

ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF EMPLOYEE SILENCE: RESEARCH FRAMEWORK FOR INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Focus - The purpose of this study was to overview the determinants and consequences of 'Employee Silence'. Though employees' being the core members of any organization encounters many issues at various stages throughout their work life leading into restraint from communication and occurs silence. It examines the relevance of Employee Silence in Indian Organizations and proposed the work needed to be done.

Methodology - The paper critically examined the literature and vindicates the selective causes and effects of employee silence and follows method of depth and existing literature survey.

Findings – Fear, administrative reasons, hesitation, lack of communication opportunities & cultural factors have been taken as determinants and organizational commitment, job satisfaction, career satisfaction & stress as consequences of silence. Result reveals it occurs positive relationship between silence & job satisfaction; subsequently investigated the four dimensions of silence in India (Fear of victimization, internal motivation, self-competence & self-image) whereas no relationship between silence & commitment on contrast of western studies. Silence has negative relationship with career satisfaction whereas stress has positive impact on silence.

Conclusion – Enlightens a theoretical structure which shed light to the future researcher to opt empirical research on the basis of conceptual ground and to explore the mediating and moderating variables related to connected variables.

Keywords: Employee Silence, Cultural Norms, Organizational Performance, Acquiescent silence, Defensive silence.

CONCEPT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EMPLOYEE SILENCE: AN INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, employees are the assets for an organization (John & Manikandan, 2019) and in order to attain growth and prosperity managing human resources are the key elements for an organization to achieve desired outputs.

Organizations need to use the assets effectively and efficiently for the smooth functioning of the organisation. Employees are considered as a means of innovation, change and development by contributing their ideas to the organisation to achieve organizational goals (Beheshtifaret al., 2012; Liu et al., 2012; Zehir & Erdogan 2011; Cinar et al., 2013; Karaca, 2013; Nikmaram et al., 2012). According to western context, today in this advanced competitive

environment open communication to the managers are being offered by the organisation so as to gain maximum return through workers suggestion, feedback and ideas (Deniz et al., 2013). However, many employees feel disinclined to convey the information or ideas to the top executives. Employees prefer being silent rather than voicing its point of view as employees often feel their perspective may upset or disappoint the bosses and might lose valuable relationships, image, trust and will be considered as insignificant, reckless, agitator, complainer etc. (Milliken et al., 2003). In a country like India; cultural norms, dominating culture and patriarchal hierarchy plays a vital role in Indian organizations for taking influencing decisions (Jain, 2015). On the other part, Agarwal and Rai (2017) opined mistreatment at the workplace leads to silence. The study concluded with the results that workplace bullying is positively associated with the employee silence and considered to be one of the factors in Indian organizations. Indian organization employees hold a sense of being dependent on other. According to Goodwin and Goodwin (1999) to obey the rules of an organization is mandatory rather than raising up issues that confines one's superiority to challenge the boss with his concerned questions which might be deliberated as inapt to the supervisors (Porter et al., 2003). Prior the 'silence' was considered or corresponded to 'loyalty' and Dyne et al. (2003) specified that being silent of employees could be considered for reducing organizational conflict or say organizational disagreement between employees and managers, managers and managers, employees and employees. As far as the authenticity Morrison and Milliken (2000) argued eventually this does not occur but silence lead to negative conclusions.

According to Pinder and Harlos (2001) the definition of Employee Silence is "The intentional withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individuals behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his/her organizational circumstance to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting

change or redress". Morrison and Milliken (2000) had opined the silence which occurs at an individual level is employee silence whereas the collective occurrence of individuals about organizational matters is known as organizational silence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The silence theory was coined on 1974 that assumes to determine why a small number of groups remain silent while others are more publicly expressive (Neill, 2009). In the 1980's, silence and voice were studied through the lens of justice theory and it brought a scholarly focus on whistle blowing and boat rocking (Bogosian, 2012). Employees are very important for any organisation as organisation is nobody without human resources. Employees help organisation to achieve their goals in this cut throat competitive environment. Various numbers of literatures are available for employee silence.

In this world of silence and voice, where silence used to be considered as 'loyalty' amidst their workplace whereas Pinder and Harlos (2001) redesigned the existence of silence as a withholding of ideas or expression, having a ability to bring the change. Milliken et al., (2003; Richard, (2003) explained fear is the biggest predictor of causing silence resultant in damaging relationships. Vakola & Bouradas (2005) asserts there is a positive relation between top management attitudes to silence and supervisors' attitudes to silence and a negative association between employees' silence behavior and communication opportunities, being perceived by the individuals and employee silence behavior. Karaca (2013), Cakici's (2008) observed that employee silence occurs due to the top management department and attitude towards employees. Eriguc et al., (2014) had stated that employees who are new to the organisation and have a working experience of one to two year withhold their opinions more comparatively to others due to the existing fear. Umashankar and Padmavathy (2015) emphasized that silence affects consequently the employees and organisation, and ultimately it has impact on the

