



Investigating the Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Quiet Quitting and Service Quality: An Integrated Delphi-DEMATEL Framework

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Abstract

Workplace ostracism can weaken employee participation without producing immediately visible conflict. Its consequences may emerge through quiet quitting and eventually affect customer service. However, these relationships have rarely been examined within one causal framework. This study integrates workplace ostracism, quiet quitting, employee withdrawal, and service quality using a sequential Delphi–DEMATEL design. A focused literature review initially identified 37 factors. Eighteen experts from academia, healthcare, banking, hospitality, and information technology then participated in three Delphi rounds. Strong expert agreement was achieved (Kendall's $W=.79$), resulting in 22 retained factors. Twelve experts subsequently evaluated the pairwise influence among these factors using DEMATEL. The analysis classified ten factors as net causes and twelve as net effects. Low agreeableness emerged as the strongest causal driver, followed by threats to group harmony and leadership vacuum. Avoidance of growth and technological isolation also occupied important upstream positions. Staff withdrawal was the most prominent and strongly dependent factor, while customer responsiveness and psychological withdrawal represented central downstream outcomes. Service reliability, service recovery, and overall service quality formed a distinct outcome cluster. The pattern suggests that quiet quitting can function as a behavioural mechanism through which exclusionary workplace conditions become consequential for employees and customers. The study extends workplace-ostracism research by connecting internal social conditions with service delivery. It also provides managers with an intervention hierarchy focused on inclusion, leadership accountability, developmental access, recognition, communication, and technological support. Because the relationships reflect aggregated expert judgements, future longitudinal and multilevel studies should test the proposed pathways empirically.

Keywords: DEMATEL, mixed methods, quiet quitting, service quality, workplace ostracism

1. Introduction

Service work depends on daily employee choices. Employees shape customer experiences through small actions. They greet, listen, explain, and solve problems. These actions often exceed formal job descriptions. Service quality therefore depends upon discretionary effort. It also depends upon employee attention and care. The service-profit chain makes this connection clear. Internal working conditions shape employees' capabilities and commitment. These conditions later shape customer value and loyalty (Heskett et al., 1994).

Workplace ostracism threatens those everyday choices. Ostracism occurs when others ignore or exclude someone. It may involve silence, avoidance of interaction, or withholding information. The conduct can appear mild. Its effects can still be serious. Ostracism frustrates belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence (Williams, 2007). Workplace research links it with poorer attitudes and harmful behaviour (Ferris et al., 2008; Howard et al., 2020).

Quiet quitting has recently entered public discussion. The term describes restricted effort beyond required duties. It does not necessarily imply resignation. It often reflects psychological withdrawal from discretionary work. This study uses that narrow meaning. It does not label reasonable work boundaries as withdrawal. Employees may protect healthy boundaries for valid reasons. The concern begins when exclusion reduces willingness to contribute. Such reduction can affect customers and coworkers. Research on job disengagement offers a useful foundation. Engagement involves personal investment in work roles (Kahn, 1990). Disengagement reflects the withdrawal of that investment. Job demands and scarce resources can intensify this process (Demerouti et al., 2001). Existing research has examined ostracism and withdrawal. Other work has examined employee attitudes and service delivery. Yet the full causal chain needs closer attention. Service managers need to know where action matters most. A simple correlation cannot identify driving factors. It cannot distinguish a root cause from a downstream result. DEMATEL addresses this need. It maps mutual influence among connected factors. It also separates cause factors from effect factors (Si et al., 2018).

This study addresses two objectives. First, it validates factors linking ostracism, quiet quitting, and service quality. Second, it maps their causal relationships. The study asks three questions. Which factors should remain in the framework? Which factors operate as causal drivers? Which effects explain declining service quality? The answer offers a practical priority map. It also extends research on workplace ostracism to service outcomes.

The service setting increases the importance of this issue. Customers often cannot see internal exclusion. They only see the final interaction. They may experience delayed responses or limited problem-solving. Such experiences can lower trust. Frontline employees also influence one another. A disengaged colleague can increase others' workload. This may create a wider climate of withdrawal. Service quality, therefore, requires both technical systems and supportive relationships.

The proposed chain also recognises multiple levels. Ostracism begins through interpersonal conduct. Leadership and work arrangements can shape that conduct. Withdrawal then becomes visible through individual behaviour. Service quality is judged at the customer interface. These levels are connected through daily work. An integrated framework can therefore support a more complete diagnosis. It helps managers move beyond one-off engagement activities.

2. Literature Review

Workplace ostracism refers to social exclusion at work. It occurs through ordinary organisational interactions. Employees may receive silence instead of responses, they may be ignored during informal discussions, and they may also lose access to useful information. Such experiences can remain hidden from formal systems. They often appear less visible than overt mistreatment; yet, their psychological effects can be substantial. Ferris et al. (2008) developed the Workplace Ostracism Scale, establishing ostracism as a workplace construct. Robinson et al. (2013) provided further conceptual clarity, distinguishing ostracism from other negative workplace behaviours. Ostracism specifically concerns being ignored or excluded, and it may occur without direct verbal hostility. This feature makes early detection difficult for managers.

Ostracism threatens important psychological needs. Employees need belonging within their work groups; they also need respect, influence, and social acceptance. Belonging represents a basic human motivation, and its absence can create significant emotional discomfort. Baumeister and Leary (1995) explained this need clearly, arguing that stable relationships support wellbeing. Workplace exclusion can disrupt these relationships. Williams (2007) identified similar consequences of ostracism: it threatens belonging, control, and self-esteem, and weakens a person's sense of meaning. Employees may therefore question their workplace value, a reaction that can reduce their emotional investment in their work.

Research consistently supports these harmful consequences. Workplace ostracism relates to poorer employee attitudes as well as reduced wellbeing and performance. Employees may report greater strain and dissatisfaction and may also exhibit withdrawal and deviant behaviours. Howard et al. (2020) reviewed these relationships meta-analytically, identifying leadership as an important antecedent. Personality factors also predicted experiences of ostracism, and contextual support showed similar relevance. These findings support the present factor structure. Leadership vacuum was a major causal driver, low agreeableness also ranked as a key driver, and threats to group harmony remained equally important.

