



Enigma of Silence in Organizations: What Happens To Whom and Why?

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Abstract

Organizational silence, which is defined as being employees remaining silent about their views, opinions and concerns about organizational problems, has recently started to receive due interest in organizational behavior literature. This phenomenon, which poses a great barrier to organizational change and development, is frequently experienced in many organizations. Organizational silence is a composition of various personal and organizational factors and thus has negative impacts and results on both individuals and organizations. This study is a qualitative research and has been conducted through face to face interviews with 10 employees who work at the marketing and export departments of a company active in automotive supply industry. Findings of the study suggest that employees experience the phenomenon of organizational silence and the causes that lead to it are in parallel with the ones elaborated on in the literature.

Keywords: *Organization, Silence, Behavior.*

1. Introduction

Organizational Silence is seen as one of the biggest barriers to organizational change and development. Morrison and Milliken (2000: 707) define organizational silence being "for employees to withhold their opinions and concerns about organizational problems." Pinder and Harlos (2001: 334) refers to it as "the withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual's behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his or her organizational circumstances to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress."

Although silence may be perceived as being the opposite of speech; not all forms of silence are the opposite of voice. As in the case of employees protecting confidential information by withholding it from others, some forms of silence can be strategic and proactive (Dyne *et.al.*, 2003: 1360). These structures of silence may denote a certain type of behavior which is active, conscious and deliberate, hence serving a purpose (Pinder and Harlos, 2001: 333).

Organizational silence is interpreted as a collective phenomenon which is a potentially dangerous hindrance to organizational change and development and also as a significant obstacle to the development of a pluralistic organization (Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 707).

In this study it's pointed out the definitions and forms of silence, explained the issues and reasons of remaining silent and presented the results of a qualitative research conducted in a company.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Organizational Silence As a Concept

In management literature, the concept of employee silence may date back to Hirschman, who was the first to try to define it. Hirschman (1970) framed silence as a passive but constructive response synonymous with loyalty, and since then management scientists have continued to equate silence with loyalty. For example, employees who are exposed to bad treatment but do not file formal complaints are commonly regarded as silent but consenting. Whether employee silence reflects behavioral, effective or cognitive elements has usually been overlooked. Therefore, silence has always remained a neglected response of dissatisfied and unjustly treated employees (Pinder and Harlos, 2001: 332).

While Bowen and Blackmon (2003) defines organizational voice as the voluntary expression of people's views to influence organizational actions, they handled organizational silence as the opposite of organizational voice and defined it as a condition that occurs when "people cannot contribute freely to organizational discourse" (Bowen and Blackmon, 2003: 1394).

Silence is multi-dimensional, elusive and difficult to grasp as being ambiguous (Cakici, 2007: 148). Different researchers discuss silence from different perspectives. Morrison and Milliken (2000) reviewed silence as a collective phenomenon at the organizational level, while other researchers such as Miceli and Near (1992), Ashford *et.al.*, (1998), Zhou and George (2001) approach it as an individual phenomenon (Bowen and Blackmon, 2003: 1394).

This decision to not speak up about issues or problems - "silence"- is important to understand, not only because it has the potential to undermine the reporting of unethical and illegal practices, but also because it obstructs the effective organizational learning. This constitutes a barrier to organizational change and development and suppresses pluralism, hence innovation and creativity (Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 707; Milliken and Morrison, 2003: 1563).

One of the reasons for the little attention given to silence is that it is viewed by many researchers as the absence of speech. It is also considered that analyzing not speaking up is more difficult than simply analyzing behavior (Dyne *et.al.*, 2003: 1364).

While many scholars emphasize the importance of upward communication for organizational health and highlight the importance of divergent points of view for effective organizational decision making, it seems paradoxical that so many employees cannot communicate upwardly about problems. It is also paradoxical that problems such as silence usually occur at times when practices such as employee empowerment, which focus on participation, are on the agenda and the fact that most employees in many organizations know the truth about certain issues and problems within the organization but they do not dare to speak that truth to their superiors. (Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 707; Bowen and Blackmon, 2003: 1394)

Redding (1985) argued that most organizations convey the message to their employees that they should not "rock the boat" against corporate policies and management's privileges. Other authors likewise have pointed out that organizations are generally intolerant of dissents and thus employees become reluctant to speak up about problems. (Ewing, 1977; Nemeth, 1997; Scott and Hart, 1979; Sprague and Ruud, 1988 cited in Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 706).

There are empirical studies that indicate that employees feel obliged to remain silent in the face of concerns and problems. For example, in a survey of 845 managers from diverse organizations published in *Industry Week*, it was stated that only 29 percent of managers encouraged employees in their organizations to express opinions openly (Moskal, 1991: 18-25). In addition, Ryan and Oestreich (1991) conducted research based on interviews with 260 employees from 22 organizations throughout the USA and found that more than 70 percent of the employees felt afraid to speak up about issues or problems that they encountered at work. Undiscussable issues in these organizations were pointed out to be decision-making procedures, managerial incompetence, pay inequity, organizational inefficiencies, and poor organizational performance (Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 706). One of the reasons that Ryan and Oestreich's (1991) respondents noted for not speaking upwardly about these issues to their superiors was that they

feared there would be negative repercussions for conveying negative messages to their superiors, and they did not believe that speaking up would make a difference (Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 707).