individual commitment and job satisfaction. Laeeque and Bakhtawari (2014) found in his study that dimensions of Silence behavior have negative impact on the organizational commitment and job satisfaction whereas Imam and Shah (2017) mentioned there is a positive and significant relationship between employee silence and job satisfaction. Batmani and Jalilian(2015) did a descriptive study in social security organisation in Kermanshah and opined there is a significant relationship between dimensions of organizational silence and performance of the employees, also there is an inverse negative relationship between the obedient silence and performance silence. The study of Yaghoubi et al.,(2016)explained there is a negative relationship overall between work life quality & organizational silence. Akbarian et al., (2015) believed that top managements behavior plays a major role to the workers. Managers should possess positive qualities such as good listener, friendly nature, patient, accepting mistake and this in turn leads to sound organizational environment. Managers should accept the suggestion or information from their workers however positive attitude results to employee voice whereas negative attitude results to employee silence and ultimately commitment towards their work decreases. To the latest study according to John & Manikandan (2019) which has been conducted in India found out it is necessary to minimize the employee silence at first, which later turns onto organizational silence and apparently it hurts the employees and organization both simultaneously. The study also contributed to the three main factors causing silence is individual, organizational & socio-demographic reasons behind the occurrence of silence.

DIMENSIONS OF EMPLOYEE SILENCE

Various researchers such as Morrison and Milliken (2000); Van Dyne et al.,(2003); Pinder and Harlos, (2001) have listed the following three dimensions of silence:

- **Acquiescent Silence:** In this silence, employees withhold their ideas, information or suggestions intentionally due to the fact that employees think their voicing up of issue is futile and their raising of voice will not bring any change in the organisation. It is a disengaged behavior of the employees.
- **Quiescent Silence:** It is also known as defensive silence and it is based on self-protection to keep away from several dangers in future. The nature of this silence is proactive and it deliberately wishes to stay silent in order to keep oneself safe. There is no alternative options for the employees to switch on another job, instead the existing job is better and often brings a sense of security.
- **Prosocial Silence:** In this silence, the employees intentionally withhold their ideas, information or opinions with the sole motive of concern for others and for benefitting the organisation or the society. The employees get motivated to keep their mouth shut out of concern to build the social relations in order to create harmony in the workplace.

According to Brinsfield (2009) listed six following dimensions of employee silence in his dissertation work:

- **Deviant Silence:** Brins field defines deviant silence when an employee does not convey the useful information to the organisation and that will save them from negative consequences in the near future.
- **Relational Silence:** In this silence, employees want to maintain their social relations with the co-workers in the organisation. This silence is quite similar to pro-social silence as it promotes to build social network among them.
- **Defensive Silence:** As stated above, also known as quiescent silence is based on self-protection out of fear from negative consequences and fear of authorities of organisation.
- **Diffident Silence:** This silence occurs due to

lack of confidence, self-doubt, lack of clarity of expressing ideas to the organisation which blocks them to transmit ideas or any issue.

- **Ineffectual Silence:** Similar to acquiescent silence, employees does not feel worth speaking. Employees believe their raising up an issue will not bring any change in the organisation and to speak up is a futile option.
- **Disengaged Silence:** Due to lack of concerns towards organisation, employees do not engage in flow of communication and the disengage silence occurs.

FURTHER IN INDIAN CONTEXT, JAIN (2015) ADDED TO THESE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF SILENCE:

- **Fear of Retaliation:** This dimension specified about the authoritarian dominant leadership among the organizational hierarchies' members which gives birth to fear and a sense of insecurity among employees. Indian employees prefer to be silent to avoid the negative consequences from their bosses which are harmful to their work life. The author had already mentioned in India fear of negative outcomes plays a solid factor due to the dependency of subordinates on the supervisors. This dimension is also considered

as a defensive silence or quiescent silence.

- **Internal Motivation:** On this dimension, due to the lack of knowledge, understanding, skills, capabilities and ideas the silence occurs. To keep their mouth shut is a better idea than speaking up futility, consequently proving wrong or say negative image to their bosses because of the knowledge gaps.
- **Self-Competence:** This dimension has traits with the lack of belief in one's self-idea. Employees are not confident enough about their existing skills instead they believe due to their inadequate communication skills, prefer to remain silent than rising up an issues with a good fight. This can be the result of fear of higher authorities and incompetence to develop an open relationship with bosses.

Self-Image: Self-image is another dimension to be the reason for silence behavior. This is very common to all the employees to put a positive impression towards their bosses, despite being a negative image in front of others. Thus, employees want to maintain a good image of himself being a wonderful and simple person by not arguing with their supervisors, and thinks he has come for a work in work place rather than being a bad conveyer or to argue with his boss.

