

**A STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE BASED ON DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Background – To sustain in this competitive world, an organization expect their employees to take initiatives and accept more responsibilities. Although they want their employees to express their ideas and knowledge, the presence of norms and procedures at the organization prevent the employees to speak up and express their views. This causes the organizational silence in an organization.*

*Aims – The research study targets to explore the constructs of antecedents and consequence of organizational silence as experienced by the employees in an organization and to discover the effects of these constructs on the demographic variables of the employees.*

*Design/Methodology – A sample of 121 respondents was collected from the employees of Automobile sector in Coimbatore region. The antecedents of the organizational silence measured were Top management attitude to silence, Supervisor's attitude to silence and Communication opportunities, which causes an impact on employee silence behavior and job attitude such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction.*

*Results/Findings – Results shows the exploration of the constructs of organizational silence and shows that the individual and organizational demographic variables are generally affected by these constructs.*

*Conclusion – Comparing to the Individual demographic variable such as gender, age and education, the Organizational demographic variables like technical division, designation and experience of the employees make more difference on the study constructs of the Organizational Silence.*

**Keywords**

**Communication Opportunities, Demographic variables, Employee silence behavior, Job satisfaction, Organizational commitment, Organizational silence.**

## INTRODUCTION

In this Globalization era, the organization expects their employees to take initiative and accept responsibility to have high productivity, to meet the customer expectations and to succeed in a competitive market. For these reasons, the organizations look after those employees who are ready to express their ideas, share the information and knowledge. Although the organizations focus on open communication, the presence of norms and procedures, prevent the employees from expressing their views.

Most of the employees believe that the organizations operates with a closed mind, do not support their knowledge and relationships. This makes the people to discuss the issues only in private, and do not have courage to give the information to their supervisors and managers. This leads to the organizational silence, Morrison and Milliken (2000) explains it as "the employee's choice to withhold of their opinions and concerns about organizational problems".

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Organizations are increasingly demanding more and more from their employees such as 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 (Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997). Although this focuses on empowerment and open communication channels, so many employees report that their organizations do not support communication and sharing of information and knowledge which are some of the reasons why change management programs fail (Beer and Noria, 2000).

Senge (1999) in expression of silence on climate change, states that the organization operates with a closed mind, in which the staff investigate the issues related to their duties and neglect to interact. As a result, the problem of organization in a non-institutional environment enhances the atmosphere of discontent organization (Senge, 1999).

Van Dyne (2003) stated organizational silence as an organizational behavior has been defined as "consciously refrained from expressing ideas, information and opinions related to the job. Henrikson and Dayton (2006), said that organizational silence is defined as a mass phenomenon and very few people participate and comment in response to the problems faced by the organization. Organizational silence will cause the employees to intentionally withhold opinions and concerns about the Organizational matters. It may result in employees' feelings of not being valued and his perceived lack of control.

Argyris (1977) stated that there are norms and procedures that often prevent them from speaking or understanding people and the organization. While there is a culture of silence among the members, they encountered a clear contradiction, so that most employees know about organizational issues and they provide accurate information, but they didn't have courage to give the information to the manager or the supervisor (Molykin and Morrison, 2000).

According to Pinder and Harlos (2001), employee silence is defined as 'the withholding of any form genuine expression about the individuals behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his or her organizational circumstance to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress' (p.334). Brinsfield et al. (2009) claimed that silence may also be at team and organizational levels. They expressed that silence can begin at individual level at the beginning, and then it may become 'contagious' among team members in case many individuals are unwilling to speak up (p.19).

Employee silence is a subset of a larger class of behaviors that include both expressive and suppressive communicative choices of employees (Hewlin, 2003). Silence can be a reason to submit to any conditions, sometimes due to fear sometimes conservative and behaviors in order to create opportunities for others to express their opinions (Tolabas and Kolb, 2012). Brinsfield research (2009) showed that employee silence is contagious phenomenon, multi-dimensional, measurable and significantly associated with organizational phenomena (Zehir&Erdogan, 2011).