Some research has shown that in order for employees to express their concerns, they must believe that doing so will be both effective and not cost them too much personally (Ashford *et.al.*, 1998; Miceli and Near, 1992; Withey and Cooper, 1989 cited in Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 707).

2.2. Forms of Silence

A literature review about the forms of silence demonstrates that Pinder and Harlos (2001: 331) have classified employee silence into two forms, namely quiescence and acquiescence. Dyne *et.al.*, (2003: 1362) have developed another form of silence and named it prosocial silence. The three forms of silence are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1: Forms of Silence and Their Critical Characteristics

Nature of Behavior	Primary Motive	Specific Type of Behavior
Employee Passive	Acquiescence (submission)	Acquiescent silence
	Self-protection (fear)	Defensive silence
Employee Proactive	Other-oriented (cooperation)	Prosocial silence

Source: Dyne, L. V., S. Ang and I. C. Botero (2003). *Conceptualizing Employee Silence and Employee Voice as Multidimensional Constructs. Journal of Management Studies*, 40 (6), pp. 1362.

2.2.1. Acquiescent Silence

This is defined as the withholding of information, views, opinions and ideas in the face of developments in the organizations and this attitude is based on acquiescence. It is, therefore, a passive behavior. In the case of acquiescent silence, employees approve the status quo, do not want to speak up much, and do not attempt to change the organizational circumstances. This attitude requires remaining silent purposefully and not being involved in developments. The reason that lies behind employees' failure to speak out is the belief that it will not make a difference even if they do speak out (Karacaoglu and Cingoz, 2008: 158).

2.2.2. Defensive Silence

The feeling of "fear" has been emphasized by Morrison and Milliken for this form of silence. The idea of self-protection based on fear has been pointed out as the reason behind not speaking up views, opinions and ideas. Defensive silence is a proactive and conscious behavior with the urge of self-protection against external threats (Karacaoglu and Cingoz, 2008: 158).

Based on Johannesen's (1974) conceptualization of organizational silence, which is "intentionally withholding information", overt definitions of fear-oriented silence are related to the urge to speak out as much as they are related to the fear of taking action (see for example, Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008).

One reason why people sometimes choose to remain silent about their concerns is defined as what psychologists termed the "mum effect" (Rosen and Tesser, 1970 cited in Milliken *et.al.*, 2003: 4) Research about this subject shows that employees show reluctance to convey negative information because they feel the discomfort of being the conveyer of bad news (Conlee and Tesser, 1973 cited in Milliken *et.al.*, 2003: 4). In organizations, there is evidence that employees are especially uncomfortable conveying information about potential problems and issues to their superiors (see for example, Athanassiades, 1973; Read, 1962; Roberts and O'Reilly, 1974 cited in Milliken *et.al.*, 2003: 4). In other words, the hierarchical relationship between subordinate and supervisor results in the intensification

of the mum effect. In a sense, individuals choose this type of behavior in order for self-protection (Milliken *et.al.*, 2003: 4).

2.2.3. Prosocial Silence

Prosocial Silence is "withholding work-related ideas, information, or opinions with the goal of benefiting other people or the organization – based on altruism or cooperative motives." This form of silence is intentional, proactive and other-oriented. In other words, primary priority of an employee who decides to remain silent is not himself but the external factors such as the organization or his colleagues (Dyne *et.al.*, 2003:1368).

2.3. Issues About Which Employees Remain Silent

It is possible to examine the issues about which employees remain silent under eight headings (Milliken *et.al.*, 2003: 30):

- Concerns about a supervisor's or colleague's competence or performance*
- Problems with suggestions for improvement of organizational processes or performance*
- Concerns about pay or pay equity*
- Disagreement with company policies or decisions*
- Personal career issues or related concerns*
- Ethical or fairness issues (e.g. professional misconduct, discrimination, etc.)*
- Harassment or abuse*
- Conflict with a coworker*

One interesting feature of the topics that employees say they feel uneasy speaking about is that most of them can be seen as forms of bad news for the recipient of the message. In the eyes of employees, discussing such issues with bosses is perceived as risky and futile. Furthermore, research findings indicate that employees often view dissent as something that is not welcome in their organizations (Redding, 1982; Sprague and Rudd, 1988 cited in Milliken *et.al.*, 2003: 16).

2.4. Reasons for Silence

There are a variety of reasons behind the fact that in organizations individuals cannot speak out their concerns and worries about several issues and problems. Some of them are explained below:

2.4.1. Managers' Fear of Negative Feedback

One of the crucial factors that facilitate the creation of a climate of silence in organizations is top management's fear of receiving negative feedback from subordinates. There is strong evidence that managers are usually affected negatively by this negative feedback whether it is about personal matters or about top management (see for example, Carver *et.al.*, 1985; Meyer and Starke, 1982; Sachs, 1982; Swann and Read, 1981 cited in Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 708). Therefore, people try to refrain from receiving negative feedback, ignore the message conveyed; think it to be inaccurate or question the credibility of the source (Ilgen *et.al.*, 1979 cited Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 708).

