Kock (2015) recommends for identifying CMB, confirming that common method bias was not a significant concern in the dataset.

Measures

Workplace ostracism, the dependent variable, was adapted from the 10-item Workplace Ostracism Scale developed by Ferris, Brown, Berry, and Lian (2008), rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), with demonstrated reliability of Cronbach's alpha = 0.89 in the original validation study. Inclusive leadership, the independent variable, was adapted from the validated scale developed by Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv (2010), which operationalises inclusive leadership across the three dimensions of openness, accessibility, and availability in leader-follower interactions; the 8-item version administered in this study achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.947-0.951 across diagnostic checks, confirming strong internal consistency. Perceived organisational support, the mediating variable, was adapted from the

8-item short form of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986), the most widely used and validated instrument for measuring employees' perceptions of organisational care and valuation (Kurtessis et al., 2017); items 7 and 8 are negatively worded and were reverse-scored prior to analysis. In the present study, the scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.947-0.951, confirming strong internal consistency reliability.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis and common method bias diagnostics were conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26, while Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS Version 4 was used to estimate the measurement and structural models, using bootstrapping of 5,000 subsamples for hypothesis testing. PLS-SEM was considered the most appropriate technique because it performs effectively even when data do not meet strict assumptions of normality, is well suited to theory-testing and prediction-oriented research in management studies, and enables the concurrent estimation of both the measurement and structural models (Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2022; Sarstedt, Ringle, and Hair, 2021).

Result

Respondents' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Descriptive statistical analysis conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26 on the 211 valid respondents is summarised in Table 1. Male respondents constituted 65.4 percent of the sample, consistent with the documented male predominance in Nigerian federal scientific and technical institutions. The largest age bracket was 38-47 years (38.4%), and 51.7 percent of respondents held a First Degree as their highest qualification, with a further 39.8 percent holding a Masters or PhD, reflecting the research and technical nature of the NMDC workforce. Senior staff constituted 51.7 percent of the sample and junior staff 48.3 percent.

Table 1

Respondents' Socio-Demographic Characteristics.

Variable	Category	Frequency (N = 211)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	138	65.4
	Female	73	34.6
Age (years)	18–27	29	13.7
	28–37	74	35.1
	38–47	81	38.4
	48–57	27	12.8
	58–67	10	4.7
Marital Status	Single	62	29.4
	Married	134	63.5
	Divorced	15	7.1
Qualification	Diploma	18	8.5
	First Degree	109	51.7
	Masters/PhD	84	39.8
Level	Junior Staff	102	48.3
	Senior Staff	109	51.7

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Assessment of Measurement Model

The measurement model was specified as reflective and evaluated for indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2022). All items across the three constructs, Inclusive Leadership (8 items), Perceived Organisational Support (8 items), and Workplace Ostracism (10 items), returned outer loadings exceeding the 0.708 threshold. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Reliability and Convergent Validity of Study Constructs.

Construct	Items	Loading Range	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Inclusive Leadership (IL)	8	0.821–0.871	0.951	0.961	0.731
Perceived Organisational Support (POS)	8	0.828–0.867	0.947	0.958	0.724
Workplace Ostracism (WO)	10	0.798–0.841	0.954	0.963	0.706

Thresholds: outer loading ≥ 0.708 ; Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.70 ; CR 0.60–0.95; AVE ≥ 0.50 (Hair et al., 2022).

All three constructs exceeded the recommended thresholds for Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (with CR values of 0.958–0.963 slightly above the conventional upper guideline of 0.95), and AVE, confirming high internal consistency reliability. Although CR values above 0.95 can occasionally indicate item redundancy (Hair et al., 2022), the outer loadings remained within an acceptable range and discriminant validity was supported, so the measurement model was retained as specified. Discriminant validity was subsequently confirmed through both the Fornell–Larcker criterion, under which the square root of the AVE for each construct (Inclusive Leadership = 0.855; Perceived Organisational Support = 0.851; Workplace Ostracism = 0.840) exceeded its highest inter-construct correlation, and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio, which returned a maximum value of 0.691 (between Inclusive Leadership and Workplace Ostracism), well below the conservative 0.90 threshold (Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2015; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Correlations between Inclusive Leadership/Perceived Organisational Support and Workplace Ostracism were negative (–0.679 and –0.514 respectively), consistent with the theorised inverse relationships. The measurement model therefore presents no reliability or validity concerns.

Assessment of Structural Model

Collinearity diagnostics returned variance inflation factor values not exceeding 1.614, below the 5.0 threshold, indicating that collinearity was unlikely to distort the structural estimates (Hair et al., 2022). Model fit was acceptable, with SRMR = 0.063 for both the saturated and estimated models, below the 0.08 threshold recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999). Path coefficients were assessed using bootstrapping with 5,000 sub-samples. An important interpretive note applies throughout: negative path coefficients toward Workplace Ostracism indicate negative statistical associations, consistent with the hypothesised inverse relationships. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Path Coefficients — Direct and Indirect Associations.

