

## Spiritual Leadership and Workplace Ostracism: Would Attitude towards Diversity and Perceived Organization Spiritual Climate Matter?

Linus Jonathan Vem<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Nelson Pam Chuwang<sup>1</sup>, Keng-Kok  
Tee<sup>2</sup>, Siew Imm Ng<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Jos, Nigeria, <sup>2</sup>ELM Graduate School of Business, HELP University of Achievers, Kuala-Lumpur, Malaysia, <sup>3</sup>School of Business and Economics, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Malaysia

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### Abstract

Ostracism has become a workplace paradox in today's modern organizations, which encourages social integration and teamwork. Leveraging on conservation of resource theory (COR) and affect event theory (AET) we explored the intervening role of attitude towards diversity (ATD) and the moderating role of perceived organizational spiritual climate (POSC) in the relationship between spiritual leadership (SL) and perceived workplace ostracism (PWO). Data were collected from 332 federal civil servants in Plateau State, Nigeria, at two different times. Andrew Hayes PROCESS Macro 4, models 7 and 8 were used to test the hypothesized relationships. The result on the direct link between SL and PWO was insignificant, challenging the theoretical framing of AET and COR theory. However, SL has a positive relationship with ATD, and a moderated mediation of POSC was discovered when ATD mediates between SL and PWO. The role of SL provides a better understanding of how bystander interventions help in coping with PWO through ATD. This provides an insightful explanation of the plausibility of the process in which SL relates with PWO. This study made theoretical contributions through the mediating role of ATD and how AET supported COR to convey the conserved resources to attenuate negative work outcomes.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Leadership, Attitude Towards Diversity, Workplace Ostracism, Perceived Organizational Spiritual Climate, Civil Service

### Introduction

The concept of ostracism has attracted the interest of organizational experts and researchers in recent times. This followed the groundbreaking contribution of Ferris et al. (2008), which brought to the front burner an emergent workplace deviant behavior perpetrated against disadvantaged coworkers. A cursory search reveals that, from January to November 2023, 2,930 published research were visible in Google Scholar with two

publications from the context of this study. This buttresses the global concern about ostracism in the workplace and the need to contribute to the existing literature on the experience of developing economies in the ongoing debate. The concept of ostracism explains the extent to which an individual feels excluded by others within a social circle or in a work setting (Ferris et al. 2008). It is experienced when "an individual or group neglects a colleague at work or in a social context for socially justifiable or unjustifiable reasons" (Robinson et al., 2013, p. 206). Consequently, the victims feel neglected, thereby threatening their psychological well-being (Wang & Lai, 2023), and thriving within the organization through learning and vitality is affected (Zhang et al. 2023).

Workplace ostracism manifests in diverse ways. Leung et al. (2011) relate behaviors such as withholding information from or refusing to interact or make eye contact with the victim, as forms of workplace ostracism. It is worth noting that workplace ostracism is synonymous with toxic work behavior such as harassment, incivility, and interpersonal deviance, however, it is a covert type of aggression that is expressed indirectly and passively (Zhang et al., 2023). Because ostracism is a nonconfrontational, subtle, and noninteractive form of aggression, it impinges negatively on the victim's physical and psychological health (Robinson et al., 2013), by gradually eroding the victim's needs for "belongingness, work passion, self-esteem, control, sense of meaningfulness and social vitality at work" (Ferris et al., 2017, p. 318). This is substantiated by Ferris et al., 2017, cited in Zhang et al. (2023), who argued that employees will prefer to "engage in an argument than to be ignored since ostracism neither acknowledges the individual's existence nor enables them to have any control over a situation."

Although ostracism is often framed from the victim's perspective, it is noteworthy to emphasize that it is sometimes beneficial and necessary when we consider the type of victims closely. A review by Howard et al. (2020) categorizes the victims into submissive and provocative. The submissive victims are extremely helpless, passive, insecure, and unwilling to defend against attack, they often internalize their experience and blame themselves (Katz et al., 2007; Neves, 2014) rather than the perpetrators. On the flip side, are provocative victims who are highly aggressive, hostile, and irritable (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004). Ostracising a provocative victim or a poor performer is usually initiated in response to their violation of social norms in the workplace which serves as a form of discouragement for their deviant behaviors (Renn et al., 2013). This is hoped to trigger a remorseful response to intentional provocation (Wu et al., 2019), which in turn benefits the individual and the organization. This study however seeks to explore perceived workplace ostracism (PWO) from the submissive victim's perspective.