2.4.2. Managers' Implicit/Tacit Beliefs

Managers' beliefs are one of the factors that lie at the root of organizational silence. One of these common beliefs is that managers see employees as self-interested and untrustworthy. This belief is also relevant to the X theory of McGregor (Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 708).

Opportunistic approaches by the employees may result in them being excluded from decision-making mechanisms. The tendency to exclude employees from decision-making procedures is a way of avoiding negative feedback and being dissident (Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 721).

2.4.3. *Organizational Structure and Policies*

Why do managers develop structures, policies and practices which can foster organizational silence? Morrison ve Milliken (2000: 713) suggest two structural features of organizations which reinforce organizational silence.

1. High centralization of decision making
2. Lack of formal upward feedback mechanisms

In some organizations, employers have the dual role of entrepreneurship and management. Such executives may want to have the sole authority and initiative in the decision making mechanism, because of the management mentality they have. Alternatively, managers who find employees untrustworthy and opt for an autocratic management style instead of a participative management style, handle subordinates with a patronizing downward approach. This management style may result in employee silence by excluding employees from the mechanisms of decision making.

On the other hand, in some organizations downward communication channels function while upward communication channels are usually neglected. For example, while feedback mechanisms are defined through procedures and instructions, processes are monitored and controlled with performance indicators in the organizations whose business activities are managed by process based management style. Such tools are either misused or totally neglected in the organizations managed within this framework of classical functional management style.

2.4.4. *Organizational Norms and Defense Mechanisms*

In his work on organizational learning, Argyris (1977) mentioned that there are powerful norms and routine mechanisms of defense within organizations that make employees reluctant to voice what they know. Other researchers note that organizations are not usually intolerant of criticism, and that employees may withhold information in order to not create disorder or "rock the boat." (Ewing, 1977; Redding, 1985; Sprague and Ruud, 1988 cited in Milliken et.al., 2003: 4)

2.4.5. *Managerial Practices*

Saunders, Shepard, Knight, and Roth (1992) found that employees' willingness to voice work-related concerns and suggestions to their superiors depended on how approachable and responsive they perceived their superiors to be. This finding is consistent with Glauser's (1984) review of earlier works. In his review, Glauser suggested that upward communication is affected not only by characteristics of the communicator, the message, and the organizational context, but also by characteristics of the superior-subordinate relationship (Milliken et.al., 2003: 5).

2.4.6. *Culture*

A supportive "culture" is most often named as one of the contributors to top management's willingness to listen (Dutton *et.al.*, 1997: 407-425). Cultural infrastructure of top management may have an impact on their beliefs about employees. If the top management comprises executives from a high power distance culture as in the Turkish culture, such managers would believe that they always know the best. In a high power distance culture, individuals tend to believe that managers are always right for the simple reason that they are the boss. From this point of view, it can be concluded that the possibility of organization silence to take root and develop in the management teams that comprises individuals from collectivist and high power distance cultures is more likely. Despite encouragement by the management and establishment of formal participatory mechanisms, employees in high power distance countries tend to be reluctant to speak up since they are used to accepting the activities of an authority without criticism (Huang *et.al.*, 2003 cited in Karacaoglu and Cingoz, 2008: 161).

2.4.7. *Individual Fears and Beliefs*

According to Milliken *et.al.*, (2003: 31), the reasons behind organizational silence are as follows;

Fear of being labelled or viewed negatively by others

Fear of damaging a relationship (It may appear as the fear of loss of trust and respect and loss of acceptance and support in the eyes of superiors)

Feelings of futility that speaking up will not make a difference and recipient will not be responsive about the issue.

Fear of retaliation or punishment (It may appear as the fear of losing job or not getting promoted)

Concerns about others being upset or embarrassed

There have recently been numerous studies related to the notion that fear is one of the significant underlying reason for employee silence about all types of work issues (Chiang and Pepper, 2006; Cortina and Magley, 2003; Dutton *et.al.*, 2002; Edmondson, 2002; Graham, 1986; Gundlach *et.al.*, 2003; Henik, 2008; Milliken *et.al.*, 2003; Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Sprague and Ruud, 1988 cited in Kish-Gephart *et.al.*, 2009: 167).

Milliken *et. al.* (2003: 34) found that employees are afraid to speak up about a variety of day-to-day concerns because of the risks of negative labeling or perception. Individuals may encounter many negative situations because of being perceived or labelled negatively. Figure 1 illustrates the perceived implications of a negative label or image:

