A REVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE ANTECEDENTS AND ITS IMPACT ON JOB ATTITUDES

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Abstract. *In order to achieve the objective effectively and efficiently, employees are viewed as wellsprings of progress, innovation, learning and advancement. However a large number of them choose silence and not to pass on their profitable feelings and worries about the issues in their associations. The aim of the study is to use literature to find out the motives for silence among employees and factors that cause silence in an organization. The most widely recognized components bringing about silence are organizational culture, fear and negative criticism by administration, absence of trust and lack of support from management. The literature suggests that silence is a behavioral practice which is also associated with several job attitudes like satisfaction, turnover intention and organizational citizenship behavior. When there is a climate of trust in organization and proper channels of communication are available, employees will be more willing to speak up about organizational issues.*

Key words: Organizational silence, fear, job attitudes, trust, communication

Introduction

To accomplish the end goal effectively, nowadays organizations are attempting to take advantage of the intellectual abilities of their human capital to improve efficiency and productivity. Organizations are giving increasingly attentiveness to techniques and applications such as teamwork, democracy and opportunity of expression in organization and reinforcing the culture of the organization. Organizations now have turned out to be more knowledge-based than ever (Akram, 2015). As a result, employees who express their thoughts and share their understandings prompt to high organization performance. Organizations are supposed to create such an environment. Notwithstanding, majority of the employees prefer to remain silent (Meral, 2014).

Morrison and Milliken (2000) were the first to raise the issue of organizational silence to the level of scholarly discourse in 2000. Organizational silence is sort

of attitude wherein employee's decide to suppress their opinions, information and concerns about organizational matters and when most individuals of organizations choose to keep hushed about organizational affairs, silence becomes a common behavior within the organization (Dan et al.,2009). Silence is most of the times considered as a thought which is close to communication; it is really a critical type of communication (Ali, 2015). Employees pass on a variety of messages associated to work to colleagues, supervisors, managers, and the organizations in their business lives. Silence is more than unimportance (Brinsfield & Greenberg, 2009). Silence doesn't necessarily mean individual's not speaking, it is not only verbal in nature, but it can be physical too. It likewise includes not writing, not being available, negative state of mind, not opposing, not being listened and being disregard. In the context of organization, silence alludes to not speaking, censorship, limitation, minimization, trivialization, rejection, ghettoization and other forms of discounting (Hazen, 2006). Such behaviour hurdles communication channels and negatively effects employee motivation (Vakola & Boudaras, 2005).

Farrell's exit–voice–loyalty–neglect (EVLN) described employees' reactions to dissatisfactory events in terms of two dimensions: a constructive–destructive dimension and an active–passive dimension. In the constructive-active quadrant, voice includes those conducts that aimed at dealing with the situation in hand such as talking to a supervisor or senior management about certain problem. Loyalty refers to those behaviors in the constructive-passive quadrant, where an employee patiently waits for organization to resolve the issue or deal with situation. Exit lies in the destructive-active quadrant and it includes those behaviors where employee avoids dealing with the problem by quitting, such as looking for a new job somewhere else. Finally, in the destructive passive quadrant, deviant behavior is followed by the employee, such as using work hours for personal use, voluntary lateness and absenteeism (Hagedoorn et al., 1999).

Employees are considered as internal customers of the organization and most reliable source for data and information (Ali, 2015). Their input in the form of feedback can be beneficial for the organization. But it is notice that generally tends not to express their perspectives, thoughts continuously. (Clapham & Cooper). After reviewing the management literature it was found that there are some comparable ideas related to silence, such as the employee's voice, issue-selling and whistle-blowing that helps us understand why some people are courageous enough to speak up in the work place (Ioannis, 2011). Van Dyne et al. (2003) claim that, although silence and voice are considered polar opposites, but this is not true. They suggest that "the key feature that differentiates silence

and voice is not the presence or absence of speaking up, but the actor's motivation to withhold versus express ideas, information, and opinions about work-related improvements". Burris et al. (2010) found that only 51 percent of employees within Fortune 100 multinational organizations felt safe to speak up most of the time.

There are two functions of employee voice. One is that voice which has an objective of changing the situation and the second is communicating facts, thoughts or information to boost the performance of the organization (Sean Donovan, 2016). Voice and silence serve as signals used by employees to show their desire or hesitations to become involved in organizational actions and decisions (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Employee voice is also associated with contextual performance. It means that when employee feels that he can freely raise his voice, he performs his task better. At this point management and higher authorities have a role to develop mechanisms and create a climate of voice in the organization, and employees also have a choice that whether they are willing enough to use those channels or they feel it is better to remain silent. Some employees prefer not to use any channel to break the silence despite potentially having something to express (Harlos, 2010). Furthermore, there is a need to understand why employees are not willing to use those opportunities or mechanisms to raise their voice even when they know that it could be meaningful for organization (Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Greenberg & Edwards, 2009).