Ostracism can reduce valuable social work resources. Employees often depend on colleagues for support, needing information, feedback, and informal guidance, as well as encouragement during demanding work periods. Exclusion can restrict access to these resources while creating greater emotional work demands. The job demands-resources model explains this imbalance: job demands require sustained employee effort, whereas resources support motivation, learning, and recovery. High demands can exhaust employees over time, and limited resources can weaken engagement and performance. Demerouti et al. (2001) developed this central argument, and Bakker and Demerouti (2007) expanded this model later by emphasising the protective role of work resources. Ostracism may therefore produce a double burden-increasing strain while reducing social support.

Conservation of resources theory offers similar insight. Employees seek to protect valued personal resources, including energy, status, and social support. Resource loss can create further vulnerability over time. Employees may then conserve their remaining resources by avoiding demanding or voluntary work activities. While this response can initially protect personal wellbeing, it can weaken broader organisational contribution. Hobfoll (1989) explained this resource-loss process, and the present findings reflect this theoretical pattern. Emotional exhaustion appeared as a key effect factor, and weak organisational commitment also emerged downstream; both conditions may encourage psychological withdrawal. Emotional exhaustion deserves particular theoretical attention. It reflects depleted emotional and cognitive capacity. Exhausted employees may struggle to sustain engagement, avoiding extra responsibilities and interactions while also reducing emotional effort toward customers. Maslach and Leiter (2016) linked burnout with detachment as well as reduced work

efficacy-conditions that can weaken employee service behaviour. Emotional labour research offers a related explanation: service employees often regulate their feelings during interactions, a process that requires considerable personal energy (Grandey, 2000). Repeated strain can reduce employee emotional availability, and ostracism may intensify this strain considerably, leading employees to conserve energy through withdrawal.

Quiet quitting should be interpreted carefully here. It should not describe healthy work boundaries, as employees may reasonably reject unreasonable extra demands and protect personal and family wellbeing; such choices may support sustainable work participation. This study uses a narrower behavioural definition: quiet quitting means reduced discretionary work contribution. Employees continue completing their formal duties; however, they reduce extra effort and initiative. They may avoid voluntary helping and problem-solving, and they may also limit emotional investment in work. This pattern closely resembles work disengagement. Kahn (1990) linked engagement with personal role investment, whereas disengagement reflects withdrawal of that investment. Afrahi et al. (2022) reviewed work disengagement research, showing its complex and contextual nature. While disengagement may sometimes protect employees from strain, its organisational effects nevertheless require careful examination.

The present study therefore avoids blaming employees. Quiet quitting may signal damaged work relationships and indicate weak organisational support. Employees may restrict effort after continued exclusion because they no longer expect fair treatment or growth. This interpretation aligns with social exchange logic: employees often respond to perceived organisational treatment, where supportive treatment encourages reciprocal contribution and unsupportive treatment weakens it. Organisational commitment becomes important within this process. Committed employees usually identify with organisational goals and contribute beyond formal role expectations, whereas employees with weak commitment may limit such efforts. Meyer et al. (2002) supported these relationships through a meta-analysis. The present findings similarly identify weak commitment, which appears before quiet quitting and underperformance.

Service quality provides the framework's final outcome. Service organisations depend heavily on employee behaviour. Customers often judge organisations through direct encounters, noticing timely responses, accurate service, and empathy during service failures. Parasuraman et al. (1988) identified key quality dimensions, including responsiveness and service reliability. Service recovery also shapes later customer judgments (Tax et al., 1998). Employees often need discretionary effort during recovery because procedures alone cannot solve every customer problem; employees may need to explain, coordinate, and reassure. Such actions require motivation and emotional availability.

Service climate research further strengthens this argument. Employees respond better within supportive work climates, providing stronger customer-oriented behaviour under support. Schneider et al. (1998) linked service climate with quality, connecting employee perceptions with customer views. Bowen and Schneider (2014) later extended this perspective, describing service climate as strategically important because internal work conditions influence external customer experiences. The service-profit chain offers a related explanation: internal service quality influences employee attitudes first, and these attitudes can shape customer value later (Heskett et al., 1994). Workplace ostracism can damage this internal foundation. Employees may provide less initiative and flexibility, and they may also reduce service-recovery effort, causing customer responsiveness and reliability to decline.

Emotional contagion also matters during service encounters. Customers respond to employees' displayed emotions quickly; warm employee behaviour can improve customer reactions, whereas detached behaviour may produce the opposite response (Pugh, 2001). Employees

experiencing exclusion may find warmth difficult, becoming less attentive or emotionally available. Such changes can affect customer perceptions indirectly—a pathway that is especially relevant within high-contact services. Healthcare, hospitality, and banking require sustained interaction, in which employees often manage pressure and uncertainty, making their social work environment matter greatly.

Earlier studies usually examined these relationships separately. Ostracism studies focused mainly on employee outcomes, service studies often focused on climate and delivery, and disengagement studies examined withdrawal from work roles. Few studies integrate these constructs in a causal manner, creating an important theoretical and practical gap. Managers need to know where intervention begins and distinguish causes from symptoms. For example, underperformance may be a visible symptom, whereas its causes may include exclusion and weak support. The integrated Delphi–DEMATEL framework addresses this need. Delphi validates factors through structured expert consensus, and DEMATEL then identifies cause-and-effect relationships. This approach helps prioritise organisational interventions by directing attention toward upstream workplace conditions.

The reviewed literature supports the proposed framework. Ostracism can weaken belonging and social resources. Resource loss can increase emotional exhaustion, and exhaustion can weaken commitment and work involvement. Reduced involvement may appear as quiet quitting, which can restrict discretionary service behaviour, causing service quality to decline across customer outcomes. The present study examines this full causal sequence while also identifying the most influential drivers, a contribution that strengthens both workplace and service research.