Documented evidence exists regarding the association between PWO and organizational and employee outcomes, as well as the antecedents which range from behavioral/attitudinal, to social, and contextual issues. For example, Howard et al. (2020) in a systematic review grouped some well-established outcomes of ostracism in the literature into Personal (positive/negative emotion, self-perception, satisfaction, identification, commitment, and justice perceptions) social factors (in-role behaviors, helping, voice, deviance and silence) and environmental outcome (retention). On the other hand, antecedents such as personal variables (personality (big five), need to belong, future orientation, political skills, and gender), social variables (LMX, Abusive supervision, and

supervisors' ostracizing behaviors), and environmental factors (perceived support) have also been found to predict PWO (Howard et al 2020).

In contributing to the ongoing debate, this study trows the path of Ali et al. (2022) and Mahyarni (2019) regarding the effect of leaders' actions on subordinates' behavior. We align with Ali et al. (2022) that spiritual leadership (SL) which is expressed through vision, hope, and altruistic love, is expected to stimulate a caring climate. This will undermine negative work behavior that causes disenchantment among coworkers. SL is an emerging construct within the management, leadership, and organizational behavior guilds. The choice of the construct SL is motivated by its effect on both negative and positive individual outcomes. Previous studies show that SL attenuates negative work outcomes such as anxiety, work-life satisfaction, depression, dark-side employee behaviors (Piwowar-Sulej & Iqbal, 2024; Haque et al., 2022), prohibitive voice behaviors (Zakkariya & Aboobaker, 2021). It was also found to predict psychological contracts (Sholikhah et al., 2019) and work engagement (Sheikh et al., 2019). It is on this basis that we consider SL to have a potential mitigating effect on PWO.

According to Fry (2003), SL involves sets of attitudes, behaviors, and values centered on one's work-related needs and those of others. The central theme of SL is the emphasis on the emotional and interpersonal well-being of workers (Fry, 2003). As such, the focus is on values such as fairness, honesty, and integrity in decision-making, by providing social and emotional support to coworkers (Usman et al., 2021). Those who possess this leadership attribute express gratitude, compassion, forgiveness, and kindness to others through their behaviors and actions (Ali et al., 2022). When this experience is shared at work, it is capable of eliciting positive virtues, leading to harmony, respect, compassion, and collegiality among employees (Fry et al., 2005), thereby reducing the effect of perceived or ostracism experience. A search in the literature reveals that the link between SL and PWO was established by Ali et al. (2020), however, the study called for in-depth research to understand other mechanisms that could provide a better understanding of the process through which SL influences PWO. In response to this call, we propose that employee attitude toward diversity (ATD) explains the mechanism of the relationship between SL and PWO.

The workplace has been characterized by demographic changes hence the imperative for an accurate understanding of the triggers and the consequences of employees' attitudes and perceptions towards diversity at work (Brouwer & Boros, 2010). It has been stressed (Cundiff, Nadler, & Swan, 2009) that an organization that effectively manages diversity enjoys a competitive advantage. However, supporting diversity in organizations comes with both pros and cons. While diversity best practice tends to create a common ground in intergroup relations (Schaafsma, 2008), leading to perceived workplace dignity and harmony, over-emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism can threaten the players in the dominant sphere (Brouwer & Boros, 2010; Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010), particularly where the pursue of cultural diversity policy is at odds with the values, behaviors, attitudes and feelings of the employees in the majority (Turnbull et al., 2009). Hence, we proposed an integrative approach in this study, where SL is expected to trigger positive work resources. These resources are expected to enhance learning and, attitudes toward diversity thereby mitigating workplace ostracism. This fills the literature gap on the mediating role of employees' ATD in the SL-PWO model.

Furthermore, the study evaluates the effect of the internal environment through the moderating role of perceived organizational spiritual climate as a boundary condition under which the relationships between SL, perceived WO, and employees' ATD are sustained. Though spiritual leadership and individual spirituality have been found to impact significantly in creating meaningfulness at work (Sarkar & Garg, 2021), it was further posited that the positive climate of an organization helps to facilitate the expression of the spiritual values that impact the behavior and culture of the organization as a whole (Kolodinsky et al., 2008), hence the imperative of POSC in the SL, ATD, and PWO model as a moderating construct. Secondly, Ng and Sear (2020) reported that the CEO's words and actions alone are rarely sufficient for effective diversity management practices hence, challenging the positions of Jha et al. (2024) on the role of leadership in an inclusive workplace. Consistent with affective event theory AET which according to Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), focuses on the structure, causes, and consequences of affective experiences at work, where workplace interaction prompts positive or negative emotions which can determine an individual's and organization's response. We argue that POSC enhances the expression of SL's attributes thereby mitigating PWO and enhancing positive ATD. However, the literature on the boundary condition under which SL is associated with PWO and ATD is yet known.

This study explores these gaps in the proposed model through the conservation of resources (COR-theory) (Hobfoll, 1989) affect event theory AET, and social learning theory (SLT). The theories provide the basis to understand how resources created by SL remedy the negative energy that emanates from WO through employees' ATD.