Organizational silence effects on the development of the organization because it prevents the negative feedbacks by influence of which the organization is not able to examine and correct the

errors (Miller, 1972). It is an art to teach the employees how to say "no". These negative behaviors lead to organizational silence, so that the employees neglect them (Cox, 1993).

Panahi et al (2012) focused on the degree of demographic dissimilarity between employees and top managers may contribute to a climate of silence. Degree of demographic dissimilarity between employees and top managers was manipulated by specifying similarity or dissimilarity of ethnicity, age, and gender. The similarity or dissimilarity of the demographic profile (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, age) of the top management team in comparison to that of lower-level employees might influence the prevalence of silence-creating beliefs. Research on diversity has shown that salient differences often create distrust and fear of the unknown (Cox, 1993). Hence, the greater the demographic dissimilarity between top management and others within the organization, the more likely it is that top management will view employee input with suspicion.

Nikmaram et al (2012) considered a Direct Effects of Demographic Dissimilarity. Demographic dissimilarity between top managers and lower-level employees was a factor that was hypothesized, would increase the likelihood of management holding beliefs that contribute to silence. This variable is also likely to contribute more directly to a climate of silence by affecting the perceptions and beliefs of lower-level employees. Research has shown that the common experience of being different from those in positions of power leads to some predictable reactions on the part of those at lower levels in the hierarchy (Ely, 1994). When a large number of employees see that people like themselves are underrepresented at the top, they may be more likely to conclude that the organization does not value the input of people like themselves. This conclusion, in turn, may foster the belief that it is even more risky for them to honestly voice their opinions than it is for employees who are more similar to those at the top.

The antecedents of organizational silence are top management attitude to silence, supervisor attitude to silence and communication opportunities. Employee silence behavior is measured in an organization based on the antecedents. The consequence will result in the measure of job attitudes such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Vakola and Bouradas 2005).

The role of top management is considered crucial for the success of the change in the change management literature (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Kotter, 1996), since trust in top management can reduce feelings of uncertainty and unfounded fears (Weber and Weber, 2001). Argyris and Shon (1978) analyze the fear of feedback among managers indicating that they want to avoid embarrassment, threat and feelings of incompetence. Therefore, they question the intentions of their subordinates and the credibility and accuracy of their feedback (Korsgaard et al., 1998). As a result, top managers become reluctant to share their mistakes, ask for help from their peers or subordinates and admit that somebody else's solution may work better. These reactions constitute the "macro" climate of silence.

Donaghey et al., (2011) explain how management attitude and behaviors can, through the design of particular institutional arrangements, perpetuate a climate of silence and affect organizational participations.

Supervisor's behavior affects various aspects of an employee's work behavior due to the power that supervisor hold over employee outcomes and due to proximal nature of the supervisor-subordinate relationship (Pierce et al., 1984). Although supervisors are committed to their role and task and, in change contexts, they support improvement efforts; at the end they feel threatened by the prospect of examining their own role, responsibility and performance. They feel defensive and fear the idea that their performance may not be always adequate and that their salaries cannot be justified. As a result, they project the blame of any problems away from themselves and they prefer to negatively comment on their subordinate's behavior, unclear goals or organizational inefficiencies. This type of behavior creates a "micro" silence climate where employees cannot trust that their supervisors will not penalize them directly or indirectly for revealing mistakes or for questioning their course of action.

Some people believe that some of the managers work in stressful environments and they cannot change their conditions, which affects on the organizational silence. Therefore, this condition

increases the managers' dissatisfaction. The organizations, which accept this trust are regarded as the prosperous organizations (Dimitris&Vakola, 2007).

Communication opportunities are related to openness and trust in communication, information sharing, perceived feelings of having a voice and being taken seriously. Experiencing openness in communication with top management supervisors and colleagues leads to greater organizational identification which concerns the perception of "oneness" with an organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Smidts et al., 2001). With respect to "openness" about organizational issues, employees have the opportunity to share information and ideas` and give their opinions and suggestions, which lead to a better sense of belonging to and involvement in the organization (Lawler, 1989).