3. Materials and Methods

The study used a sequential mixed-method design. Delphi validation formed the first phase. DEMATEL analysis formed the second phase. This design combined structured expert judgment with causal mapping. Delphi is useful when direct evidence remains fragmented. It supports controlled feedback and progressive consensus (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). DEMATEL then assesses interdependence among the retained factors. The two methods are complementary. Delphi narrows the factor set. DEMATEL examines the resulting system.

A focused literature review generated the initial factor pool. Searches covered workplace ostracism, exclusion, disengagement, quiet quitting, service performance, and service quality. The review also examined reference lists from key studies. The initial pool contained 37 candidate factors. They represented three domains. The first domain covered workplace ostracism. The second covered quiet quitting and withdrawal. The third covered service quality outcomes. Candidate labels were refined for clarity before expert review.

Eighteen experts participated in the Delphi phase. They represented academia, healthcare, banking, hospitality, and information technology. All had substantial work experience. Their experience ranged from 13 to 40 years. Each had team-leading experience. The panel included public- and private-sector professionals. This diversity suited the service-sector focus. It also reduced reliance on one occupational view. Table 1 summarises the study design. Table 2 presents the panel profile.

Table 1. Study design and analytical sequence

Phase	Purpose	Participants	Output
Literature review	Identify candidate factors	Published research	37 candidate factors
Delphi validation	Refine and validate factors	18 service-sector experts	22 retained factors; W = .79
DEMATEL mapping	Map causal influence	12 experts	Cause and effect groups

Table 2. Delphi expert-panel profile

Sector	Experts	Experience range	Work setting
Academia	3	13–40 years	Public and private
Healthcare	5	13–40 years	Public and private
Banking	3	13–40 years	Public and private
Hospitality	3	13–40 years	Public and private
Information technology	4	13–40 years	Public and private
Total	18	13–40 years	Mixed

Three Delphi rounds were completed. In Round 1, experts reviewed relevance and clarity. They could suggest additions or revisions. In Round 2, they reconsidered the revised factors. They received controlled group feedback. Round 3 tested convergence and stability. Consensus was assessed through Kendall's coefficient of concordance. Median, standard deviation, and mean-difference checks supported the closure decision. Kendall's W reached .79. This indicated strong agreement among panel members. The process retained 22 factors. The retained factors appear in Table 3. Their wording follows the presentation record. "Staff remotion" is reported as staff withdrawal. This clearer term preserves the intended meaning.

Twelve experts completed the DEMATEL phase. They assessed every pairwise influence among 22 factors. A five-point scale was used. Zero indicated no influence. Four indicated a very strong influence. Individual assessments were averaged into a direct-relation matrix. The matrix was normalised before analysis. The total-relation matrix was then calculated. For each factor, prominence was calculated as $D + R$. Relation was calculated as $D - R$. D represented influences given. R represented influences received. Positive relation values indicated cause-group factors. Negative values indicated effect-group factors. This procedure follows established DEMATEL practice (Gabus & Fontela, 1972; Si et al., 2018).

The study used anonymised expert judgments. Participation was voluntary. Experts received the study's purpose and process. No personal employee data were collected. The results, therefore, report collective expert assessments. They do not report identifiable individual opinions. Several safeguards strengthened the process. The Delphi rounds separated initial judgment from later reconsideration. This reduced immediate group pressure. The panel also represented several service contexts. The DEMATEL ratings used a common scale and identical factor labels. These steps improved consistency across respondents. The study nevertheless treats expert assessment as informed judgment. It does not treat it as direct behavioural measurement.

4. Results

The Delphi phase reduced 37 candidate factors to 22. Eight factors represented workplace ostracism. Eight represented quiet quitting and related withdrawal. Six represented service quality outcomes. The final pool retained interpersonal, leadership, developmental, and technological conditions. It also retained psychological mechanisms and service consequences. This breadth was important. Ostracism can arise through social treatment. It can also arise through weak leadership or inaccessible work systems.

Table 3. Factors retained after Delphi validation

Workplace ostracism	Quiet quitting and withdrawal	Service quality
Social exclusion (Ferris et al., 2008)	Emotional exhaustion (Li et al., 2021)	Staff withdrawal (Hanisch and Hulin, 1991)
Communication avoidance (Hitlan et al., 2006)	Weak organisational commitment (Anand et al., 2024); Li et al., 2021)	Underperformance (Li et al., 2021); Zhu et al., 2017)
Leadership vacuum (Ali et al., 2020); Wang and Li, 2018)	Reduced work engagement (Anand et al., 2024)	Customer responsiveness (Parasuraman et al., 1988); Zhu et al., 2017)
Lack of recognition (Brun and Dugas, 2008); Corbin and Flenady, 2024)	Avoidance of growth (Galanis et al., 2023)	Service reliability (Parasuraman et al., 1988); Brady and Cronin, 2001)
Low agreeableness (Wang and Li, 2018)	Minimal discretionary effort (Anand et al., 2024)	Service recovery (Smith et al., 1999)
Threats to group harmony (Henle et al., 2023)	Psychological withdrawal (Galanis et al., 2023)	Overall service quality (Brady and Cronin, 2001)
Lack of inclusion (Shore et al., 2011)	Job satisfaction (Galanis et al., 2023, Li et al., 2021))	
Technological isolation (Yang et al., 2022)	Work–life boundary reinforcement (Corbin and Flenady, 2024)	

Strong consensus supported the final factor set. Kendall's W was .79 across the Delphi process. This value indicates substantial agreement. The final factors were sufficiently stable for causal analysis. The panel did not treat every factor equally. Some factors were viewed as upstream drivers. Others were viewed as consequences. DEMATEL made this distinction visible.

The aggregated direct-relation matrix was normalized using the maximum row-sum method. As the maximum row sum was 52, the normalized matrix was obtained as $X=A/52$. The total-relation matrix was subsequently calculated as $T=X(I-X)^{-1}$. Table 4 and Table 5 represents Direct matrix and the T-matrix.