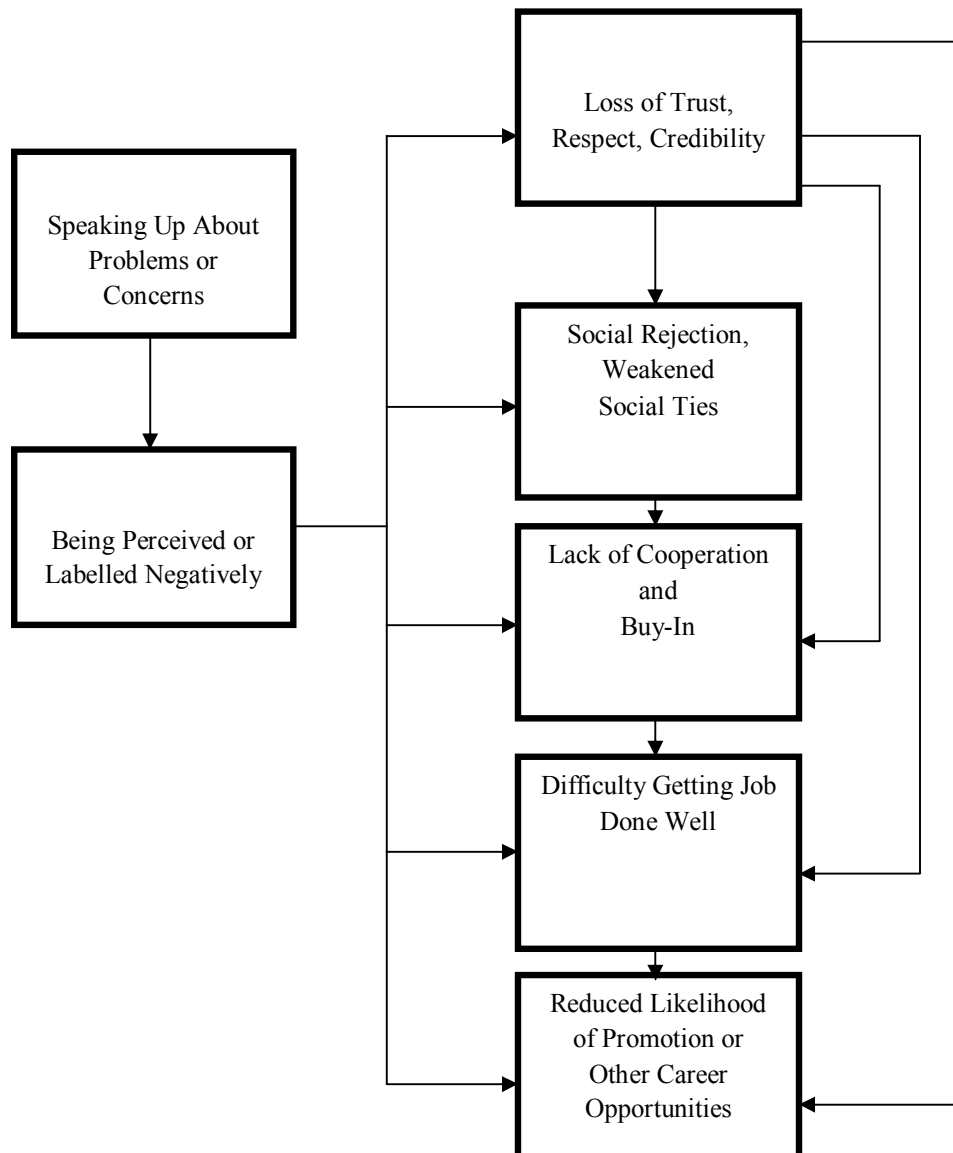


Figure 1: The Perceived Implications of a Negative Label or Image

Source: Milliken, F.J., E. W. Morrison and P. F. Hewlin (2003). *An Exploratory Study of Employee Silence: Issues that Employees Don't Communicate Upward and Why.* pp. 34. <http://w4.stern.nyu.edu/emplibary/Milliken.Frances.pdf>, 15.10.2011.

Findings of research based on interviews with 40 employees working in different industries including consulting, financial services, new media, pharmaceuticals and advertising suggest that respondents felt that they may not be able to speak with their bosses or hierarchical superiors about their jobs or the course of events related to organizational issues. According to this suggestions, decisions to remain silent about concerns or state of affairs might sometimes be a generalized choice by the employees in the organizations (Milliken *et.al.*, 2003: 7).

Research findings point out to two significant issues. First, employees focus on what is potentially negative and poses risk when spoken up about. While answering the question of "What will happen, if I communicate upward about these issues", employees consider knowledge they deduct from their previous experience and observation (Ashford *et.al.*, 1998: 23-57; Dutton *et.al.*, 1997: 407-425).

2.4.8. *Other Factors*

Among other variables that result in organizational silence, the following are noteworthy (Milliken *et.al.*, 2003: 31):

Individual characteristics (Lack of experience and tenure)

Organizational characteristics (Hierarchical structure and unsupportive culture)

Poor relationship with supervisor (Unsupportive style and lack of closeness)

Employees' lack of experience and self-perception that they are not in a position to have a voice also precipitates silences. Concerns that their opinions may be rejected or ignored because of lack of experience; concerns that expressing an opinion in front of senior employees may be named as disrespect and being opinionated stop employees from speaking up their "voices."

When organizational structure dictates that activities in an organization are carried out within the limitations of well-defined principles and rules, especially in such large-scale companies where bureaucratic management style is dominant, the organizational climate that emerges as a result or the very organizational culture developed by such principles, rules and behavior may lead to employee silence.

In organizations where non-formal groups are not supported, social interactions are not developed and employees are not considered as social beings; insincere relationships contribute to the creation of an unreliable culture and employees prefer remaining silent.

