

## EMPLOYEE SILENCE AND ITS EFFECTS ON ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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### ABSTRACT

*Access to information about organizations potentials or issues could strengthen the level of prosperity, transformations and stability, so also when vital information are withheld (silenced on) could cause the opposite. It is therefore pertinent to highlight the factors which could be responsible. The study employs survey design as its research approach. The sample frame consists of all 2015 – 2016 Postgraduate students in Babcock University with the total population of 1,039. This study adopted a simple random sampling selection of 400 from the eleven (11) schools. Well-structured questionnaire were distributed as means of data collection of which 380 representing 95% were successfully filled and retrieved. The data were analysed using simple percentage based on three research questions The findings indicated that, there is meaningful relationship between ES and OE and the influence dimension is very significant. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others the need to establish effective communication and team-spirit among employees as it enhances employee commitment and productivity. The study also provided suggestion for future research.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Organizational silence, organization effectiveness, silence, influence, organization.*

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Employee being the main ingredient of organizational success and productivity, they possess information, experience, institutional knowledge, and ideas about their organizations. They also encounter many problems at all stages of their work. Although it is expected from them to report the problems or share the solutions and information they have, they sometimes choose to remain silent. Park and Keil (2009) examine this silence in three dimensions. Firstly, silence can be intentional. Employees remain silent even if they are aware of the problem and know of a better solution. Secondly, silence can be defens mechanism. Employees can remain silent in order to protect their personal interests or not to openly contradict others. Lastly, silence can be a collective decision of employees; a collective reaction of not sharing ideas, thoughts, or knowledge with others. Remaining silent creates negative consequences both for employees and the organization. Remaining silent from the perspective of the

organization means not benefitting from the intellectual contributions of employees, problems not being identified, feedback not provided, information not obtained directly, and solutions to problems remaining inadequate. The organizations, in which silence is the dominating atmosphere, witness changes in organizational commitment of their staff. Not only the employee silence disrupt employees' commitment, but also it leads to the appearance of a behavior entitled organizational rumors. Consequently, effect organizational effectiveness and result in its variation. Employee silence is feeling worthless, perceived lack of control and creates cognitive dissonance that leads to decreased motivation, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. Managers are to ensure the smooth running and effectiveness of the organization by gaining staff commitment to the goals of their organization and in this regard, managers do their best to make them as more loyal as possible. Some managers believe that, through collective management,

staffs can gain commitment and reduce disastrous behaviors such as turnovers, attendance, hardiness, and absenteeism to the least. If employee silence does occur, communication suffers and as a result harms the overall functioning of the organization. In an article entitled "Get Talking" author Chris Penttila says, "Employee silence is killing innovation and perpetuating poorly planned projects that lead to defective products, low morale and a damaged bottom line" (Penttila, 2003).

Gulsun, Ozlem, Ilkay, and Cuma, (2014) observed that interest towards studies on organization silence in all sectors have increased in recent years and when these studies were evaluated in general, it was seen that studies were carried out in banks and hotel managements institutions. The term organizational silence among sectors such as universities, other educational institutions, has not been analyzed adequately at international level and this issue is of great importance to economic development.

**Objective of the work:** In the light of the above, this paper sought to clarify the reason and issues employees are silent and the effect of the silence on organizational effectiveness.

**Research questions:** The survey aimed at addressing the following research questions;

1. What are the reasons why employees choose to remain silent at work?
2. What are the issues the employees remain silent about?
3. To what extent are the effects or consequences of the silence?

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Employee Silence

Morrison and Milliken (2000) define organizational silence as a typically collective act of employees consciously not sharing their knowledge, beliefs, thoughts, ideas, and experiences with the management about the issues for their work or to improve their working environment.

*Sahar, Hamide, Samereh, Maryam and Seyed (2012) posit that, the organizational or employee silence is an inefficient process which can waste all organizational efforts and may take various forms, such as collective silence in meetings, low levels of participation in suggestion schemes, low levels of collective voice and so forth.*

The silence by employees in an organizational silence is a behavioral choice that can deteriorate or improve organizational performance. Excluding its emotionally difficult expression, silence can convey approval and sharing or disfavor and opposition, thus becoming a pressure mechanism for both individuals and organizations (Ghodratollah, Reihaneh, & Mojtaba 2012). A phenomenon which causes refrain from commenting on the problems of organization is called organizational silence (Gazmeh, Farmani & Sedaghat 2014).