The DEMATEL results produced a clear separation between the cause and effect groups. Ten factors recorded positive relation values and were classified as net causes, whereas twelve factors recorded negative values and were classified as net effects. The causal diagram therefore places the cause-group factors above the zero-relation line and the effect-group factors below it. Prominence values indicate each factor's overall involvement in the system, while relation values show whether that involvement is primarily influential or dependent.

Table 4. Direct-Relation Matrix

Factor	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10	F11	F12	F13	F14	F15	F16	F17	F18	F19	F20	F21	F22	Row sum
Threats to group harmony	0	3	1	1	0	4	4	4	2	0	4	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	47
Leadership vacuum	3	0	1	1	0	4	4	4	2	0	4	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	47
Low agreeableness	2	2	0	3	1	3	4	3	4	1	4	4	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	52
Technological isolation	1	1	2	0	0	2	2	2	3	0	3	4	1	4	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	42
Weak organisational commitment	0	1	1	1	0	2	2	2	1	4	3	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	34
Social exclusion	2	2	1	1	0	0	4	4	2	1	4	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	45
Avoidance of growth	2	2	2	2	0	4	0	4	3	1	4	4	2	4	3	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	50
Communication avoidance	3	3	1	1	0	4	4	0	2	1	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	46
Lack of recognition	1	1	3	2	0	2	3	2	0	0	3	4	1	4	3	2	3	2	2	1	1	1	41
Lack of inclusion	0	0	1	1	4	2	2	3	1	0	3	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	34
Emotional exhaustion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2	2	2	35
Work–life boundary reinforcement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	2	2	2	34
Job satisfaction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	23
Reduced work engagement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	2	0	4	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	31
Psychological withdrawal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	2	3	0	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	35
Minimal discretionary effort	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	2	3	4	0	4	4	4	3	3	3	36
Staff withdrawal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	2	2	4	4	0	4	4	4	4	3	36
Underperformance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	3	3	4	0	4	3	3	3	29
Customer responsiveness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	3	3	4	3	0	4	4	4	31
Service reliability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	3	3	2	2	0	3	4	21

Factor	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10	F11	F12	F13	F14	F15	F16	F17	F18	F19	F20	F21	F22	Row sum
Service recovery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	3	2	4	3	0	3	20
Overall service quality	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	2	3	4	4	0	19
Column sum	14	15	13	13	5	27	29	28	20	8	52	57	32	57	63	60	66	50	57	41	41	40	788

Table 5. Total-Relation Matrix (T)

Factor	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10	F11	F12	F13	F14	F15	F16	F17	F18	F19	F20	F21	F22	Row sum
F1	0.022 1	0.076 6	0.034 5	0.033 9	0.0012	0.107 1	0.108 8	0.1072	0.061 5	0.0070	0.1752	0.1793	0.115 6	0.180 1	0.2028	0.197 9	0.212 3	0.1680	0.181 7	0.133 6	0.133 6	0.129 8	2.5699
F2	0.076 6	0.022 1	0.034 5	0.033 9	0.0012	0.107 1	0.108 8	0.1072	0.061 5	0.0070	0.1752	0.1793	0.115 6	0.180 1	0.2028	0.197 9	0.212 3	0.1680	0.181 7	0.133 6	0.133 6	0.129 8	2.5699
F3	0.059 3	0.059 7	0.019 8	0.073 9	0.0217	0.092 4	0.112 4	0.0929	0.101 8	0.0270	0.1863	0.2110	0.122 0	0.194 2	0.2181	0.211 5	0.227 6	0.1801	0.195 8	0.143 8	0.143 8	0.139 8	2.8349
F4	0.032 7	0.032 7	0.049 1	0.011 6	0.0013	0.059 1	0.061 2	0.0591	0.072 8	0.0045	0.1399	0.1800	0.085 0	0.179 8	0.2010	0.178 4	0.191 9	0.1526	0.165 4	0.121 8	0.121 8	0.118 4	2.2200
F5	0.012 1	0.030 4	0.029 4	0.029 3	0.0068	0.058 5	0.059 6	0.0599	0.034 5	0.0814	0.1248	0.1215	0.071 6	0.121 9	0.1383	0.135 0	0.145 3	0.1085	0.137 9	0.099 5	0.099 5	0.096 9	1.8028
F6	0.055 8	0.055 9	0.033 1	0.032 7	0.0025	0.031 0	0.104 1	0.1029	0.058 9	0.0246	0.1681	0.1719	0.110 7	0.172 6	0.1944	0.189 7	0.203 5	0.1610	0.174 4	0.128 2	0.128 2	0.124 6	2.4287

Factor	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10	F11	F12	F13	F14	F15	F16	F17	F18	F19	F20	F21	F22	Row sum
F7	0.058 1	0.058 2	0.053 4	0.052 9	0.0030	0.106 2	0.037 2	0.1067	0.080 2	0.0253	0.1799	0.2034	0.118 6	0.203 9	0.2107	0.204 7	0.220 0	0.1744	0.189 3	0.139 2	0.139 2	0.135 3	2.6998
F8	0.075 5	0.075 5	0.034 4	0.033 9	0.0026	0.106 2	0.107 9	0.0353	0.061 1	0.0249	0.1556	0.1761	0.112 8	0.176 6	0.1988	0.193 9	0.208 1	0.1645	0.178 2	0.130 9	0.130 9	0.127 1	2.5105
F9	0.034 2	0.034 2	0.067 7	0.050 1	0.0017	0.061 6	0.081 0	0.0617	0.020 3	0.0054	0.1408	0.1800	0.085 0	0.179 4	0.1825	0.160 2	0.190 4	0.1506	0.163 2	0.119 6	0.119 6	0.116 2	2.2056
F10	0.012 1	0.013 5	0.029 4	0.029 3	0.0783	0.058 5	0.059 6	0.0765	0.034 5	0.0103	0.1244	0.1215	0.071 5	0.121 9	0.1382	0.134 9	0.145 2	0.1085	0.137 8	0.099 5	0.099 5	0.096 9	1.8017
F11	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.0000	0.0469	0.1218	0.115 0	0.139 5	0.1607	0.158 2	0.169 8	0.1399	0.151 1	0.119 5	0.119 5	0.116 5	1.5585
F12	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.0000	0.0999	0.0658	0.078 4	0.137 4	0.1588	0.156 3	0.168 1	0.1387	0.167 0	0.119 4	0.119 4	0.116 4	1.5259
F13	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.0000	0.0698	0.0837	0.029 8	0.101 2	0.1159	0.114 1	0.121 6	0.0960	0.103 3	0.075 7	0.075 7	0.073 6	1.0604
F14	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.0000	0.0958	0.1314	0.074 8	0.060 5	0.1509	0.132 0	0.142 8	0.1308	0.141 7	0.111 5	0.111 5	0.109 0	1.3926
F15	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.0000	0.0798	0.1181	0.075 5	0.117 9	0.0853	0.154 6	0.167 7	0.1549	0.167 3	0.138 2	0.138 2	0.135 2	1.5327
F16	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.0000	0.000	0.000	0.0000	0.000	0.0000	0.0985	0.1203	0.077	0.120	0.1596	0.086	0.170	0.1574	0.170	0.140	0.140	0.137	1.5784