### **Theoretical Foundation and Hypotheses Development**

The study was underpinned by COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and affect event theory AET. COR theory argues that individuals ascribe value to resources generated during personal work engagement, and social interaction. Resources are acquired and protected against any loss to help the individuals cope with challenges in work and life environments. Furthermore, resources such as behaviors, emotions, and social capital are transmitted during the process (Hobfoll et al., 2018). To ensure the availability of resources over time, they invest efforts to acquire new resources (Pradhan et al., 2023). When this is achieved, individuals and organizations can cope with the stressful demands and events (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Affect event theory (AET) focuses on the structure, causes, and consequences of affective experiences. The theory contends that workplace interactions can prompt positive or negative emotions which can shape an individual's relationship and organization's climate. That is while working, people may experience both pleasant and unpleasant circumstances, either civil or uncivil, prompting different behavioral and attitudinal reactions in favor or against the organization. We argue that a civil climate generates positive resources within the organization. This strengthens SL's attributes in favor of the subordinate. According to Fry (2003); and Usman et al. (2021) resources from SL include, (a) the emotional and interpersonal well-being of workers and (b) values, comprising fairness, honesty, and integrity in decision-making and providing social and emotional support to coworkers (c) show gratitude, compassion, forgiveness and kindness for others through their behaviors and actions (Ali et al., 2022) are found to influence workplace relationship. These resources are expected to stimulate positive ATD by offering a common ground for intergroup relations

(Schaafsma, 2008). However, where leadership lacks or expresses low spiritual attributes, followers including victims and perpetrators of PWO may tend to lose resources rather than gain, thereby expressing low ATD and high ostracism perception.

#### *Spiritual leadership and workplace ostracism*

SL like another people-centered leadership approach, stresses intrinsic motivation, with emphasis on religiosity, ethics, and values in conceptualizing the construct (Fry, 2003). It connects intrinsic motivation to one's sense of spiritual survival by calling and membership (Sholikhah et al., 2019). Studies found that SL is a strong determinant of subordinates' self-esteem, organizational citizenship behavior, and workplace spirituality (Sholikhah et al., 2019; Göçen & Şen, 2021). It is also found to stimulate an inclusive climate (Gotsis & Grimani, 2017). According to Fry et al. (2005), SL has been found to improve the quality of relationships at work. This leads to a sense of obligation in employees, and the motivation to express concern for one another well-being to achieve collective purpose (Ali et al., 2020). On the flip side, SL has been negatively linked to bullying behavior, enhancing tolerance of workplace incivility (Ghaedi et al., 2021), reducing the occurrence of hazing (Ali et al., 2022), and improving employees' perceived safety (Liu et al., 2023).

Given the predicted effect of SL on both positive and negative work outcomes, we argue through the COR theory which posits that resources such as conditions, objects, social relationships, physical and psychological energies, time, attention, and personal characteristics are generated during personal work engagements and social interactions. These resources are generated, conserved, and shared among coworkers (Hobfoll et al., 2018), thereby enhancing positive work behavior. In this context, SL expresses positive resources such as vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love and promotes positive organizational and individual behavior, ensures the availability of the resources over time, and invests or emphasizes the valuable resources (Pradhan et al., 2023) which will in turn, lessen negative work behavior such as PWO. Hence, we hypothesize that:

*H1: SL will have a negative and significant effect on PWO*

#### *The mediating role of Attitude toward Diversity*

Diversity management has increasingly attracted research interest in the field of organizational behavior. This is attributed to the heterogeneous nature of today's workplace (Byars-Winston et al., 2015). As a result, employees express mixed attitudes toward diversity, with some feeling threatened and others accepting it as a new normal (Anglim et al., 2019). People with positive attitudes towards diversity consider the benefits of inclusion and the creation of a respectful and tolerant workplace (Anglim et al., 2019). As such, they understate claims about group differences that perpetuate the adverse treatment of minorities and overlook inconsequential demographic differences in favor of characteristics that support work competence and social factors (Fine & Sojo, 2019). On the other hand, scholars have also argued that unintended consequences might occur when organizations emphasize diversity while precluding equity and inclusivity (Dover et al., 2020; Harrison et al., 2006) as this might result in reverse discrimination against the majority.