#### 2.1.2 Silence

Said and Diar (2014) defined silence as when the members prefer to be silence about some secret and confidential information and statistics. Being silent, keeping one's tongue, being calm, all mean silence in a general sense but within organizations this must be a concept beyond simple passivity which means that silence can have a message. The silence of the working staffs is an intentional behavior that can lead to the perception of inequality in the organizations.

The occurrence of a phenomenon called internal isolation among the staffs (Nasr& Agha, in Said & Diar 2014).

According to Hazen, (2006) Silence is not only defined as not to speak but also defined as not to write, not be present, not to hear and to ignore. Silence also includes talk or text without credit. Moreover, silence may refer to censoring, suppression, marginalization, trivialization, exclusion and other forms of discount. Pinder and Harlos (2001) also defined silence as the absence of voice as it has its own form of communication, involving a range of cognitions, emotions, or intentions such as objection or endorsement.

Zehir and Erdogan, (2011) distinguished silence in two forms, such as "quiescence" and "acquiescence" silence. In terms of "quiescence" silence represented deliberate omission, while "acquiescence" silence is based on submission.

#### 2.1.3 Types of silence

Van, Ang and Botero (2003) differentiate three specific behaviors based on three employee motives. They introduced three types of silence as followings:

- **Acquiescent/ Submissive Silence:**

Acquiescent Silence as withholding relevant ideas, information, or opinions, based on resignation and become satisfied with everything. Thus, Acquiescent Silence suggests disengaged behavior that is more passive than active. When most people label another person's behavior as 'silent', they often mean the person is not actively communicating

- **Defensive Silence:** define defensive silence as withholding relevant ideas, information, or opinions as a form of self-protection, based on fear. Defensive silence is intentional and proactive behavior that is intended to protect the self from external threats. In contrast to acquiescent silence, defensive silence is more proactive, involving awareness and consideration of alternatives, followed by a conscious decision to withhold ideas, information, and opinions as the best personal strategy at the moment. Pinder and Harlos (2001) used the term Quiescent Silence to describe deliberate omission based on personal fear of the consequences of speaking up.

- **Pro-social Silence:** define Pro-social Silence as withholding work-related ideas, information, or opinions with the goal of benefiting other people or the organization – based on altruism or cooperative motives. Pro-social Silence is intentional and proactive behavior that is primarily focused on others. Pro-social Silence is discretionary behavior that can not be mandated by an organization. Like defensive silence, Pro-social silence is based on awareness and consideration of alternatives and the conscious decision to withhold ideas, information, and opinions. In contrast to defensive silence, Pro-social Silence is motivated by concern for others, rather than by fear of negative personal consequences that might occur from speaking up.

- **Friendly silence:** the motive for this kind of silence is letting other speak and creating opportunities for the spread of attempts.

Summary;

The reasons for the submissive silence:

- ♦ The individual believes that it is useless to speak.
- ♦ The individual is not sure about his abilities to exercise any influence.

This kind of silence indicates fear as the main and central motive in persons.

The reasons for defensive silence:

- ◆ Agitating others
- ◆ Creating bad consequences for oneself.

The defensive silence is an intentional and active behavior with the aim of protecting oneself against the external threats. Defensive silence explains a situation in which people do not spread the news for the fear that others might be agitated or there might be some bad consequences for the person that reveals the information.

The reasons for friendly silence

- ◆ Taking benefits from the others' speeches.

The friendly silence occurs with the aim and intention of letting others take benefits in an organization from shared attempts. This kind of silence is intentional and active that generally focuses on the others. It is done with attention to some considerations and knowledge about the consequences and decisions and refusal from giving ones' ideas and opinion.

## 2. 1. 4 Organizational Effectiveness

This is one of the chief factors in terms of organizational rating of the staffs and organizational output (Mojtaba, Reihaneh, & Hasan 2014). Jean (2003) posit that Organizational effectiveness (OE) has been one of the most extensively researched issues since the early development of organizational theory (Rojas 2000). Despite some consensus, there is still significant lack of agreement on the definition and operationalization of this concept.

According to Michael, Jamie, Deborah, and Hilda .W (2010) organizational effectiveness is the ability to ensure sustainability, through leaders focusing their attention on aligning their people, the systems, the structure and roles with the organization's strategy, while engaging their employees with their jobs and with the organization. They also posit that organizational effectiveness is the integration of framework that address the following elements;

**Strategy:** The role, purpose, and strategic direction that summarizes the work of the organization and/or division being clear and appropriate.