Table 1: Dimensions of Employee Silence

Van Dyne et.al., (2003) Pinder and Harlos(2001)	Brinsfield (2009)	Jain (2015)
Acquiescent Silence	Deviant Silence	Fear of Retaliation
Quiescent(Defensive)Silence	Relational Silence	Internal Motivation
Pro-Social Silence	Defensive Silence	Self-competence
	Diffident Silence	Self-Image
	Ineffectual Silence	
	Disengaged Silence	

DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEE SILENCE

- A. Fear :** Reviewing numerous literatures, the common antecedent that has been generalized among the practitioners is fear including Indian association (Milliken et al., 2003; Richard, 2003; Valk & Eme life onwu, 2018; Jain, 2015; Agarwal & Rai, 2017). The existing papers also bring attention to the reader of various kinds of fear which occurred to an individual that are fear of being characterized negatively, fear of risking existing work, fear of getting promotion that hinders individual's growth, fear of losing relationships, fear of distrust (Cakici, 2008). Milliken et al., (2003) explained fear is the biggest predictor of causing silence affecting the performance of an organization, likewise a sense of fear or insecurity be the dominant factor of silence among Indian employees (Jain, 2015; Agarwal & Rai, 2017).
- B. Administrative Reasons/ Organizational Factors:** Administrator plays both positive and negative role in the organizational success. It has been showed that administrative reasons mostly influences silence in the workplace (Karaca, 2013). Manager's behavior and attitudes does matter for the success of an organisation. Top managements should hold onto various qualities like free flow of communication, patience, learning nature and accepting mistakes which help to build the employer employee relationship (Akbarian et al., 2014).
- C. Hesitation:** Despite employees are the valuable resources for the organization (Yaghoubiet al., 2016), feel hesitant to share important information to the organizational hierarchy to talk about various issues such as norms, moral ethics, money, gender, female harassment and politics (Richard, 2003).
- D. Lack of Communication Opportunities:** Due to lack of opportunities, talented

employees won't get the platform to share their concerned ideas, issues, suggestions to present in front of their bosses subsequently leading into the shape of employee silence (Richard, 2003). Vakola and Bouradas (2005) suggested another way of speaking up is by giving the opportunities to communicate.

- E. Cultural Factors:** Cultural norms of a particular organisation plays an imperative antecedent of causing employee silence behavior (Lu & Xie, 2013). Jain (2015) conducted a study of silence in Indian organization and figured out that domestic culture reflects a high-power distance, communism, mannerisms like sense of being submissive to the authoritarian leaders and dominant leadership; slightly similar to tradition of Chinese culture shaping into silence deeds.

CONSEQUENCES OF EMPLOYEE SILENCE

Every side has two aspects; positive and negative aspect. Various researchers and practitioners have studied the effects of employee silence in two aspects. Based on the emergent literature, the paper has selected few consequences which have been important for the framework of Indian organization i.e. organizational commitment, job satisfaction, career satisfaction & mental stress.

- A. Organizational Commitment:** Organizational commitment is the magnetic force that attracts employees towards their organisation (Meyer & Maltin, 2010). Ponnu and Chuah (2010) defined OC is the bond being shared by the employees towards organisation. Meyer and Allen (1991) had developed three multidimensional model of commitment: firstly, Affective commitment (attaches to the organisation emotionally); secondly, Continuance commitment (to continue rather than to leave, believes existing work is much

relevant than seeking alternative options) and lastly Normative commitment [where employees want to stay in the organisation due to the feeling of obligation and said it is their moral responsibility to stick and to be loyal towards the workplace (Meyer & Allen, 1998). According to western perspective Vakola and Bouradas (2005) there is a reduction in Organizational Commitment when pooled dimensions of silence ensues at the workplace, resultant in inhibiting innovation (Argyris and Schon, 1978) to the contrast on the study of Iman et al., (2017); Jain (2015) there is no relationship between employee silence and organizational commitment. Employees worry more about their jobs rather than conveying bad news and considered as a troublemaker.

- B. Job Satisfaction :** In western context perspective, silence has a negative impact on job satisfaction showing negatively related to job satisfaction which means higher the employee silence higher will be the job dissatisfaction & vice-versa which has been contradictory to Indian study. However, Jain (2015) conducted his study in India and has been revealed that silence has a positive impact on job satisfaction and investigated the four plausible factors of silence (fear of retaliation, internal motivation, self-image and self-competence) occurring in superior-subordinate relationships.
- C. Career Satisfaction:** Career satisfaction is similar to job satisfaction (Igbaria & Siegel, 1992). Career satisfaction is defined as the level of individual satisfaction with the progression and attainment through one's preferred career, which results in performance (Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Wormley, 1990). Based on the Social Cognition Theory, Career satisfaction mediated the relationship between employee silence and employee innovative behavior leading to adverse relationships and it has also been found that employee silence has negative

impact on career satisfaction. There is negative relationship between employee silence and the dimensions of career satisfaction i.e. career identity and work self (Tang, 2018).

