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Analyzing the Infrastructures of Organizational Silence and Ways to Get Rid of it

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Abstract

Among the most fundamental decisions made by people in the workplace involves whether or not to express their ideas and concerns-or even if it is possible to do so. The situation in which people decide not to express their ideas about organizational problems leads to the phenomenon which Morrison and Milliken have termed " organizational silence " that prevent organizations from hearing their employee's voice and employee choose to withhold their opinions and concerns about organizational problems. A number of research questions have been generated dedicated to answering why employees make the decision to be silent; what types of issues employees are likely to be silent about and how organisations might surmount this problem.silence atmosphere have some negative consequences on organization's ability to change and development in the context of pluralism .In these research, Definitions of organizational silence, Reasons of organizational silence , Manager's Common tactics for silencing, Dynamics giving rise to organizational silence, Effects of organizational silence, Organizational silence and organizational change, Ways of overcoming to organizational silence are discussed.

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Introduction

Organizations are demanding more and more from their employees today namely, taking initiative, speaking up and accepting responsibility because of more intensive competition, higher customer expectations, more focus on quality indicating a constant world of change. In order to survive organizations need individuals who are responsive to the challenges of environment, who are not afraid of sharing information and knowledge, can stand up for their own and their team's beliefs. Although the literature focuses on empowerment and open communication channels, many employees report that their organizations don't support communication and sharing of information and knowledge which are some of the reasons of why change of management programs fails. More specifically talking, one of the major obstacles to change programs was lack of information, lack of trust and what Morrison and Milliken (2000) defined as "organizational silence" which is the employee's choice to withhold their opinions and concerns about organizational problems.

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Definition of organizational silence and its role in organizations

Silence does not mean no speaking, no writing, no,...; it entails speaking or writing ephemerally or without authenticity, confidence or authority (Hazen, 2006, p.238). Early definitions of silence equated it with "loyalty" and the assumption that nothing was wrong if concerns were not being voiced. But researchers today have shown that a climate of silence can work against desired organizational outcomes (Aylsworth, 2008).

Different definitions from organizational silence are as follows:
Pinder and Harlos conceptualize employee silence as involving the withholding of "genuine" expressions about organizational circumstances by certain organizational members from those who are in a position to change those circumstances (Fletcher&Watson, 2007, p.157)**.**
Morrison and Milliken see organizational silence as a "collective" phenomenon. They ground the question "why silence?" in the sociology of the workplace, not the psychology of individual workers (Maria, 2006, p.226). They proposed that when most members of organizations choose to keep silent about organizational matters, silence becomes a collective behaviour, which is referred to as organizational silence. . (Dan et al, 2009, p.1647)
Van dyne defined organizational silence as the "intentionally withhold of work- related ideas, information and opinions" (Vakola&Dimitris, 2005, p.441).

Actually, organizational silence is an inefficient organizational process that wastes cost and efforts and can take various forms, such as collection silence in meetings, low levels of participation in suggestion schemes, low levels of collective voice and so forth. (Dan et al, 2009, p.1647). Organizational silence is also likely to compromise effective organizational learning and development by blocking negative feedback or information that suggests that current practices are not working as intended (Morrison&Milliken,2000 ,p.31).
Employee silence pervades organizations. Yet the concept is elusive and there is relatively little academic research on employee silence. For example, Morrison and Milliken noted that silence is a powerful force in organizations but that it has not received the rigorous research attention that it deserved. The main reasons are as follows:

- Many view silence as the absence of speech (essentially a non- behaviour). When speech dos not occur, the absence of behaviour is not particularly obvious and does not attract attention.
- The related to this first point, the absence of behaviour is more difficult to study than more overt and more obvious behaviour (Dyne, 2003, p.1363).
- The latent or subjective nature of silence makes it inherently difficult to either quality or quantity without the proper lens to recognize or interpret it.
- The hierarchical constructs of organizational structures and power suggest that employee silence may occur too far from senior management's detection and therefore may inhibit an awareness of its presence (Slade, 2008, p.6).

Reasons of organizational silence
Reasons of organizational silence can be categorized into three groups:

Managerial factors:
- one obvious managerial factor for organizational silence is constant negative feedback from supervisors. When an employee gives a supervisor a suggestion and is shot down, employee silence is developed in organization (Wikipedia).
- a second important managerial factor t5hat causes organizational silence is a set of unstated beliefs that managers often implicitly hold about employees. One such belief is that employees are self-interested and untrustworthy. Recent works have emphasized that an economic paradigm currently

dominates the thinking of many managers. This paradigm assumes that individuals are self-interested and effort-averse and can be expected to act in ways to maximize their individual's utilities rather than the organization's performance (Morrison&Milliken, 2000, p.33).

- another managerial factor is when supervisors fail to address the actual problems that exist within organizations. Avoiding these problems or looking for "quick fixes" only make thing worse and causes employees to feel that there is no hope for resolution (Wikipedia).

- if employees are cynical and distrust their leaders, they will keep silence (Dan et al,. 2009,p.1649).

Organizational factor

Morrison and Milliken identified many of the organizational reasons:
- decision making procedures
- pay inequity
- organizational inefficiencies
- poor organizational performance (Slade,2008,p.25)

Furthermore, when an organization relies heavily on contract labour and centralizing decision making, this action leads to organizational silence (Maria, 2006, p.226).