Factor	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9	F10	F11	F12	F13	F14	F15	F16	F17	F18	F19	F20	F21	F22	Row sum
	0	0	0	0		0	0		0				6	4		0	7		0	3	3	3	
F17	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.0000	0.0789	0.1177	0.074 9	0.100 8	0.1570	0.155 2	0.097 6	0.1556	0.168 7	0.156 9	0.156 9	0.137 3	1.5575
F18	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.0000	0.0532	0.0888	0.049 6	0.087 9	0.1240	0.122 4	0.150 9	0.0689	0.151 2	0.125 6	0.125 6	0.122 9	1.2711
F19	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.0000	0.0534	0.0900	0.049 8	0.089 1	0.1259	0.124 3	0.153 6	0.1256	0.082 9	0.146 2	0.146 2	0.143 4	1.3303
F20	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.0000	0.0239	0.0550	0.020 9	0.053 8	0.0850	0.100 9	0.110 2	0.0860	0.094 7	0.052 5	0.107 1	0.122 0	0.9119
F21	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.0000	0.0219	0.0530	0.019 6	0.051 8	0.0827	0.064 9	0.108 0	0.0834	0.126 0	0.105 1	0.050 6	0.103 2	0.8701
F22	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.000 0	0.0000	0.000 0	0.0000	0.0189	0.0490	0.016 7	0.048 1	0.0609	0.060 0	0.086 1	0.0786	0.104 2	0.118 1	0.118 1	0.045 2	0.8040
Col sum	0.438 5	0.458 9	0.385 4	0.381 6	0.1203	0.787 7	0.840 8	0.8094	0.587 2	0.2174	2.3113	2.8186	1.691 0	2.818 8	3.3540	3.232 8	3.603 6	2.9519	3.333 7	2.658 9	2.658 9	2.576 7	39.037 4

Table 6 identifies low agreeableness as the strongest net causal factor. It recorded an influence-given value of 2.8349 and an influence-received value of 0.3854, producing the largest positive relation value of 2.4495. Its prominence value of 3.2202 further indicates substantial involvement across the network. Low agreeableness therefore functions as the principal upstream driver within the revised model, exerting considerably more influence than it receives. Threats to group harmony and leadership vacuum occupied the next two causal positions. Threats to group harmony recorded a relation value of 2.1315, while leadership vacuum followed closely at 2.1111. Their prominence values were also similar, at 3.0084 and 3.0288, respectively. This close positioning suggests that interpersonal tension and absent leadership direction play comparably strong initiating roles in the system.

Table 6. D-R calculations

Factor	Code	D	R	D + R	D – R	Group
Threats to group harmony	F1	2.5699	0.4385	3.0084	2.1315	Cause
Leadership vacuum	F2	2.5699	0.4589	3.0288	2.1111	Cause
Low agreeableness	F3	2.8349	0.3854	3.2202	2.4495	Cause
Technological isolation	F4	2.22	0.3816	2.6017	1.8384	Cause
Weak organisational commitment	F5	1.8028	0.1203	1.923	1.6825	Cause
Social exclusion	F6	2.4287	0.7877	3.2164	1.6411	Cause
Avoidance of growth	F7	2.6998	0.8408	3.5405	1.859	Cause
Communication avoidance	F8	2.5105	0.8094	3.32	1.7011	Cause
Lack of recognition	F9	2.2056	0.5872	2.7928	1.6183	Cause
Lack of inclusion	F10	1.8017	0.2174	2.0191	1.5843	Cause
Emotional exhaustion	F11	1.5585	2.3113	3.8697	-0.7528	Effect
Work–life boundary reinforcement	F12	1.5259	2.8186	4.3445	-1.2927	Effect
Job satisfaction	F13	1.0604	1.691	2.7514	-0.6306	Effect
Reduced work engagement	F14	1.3926	2.8188	4.2114	-1.4262	Effect
Psychological withdrawal	F15	1.5327	3.354	4.8867	-1.8213	Effect
Minimal discretionary effort	F16	1.5784	3.2328	4.8112	-1.6544	Effect
Staff withdrawal	F17	1.5575	3.6036	5.1612	-2.0461	Effect
Underperformance	F18	1.2711	2.9519	4.223	-1.6807	Effect
Customer responsiveness	F19	1.3303	3.3337	4.664	-2.0034	Effect
Service reliability	F20	0.9119	2.6589	3.5709	-1.747	Effect
Service recovery	F21	0.8701	2.6589	3.5291	-1.7888	Effect
Overall service quality	F22	0.804	2.5767	3.3807	-1.7728	Effect

Avoidance of growth ranked fourth among the causes, with a relation value of 1.8590. However, it had the highest prominence among all cause-group factors, reaching 3.5405. This combination is analytically important. Although avoidance of growth was not the strongest net cause, it was the most extensively connected causal factor. It may therefore operate as a

transmission point through which upstream attitudes and workplace conditions spread into later psychological and behavioural outcomes.