**Structure, Capacity, and Capability:** Capable people doing the right work through a "fit for purpose" structure and clearly described role accountabilities and relationships.

**Leadership:** Leaders have the capability and capacity to drive sustainable business success

**People Systems & Processes:** Leaders need to be supported by good people systems and processes. These systems and processes work in organizations by sharing adequate information, and make well-informed decisions across the business. Organizational processes and systems are an extension of leadership, creating consistency and trust.

**Culture & Values:** A set of shared, basic assumptions about how to behave and carry out work within the organization that is aligned to business strategy. The systems, symbols, and behaviors that leaders and other employees are exposed to within an organization must align to the desired culture to achieve the business strategy.

**Employee Engagement:** High numbers of engaged employees whose hearts and minds are aligned with both the job that they do and the organization that they work for. Engaged employees are:

- Satisfied with their current job and their organization as an employer.
- Committed to making the job and organization successful.
- Proud of their organization and the work they do.
- Willing to positively talk about their job and the organization.

Integration of these elements will produce powerful and mutually reinforcing results as OE as no single initiative can create organizational effectiveness. Excellence is required across the full range of organizational effectiveness framework elements.

## 2.1.5 Effect of Silence on Organizational Effectiveness

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" (Colquitt and Greenberg 311-312). Communication is the key to an organization's success and if employee silence does occur, communication suffers and as a result harms the overall functioning of the organization. In an article entitled "Get Talking" author Chris Penttila says, "Employee silence is killing innovation and perpetuating poorly planned projects that lead to defective products, low morale and a damaged bottom line" (Penttila, 2003). This indicates how much an organization can suffer just because of lack of proper communication. 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). Indifferent employees cause the organization to lose money and function poorly. Unfortunately when major monetary losses are detected in organizations, managers tend to react by trying to recover the loss, overlooking the fact employees have become indifferent as a result of unaddressed employee silence. More often than not employees who are not doing their share of the work are also not speaking up with the problems they see, leading to a perpetual cycle of employee silence (Joinson, 1996).

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework:

Spiral of Silence theory developed by Noelle-Neumann in context of public opinions in organizational concept. This theory explains how the opinions of majority overcome and opinions of minority weakened. They suggest that understanding of people about the ways of dealing with the problems in working group significantly effect on organizational voice. Specifically, people express their opinions when they believe that their position is supported by others, and they remain silent otherwise (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003).

## 2.3 Empirical

Vakvla and Bvrdivs (2006) empirically tested and investigated the model and the implications of organizational silence of Morrison Molykin. These two researchers survey 677 corporate employees in the technology sector, they identified the three dimensions atmosphere of silence: senior management attitude to silence, supervisors attitude

to silence, and to the communication opportunities. These three dimensions predict the behavior of the staff’s silence.

Edmonson (2003) examined learning in interdisciplinary action teams using qualitative data analyses pointed out dangers when employees remain silent about concerns. Speaking up enabled successful implementation of new practices, whereas reluctance to speak up inhibited implementation.

Right Management conducted a global study of nearly 29,000 employees from ten major industry sectors in 15 countries in the Americas, Europe and Asia Pacific and discovered that to create organizational effectiveness, business leaders need to focus on aligning and engaging their people, the people management systems.

**3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This paper aims to identify the reasons for Organizational Silence and its Effects on Organizational Effectiveness. The study employs survey design as its research approach with focus on students of Babcock College of Postgraduate Studies since its houses employees from different sectors and establishment. A survey design is that in which a portion of the population is selected as representative of the entire population and the instrument was adapted from Cakici (2008) who designed a survey (instrument ) that have five

groups as the reasons why employees choose to remain silent at work. For the purpose of this study the questionnaire consists of four parts. The first part includes demographic variables, the second part was devoted to the questions about the reasons why employees choose to remain silent at work, the third part address the issues the employees remain silent about and the fourth part is on to what extent are the effects or consequences of the silence. Administrative and organizational reasons with (15 items), The Issues that the Employees Remain Silent about (7 items), The Perception Consequences of Silence (8 items) making a total of 30 questions.