This study contends that the positive resources (vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love) conserved due to the presence of SL will promote social relationships and positive psychological energies. This is expected to yield positive ATD within the workplace. Empirical

evidence exists on leadership behavior in managing diverse employees. For example, Ashikali and Groeneveld (2015) attribute workplace diversity management and employee affective commitment to the effect of transformational leadership. Similarly, McCallaghan et al. (2020) found a direct relationship between servant leadership and the prevailing work climate regarding diversity. Hence Kuknor and Bhattacharya (2020) argued that an inclusive workplace is possible under a leadership style that is people-centered. However, findings from Ng and Sear (2020) challenged the previous outcome. They indicated otherwise, suggesting that the CEO's words and actions alone do not guarantee diversity management practices. In keeping with the assumption of COR theory we argue that SL resources such as vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, when conserved, can engender positive relationships among coworkers and promote positive ATD. We therefore posit that:

*H2: SL will have a positive and significant effect on ATD*

On the hind side, positive ATD has been found to enhance healthy workplace interaction. For example, a positive attitude toward diversity tends to yield a high perception of workplace ethics and citizenship behavior (Dang et al., 2023). Other findings revealed that good attitude and management of diversity can reduce grievances and help increase creativity, and opportunity to excel (Horwitz (2005). It was also found to positively impact employees' work experience, job engagement, and affective commitment (Bizri, 2017). enhancing learning opportunities and the overall development of employees (Hossain et al. 2020). Consistent with COR theory, we argue that a positive attitude towards diversity is a relational resource that can further enhance workplace equity and inclusivity, thereby mitigating PWO. Therefore, we posit that civil servants who possess an attitude towards diversity will have less tendency to ostracise their coworkers. Hence the hypothesis

*H3: Positive ATD will have a negative and significant effect on PWO*

*H4: Positive ATD will mediate the relationship between SL and PWO*

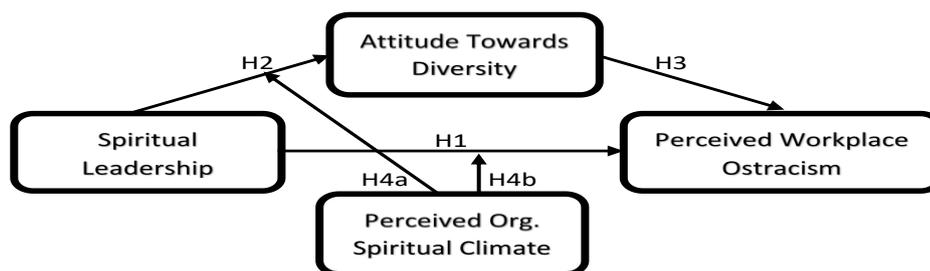
#### *Moderated Mediation of POSC*

Climate as a workplace ecosystem has been diversely interpreted and debated over the past decades (Vem et al., 2020) and has attracted over 32 different conceptual understandings (Verbeke et al., 1998). Although researchers have alluded to the strong connection between leader, individual, and organizational spirituality with individual and organizational outcomes (Piwowar-Sulei & Iqbal, 2024; Vem et al., 2020; Pattanawit & Charoensukmongkol, 2022), the organizational climate remains the gestalt that integrates and facilitates the spiritual values, that yields the desirable outcome the organization seeks (Sarkar & Garg, 2021).

A Study (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) broadly situated workplace climate into two namely, psychological and organizational climate. Cruz et al. (2018) and Pandey et al. (2009) introduced spiritual climate as an aspect of organizational climate since spirituality is rooted in the value framework of an organization (Ashmos and Duchon 2000; Pandey et al., 2009). Spiritual climate according to Pandey et al. (2009, and Vem et al 2020) is an organizational climate where the employees perceive the workplace as capable of stimulating harmony with self through meaningful participation at work, having a sense of interconnectedness within the prevailing social, natural environment and with the transcendence. Three conceptual themes are deducible according to Vem et al. (2020, p.70), "harmony with self (meaningful work, hopefulness, authenticity, sense of community); harmony with environment (respect for diversity, meditative work, i.e., working for world's maintenance); and relationship with

transcendence (concern for the social and natural environment).” As such we argue that Perceived organizational spirituality climate (POSC) will affect the role of SL on ATD and PWO on the premise that, high POSC will strengthen the effectiveness of SL in eliciting positive resources of vision, hope, and altruistic love in line with AET which posit that positive event in POSC generates positive affects (resources). In Vem et al. (2024), POSC was found to moderate the relationship between spiritual characteristics and work-to-home resources. As such we expect that POSC to interact with SL and moderate the mediating role of ATD on PWO. We therefore hypothesize that:

*H5: POSC moderates the mediation role ATD between SL and PWO such that high POSC Strengthen*



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

## Method

### *Population and the Sample*

This study evaluates the process through which SL and ATD influence PWO. Data was collected from federal civil servants and staff working in agencies in Plateau State, Nigeria. The choice of Plateau state is because of: (a) its central location which makes it accessible to all Nigerians, (b) its temperate and clement weather has attracted investors within and outside of the country, and (c) historically it is known for its tin mining activity. These key factors give the state a cosmopolitan outlook, reflecting the Nigerian population (Vem et al., 2023).