Dynamics of organizational silence are demonstrated in detail in Figure 2.

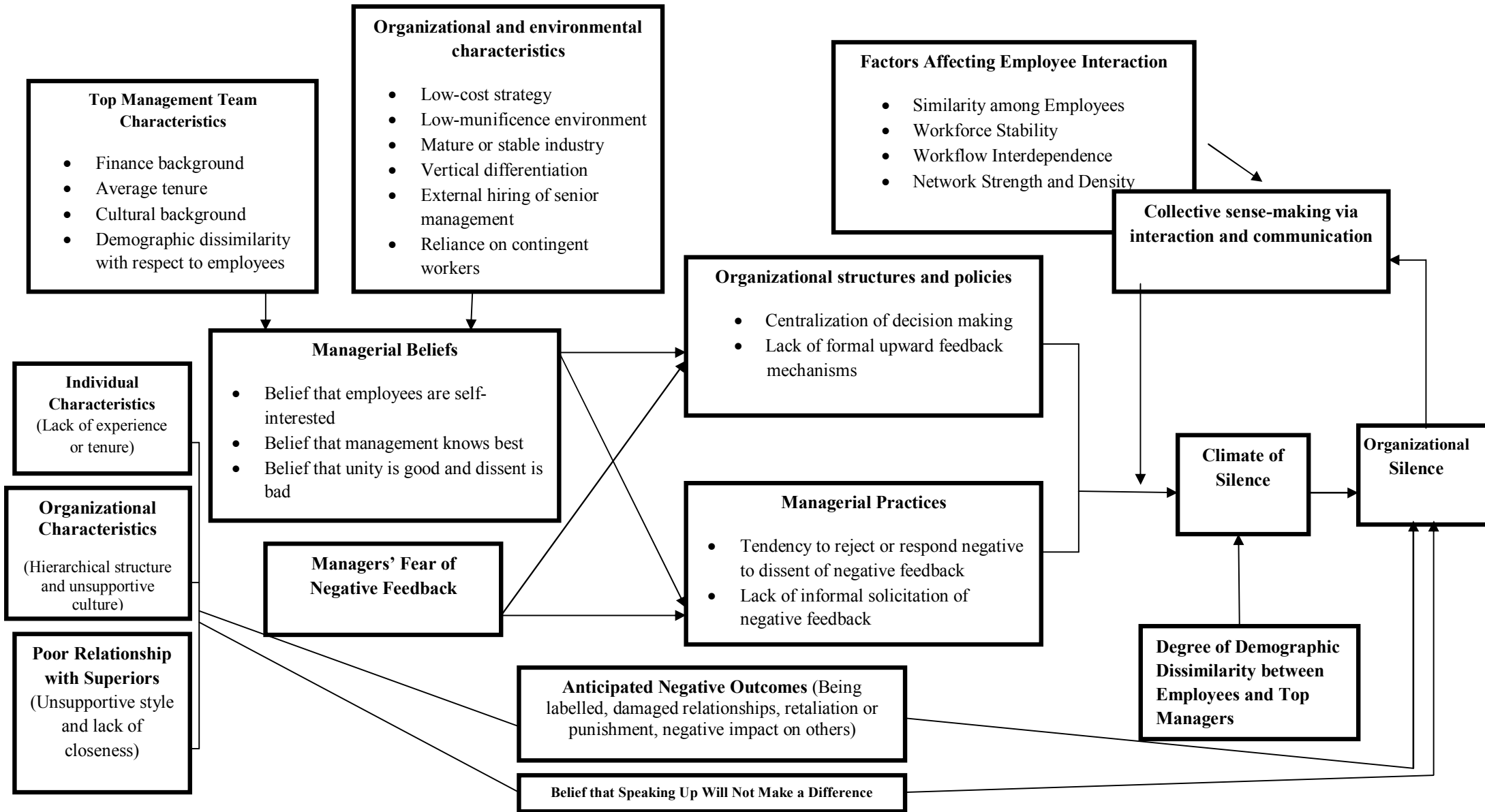


Figure 2: Dynamics of Organizational Silence

Source: Morrison, E. W. and F. J. Milliken (2000). Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world. *Academy of Management Review*, 25, pp. 709; Milliken, F.J., E. W. Morrison and P. F. Hewlin (2003). *An Exploratory Study of Employee Silence: Issues that Employees Don't Communicate Upward and Why*. pp. 33, <http://w4.stern.nyu.edu/emplibrary/Milliken.Frances.pdf>, 15.10.2011.

2.5. Implications of Silence

Daily and ordinary decisions to remain silent may seem at first as small and harmless issues, however they may create serious problems for employees and organizations. Below are the effects of silence on the organizations and employees.

2.5.1. Effects on Organizations

If individuals within an organization have the constant feeling that they cannot express their opinions openly about critical issues, then it is not possible to sustain pluralism (multivocality). Employees may vary in terms of values, beliefs, priorities, appearances and experiences, but because perspectives are expressed in a monolithic way, the organization will not be able to benefit from this diversity (Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 707). Therefore employees' opting to intentionally hide their opinions, ideas, criticisms and suggestions, instead of speaking up not only have the potential of hindering performance increase of employees by realization of different abilities and points of view (Amah and Okafor, 2008: 1-11), but also brings along many such negative impacts as low levels of motivation, trust and organizational loyalty.

