

Extended Abstract

A Study on the Workplace Determinants of Employee Silence in Indian Organizations

1. Background

Employee silence, the willful withholding of perception, issues, or opinions remains an important hindrance to organizational learning, innovation, and ethical work (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Van Dyne et al., 2003). Despite higher sensitivity to the harmful impact it has, silence is still poorly understood, particularly regarding the low-profile psychological, contextual conditions under which it flourishes (Brinsfield, 2014). Past investigations have predominantly demonstrated silence because of explicit structure such as centralized management, fear of punishment, or inadequate mental security (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). However, this approach disregards the ways in which normative climates, ethical feelings, attitudinal accommodations, and contextual values interact to affect employees' decisions to remain silent (Knoll & van Dick, 2013; Röllmann et al., 2021). This study addresses this gap by exploring how silence emerges not only as a rational avoidance of risk, but as a nuanced, socially situated and resource-dependent action, moving beyond the voice–silence dichotomy to situate silence as an adaptive and deliberate act.

This research is based on Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) to elucidate employee silence. COR shows it as conserving mental capabilities in unsafe contexts. Together, they position silence as both relational protection and resource maintenance, persisting even in favorable environment.

2. Literature review

To highlight the various manners that employees refrain their views and ideas at their workplace, previous studies define this through a framework through the combination of the exit (Hirschman, 1970), voice, loyalty and neglect (EVLN) and the theory of spiral of silence. The EVLN theory illustrates that “employees who are dealing with the existential crisis in their workplace can opt for either exit or voice, contingent upon their level of commitment towards the organization (Hirschman, 1970). The intentional choice of employees not to express their thoughts, perspective and critiques may result in negative implications for individual and organization that decline their organizational commitment level (Xu et al., 2020). Due to breakdown of openness among employees and management, it creates overall sense of worthlessness and devalued, resulting lower their motivation and job satisfaction (Ehtiyar & Yanardağ, 2008).

At the same time employees silence result to increase the workplace ostracism(Yao et al., 2022), increase in workplace incivility(Gustiawan et al., 2023) and significant increase in organizational cynicism(Adamska, 2023).

Previous studies have demonstrated that employees showcase great tendency to speak up their view and idea towards their peers and organization (Lee et al., 2024) when they believe in their norms which permits them to express freely without any negative consequences. The absence of psychological safety is one of the prime factors for employees' silence. On the other hand, negative leadership also plays a significant role to encourage silence behavior among the employees , Chen et al., (2022)illuminated that employees remain their views and knowledge refrain when they don't trust in their leader and their intentions.

Theoretically thoughts have influenced our literature progress and give us a basis for analyzing derived themes using topic modelling analysis and help us to conceptualize our upcoming findings within the pre-established research frameworks.

3. Purpose and Objectives:

After studying literature in this field, we have been able to identify two major gaps. First, most research focuses on structural barriers and fear-based antecedents such as abusive leadership, inadequate psychological safety, and fear of retribution while excluding the subtle effect of workplace environment (Brinsfield, 2014; Morrison, 2023). Environments where incivility conduct is frequent and unattended, might increase silence, while value-infused environments supporting equity and significance might dampen it (McNulty et al., 2018) .Second, the psychological mechanisms linking climate-related conditions and silence are yet insufficiently studied. Emotional pressure, arising from moral distress or pressure, and attitudinal accommodation, referring to gradual acceptance of unfit behavior, and might clarify why employees refrain from speaking up. Yet these are rarely applied in an integrated framework to understand employee silence. In addition, single-wave, cross-sectional designs constructed as a base build limit understanding of indirect processes and conditions over time (Podsakoff et al., 2012), by analyzing the all- related variable through using PLS-SEM and NCA, our research has four (4) major objectives as follows:

- 1.** To explain how unfavorable interpersonal work climate and favorable value climate influence silence.
- 2.** Discuss the contributions made by psychological processes, namely emotional and cognitive stress and attitude transformation, in building a connection between work environments and silence.

3. Employ multi-method research, by combining sufficiency-based (PLS-SEM) and NCA.
4. Encourage a resource-based theory of silence that moves us beyond avoid-harm accounts.

4. Methodology

Data was collected from 302 employees across diverse organizations using a multi-wave design to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Validated scales were employed to measure workplace climate, emotional experiences, attitudinal responses, and silence behaviors, using a 5-point Likert format. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized structural relationships as well as indirect effects through psychological mechanisms (Sarstedt et al., 2017). To complement this, Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA) was conducted to identify factors that act as minimum requirements for silence, thereby clarifying how antecedents' function simultaneously as sufficient and necessary conditions (Richter et al., 2020).

5. findings

The study reveals that unfavorable interpersonal climate and emotional strain have the best explanatory value regarding silence. Those employees who perceived discourteous behavior commonly avoided voicing their opinion, mainly if they also faced moral distress because of other people's behavior. This assigns primacy to emotional strain as an integral psychological process between climate and silence. Attitude adaptation registered less clear-cut and inconsistent effects, reflecting that the acceptance of improper behavior is not consistently followed by silence unless supported with emotional pressure. In contrast, value-oriented positive settings revealed circumscribed direct effects on silence yet acted as contextual resource conditions with an indirect alleviating effect on silence through fostering psychological protection and hardiness.

The NCA study also established that value-based environment and emotional distress were moderately salient needs; silence was improbable in situations without emotional tension or with completely lacking value-based support. It was noted that normative and attitudinal conditions individually failed, meaning that silence phenomenon is conditional upon the simultaneous presence of emotional tension and either benign or adversative depending on contextual conditions.

6. Conclusion

This study redefines employee silence as a resource-based and multidimensional behavior that is conditioned by organizational cultures, emotional stress, and resource availability. On COR (Hobfoll, 1989), it shows that silence is often a resource-saving choice when emotional energy is strained. Moreover, workplace spirituality turns out as a repository of resources that builds cooperation and confidence, and it ends up constricting silence indirectly.

For institutions, the research emphasizes that silence must be understood as protective, not disengaged. Successful resolutions involve breaking down norms that justify incivility, confronting latent emotional expenses, and building value-oriented cultures that restore employees' mental assets.

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avenues for investigating ways in which favorable cultures and shared assets facilitate voice with time.

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