Research Objectives

The point of this review is to find out what are the major motives for employees to remain silent. This study will also shed light on various forms of silence, impact of silence on different job attitudes and how to overcome silence.

Literature on Organizational Silence

Usually employees have purposes behind their silence as they are having some facts and figures about business between them (Johannesen, 1974). Çakıcı (2007) defined organizational silence as a negative phenomenon, as employees do not share their opinions, ideas or information about issues they face at workplace which inhibit improvement and development. Employees decide to keep their thoughts, opinions and criticism purposely when they suspect that it could have influence both organization and themselves negatively (Ali, 2015). Employee silence is a piece of a bigger class of practices that incorporates both expressive and suppressive open decisions of the workers (Hewlin, 2003).

The employees are reluctant to raise their voice in an organization about some issue or a situation that can be interpreted wrongly by the managers. However it does not mean that they don't talk about it with one another in the absence of

their managers or when they are alone (Morrison, 2000). The just don't dare to speak up to their supervisor; they remain silent because they feel compelled to. Organizational silence is not an individual's behavior; it is a collective behavior and it is spread over the whole organization (Sayğan, 2011). Silence can be associated as general attitude of the employees within an organization that is present whether an employee is a neophyte or an experienced one. Behaviorally, voice and silence are considered as polar opposites. The shallow examination of voice and silence may propose that communicating thoughts (voice) is the opposite of intentionally suppressing ideas (silence) (Linn, 2003).

Silence of employees is commonly considered as suppression of concerns and their point of view (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Exit is the utmost form of suppressive behavior, when employee decides to leave the organization as opposed to raising voice (Hirschman, 1970). This suppressive conduct is moderately common at work place (Johannesen, 1974; Scott, 1993).

Motives of organizational silence

After reviewing the literature, eight major motives for employees to remain silent was found. These motives are defensive motive, acquiescent motive, pro social motive, ineffectual motive, opportunistic motive, disengagement motive, deviant motive and diffident motive.

Acquiescent Motive

Pinder and Harlos (2001) defined acquiescent silence is referred as withholding of information, opinion or views on the basis of resignation (Jain, 2014). It can be due to the belief that speaking up will have no impact and it will be useless or there is personal incapability to influence the situation in hand. It occurs when employees are quite sure their opinions will not be valued by supervisors (Hawass, 2015).

Defensive Motive

In defensive motive to remain silent, employees refrain from sharing information due to fear and for self-protection (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Employees are afraid of being punished, fired from the job or being labeled as whistle blower and trouble maker tends to protect themselves from negative outcomes of voice by becoming reluctant to communicate issues or problems of organization (Alisher, 2015). Employees use silence as shield for their protection.

Pro-social Motive

An employee may remain silent and withhold his opinions, ideas or information in order to provide benefit to some other employee or organization (Dyne et al., 2003: 1368). It occurs in two ways. Either the employee stays noiseless to ensure the advantages of association or he stays quiet with a thought process to secure some other worker's advantages. It is positive dimension of silence as compared to acquiescent and defensive motive to remain silent (Ali, 2015). The employee is motivated to remain silent for concern of others like his social circle rather than by the fear of negative outcomes that could harm him.

Ineffectual Motive

According to ineffectual motive to remain silent, the employee has a belief that speaking up or raising the voice would not positively affect the situation (Brinsfield, 2013). It would be ineffective in changing the situation. It reflects an employee's feeling that his voice will not make any difference (Ali, 2015).

Opportunistic Motive

An employee can withhold opinions or information to promote his self-interest by misguiding or misleading others (Ali, 2015). This is called opportunistic motive to remain silent. Employee uses his silence as an "opportunity" to place his egoistic and personal goals above organizational goals. Opportunistic motive leads to more informal ties to promote self-centered hidden agendas (Ferris and Judge, 1991).

Disengagement motive

Disengagement is a form of disconnection of an individual from his organization or work situation demonstrating behaviors like not caring what happens, not caring about the organization, not willing to get involved and holding a belief that someone else should speak up (Brinsfield, 2013). The employee has a feeling of disengagement from the workplace and he doesn't care to raise his voice for the benefit of organization.