Intra-organizational factors such as an established decision making mechanism, managerial incompetence, pay inequity, organizational inefficiencies, and poor organizational performance result in employee silence and become a barrier to the making of a decision that may be for the good of the organization (Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 706).

Organizational silence also has a negative impact on the removal of inadequacies and mistakes occurring in the organizational activities as well as on the establishment of a healthy feedback mechanism. In an organization without feedback mechanisms, mistakes turn into a mechanism of carrying out activities or become more severe (Milliken and Morrison, 2003: 1565-1566).

Because an employee thinks that they might be perceived as being negative or critical, upward transfer of information about problems or issues may be distorted or even may not exist at all. An organization's top-level management should be aware of what is working and not working in order to ensure the future effectiveness of their organization. However distortions in or non-existence of information from subordinates may result in faulty decisions (Milliken and Morrison, 2003: 1564).

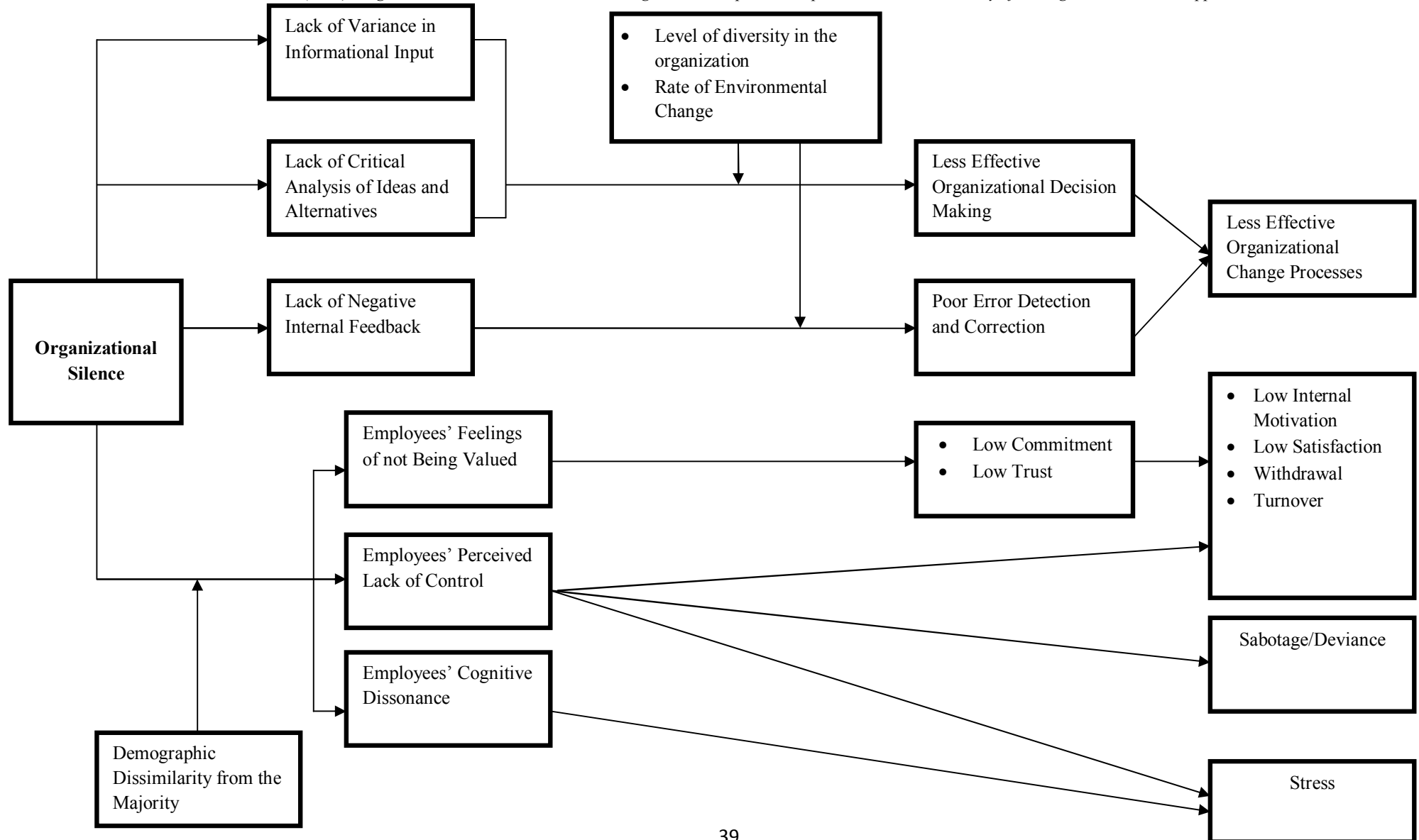
2.5.2. Effects on Employees

Effects of silence on employees may appear as feelings of impotency to speak up about the problems and concerns about their job, diminished feelings of organizational commitment, trust, appreciation and being supported; not maintaining job satisfaction and wishes to leave the job. Moreover employees have the feelings of discomfort, inability and lack of self-appreciation when they have to remain silent about what they know or are good at (Cakici, 2008: 119).