Rusbult et al., (1982) and Farrell (1983) studies, indicate that employees may show slack and disregardful behavior in some situations. This cause atrophy in organizational relationships and alienated employees withdraw from committed organizational participation to more silent.

Porter et al. (1974) define organizational commitment as "the relative strength of an individual's identification and involvement in a particular organization". Mowday et al. (1982) conceive commitment as an attitude, which reflects the nature and quality of the linkage between an employee and an organization. It is a state in which an individual identifies with a particular organization and its goals and wishes to maintain membership in order to facilitate these goals. It is argued that commitment often establishes an exchange relationship in which individuals attach themselves to the organization in return for certain rewards from the organization (Buchanan, 1974).

Bateman and Strasser state that the reasons on studying on organizational commitment relate to: (1) employees' behavior and performance efficiency, (2) attitude, affection and cognition paradigms such as job satisfaction, (3) job traits and employees' role such accountability and (4) personal traits such as age and proficiency.

According to Morrison and Milliken (2000), organizational silence leads to feelings of not being valued, perceived lack of control and cognitive dissonance, which result in low satisfaction, commitment and motivation. Also, Oliver (1990) argues that the above determinants affect outcomes such as turnover, stress level and job effort towards the organization. It is important to note here that commitment differs from the concept of job satisfaction (Mowday et al., 1982).

#### METHODOLOGY

A study was conducted at the Automobile sector in Coimbatore region. The research was done in a systematic way and an in-depth study was made about the constructs of Organizational silence.

The research was trying to understand

The antecedents of the Organizational Silence namely Top management attitude to silence, Supervisor's attitude to silence and Communication Opportunities

The consequence of the Organizational silence like Organizational Commitment, Job Satisfaction

The Employee behavior to silence is one of the outcomes of the antecedents of Organizational silence, which have impact on the consequences

The respondents chosen for the study belongs to the executive cadre who were responsible for different technical and administrative categories. The instrument was circulated to 152 respondents, out of which 121 questions were valid, reliable and complete in all aspects. This indicates the response rate of 79.6%. The data was collected by a deep discussion and through a personal interview from each respondent. The details about study were explained and their willingness to complete the instrument was sorted. After building rapport with the individual over a discussion on wising the views and organizational silence in general, they responded to the survey items. Then the cronbach's alpha test was performed to test the reliability value and it was found to be greater than 0.7 for each study constructs.

#### MEASURES

*Top management attitude to silence:*The role of top management is considered crucial for the success of the change in the change management since trust in top management can reduce feelings

of uncertainty and unfounded fears (Weber and Weber, 2001). The instrument was measured by a five point scale ranging from 1- strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree, with the average overall score  $\alpha = 0.922$ . Three items were reversed score. An example item is “Top management of the company encourages employees to express their disagreements regarding company issues”.

*Supervisor’s attitude to silence:* Supervisor’s behavior affects various aspects of an employee’s work behavior due to the power that they hold over employee outcomes and due to proximal nature of the supervisor-subordinate relationship (Pierce et al, 1984). The instrument was measured by a five point scale ranging from 1- strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree, with the average overall score  $\alpha = 0.792$ . An example item is “I believe that my supervisor encourages his/her partners to express different opinions or disagreements”.

*Communication opportunities:* The Communication Opportunities is related to openness and trust in communication, information sharing, perceived feelings of having a voice and being taken seriously. When communication opportunities exist and communication channels are open, there is involvement in decision making; active participation in discussions about organizational issues (McCauley and Kuhnert, 1992; Smidts et al, 2001). The instrument was measured by a five point scale ranging from 1- strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree, with the average overall score  $\alpha = 0.695$ . An example item is “There is a systematic and organized exchange of knowledge and experiences among employees in this company”.