Hyp	Path	β	T-Stat	P-Value	95% CI	Decision
H1	Inclusive Leadership → Workplace Ostracism	–0.531	10.837	<.001	[–0.612, –0.447]	Supported
H2	Inclusive Leadership → Perceived Org. Support	0.617	14.023	<.001	[0.547, 0.688]	Supported

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Hyp	Path	β	T-Stat	P-Value	95% CI	Decision
H3	Perceived Org. Support $\rightarrow$ Workplace Ostracism	-0.213	3.435	.001	[-0.316, -0.107]	Supported
H4	IL $\rightarrow$ POS $\rightarrow$ Workplace Ostracism (indirect)	-0.131	3.195	.001	[-0.211, -0.059]	Partial mediation

Bootstrapping: 5,000 sub-samples; decision rule $t \geq 1.96$, $p \leq 0.05$, bias-corrected 95% CI excluding zero (Hair et al., 2022).

All four hypothesised relationships were supported. Inclusive leadership was significantly and negatively associated with workplace ostracism ($\beta = -0.531$, $p < .001$) and significantly and positively associated with perceived organisational support ($\beta = 0.617$, $p < .001$), the largest path coefficient in the model. Perceived organisational support was also significantly and negatively associated with workplace ostracism ($\beta = -0.213$, $p = .001$). The indirect statistical association from inclusive leadership through perceived organisational support to workplace ostracism was significant ($\beta = -0.131$, $p = .001$; bias-corrected 95% CI [-0.211, -0.059], excluding zero). Because the direct statistical association between inclusive leadership and workplace ostracism remained significant after perceived organisational support was included, the mediation is classified as partial (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Inclusive leadership and perceived organisational support jointly explained 54.7 percent of the variance in workplace ostracism ($R^2 = 0.547$), while inclusive leadership alone explained 38.1 percent of the variance in perceived organisational support ($R^2 = 0.381$). Effect sizes confirmed inclusive leadership as the dominant predictor of both perceived organisational support ($f^2 = 0.616$, large) and workplace ostracism ($f^2 = 0.387$, large), while perceived organisational support's statistical contribution to workplace ostracism was comparatively modest ($f^2 = 0.063$, small).

Discussion

A parsimonious mediation model was proposed to examine the statistical relationships among inclusive leadership, perceived organisational support, and workplace ostracism. We hypothesised direct and indirect statistical associations, underpinned by Inclusive Leadership Theory, Organisational Support Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Belongingness Theory. For H1, the negative association between inclusive leadership and workplace ostracism was statistically significant and was the strongest relationship in the model. This finding is consistent with prior research linking inclusive leadership with employee inclusion-related outcomes (Carmeli et al., 2010) and with the broader workplace ostracism literature. Given the cross-sectional design, the result should be interpreted as an association rather than evidence that inclusive leadership causes lower ostracism.

The finding for H2, that inclusive leadership was significantly and positively associated with perceived organisational support, is consistent with Qi, Liu, Wei, and Hu (2019), who reported a positive relationship between these constructs using multi-wave and multi-source data. The present finding represents the largest path coefficient in the model ($\beta = 0.617$), indicating a strong statistical association between employees' perceptions of inclusive leadership and perceived organisational support at the NMDC.

The finding for H3 indicates that perceived organisational support was significantly and negatively associated with workplace ostracism, over and above the association between inclusive leadership and workplace ostracism. This finding is broadly consistent with the literature examining perceived organisational support alongside workplace ostracism (Sarraz et al., 2019; Chung, 2017). The present cross-sectional evidence does not establish that perceived organisational support causes lower ostracism, but it does indicate a statistically significant inverse relationship in the sampled organisation.

The significant partial mediation under H4 is consistent with perceived organisational support forming an indirect statistical pathway in the relationship between inclusive leadership and workplace ostracism. The direct statistical association remained significant after perceived organisational support was included, indicating partial rather than full mediation. This pattern should not be interpreted as proof of a causal statistical pathway because all study variables were measured at one point in time. Instead, the findings indicate that employees who reported higher inclusive leadership also tended to report higher perceived organisational support and lower workplace ostracism, with perceived organisational support accounting for part of the observed statistical relationship.

Implications of Findings

The study makes a modest theoretical contribution by integrating Inclusive Leadership Theory with Organisational Support Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Belongingness Theory within a single statistical model. The findings indicate that perceived organisational support forms part of the statistical pathway connecting inclusive leadership with workplace ostracism in the sampled context. Practically, the findings suggest that leadership development may be considered alongside institutional support practices, but the cross-sectional evidence does not establish that such interventions will cause reductions in ostracism. The NMDC and comparable Nigerian federal research institutions may therefore consider leadership development covering openness, accessibility, and availability together with institutional support practices such as transparent communication, responsive handling of employee concerns, and recognition of contributions.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

This study makes a modest contribution to understanding workplace ostracism among public sector research institution employees, though not without limitations. The cross-sectional survey design limits the ability to establish causal directionality because data were collected at a single point in time. The observed statistical relationships may therefore reflect reciprocal, omitted, or alternative explanations that cannot be distinguished with the present design. The study relied on self-reported questionnaire responses, making the data susceptible to social desirability and common method concerns on a sensitive construct such as workplace ostracism, and is contextually confined to the NMDC, limiting direct generalisability to other Nigerian federal research institutions or private sector contexts. Future research should use longitudinal or time-lagged designs, multi-source data, and broader samples to test whether the observed relationships remain stable over time and to examine the temporal ordering of inclusive leadership, perceived organisational support, and workplace ostracism.

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