The fact that employees suppress critical communication intrinsically and prefer not to share the information intentionally may lead to higher levels of stress and the emergence of psychological problems. Furthermore, inability to speak about problems and to express their own points of view openly may lead to feelings of being not valued and cognitive dissonance, which will eventually result in employee silence as well as low levels of satisfaction, commitment and motivation. In time, diminished morale, commitment and motivation make employees less interested in organizational change (Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008: 37-68).

Effects of organizational silence are demonstrated in detail in Figure 3.

Source: Morrison, E. W. and F. J. Milliken (2000). *Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world. Academy of Management Review, 25, pp. 718.*



3. A Case Study and Discussion

3.1. Methodology

The study has been conducted with employees who work in the marketing and export departments of a company active in automotive supply industry. These departments are in a separate office in Istanbul. Total number of employees is 10. The objective of the study is to reveal whether employees experience "silence" and - if affirmative- evaluate the reasons and results of employee silence.

We utilized the interview guide used by Milliken *et.al.* (2003: 1-35) in their respective studies and carried out a qualitative research by interviewing 10 employees from the two departments mentioned, of the same company, on face-to-face basis.

3.2. Results and Discussion

Demographical characteristics of people interviewed are shown below:

5 of the respondents were female and the other 5 were male.

3 were high school and 4 university graduates. 1 was a post graduate, 1 of them was a student at the Open University and 1 was a college graduate.

8 of the respondents were between the ages of 30-39. 1 of them was under 30 and 1 of them was above 40.

1 of the respondents had the title of Accounting and Administrative Affairs Manager, 1 of them was Finance Supervisor, 6 of them were Customer Relations Agents, 1 of them was responsible for Operations and finally 1 of them was a Secretary.

In terms of total employment terms; 5 of them have been employed between 11-18 years; 4 of them less than 8 years and 1 of them 27 years and more.

Tenure for the current job; 7 of them have been working for the company between 0-5 years; and 3 of them 6 years and more. The longest tenure for the current job was 12 years.

The first question in the interview was about how comfortable employees feel in their communication with their boss or to top management. 6 of the respondents stated that they felt comfortable and had not had any problems when raising issues. 4 of the respondents who stated that they did not feel comfortable in communication with superiors, expressed that a healthy communication, generally speaking, depended on the attitude of their manager, that they felt uncomfortable to communicate when they knew that they did not share the same ideas with the manager, and that ease of communication depended to a great extent on the sincerity and closeness of the manager.

The second question was whether the respondents could get the attention of their boss or top manager to the issues or problems about which they express their points of view. 6 of the respondents indicated that they could get the attention of their boss or top manager to the issues or problems about which they express their points of view and that they had not experienced any problems about this. 4 respondents who expressed that they experienced such problems indicated that this was mostly related to the attitude of their manager and organizational environment. Moreover, 1 respondent indicated that they felt uncomfortable raising issues to their superiors because they had difficulties in expressing themselves properly. Frequency of experiencing such problem seems to be variable. Among the 4 respondents who expressed that they experienced such a problem, 1 of them indicated that they experienced it every two meetings, 1 stated that in 20% of the meetings and 2 stated that they generally experienced such a problem.

The third question in the interview was whether the respondents had ever experienced organizational silence. All respondents answered the question with a definitive "yes" that they remain silent about certain issues.

Issues that organizational silence emerged about were as follows:

Table 2: Issues Employees Remain Silent About

Issues of Silence	n= 10
Employee personal rights	3
Opinions that need to be raised again regarding issues or projects that have been received negatively by the top managers in the past.	4
Issues or problems to which manager may react negatively because of their lack of information	3
Issues about a supervisor's or colleague's competence or performance	5
Issues or problems about colleagues	4
Issues related to human resources management	3
Personal issues	5

It is seen that the issues employees choose to remain silent have parallels with the findings in the literature of Milliken *et.al.*, (2003: 30). The fourth question in the interview was about the reasons why employees remained silent. Our interviews suggested several reasons why employees remained silent and they are listed below:

Table 3: Causes of Employee Silence

Reasons For Silence	n= 10
Top managers have already known about the issue/problem	4
The idea that the managers do not have the necessary competence	4
Concerns that problems can be taken personally by other employees	5
Belief that it is not possible to have a positive response	4
Concern that speaking up may return back negatively	4
Fear of being affected negatively	5
Fear of being potentially harmful for other employees	4
Non-supportive management style and lack of sincerity of top managers	3
Managers' way of behaving being personal instead of corporate	3
Concern about inability to have a good command of the issue	4
Shyness	2
Belief that top managers and/or employees are not honest	3
Insecurity	4
Worry that they can be harmed related to their job	5
Interests	2

According to the research findings, we can suggest that the employees in the mentioned departments of the company studied also experienced silence about the issues emphasized so far in the literature. The reasons they enumerated were in parallel with the findings of the existing studies (Morrison and Milliken, 2000: 709; Milliken *et.al.*, 2003: 33). When they realized that managers did not like hearing about some issues, employees engaged in the climate of silence. Employees also remained silent and did not convey to the top management the issues or projects that needed to be raised again on the agenda, particularly if these had been received negatively by the top managers in the past or caused problems amongst themselves. When reasons for employee silence were questioned, employees suggested that top managers had already known about the issue, that they might be misunderstood, or concerns that speaking up may result in them being treated negatively.