Having conducted the pretest with face and content validity assessments, we recruited respondents through direct and online administration of questionnaires to increase the participation rate. We assured respondents of anonymity in the data treatment and presentation to increase the confidence of the participants. The respondents' consent was sought before the administration of the questionnaire. We collected data at two different times, within an interval of one week. We separated the dependent variable PWO and the mediator, SL were collected in Time 1, while the data for the independent variable ATD and POSC were collected in Time 2. The minimum required sample size for this study was determined via an analysis using G\*Power software. Using the F test (Linear multiple regression: fixed model,  $R^2$  deviation from zero), the effect size of 0.15 (which is moderate),  $\alpha$  err prob=.05, with the recommended statistical power of 80%, with the total number of predictors as 3 this study revealed that a sample size of 77 is sufficient (Faul et al., 2009). Accordingly, Time 1 yielded a total of 360 responses, and the respondents were further invited a week later in Time 2 to complete the second part of the survey describing the SL attributes of their immediate heads of units or departments. However, the response was 332 in Time 2, representing an insignificant dropout rate of 7.8%. Furthermore, a post hoc test in

G\*Power was conducted to ensure that the number of responses was sufficient to provide the needed statistical power. Using the F test (Linear multiple regression: fixed model,  $R^2$  deviation from zero), the effect size of 0.15,  $\alpha$  err prob=.05, the total number of responses of 332, and the total number of 3 predictors, revealed that the number of responses would provide a statistical power of 0.80 (Faul et al., 2009).

### *Common Method Bias*

To minimize systematic error variance among the variables measured the study adopted a procedural approach to cope with tendencies of common method bias (CMB). First, a pretest of a small sample with 15 employees and 10 academics was conducted to identify and modify difficult and similar questionnaire items to ensure scale clarity (Baumgartner & Weijters, 2012). In addition, the respondents were well informed about the intention and benefits of the study in line with Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) suggestion to enhance accuracy and reduce social desirability. These approaches have been recommended as a procedural recipe for common method bias in studies involving self-response questionnaires (Podsakoff et al., 2003)

### *Measures*

*Attitude towards diversity* was assessed on a 6-item scale adapted from The Munroe multicultural attitude scale (TMMAS) (Munroe & Pearson, 2006), specifically the items were positive attitudes generated from "care" and "act" dimensions. *Spiritual leadership*, a 17-item scale was adapted from Fry et al. (2005). The sample of items from each dimension include; "I have faith in my supervisor's vision for its employees" (vision), "I persevere and exert extra effort to help my supervisor because I have faith in what he/she does" (hope/faith), and "My supervisor is honest and without false pride" (altruistic love). *Perceived Workplace Ostracism* was adapted from the 10-item scale developed and validated by Ferris et al., (2008), with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.89. *Perceived Organizational Spiritual Climate (POSC)*. We adapted POSC's 6 items from Cruz et al. (2018) and Pandey et al. (2009) as used in Vem et al. (2020). Examples of items include "My spiritual views are respected in this organization", "My spirituality has a comfortable home in my department", "A diverse set of spiritual views are accepted among colleagues", and "I am encouraged to express spirituality at work".

### **Data Analyses**

Analyses were conducted using SPSS version 28 and PROCESS Macro Ver. 4.1 as follows. First, we determine the distribution of the sample based on certain characteristics relevant to the population. Additionally, an internal consistency analysis was performed to ensure that the reliability of the data met the required standard. Correlation analysis was also reported to confirm the relationship and ensure that the discriminant validity requirement between the variables is not violated (see Table 2). Subsequently, PROCESS Macro Model 8, (Hayes, 2013) was employed to evaluate simultaneously the effect of SP on PWO and ATD as well as the moderated mediation effect of POSC. The mean-centering function of the independent variable and moderating variable in the PROCESS Macro Model has the advantage of eliminating multicollinearity automatically as activated.

### **Results**

Analysis of the demographic data presented in Table 1, reveals that the composition of the respondents based on gender is 65% and 35% for male and female, respectively. In

terms of years of experience, 16% are newly employed, 27% have 2-5 years of experience, 34% have spent more than 6 years and 23% are more than 10 years on the job. Respondents' educational background also reveals that 32% possess diploma certificates, 39% have university degrees, 17% have masters, and 11% have other educational qualifications other than the aforementioned. Similarly, Table 2 shows other descriptive statistics and the correlation coefficients which suggest that the values mean and the standard deviation of 3.2 to 4.6, and 1.0 to 1.5 respectively, and skewness and kurtosis are within the range of -0.32 to -0.93 and -0.29 to -1.1 respectively, suggest that the data is from a normal distribution. In addition, the correlation coefficient  $r$  signifies strong relationships among the hypothesized constructs ranging between -0.58 and 0.77.