Deviant motive

Deviant motive to remain silent represent an intentional counterproductive work behavior where one does not convey necessary information or share opinion with the goal of revenge or harming some other individual or organization (Shih Yung Chou, 2017). It includes an individual's desire to purposefully harm others, to seek revenge or distort management's image (Brinsfield, 2013).

Diffident motive

Brinsfield (2013) defined diffident motive to remain silent as being hesitant to speak up due to lack of self-confidence. An individual may feel not confident enough to raise his voice or speak up. He feels that if he speaks up, it will draw attention toward him. Employees remain silent when they have no idea or being unsure of right path for complaints (Pirie, 2016).

Factors of organizational silence

There are numerous perspectives about the factors leading to organizational silence (Schechtman, 2008), as a result of its wide range of determinants and causes, some of these are : (1) top management's support to silence (2) lack of communication opportunities, (3) supervisor's support for silence, (4) official authority, and (5) the subordinate's fear of negative reactions (Brinsfield, 2009).

Top management's support to silence

In the accomplishment of the business organizations top Management plays instrumental role. The accessibility of high level of trust in the organizations decreases worries of speaking freely about the issues of labor. Atmosphere of trust in the top management minimize the feelings of instability (Weber & 2001). The perspectives and values of the top administration may contribute significantly to develop an atmosphere of silence, as few organizations do not allow employees to share what they know or feel (Argyris, 1997).

Different exercises perform by top management may cause increment in the level of silence within the organization. These exercises are illustrated in two factors (Morrission & Milliken, 2000).

Manager's Fear of Negative Feedback.

The top management may fear getting negative comments from the subordinate, as it may feel threatened due to this information and by the involvement of individuals or their work. Due to this, those members will deny that information or question the believability of that source, they will assume that this information may be not exact or real (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005).

Manager's Implicit Beliefs.

When the top management unable to know about the reality due to lack of access to information or due to less appreciation to information beneficial for the organization rather than the negative it will cause increase in Silence (Van, Dyne et al., 2003).As a result, the employees will not share work issues with the top management. Moreover the administration may name the employees as problem makers who share work problem (Milliken et al., 2003).

Lack of Communication Opportunities

For the effectiveness of any organization it is important to communicate information with individual for the purpose of decision-making, as it a way to express feelings, ideas and developments. The purpose of sharing this information is to encourage and impel the behavior of others. Through these social needs of individual are fulfilled (Robbins & Judge, 2013). When an organization could not create a proper climate for voice, employees will have to suffer from silence. They will feel that their opinion is not valuable. The freedom of expressing opinion and participation of employees increase the career belongings and job involvement of employees (Smidts et al., 2001).

Supervisor's support for silence

The supervisor has some character in him that make the employees keep relationship with him according to the professional features he possesses. There are two ways to analysis the association between supervisor's strength and importance of silence or talking: if the superior is more influential, then the employees may be willing to talk as the employees have idea about the strength of the superior in problem solving or any other important task. At this point, an employee feels more confident to talk with the supervisor who has the ability to solve work issues inside the organization (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

On the other side, sharing ideas and suggestion with a supervisor having respect and command may be prohibited, since the subordinate has fear of adverse effect of conveying the disobedient opinion (Turner & Pratkanis, 1998).

There is a microcosm atmosphere of silence due to manager's behavior at the place where he works. For that reason, employees incline to silence (Spreitzer, 1996; Sugarman, 2001).

The silence of subordinates is affected by the supervisor's inclinations and tendencies to silence not by the top management. Consequently, when the superior pay attention to his subordinates and the issues faced by them, they will consider him as exemplar (Sparrowe & Liden, 2005). However, authority and prestige of the supervisor can affect the silence of subordinates, but many researchers emphasize that subordinates are more delicate to the threats of talking more than the benefits, in the presence of a strong supervisor (Edmondson, 1996).

Official Authority

Officialdom is a way for which the activities done by employees are planned inside the association, by actualizing few measures (Moorhead & Criffin, 2004). Officialdom relies on upon the nature of the position or zone in the authoritative structure. Managing takes after Managing takes after particular orders and a public servant approach through decision making centralization, and the use of

directions to manage the issues of work. At this moment, there is no proper system of getting feedback. Due to lack of communication channels as the supervisor think that the opinions of employees are insignificant which tends to silence (Ashford et al., 1998).

Subordinate's Fear of Negative Reactions

Due to fear of the reactions employees think that sharing work issues might take away their job or promotion within the organization (Milliken et al, 2003). Employee's perception that his voice can cause loss of his job or fear of losing a status often becomes a major reason for organizational silence.