- D. Stress:** Individuals who intentionally constrain themselves from communication have the higher tendency to suffer from anxiety, stress, emotionally ill (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Beer & Eisenstat, 2000). A study of Rhee et al., (2015) results have indicated that silence has a positive relationship with the stress. Higher the silence, higher will be the stress which affects employee's health as well as the organizational performance.

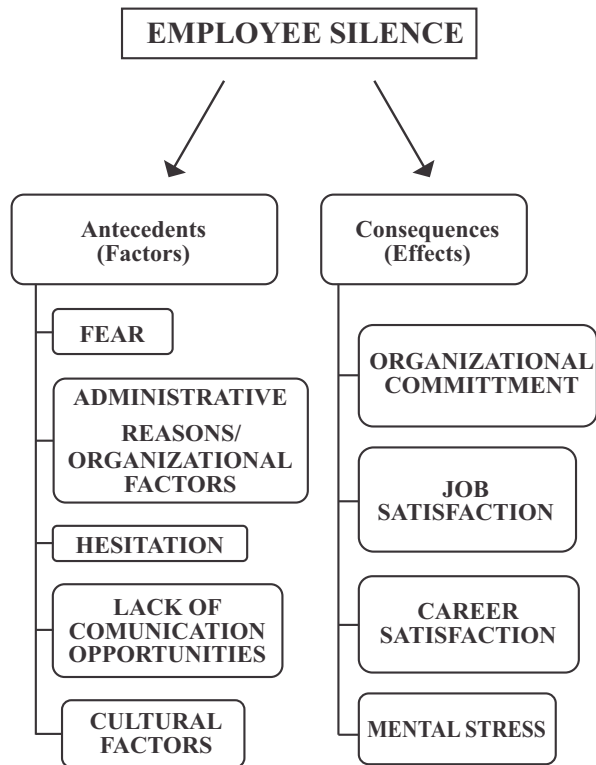
GAP AREAS AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Based on the existing literature, there are certain research gaps which need to be studied. The construct 'Employee Silence' has been studied a lot individually in western context relating to various sectors but there are very few studies which have been conducted in Indian Organizations. There is a need of further exploration of silence behavior of employees through gender perspective and also to explore the mediating variable between different variables. Indian scholars have studied few about the positive impact on employees neglecting the negative consequences of silence behavior. Though India is rich in diversity in culture, cultural norms can be taken as a variable for the further study and also to ascertain the relationship with employee silence.

Based on the review of literature, following hypotheses have been developed:

- H1:** There will be a positive association between cultural norms and employee silence.
- H2:** Dimensions of culture has a positive impact on silence behavior of employees.
- H3:** Employee silence leads to reduction in Career satisfaction.
- H4:** Employee silence increases mental stress.

FIGURE 1: Antecedents and Consequences of Employee Silence



CONCLUSION AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Managers should give adequate importance to Employee Silence because it is an important factor for increased organizational performance & effectiveness, organizational commitment, job satisfaction etc. Employee Silence has got few positive influences in the Indian organization like increasing job satisfaction of employees, increasing retention; increasing commitment of the employees and deliberately cultural factors in India plays a major role. But concurrently the weaker side of this construct should not be elapsd which may lead to several negative outcomes like decreased organizational performance & effectiveness, reduction in commitment, lower job satisfaction, decreased level of retention.. The current article presents some positive as well as negative aspect of

silence and has been highlighted which gives knowledge about the application of Employee Silence in the organization. The determinants of Employee Silence such as fear, hesitation, cultural factors, lack of communication opportunities & administrative reasons can be used as strategies to promote employee silence in organizations. This paper will also help practitioners to carry out further empirical research on employee silence and its associated outcome variables.

As we know India is rich in diversity in culture, the future research can be done on the relationship between cultural norms and employee silence i.e. the impact of cultural norms on employee silence in Indian organizations. Silence has different repercussions in the context of western and Indian; needs to study more in depth. The academician can also shed the light for future studies on gender perspective to analyze the factor; does gender play the role as predictor of employee silence in Indian organization because few of the prior studies had observed females are more silent than male; correspondingly due to the mistreatment and abuse females prefer being silent and be safe. Another study can be conducted to see the relationship between the dimensions of culture and silence behavior on a longitudinal basis. Prior studies which were conducted in India have not explored the various segments: the future studies can be discovered on different sectors. Thus, this article would like to suggest the managers to create a friendly environment for the talented employees and to give the platform to present their feedback about the organizational performance.

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