Table 1

*Respondents Demographic Data*

Indices	Frequency N=332	Percentage %
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	215	65
Female	117	35
<b>Age</b>		
18 – 27	112	34
28 – 37	130	39
38 – 47	58	17
48 – Above	32	10
<b>Qualifications</b>		
Diploma	105	32
First Degree	131	39
Master Degree	58	17
Others	38	11
<b>Experience</b>		
Less Than 1 Year	54	16
2 – 5 Years	91	27
6 – 9 Years	111	34
10 – Above	76	23

Table 2

*Descriptive and Correlation Coefficient*

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skew.	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4
<b>1</b> leadership	3.4385	1.04350	-0.926	-0.291	1			
<b>2</b> POSClimate	4.0621	1.10755	-0.500	-0.669	0.767**	1		
<b>3</b> ATDiversity	4.4856	1.48343	-0.320	-1.101	0.712**	0.626**	1	
<b>4</b> PWOstracism	3.2742	1.51575	0.610	-1.050	-0.618**	-0.581**	-0.826**	1
Valid N (listwise)					**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The results obtained from PROCESS macro model 8 provide estimates for evaluating the hypothesized relationships. First, we assessed the direct relationships linking SL with PWO and ATD in H1 and H2 and presented in Table 3. The outcome between SL and PWO was

unexpectedly insignificant suggesting that SL does not significantly predict PWO. The direct link between SL and ATD reveals a positive and significant effect, suggesting that a percentage increase in SL yields a 93% change in ATD as seen in the  $\beta$ -value 0.929. Second, the direct link between ATD and PWO in H3 reveals a significant relationship based on  $\beta$ -value -0.778, suggesting that a 78% change in PWO is a result of a percentage change in ATD.

Table 3

*Hypothesized Direct Relationships*

Hyp	Relationship	Coeff	Se(HC4)	t-stat	p-value	LLCI	ULCI
H1	SL – PWO	-0.010	0.093	-0.620	0.95	-0.188	0.177
H2	SL – ATD	0.929	0.116	8.013	0.000	0.701	1.158
H3	ATD – PWO	-0.780	0.047	-16.509	0.000	-0.871	-0.685

Subsequently, the mediating role of ATD between SL and PWO as the mechanism that explains the relationship was evaluated. The outcome in Table 4 suggests a significant indirect relationship with an effect of 81% and zero not straddling between the upper and the lower-class interval. Since the direct effect is not significant it is a full mediation.

Furthermore, an assessment of the moderating role of POSC was done to establish the boundary condition under which the indirect relationship and the direct relationship were plausible. The outcome in Table 5 regarding H5a indicates a significant moderated mediation role of POSC between SL and ATD as seen in coefficient of 14% and t-stat 2.5 for the interactive effect with the moderated mediation index confirming the boundary condition for the mediation. However, it is not the case for moderating the role of POSC in the direct path between SL and PWO in H5b.

Table 4

*Mediating Role of Attitude Towards Diversity*

	Effect	SE	t-stat	p-value	LLCI	ULCI
Direct Effect	-0.088	0.068	-1.288	0.199	-0.222	0.046
Total Effect	-0.898	0.067	-13.455	0.000	-1.029	-0.766
	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
Indirect Effect	-0.81	0.053	-0.916	-0.707		
Standardized Indirect Effect	-0.558	0.035	-0.626	-0.488		

**Discussion**

To evaluate the PWO model proposed in this study, we hypothesized a direct relationship between SL and PWO as well as an indirect relationship through the mechanism role of ATD. A boundary condition was also proposed in the moderating role of POSC. Underpinning the study, COR theory supported by AET is used to justify the hypothesized paths. From the data analyzed, an interesting perspective on the SL-PWO model was suggested. H1 which seeks to establish a direct link between SL and PWO was unexpectedly insignificant. However, H2 and H3 which relate SL with ATD and ATD with PWO respectively were strongly supported. In addition, hypothesis H4 suggests that ATD plays a full mediating role between SL and PWO (Nitzl et al. 2016).

The results in H1 regarding the link between SL and PWO suggest that SL which is a function of vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, has an insignificant inverse relationship with PWO. This finding seems to challenge the current consensus on the influence of leadership on the perception of individuals which found SL to be significantly linked to subordinates' organizational-based self-esteem, organizational citizenship behavior, and workplace spirituality (Sholikhah et al., 2019; Göçen & Şen, 2021) and stimulate inclusive climate (Gotsis & Grimani, 2017). We expected that the victim draws coping resources from the positive attribute of a spiritual leader who plays a third-party role consistent with the work of Vem et al. (in press) where perceived supervisor's support mitigates ostracism at work. However, in this context the result shows otherwise, suggesting that beyond the direct link, SL would have stimulated certain attitudinal changes among the perpetrators or required a boundary condition to elicit positive outcomes in subordinates. All these were preempted and hypothesized in the subsequent relationships.