*Employee silence behavior:* The Organizational silence will cause the employees to intentionally withhold opinions and concerns about the Organizational matters. It may result in employees’ feelings of not being valued and his perceived lack of control (Bandura, 1989; Spreitzer, 1996). The instrument was measured by a five point scale. First four items, answers the range from 1- Always to 5 – Never, the last three items, answered the range from 1 – Difficult to 5- easy with the average overall score  $\alpha = 0.892$ . An example item is “How often you express your disagreements to your managers concerning the company issues”.

*Organizational commitment:* The Organizational Commitment is the relative strength of an individual’s identification and involvement in an Organization. It is a state in which an individual identifies with a particular organization and its goals and wishes to maintain membership in order to facilitate these goals (Porter et al, 1974). The instrument was measured by a five point scale ranging from 1- strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree, with the average overall score  $\alpha = 0.661$ . An example item is “The company encourages me to put the maximum effort in order to be more productive”.

*Job Satisfaction:* The Job Satisfaction represents the individual’s response to his/her job and emphasizes one’s own performance. It reflects more immediate reactions to specific aspects of the work environment like supervision, pay etc (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). The instrument was measured by a five point scale ranging from 1- strongly dissatisfied to 5 – strongly satisfied, with the average overall score  $\alpha = 0.749$ . An example item is “To which extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the training in this company”.

#### OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study framed are as follows

To explore the antecedents namely Top management attitude to silence, supervisor attitude to silence and communication opportunities and the consequence like organizational commitment and job satisfaction of Organizational silence

To test whether the individual demographic variables such as gender, age and education affect the study constructs of Organizational silence

To test whether the organizational demographic variables such as technical division, designation and experience of the employees affect the study constructs of Organizational silence

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

## Exploring the Domains

The exploration of all the study constructs namely Top Management attitude to silence (TS), Supervisor's attitude to silence (SS), Employee's behavior to silence (ES), Communication Opportunities (CO), Organizational Commitment (OC) and Job Satisfaction (JS) are analyzed based on their overall mean scores and standard deviation scores as shown in the table 1.

Table 1

Exploring the Study Constructs

S.No.	Study Constructs	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Top Management attitude to silence	4	0.742
2	Supervisor's attitude to silence	4.08	0.584
3	Communication Opportunities	4.10	0.531
4	Employee's behavior to silence	3.98	0.706
5	Organizational Commitment	4.18	0.575
6	Job Satisfaction	4.07	0.650

From the seven study constructs used for the study, Organizational Commitment has scored the highest with the mean value of 4.18. The next highest mean value is 4.10 by the constructs Communication Opportunities. The Employee's behavior to silence has scored the lowest score of 3.98. To study the difference in the study constructs based on Personal Demographic variables

The personal demographic questions such as gender, Age and education were considered. The study constructs were analyzed against these individual demographic values. To test the difference between the dimensions of Organizational Silence across gender, the t test was performed. The t, df and sig values of the study constructs across gender are shown in table 2.

The ages of the respondents were grouped as below 23 years, 23-27 years, 28-39 years, 40 and above. To test the homogeneity in the study constructs of Organizational Silence across the different age groups, ANOVA test was performed. The F and sig values of the study constructs across different age groups are shown in table 2.

The education of the respondents was categorized under 4 types. They were schooling, Diploma, UG and PG. To test the homogeneity in the study constructs of Organizational Silence across the education, ANOVA test was performed. The F and sig values of the study constructs across education are shown in table 2.

Table 2

To study the difference in the study constructs based on gender, age and education of employees

Constructs	Gender			Age		Education	
	t-value	df	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Top Management attitude to silence	.654	119	0.51	3.705	0.01	.359	0.78
Supervisor's attitude to silence	-.135	119	0.89	0.855	0.47	3.754	0.01
Communication Opportunities	1.985	119	0.05	2.711	0.05	.334	0.80
Employee's behavior to silence	-.436	119	0.66	0.581	0.63	.664	0.58
Organizational Commitment	1.915	119	0.06	1.230	0.30	.354	0.79
Job Satisfaction	.385	119	0.70	1.145	0.33	1.771	0.16

Considering the study constructs, there is no variation based on the gender. The top management attitude to silence shows the difference with the employees based on varying age group. The supervisor's attitude to silence shows the difference with the employees based on education. The other constructs like communication opportunities, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and employee's behavior to silence do not show any difference in the employees based on the personal demographic values like gender, age and education.