Technological isolation ranked fifth in Table 7, with a relation value of 1.8384 and prominence of 2.6017. Communication avoidance followed in sixth position, recording a relation value of 1.7011 and a comparatively high prominence value of 3.3200. The latter result indicates that communication avoidance was broadly embedded in the system even though its net causal strength was below that of the five leading causes.

Weak organisational commitment ranked seventh in Table 7. It recorded the lowest received-influence value among the 22 factors, at 0.1203, and consequently retained a positive relation value of 1.6825. Social exclusion, lack of recognition, and lack of inclusion completed the cause group. Their relation values were 1.6411, 1.6183, and 1.5843, respectively. Social exclusion had the greatest prominence among these three factors, at 3.2164, indicating a wider pattern of system involvement. Lack of inclusion displayed lower prominence, at 2.0191, suggesting a more selective but still clearly causal influence pattern.

Table 8 shows that staff withdrawal was the most strongly dependent factor. It had the highest prominence in the complete system, at 5.1612, and the most negative relation value, at -2.0461. Staff withdrawal therefore occupies a central downstream position. It receives influence from multiple parts of the system and represents the point at which earlier attitudinal and behavioural processes become visible in employee withdrawal.

Table 7. Cause-group ranking

Rank	Code	Factor	D	R	D + R	D - R
1	F3	Low agreeableness	2.8349	0.3854	3.2202	2.4495
2	F1	Threats to group harmony	2.5699	0.4385	3.0084	2.1315
3	F2	Leadership vacuum	2.5699	0.4589	3.0288	2.1111
4	F7	Avoidance of growth	2.6998	0.8408	3.5405	1.8590
5	F4	Technological isolation	2.2200	0.3816	2.6017	1.8384
6	F8	Communication avoidance	2.5105	0.8094	3.3200	1.7011
7	F5	Weak organisational commitment	1.8028	0.1203	1.9230	1.6825
8	F6	Social exclusion	2.4287	0.7877	3.2164	1.6411
9	F9	Lack of recognition	2.2056	0.5872	2.7928	1.6183
10	F10	Lack of inclusion	1.8017	0.2174	2.0191	1.5843

Note. Ranked from the largest to the smallest positive D - R value; positive values identify net causes.

Customer responsiveness ranked second in Table 8, with a relation value of -2.0034 and prominence of 4.6640. This strong negative position indicates that customer responsiveness is principally shaped by other factors rather than functioning as an initiating condition. Its placement near the lower-right region of the causal diagram confirms that service responsiveness is both highly involved and strongly dependent.

Psychological withdrawal ranked third among the effects. It recorded a prominence value of 4.8867, the second-highest value in the entire system, and a relation value of -1.8213. Psychological withdrawal was therefore one of the network's most central factors. It absorbed substantial upstream influence while remaining closely connected with subsequent withdrawal, performance, and service outcomes.

Service recovery, overall service quality, and service reliability ranked fourth, fifth, and sixth in Table 8. Their relation values were -1.7888, -1.7728, and -1.7470, respectively. These consistently negative values establish the three service factors as a downstream outcome cluster. The findings indicate that deterioration in employee attitudes and behaviour ultimately converges on customers' service experience, although the DEMATEL results should be interpreted as perceived causal influence rather than statistical causation.

Underperformance and minimal discretionary effort occupied the seventh and eighth effect positions. Underperformance recorded a relation value of -1.6807, while minimal discretionary effort recorded -1.6544. Minimal discretionary effort nevertheless had substantially greater prominence, at 4.8112, compared with 4.2230 for underperformance. The distinction suggests that minimal discretionary effort is more deeply embedded across the network, whereas underperformance represents a somewhat more concentrated downstream consequence.

Reduced work engagement and work–life boundary reinforcement ranked ninth and tenth in Table 8. Their prominence values remained high, at 4.2114 and 4.3445, although their negative relation values were less extreme than those of the principal behavioural and service outcomes. These factors appear to occupy intermediate downstream positions, receiving influence from the cause group while remaining connected with later manifestations of withdrawal and service deterioration.

Table 8. Effect-group ranking

Rank	Code	Factor	D	R	D + R	D - R
1	F17	Staff withdrawal	1.5575	3.6036	5.1612	-2.0461
2	F19	Customer responsiveness	1.3303	3.3337	4.6640	-2.0034
3	F15	Psychological withdrawal	1.5327	3.3540	4.8867	-1.8213
4	F21	Service recovery	0.8701	2.6589	3.5291	-1.7888
5	F22	Overall service quality	0.8040	2.5767	3.3807	-1.7728
6	F20	Service reliability	0.9119	2.6589	3.5709	-1.7470
7	F18	Underperformance	1.2711	2.9519	4.2230	-1.6807
8	F16	Minimal discretionary effort	1.5784	3.2328	4.8112	-1.6544
9	F14	Reduced work engagement	1.3926	2.8188	4.2114	-1.4262
10	F12	Work–life boundary reinforcement	1.5259	2.8186	4.3445	-1.2927
11	F11	Emotional exhaustion	1.5585	2.3113	3.8697	-0.7528
12	F13	Job satisfaction	1.0604	1.6910	2.7514	-0.6306

Note. Ranked from the most negative D - R value upward; more negative values indicate stronger net dependence.

Emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction were closest to the zero-relation boundary. Emotional exhaustion recorded a relation value of -0.7528, while job satisfaction had the least negative value, at -0.6306. Both factors remained net effects, but their positions indicate weaker dependence than that observed for staff withdrawal, customer responsiveness, psychological withdrawal, and the service outcomes. They may therefore function as relatively early effect-side states within the broader causal process.