The results in H2 suggest that SL has a positive and significant effect on ATD. That is, the positive resources conserved due to the leader's spiritual attributes can change the attitude and behavior of perpetrators of workplace ostracism toward diversity tolerance. The result also agrees with the work of Vem et al. (2025) on the strength of supervisors on psychological ownership in victims. In this case, we expect the spiritual leaders to impact both the perpetrators and the victims through their core values of altruistic love, hope, and vision, thereby stimulating workplace harmony and inclusivity. This is in sync with research findings where transformational leadership (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015), servant leadership, and the prevailing diversity climate at work (McCallaghan et al. (2020) influence employee ATD. This places leadership behavior at the center of organizational practices that tend towards workplace inclusivity, which is consistent with AET. The theory presupposes that pleasant circumstances prompt behavioral and attitudinal reactions in favor of the organization and the individual therein, hence the significant relationship between SL and ATD.

Table 5

*Moderated Mediation Role of Perceived Org, Spiritual Climate*

Hyp	Relationship	Coeff	Se (HC4)	t-Stat	P-Value	LLCI	ULCI
H5a	SL*POSC-ATD	0.141	0.057	2.481	0.014	0.029	0.253
H5b	SL*POSC-PWOst	-0.020	0.044	-0.533	0.594	-0.111	0.064
<b>Conditional Indirect Effect</b>							
	POSC	<b>Effect</b>	<b>BootSE</b>	<b>BootLLCI</b>	<b>BootULCI</b>		
		-1.108	-0.600	0.083	-0.765	-0.438	
		0.000	-0.720	0.094	-0.909	-0.54	
		1.108	-0.850	0.127	-1.096	-0.599	
<b>Index of Moderated Mediation</b>							
		<b>Index</b>	<b>BootSE</b>	<b>BootLLCI</b>	<b>BootULCI</b>		
		POSC	-0.110	0.046	-0.203	-0.024	

The link between ATD and PWO in H3 shows how conserved resources and positive affect generate additional resources to mitigate negative work behavior. ATD generated changes in the perpetrators' perception of diversity, which in turn influenced the victims'

perception of ostracism. The finding aligns with the work of Anglim et al., (2019) where people with positive attitudes towards diversity were found to have high regard for inclusion and the creation of a respectful and tolerant workplace. Hence, downplays the perception of group differences that perpetuate adverse treatment of minorities and other inconsequential demographic differences in favor of work competence and social factors (Fine & Sojo, 2019). Subsequently, H4 which sought to establish ATD as a mediator between SL and PWO was upheld as full mediation. This affirms the significance of ATD in the SL-PWO model where positive effects, when conserved can create a new resource ATD which subsequently attenuates PWO. This explains the role of an intermediary response from the perpetrator or the victim to change their perception of ostracism. In this case, ATD is an attribute that is expressed by both perpetrators and victims, which reduces the negative perception of hostility at work.

Furthermore, the result of the moderated mediation in H5 suggests that the mediation was moderated under the boundary condition of POSC. That is POSC determines the boundary condition under which SL associates with ATD. Under high POSC, SL generates a stronger effect on ATD than when POSC is low. However, POSC does not impact the same way when interacting with SL on the PWO path. This is consistent with the work of Vem et al. (2024) where POSC was found to moderate the relationship between spiritual characteristics and work-to-home resources. Hence, underscores the role of organizational climate in integrating and facilitating spiritual values in an organization (Sarkar and Garg (2021). The results imply that SL will be effective in creating the right ATD when the climate within the organization is right for that kind of leadership. Since spirituality is associated with love, a sense of community, interconnectedness, forgiveness, gratitude, etc (Sarkar & Garg, 2021; Vem et al. 2024), an attempt to transform perpetrators' attitudes towards diversity might yield little result in an organizational climate that deemphasizes spiritual these spiritual virtues.

### **Implications of Findings**

This study contributes to the ongoing debate on workplace ostracism, which is an unnecessary workplace toxicity prompted by diversity management challenges or victims' wild imaginations. In line with COR and AET, we discovered an insignificant relationship between SL and PWO, however, it indirectly attenuates PWO through the mediation role of ATD. Theoretically, the result demonstrates a possibility of a strong tie between COR and AET in explaining the role of a neutral third party in transforming the attitude of the perpetrators and victims toward diversity. This has been proven to be the recipe for changing victims' perceptions towards negative workplace provocations. COR adopted in framing the research model suggests how coping resources such as vision, hope, and altruistic love are provided through victims' interaction with SL. Secondly, AET conveys the positive resources conserved during the interaction of the perpetrators and the victims within the climate that promotes such interaction, Hence, the positive work behavior weakens the negative perceptions of WO. The integration of COR and AET is justified in the indirect relationship between SL, ATD, and PWO, while POSC emphasizes the critical role of AET in creating positive effects within the organizational climate to dispel employees' perceptions of a toxic workplace.