As noted above, according to the employees, managerial attitudes and behavior are among the significant parameters that lead to employee silence. This highlights the importance of the organization taking responsibility for this. It is important that human resources executives should observe the relationship between the superiors and subordinates carefully, looking at what is below the tip of the iceberg in the organizations. When silence takes over an entire

organization, it will not only have negative effects on organizational performance but it will also lead to an increase in the number of existing problems. This could be shown in high levels of employee dissatisfaction, levels of employee indifference and an increase in staff turnover. It is also of great significance that top management should select managers not only on the basis of competence but also they should consider the communication skills of the candidates.

Moreover, employees stated that they had a reluctance to speak up about the issues that managers would strictly say "no" to and they chose to remain silent because of the discomfort of conveying negative issues to those above them, a situation which is named as "mum effect" in the literature.

Poor relationship with superiors (unsupportive management style and lack of closeness), individual characteristics (concern about inability to have a good command of the issue, shyness), individual fear and beliefs (fear of being labelled negatively, worry of being harmed related to the job) and fear of giving harm to other colleagues are among the causes that lead to employee silence.

Respondents were also asked what would happen if they raised their "voice". 7 of the respondents answered this question saying that nothing would have changed, 2 of them said there would have been negative results, and 1 of them stated that there would have been positive results. Another reason that is examined in the literature is that "speaking up will not make a difference (learned helplessness)" and this was also among the findings of our research. However, employees also stated that they believed that their opinions would be beneficial to the organization and there would be positive changes in their way of doing business if they believed that managers had adopted positive attitude and behavior.

8 of the respondents who answered the question whether "you think that your colleagues would share the same feelings and opinions as you, and they would give the same reasons for the silence in your organization", stated that employees did not trust each other in this respect. Respondents stated that they believed that their colleagues would not be sharing the same feelings and opinions because of their own interests and benefits. 2 of the respondents did not want to answer this question.

Findings of this research give important clues about employee silence but it should also be noted that it is restricted within two departments of this organization. Company's production unit and other departments were established in different cities and this is one of the significant limitations of this study. It should be considered that if the study had been conducted including the entire company or with a different sample, findings of the qualitative research could also have been different.

4. Conclusions

Organizational silence with its various meanings is one of the significant issues of organizational behavior management. Employee silence, which is used as a counterpart to concepts such as employee withdrawal, lack of confidence, or social silence etc., has been a research subject for many local or global academics who study organizational behavior. However, the difficulty of analyzing silence is the biggest limitation and drawback of research in this field. The concept has both personal and organizational characteristics. However, it is possible to define organizational silence as employees' silence about or inability to express their opinions that may affect the organizational activities.

Research has shown that employees fear that there would be negative repercussions for conveying negative messages to their superiors. There is also a belief that conveying messages about negative conditions would not make a difference, and this prevents them from speaking up about their problems and concerns. Employees who participated in the research also pointed out that they believe that nothing would have changed even if they had spoken up about their opinions and ideas to the top management.

Organizational silence can appear in different forms. Employees, based on acquiescence, may not express their views and opinions openly in the face of the management in the organizations; withhold their ideas intentionally because of

fear or urge for self-protection or opt for remaining silence for the sake of other colleagues' well-being. The employees in the mentioned departments of the company under study chose to remain silent and not speak up to the upper management due to similar reasons.

Research has put forth the issues about which employees in an organization choose to remain silent. One of the common points of these issues is employees' fear of being perceived as the conveyor of bad news. Employees think that speaking up about problems and issues with bosses will not only pose risk and be a futile effort but also their dissident ideas will not be favored by the organization.

Managers' perceptions about the employees are also more likely to trigger organizational silence, which is also caused by managers' attitudes and behavior. It is likely that managers fear negative feedback from their subordinates and try to exclude employees from decision-making mechanisms because of their negative beliefs about them. Sometimes organizational structures, policies, norms and organizational culture may also contribute to employee silence.

Whatever its form and reasons are, organizational silence contributes to the creation of several negative impacts. Organizational silence not only results in low levels of morale, lack of confidence, disloyalty, stress and employees leaving, but also constitutes a barrier to the establishment of a healthy feedback mechanism. This situation can lead to unhealthy communication and serious distortions in, or non-existence of the knowledge on which managers base their decisions and can lead to flawed decisions.

In order to create an environment where multiple points of view can flourish in the organizations, individuals should be asked for and encouraged to express their opinions.

Although all necessary conditions are secured in order to ensure an environment where multiple points of view can flourish, employees may not be able to speak up. Some people require help in order to speak up because they can feel that they do not have enough credibility to speak up or they have concerns that what they tell may not be taken into consideration. Therefore, top managers and all other employees should have confidence in each other, build relationships on mutual respect, distance between the superiors and subordinates should be decreased and establishment of healthy feedback mechanisms should be ensured.

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