The impact of organizational silence on job attitudes

It is commonly perceived that "silence is golden" but when it comes to organizational perspective, silence has many restraining effects toward organizational performance. Organization would not be able to get benefit from intellectual contributions of employees if they chose not to communicate with their supervisor or managers. It will hinder effective decision making and performance enhancement (Morrison & Milliken 2000). Bowen and Blackmon (2003) affirms that silence restricts knowledge sharing, collective brainstorm-ming, problem recognition, and probable solutions to organizational issues, as well as it generates new problems depending how common and recurring this phenomenon is. Previously it was assumed that silent only effects the organization, but recent studies has shown that this behavior has negative consequences for employees as well (Karaca, 2012). For instance when employee silence leads to dissatisfaction among employees, disregards for security issues and they will feel more social irresponsibility (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003).

Organizational Silence and Turnover Intention

Turnover intention refers to the likelihood that employees may leave their job or switch the association (Kuvaas, 2006). Turnover intentions are often associated with employee job attitudes like level of satisfaction, commitment and motivation etc. Silence is a behavioral issue and if persisted, it can cause turnover intentions among employees in an organization (MeralElçi, 2014).

Organizational Silence and Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is also known as employee satisfaction. It is defined as positive pleasant state of emotion a person receives while performing his job (Locke, 1976). While some researchers believe that it is not as simple as this definition suggests because of the involvement of many psychological responses of an

employee toward his job. An employee's behavior is closely associated with his level of satisfaction in the organization.

On the exploration of relationship between organizational silence and job satisfaction, it is evident that job satisfaction is negatively related to organizational silence (Aktaş & Şimşek, 2015; Amah & Okafor, 2008; Vakola & Bouradas, 2005; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003). It means that whenever an employee experiences silence, his satisfaction toward job tends to decrease. Researchers have also found that employees who are willing to speak-up and do not remain silent against an organizational issue are more satisfied from their job than those who prefer to remain silent.

Organizational Silence and Organizational citizenship behavior

Organ (1988) defined organizational citizenship behavior as "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization". It is voluntary commitment of an employee with his organization which is not part of his job agreement. Researchers have shown that organizational citizenship behavior is negatively associated with employee silence (Çınar et al., 2013; Şehitoğlu, 2010; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Corporanzo et al., 1997). It means that greater the climate of silence in an organization has, lesser will be the citizenship behavior among its employees.

How to overcome organizational silence

An organization can take several measures to overcome silence. One way to break the barriers of silence is through organizational justice (Harlos, 2001; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Procedural justice can be used as a tool to eliminate silence. It creates a climate of trust between an employee and organization. Once an individual gains trust in his organization or supervisor, he tends to speak up and starts communicating opinion and information. Trust will also increase the level of participation of employees.

Fear is one of the major reasons why employees remain silent. Employee feels fear of negative outcomes, fear of losing his job or status once he speaks up. Job instability and job insecurity must be reduced. Those who are courageous enough to speak up for the betterment of organization should be openly welcomed rather than threatened.

The role of supervisor and manager is also very important in this context. Top management has a responsibility to create a climate in an organization where every employee will feel free and fearless to communicate his opinion and information. If employees feel that their voice will fall on deaf ears and

supervisor or manager will not be interested in hearing their voice, they will prefer to remain silent (Vacola & Bouradas, 2005).

Conclusions

Review of the facts expounded that silence cannot be equated to the absence of speaking up, but must be seen as an active state where a negative work environment and hierarchal order makes it extremely unfavorable for an employee to voice his opinions, views and concerns which serve to nurture the vitality of any organization.

A negative work environment makes it unlikely for an employee to voice his opinions on sensitive issues or on any issue, whatsoever. The most often cited reason for not speaking up is the perceived threat of jeopardizing one's valued relationships and threat of being labeled a troublemaker. This hesitance to speak up and withholding the information undermines organizational decision making and efficiency.

Communication is vital to the growth and functioning of any organization. Workplace politics can lead to a culture of silence and lack of communication. It is responsibility of higher level management to build open channels of communication in the workplace to ensure smooth and efficient performance of the organization.

The phenomena of silence can't be ignored at any level. It is expected from the employees that they will contribute for the development of organization by sharing their views, opinions, knowledge, and actively participating with their suggestion. Sometimes lack of confidence and personal inability becomes a reason for not speaking up. If the silence becomes the general practice in an organization, it hinders the way toward creativity and innovation.

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