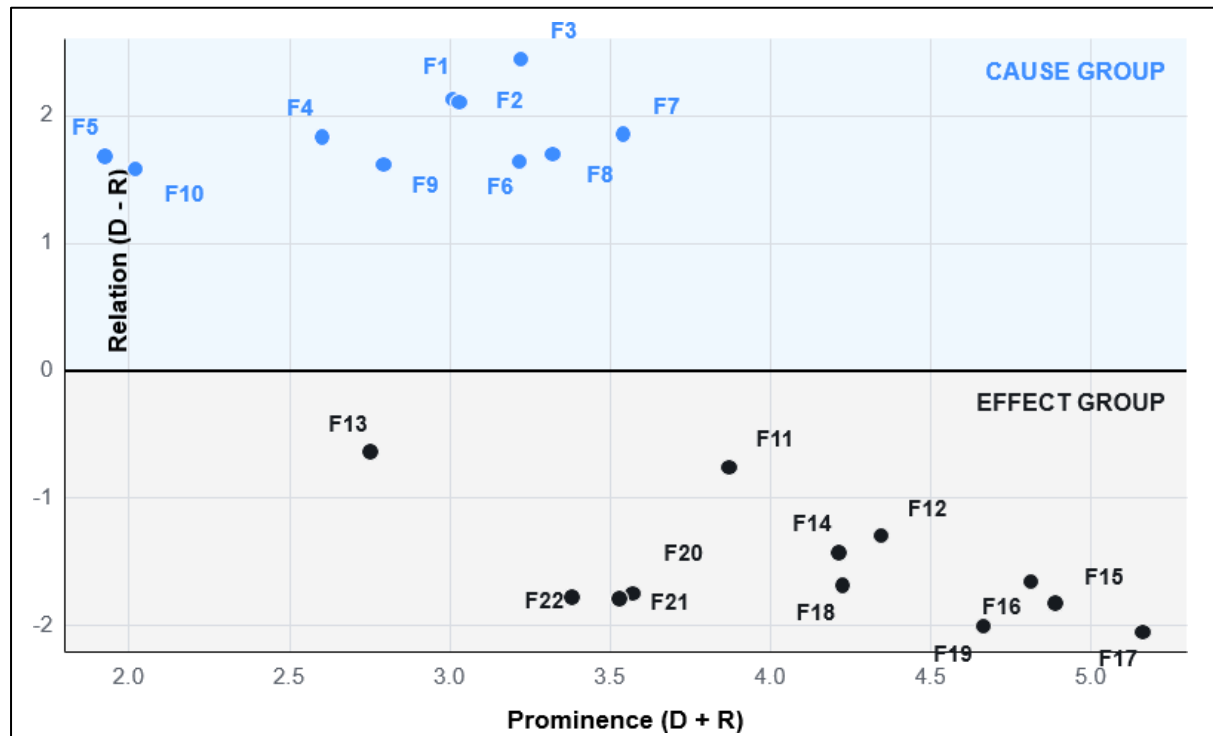


Figure 1. Dematel causal plotting

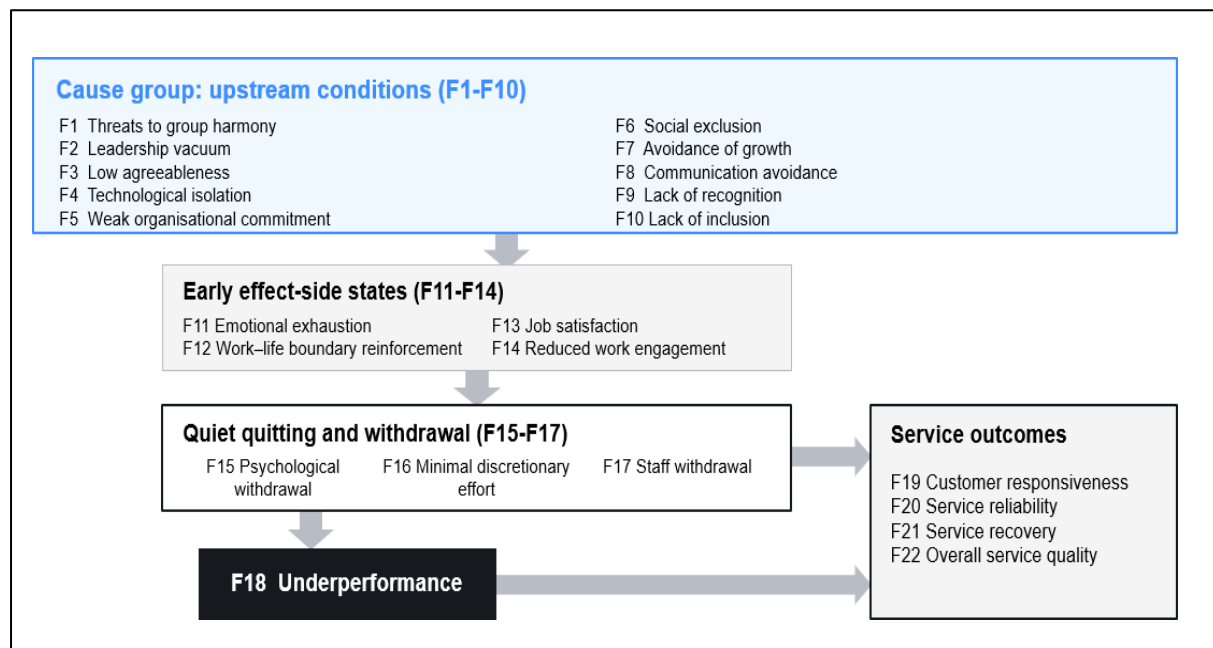


Figure 2. Cause-effect pathway

Taken together, Tables 7 and 8 reveal a structured progression. Individual and relational conditions, particularly low agreeableness, threats to group harmony, leadership vacuum, avoidance of growth, and technological isolation, form the upstream causal core. Their influence is accompanied by communication avoidance, weak organisational commitment, social exclusion, and deficits in recognition and inclusion. Downstream, the system moves through emotional and work-related states into reduced engagement, psychological withdrawal, minimal discretionary effort, staff withdrawal, and underperformance. The final

consequences are reflected in customer responsiveness, service reliability, service recovery, and overall service quality.