The sample size is includes a simple random sampling selection of 400 students from the eleven (11) schools in Babcock College of postgraduate studies. Which includes, school of Agriculture and Industrial Technology, Babcock Business School, Benjamin. Carson School of Medicine, school of Basic and applied sciences, school of computing and engineering sciences, school of education and humanities, school of Law and Security studies, school of management sciences, school of Nursing Sciences, school of Public and Allied Health and Veronica Adeleke school of Social sciences. Responses are categorized using a 5-point Likert Scale and ranged as, Totally Disagree: (TD), Disagree: (D), Neutral: (N), Agree: (A), Totally Agree: (TA)

**4.0 ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESPONSE**

**Table 1: Questionnaire Response Rate**

S/N		Number
1	Copies of questionnaire administered	400
2	Copies of questionnaire returned	380
3	Copies of questionnaire not returned	20
4	Percentage of questionnaire returned	95 %
5	Percentage of questionnaire not returned	5%
	Total Percentage	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

**Findings**

**Table 2: Frequency distribution table of demographics.**

Variables	Measures	N	%
Gender	Female	198	52.1
	Male	182	47.9
Age Group	20 - 29	103	27.1
	30 - 39	115	30.3
	40 - 49	102	26.8
	50 and above	60	15.8
Educational	Masters degree in view	218	57.4
	Mphil "	68	17.9
	Phd "	94	24.7
Length of service	0 - 5 years	85	22.4
	6 - 10	125	32.9
	11 and above	170	44.7
Sector	Educational	192	50.5
	Financial	93	24.5
	Manufacturing	38	10
	Others	57	15

Source: field survey 2016

Descriptive statistics used to describe some of the features of the respondents who participated in the survey. Table-1 provides more detailed information about the sample and the measures.

The data shows that almost all of the respondents (52.3%) are female students. Most of the respondents are in

their thirties (30.3%) and twenties (27.1%). More than half of the respondents are masters degree in view (57.4%) followed by PhDs in view (24.7%). Most of the respondents (44.7%) are their eleventh year and above period of service or career, (32.9%) in there tenth year and (22.4%) are in there first five years of their career. While one fourth (50.5%) of the respondents are from educational sector.

**Table 3: Frequency distribution table of the reasons employees remain silence by factors.**

S/N	Questions Statement	Totally Disagree (TD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Totally Agree (TA)
		%	%	%	%	%
1	Administrative & Organizational Reasons	15.5	18.2	20.3	24.5	21.5
2	The Issues that the Employees Remain Silent about	18.2	17.6	19.7	25	19.5
3	The Perceptual Consequences of Silence	17.4	18.5	19.2	23.9	21

Source: field survey 2016

The table 3: On the other hand, a frequency distribution table of the reasons of the employees remain silent at work, issues employees remain silent about and perceptual consequences of silence was generated according to the respondents' answers. In order to determine what reasons affect employees to remain silent at work. Reasons were grouped under three factors: administrative and organizational reasons, issues that the employees remain silent about and the perceptual consequences of silence.

The findings show that respondents are mostly affected by issues that the employees remain silent about (Agree 25% and Totally Agree 19.5%). The experience of unjust activities (discrimination, favouritism, godfathers) and insufficiency of equipment. This was followed by administrative and organizational reasons that employees remain silent (Agree 24.5% and Totally Agree 21.5 %). They have the fear of being labelled negatively and loss executive satisfaction and the believe that they lack authority. The respondents perception on the consequence of employees silence was also high (Agree 23.9% and Totally Agree 21%). The employee loses his motivation, get stressed and think of changing workplace, the employees turn into individuals who do only the given tasks without contributing to the organization, the sense of "do your work and do not get involved in anything" is settled, activation of working process and services and their improvement are neglected, the speed of organizational development and progress slows down and effective and productive results are not achieved with the current resources.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Morison and Milliken (2000) showed that organizational silence affects the scale of staff's commitment toward organization and may result in changes in such effectiveness and in addition, organizational silence affect organizational commitment as well. Organizational silence can negatively affect the harvesting of institutional knowledge, evolution, and development. The possibility of being excluding when speaking up may cause employees to stop communicating and giving feedback to their supervisors. Combined with a failure to intellectually support employees will lead to ineffective organizational decisions (Kahveci, 2010).

From our findings, organizational effectiveness is critical to the success of any economy. In order to achieve increased and sustainable business results, organizations need to execute the frame work strategy that engage employees in issues of authority as internal mechanism so as to remove any administrative and organizational reasons for employees silence and allow speaking up explicitly.

The current study focused on a very limited number of consequences, It is also important to explore the effects of organisational silence on both individuals and organisations in specific sector of the economy.

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