Personality factors

- one personality reason for organizational silence is that people fear of speaking up about problems because they think if they speak up, they may loose their jobs. in some cases subordinates don not want to appear as though they are going against their supervisors, as they may view the employees input as criticism of their practices and be fired.
- silence is associated with many virtues: modesty, respect for others, prudence, decorum. People silence themselves to avoid embarrassment, confrontation and other perceived dangers. (Dan et al,2009,p.1647)
- Morrison and Milliken identified five fears that affect an individual's decision to remain silent. These five fears are:
  - Damaging one' image
  - Being labelled or viewed negatively
  - Damaged relationship
  - Retaliation or punishment
  - Negative impact on others (Slade, 2008, p.8).

Effects of organizational silence
Organizational effects

Organizational silence is Employee silence is extremely detrimental to organizations often causing an "escalating level of dissatisfaction" among employees, "which manifests itself in absenteeism and turnover and perhaps other undesired behaviors". In an article titled "Re-Creating the Indifferent Employee" Carla Joinson talks about negative effects of employee silence such as monetary losses to the organization. Over time silence within organizations causes some employees to be extremely indifferent. Indifferent employees are those who are "indifferent to their jobs, employers and quality of work" (Joinson, 1996).

Effects on Employees

Employee silence also has many effects on the employees themselves. Indifferent employees, often products of ignored employee silence, tend to feel like cogs at machinery factories, developing the attitude "to get along, go along". As a result of this attitude employees sometimes develop depression and other health problems. Sometimes these employees use pills and alcohol as a "cure" for the problems they are experiencing at work, which actually

make their problems worse. Another example of such effects on employees is articulated by researcher Subrahmaniam Tangirala who says that "employee silence affects the personal well being of employees, increases stress," and causes them to "feel guilty, where they often experience psychological problems, and have trouble seeing the possibility of change."

Moose on the Table

Moose on the Table by author Jim Clemmer is a useful tool in studying what can actually happen when employee silence is a problem in the workplace. Clemmer uses a metaphor to explain the affects of employee silence and poor Communication in organizations. He formulates the metaphor using a character named Pete, who begins to see imaginary moose in his place of work that represent all the problems that aren't being addressed and have gotten larger over time. The book portrays what can happen to employees and organizations when this problem is left alone. This book is instrumental in teaching different groups how to deal with employee silence. Clemmer suggests that organizations who suffer from employee silence should take an interactive approach. First, it is important to recognize that there is in fact a problem with employee silence, next managers and employees must work together to identify what issues aren't being talked about. In doing so, managers might conduct interviews with employees and disperse surveys (Clemmer, 2008). Employees "often have ideas, information, and opinions for constructive ways to improve work and organizations. As such, employees want to know that their opinions are important and are not only being taken into consideration, but are being acted upon as well (wikipedia).

Ways of overcoming to organizational silence

How to break silence culture and establish a free climate to encourage employee's voice are big challenges faced to managers (Dan et al, 2009,p.1647) because effects of employee's silence is destructive for an organization but changing an organization from one characterized by a climate of silence to one that encourage voice may require revolutionary change to the system. Theoretically, senior managers with different assumptions ought to be able to design different types of organizational system that, overtime, will be successful in eliciting honest upward communication (Morrison&Milliken, 2000, p.722).

But the main question is that what organizations can do about organizational silence? Opportunities to speak up are as follows:

> ➢ having voice (can I speak?),
> ➢ exercising voice (do I speak?),
> ➢ the content of voice (what do I say?),
> ➢ and presumed reactions to voice (how will others respond to what I say)? (Greenberg&Edwards,2009)

And here are some ways to reduce organizational silence:

> ➢ Top managers and supervisors have to create workplace where employees will feel safe to express their views and will be encouraged to offer their ideas and suggestions. If employees perceive their managers and most importantly their supervisors either as they are not interested in hearing the truth or they will attribute their causes of speaking up behaviour to their wrong source, they will probably choose to remain silent (Vacola&Bouradas,2005,p.453).
> ➢ Another war to eliminate organizational silence is creating procedural justice climate. procedural justice exist when a majority of employees in a workgroup feel that their managers make decisions that include employee input, that are ethical, that are consistent over time and based on accurate information, suppress any bias, and provide favorable contexts for employees to speak up (Wikipedia).
> ➢ Another way to encourage speaking up behaviour is to ensure communication opportunities and create formal systems for the transfer or exchange of information, concerns or ideas. According to Milliken et al. (2003) ''...employees who have ideas or suggestions for improvement who do not feel that they can bring these to their bosses could submit them to a designated person who then presents the ideas for review. This would serve to create some potentially positive outcomes attached to the passage of ideas for process improvements up the hierarchy to offset what are now seen as potentially negative outcomes of upsetting one's boss or being perceived as critical''(Vacola&Bouradas,2005,p.454).

Conclusion

In organizations where silence rules, the employees' silence is certain and the organization does not pay any attention to the employees' comments, attitudes, and their problems, as a result, the employees avoid expressing their views and usually do not try to solve the organizational problems. In other organizations where considerable risk is involved such as airports and "hospitals; should be especially mindful of" employee silence. This is because mistakes caused by employee silence in these organizations can lead to the loss of life or serious damage costs to the organization.

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