The causal diagram supports this interpretation by displaying a sharp vertical separation between the ten causes and twelve effects. Low agreeableness occupies the highest causal position, while staff withdrawal and customer responsiveness occupy the deepest effect positions. At the same time, prominence shifts the analytical focus toward staff withdrawal, psychological withdrawal, minimal discretionary effort, and customer responsiveness because these factors are the most extensively involved in the system. The results therefore distinguish initiating conditions from central transmission mechanisms and final service consequences. The plotting is presented as Figure 1 and the causal diagram is presented as Figure 2.

5. Discussions

The findings support a relational and resource-based interpretation of quiet quitting. Rather than viewing reduced discretionary contribution as a purely individual choice, the framework suggests that it can develop when workplace relationships undermine belonging, respect, support, and confidence in reciprocal treatment. This interpretation connects the need-threat account of ostracism (Williams, 2007) with conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the job demands–resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001), and social exchange reasoning. When social and developmental resources become uncertain, restricting voluntary effort may be an attempt to conserve energy and limit further disappointment.

The analysis also broadens workplace ostracism beyond direct interpersonal exclusion. Leadership absence, blocked development, recognition deficits, and technology-mediated isolation indicate that exclusion may be reproduced through organisational arrangements as well as coworker behaviour. Meanwhile, the relevance of low agreeableness and perceived threats to group harmony suggests an interaction between individual dispositions and group dynamics. This should not assign blame to excluded employees; instead, it highlights how team climates may convert difference or conflict into exclusion.

Finally, the framework connects internal social conditions with customer-facing consequences. This extends ostracism research beyond employee attitudes and complements service-climate and service-profit-chain perspectives (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Heskett et al., 1994). Its principal theoretical contribution is to position quiet quitting as a behavioural mechanism through which damaged workplace relationships may become visible in service delivery.

6. Managerial Implications

The findings suggest that managers should address upstream workplace conditions before responding to visible withdrawal or service deficiencies. Action should begin with team inclusion, supervisory accountability, and dependable access to information. Managers can establish expectations regarding meeting participation, response practices, knowledge sharing, and informal communication. Confidential pulse surveys and structured one-to-one conversations may reveal exclusion that formal grievance systems overlook.

Leadership development should emphasise recognising isolation, allocating developmental opportunities fairly, and intervening promptly in group conflict. Low agreeableness should not become a basis for labelling or excluding employees. Conflict coaching, role clarification, and facilitated team norms offer more constructive responses. Recognition should be timely and specific, while access to learning should follow transparent criteria rather than informal relationships.

Technology also requires deliberate inclusion. Hybrid and digitally mediated teams need equal access to communication channels, meetings, documents, training, and technical assistance. Managers should determine whether remote employees are omitted from decisions or disadvantaged by rapid technological changes. Reduced participation, declining initiative, delayed coordination, and recurring service problems should prompt supportive inquiry rather than punitive surveillance.

Interventions must also distinguish psychological withdrawal from legitimate work–life boundaries. Protecting reasonable boundaries can sustain wellbeing, whereas coercing extra-role effort may deepen disengagement. Organisations should therefore evaluate interventions through a balanced set of employee-inclusion, exhaustion, engagement, withdrawal, and customer-service indicators.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations qualify the interpretation of this study. First, the causal structure represents aggregated expert judgement rather than observed temporal causation. DEMATEL identifies perceived directions and interdependencies, but it cannot establish that one factor produces another among employees or customers. Second, the DEMATEL panel was relatively small and combined experts from several service sectors. This diversity improves breadth, but averaging their assessments may conceal differences among healthcare, banking, hospitality, information technology, and academic settings.

Third, the initial factor pool came from a focused rather than fully systematic review; relevant constructs may consequently have been omitted. Some labels—particularly “leadership vacuum,” “avoidance of growth,” and “technological isolation”—are accessible shorthand for broader concepts and require precise operational definitions before survey-based testing. Quiet quitting also remains conceptually contested, and its distinction from healthy boundary-setting requires further validation. Moreover, any simplified pathway diagram depends on the rule used to retain relationships. Future reporting should disclose the threshold or theory-based selection procedure and provide sensitivity analyses using alternative cut-offs.

Future studies should test the framework with multi-wave and multilevel data collected from employees, supervisors, teams, and customers. Structural equation modelling and longitudinal designs could assess mediation and temporal ordering, while field experiments could evaluate inclusion and leadership interventions. Cross-sector and cross-national comparisons are also needed, particularly within remote and hybrid work environments.

8. Conclusion

This study develops an integrated explanation of how workplace ostracism may extend beyond employee discomfort and become consequential for service organisations. Combining Delphi validation with DEMATEL brings interpersonal, leadership, developmental, technological, psychological, behavioural, and customer-facing factors into one framework. The central message is that quiet quitting should not be treated simply as deficient employee motivation. It may represent a response to depleted social resources, weakened reciprocity, and reduced confidence that discretionary contribution will be recognised or valued.

The framework also explains why interventions directed only at visible performance problems may have limited effects. Employee withdrawal and service deficiencies can be manifestations of less visible workplace conditions. Sustainable improvement therefore requires inclusive interaction, active leadership, access to learning and information, meaningful recognition, and equitable technological support. These practices can protect employee participation and the

discretionary behaviour on which responsive and reliable service often depends. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of combining expert consensus with causal mapping when a phenomenon crosses several research domains. Its conclusions remain interpretive because the identified pathways reflect expert assessments and require confirmation through longitudinal, multilevel, and customer-linked evidence. Nevertheless, the framework provides a coherent basis for theory development and organisational diagnosis. It reframes workplace ostracism as both an employee-wellbeing concern and a service-management risk, while identifying prevention at the social and organisational source as the most defensible response.

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Ethical declaration

This study has been approved by the institutional ethics committee of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur. Informed consents were collected from all the participants.

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