Practically, the significant role of SL in the model provides an insightful understanding of the role of leader-subordinate relationships and the workplace climate in enhancing

positive attitudes toward workplace inclusivity. Mao et al. (2018) advocated for the evaluation of the role of a third party in tackling PWO as a departure from the extant literature that frames WO from the victim's or ostracizers points of view. The result in this study reinforces their view as SL was found to provide coping resources to the victim of ostracism by transforming their ATD. Though the direct link was not significant, the indirect relationship underscores the need for superiors in the civil service to provide visionary leadership that will galvanize the diversity in the workplace such that subordinates focus on the bigger picture rather than temporal discomfort from negative work perception. This can be done by effectively communicating the vision of the organization through workplace seminars and training sessions on the strategic direction, core values, and career prospects within the organization. In addition, leaders in the civil service can imbibe altruistic love and values in both informal and formal interactions to discourage the perception of social exclusion. Thus, leaders and employees who demonstrate the virtue of altruism and selflessness in their interaction with subordinates should be recognized and possibly rewarded.

Secondly need to cultivate a positive attitude towards diversity is imperative in multicultural, religious, and lingual countries like Nigeria. This requires an inside-out approach. It must be acknowledged that instinctively, humans are naturally receptive to their kinds, hence, it is human nature to be restrained when engaging in a mixed culture and diverse demographic characteristics. First, individuals must be intentional about inclusivity by practicing self-reflection, by first, acknowledging the negative side of workplace prejudice, and their own biases and baseless assumptions. Secondly, recognize how one's identity has wrongly influenced their perceptions. Thirdly, relate to previous experiences with individuals from diverse backgrounds and how that shaped one's perception of diversity. Such reflection can help in building a better understanding and positive disposition towards diversity. On the part of the organization, Zaccone and Pedrini (2024) suggested the development of a policy framework that guides the activities of all employees. This can be achieved through initiatives aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for all employees, including in hiring, promotions, and access to resources and training.

The moderated role of POSC implies that its existence strengthens the effect of SL on ATD. In line with Vem et al. (2024), we recommend that organizations can tangibly create and internalize POSC, by granting paid leave to physicians to embark on spiritual tourism to build their connection with humanity and transcendence. In addition, Karakas (2010) noted an exponential increase in the number of large corporations such as Intel, Coca-Cola, Boeing, and Sears, incorporating spirituality in their workplaces to create an atmosphere that supports the expression of spiritual values such as compassion, love forgiveness, gratitude etcetera. Their spiritual practices include encouraging Bible, Koran, or Torah study groups, voluntary prayer groups; interfaith dialogue groups, and organizing reflection and meditation exercises such as quiet time and yoga for deeper reflection on the essence of being and stimulating the sense of community.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies**

This study contributes to the ongoing debate on PWO by developing a parsimonious model that predicts and explains the mechanism through which PWO is attenuated. This is not without some limitations. The study is limited to federal government ministries and agencies in Plateau State, Nigeria. This does not include state government ministries and

agencies, and the private sector. The state is indeed a melting pot of diversity, however, the concentration of government ministries/agencies and the population of civil servants is limited compared to states like Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. To overcome this contextual limitation, a more comprehensive investigation is suggested using a larger scope to further bolster the generalizability of the findings.

This study focuses on bystanders' influence through SL, although numerous leadership approaches are yet to be explored in the literature in connection to PWO. Future researchers should investigate the extent to which the attitude and behavior of bystanders on the coping ability influence victims' perception of ostracism. In addition, ostracism could also be triggered by the provocative victim's awkward behavior, resulting in resentful responses from coworkers and supervisors. Future studies can explore the extent to which SL and or punitive exclusive measures could help in restoring such awkward behavior.

### **Conclusion**

The main thrust of this study is to develop a model to minimize workplace ostracism, a counterproductive work behavior that has hindered social integration in a diverse workplace with a severe consequence on victim's performance. We evaluated the predictive role of SL directly and indirectly through ATD to determine the level of influence on PWO and the boundary condition under which the mediation occurs. The outcome reveals that SL has both direct and indirect effects on PWO. The study therefore concludes that SL plays a significant role in reducing the perception of ostracism among civil servants through the mechanism of ATD. And that ATD occurs under the high effect of POSC.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors have no known conflicts of interest to disclose.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are readily available and can be supplied on request by the correspondence author.

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