Based on the personal demographic variables, all the constructs remain the same on variation with gender. On varying age groups, top management attitude to silence shows the variation on different age groups, while other constructs are not affected. Considering the education of the employees, the supervisor's attitude to silence alone has an impact on the employee's education. The other constructs are the same on varying education of the employees.

To study the difference in the study constructs based on Organizational Demographic variables

The technical division, designation and experience of the employees were to be dealt as the organizational demographic variables. All the technical divisions in Rajshree Automotive Pvt. Ltd. are considered. They are DCRC, Insurance, Human Resource, IT, Service, Bodyshop, House-keeping, Parts, Admin and Accounts. There are many designations of the employees. For analysis purpose, they were grouped into 5 heads. They are Manager, Incharge and Sr. System Admin; Officer, Supervisor, Sr. Technician, Service Advisor, Sr. Manager Front Office and Executive; Road Tester and Technician; Assistant, Data Entry Operator and Greeter; Cleaner, Helper and Driver. The experience of the employees working in this concern was considered. They are grouped as less than one year, 1-2 years, 3-5 years, 6-10 years and above 10 years. The ANOVA tests are performed for the study constructs across the organizational demographic variables individually and the F and sig values for the same are shown in table 3.

Table 3

To study the difference in the study constructs based on technical division, designation and experience of employees

Constructs	Technical division		Designation		Experience	
	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Top Management attitude to silence	2.277	0.02	2.641	0.04	.588	0.67
Supervisor's attitude to silence	1.600	0.12	1.328	0.26	.510	0.73
Communication Opportunities	3.981	0.00	2.228	0.07	.529	0.71
Employee's behavior to silence	2.081	0.04	1.159	0.33	3.330	0.01
Organizational Commitment	4.562	0.00	1.436	0.23	.414	0.80
Job Satisfaction	2.642	0.01	1.815	0.13	2.361	0.06

Based on the study constructs, the top management attitude to silence shows variation with employees based on technical division and designation hold by them. The communication opportunities show a difference with the employees working in various technical divisions while the designation and experience of the employees are not affected. The employee's behavior to silence is differing based on the technical division and employee's experience. The organizational commitment is varying with the employees based on technical division. The job satisfaction of the employees is found to be varied on technical division on which employees belong.

Considering the organizational demographic variables, the technical division in which the employees has the impact on the study constructs such as top management attitude to silence, communication opportunities, employee's behavior to silence, organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Supervisor's attitude to silence alone remains same across different technical divisions. On considering the designation, the top management attitude to silence alone shows the difference. Based on the experience of the employees, the employee's behavior to silence alone show the variation, while other constructs are not altered.

#### IMPLICATION FOR ORGANIZATIONS

On analyzing the effects of Organizational silence study constructs on the demographic variables, the following implications are perceived.

Considering the different age groups, the Top management interaction shows variation in their behavior. The relation between the top management and the employees above 40 years is high and they have low impact of organizational silence. The employees in 23-27 age group have the least interaction with top management, contributes higher effect of organizational silence.

The employees perception on supervisor's attitude to silence is varying based on education. They show more familiarity with the employees having UG background and have less casualness with the employees having schooling education.



The employee's views remain same on all the constructs of organizational silence irrespective of gender.

The employee's insight from different technical divisions has fluctuations in constructs of organizational silence. The top management attitude to silence, communication opportunities, employee silence behavior and job attitudes like organizational commitment and job satisfaction are differing with respect to the employees from different technical divisions.

Based on designation of the employees, the high level employees have an easiness to interact with the top management and their communication opportunities are also high. But the low level employees have some restrictions with top management and in communication opportunities.

Employee silence behavior differs based on the employee's experience. The employees with more experience have low impact on constructs of silence. They easily deliver their views. Whereas the employees with minimal experience have the difficulty in expressing their ideas. They have high impact on organizational silence.

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