

# EMPLOYEE SILENCE AT WORK PLACE – A LITERATURE REVIEW

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“Silence is talk too”

## ABSTRACT

Silence is an indication of one's attitude towards the problem or situation at hand. The main purpose of this study is to examine the various research findings on employee silence in the past and to develop a conceptual model on the reasons why employees remain silent at workplace. The causes of employee silence are found to be silence of peer employees, workplace bullying, effort to sustain valued relationships, organisational politics, negative organisational climate and fear of exploitation and isolation. This paper helps to find out the contradictions in the studies of different researchers and catch out the research gaps existing in this area of research. The review of previous literatures uncovered the indefinite usage of the terms 'organisational silence' and 'employee silence'. There appears to be a weak link between silence behaviour and the profession. Also, the findings related to the link between organisational silence and organisational commitment is found as contradicting.

Index Terms: Employee Silence, Organisational Silence and Organisational Commitment

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of employee silence became popular in early 2000s after publishing the work of Morrison and Milliken with organisational silence as its theme. Pinder and Harlos define employee silence as, “the withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual's behavioural, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his or her organisational circumstance to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress”. Silence can either indicate that the person is completely satisfied or is not happy at all with the situation but is uncertain of how he or she can bring about a change to that. It can also indicate an indifferent attitude which arises when the employees are excluded from the decision making process for long enough to make them feel that their opinions or thoughts do not count. Usually the body language reveals what is hidden beneath the silence.

The employees working in an organisation remain silent either intentionally or unintentionally with different motives. Employee silence can be viewed from an individual's perspective, team perspective or organisational perspective. Since this concept has become popular only after 2000s, only a few studies are conducted in this area. In order to explore more in this area, it is important for the researchers to review the literatures available at present. This study throws light in to the researchers who have taken this aspect as their area of research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**TABLE 1 – REVIEW OF SELECTED STUDIES RELATED TO EMPLOYEE SILENCE**

Sl No :	Authors	Year	Title	Theme	Findings
1.	Milliken J F., Morrison W E., Hewlin F P	2003	An Exploratory Study On Employee Silence : Issues That Employees' Don't Communicate Upward And Why	In this study, the authors directly interviewed 40 employees to understand why they remain silent about the issues those concern them in the organisation.	The findings of the study revealed that the most frequently quoted reason for employees remaining silent was the fear of attaching a negative label which consequently destroys priceless relationships. Also the decision to remain silent is related to the decisions made by the peer employees.
2.	Vakola Maria., Bouradas Dimitris	2005	Antecedents And Consequences Of Organisational Silence: An Empirical Investigation	A study was conducted among 677 employees to analyse the effect of three dimensions of silence (Top management attitude to silence, supervisor's attitude to silence and communication opportunities) on employee silence behaviour, job satisfaction and organisational commitment.	The result of correlation and regression analysis reveals that the silence of employees are estimated by the attitude of top management towards employee silence, supervisor's attitude to silence and communication opportunities. Also, it is found in the study that these three dimensions are linked to job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

3.	Ehtiyar Ruya., Yan ardag Melek	2008	Organizational Silence: A survey on employees working in a chain hotel	This paper examines the prevailing attitude towards silence climate of employees and managers in organizations and also analyses the relationship among silence and organisational commitment using factor analysis.	It is observed that the attitude of majority of employees surveyed was neutral and they neither had the discomfort nor a greater urge to speak up. It was also found that the employees surveyed had a medium level of commitment to the organisation.
4.	Zehir Cemal., Erdogan Ebru	2011	The association between organizational silence and ethical leadership through employee performance	In this study, the authors conducted a survey among 714 people working in national and multinational companies in Turkey, to examine whether there exists any relation between organisational silence and ethical leadership behaviour. Factor analysis, correlation and regression analysis were used in this study.	The results of the study revealed that all the factors (Employee Silence, Ethical Leadership, Employee Performance and Employee Voice) taken for the study are positively related. They also constructed a conceptual model showing the relation and found that the performance of employees is affected by leadership behaviours.
5.	Schlosser Francine., Zolin Roxanne	2012	Hearing voice and silence during stressful economic times	This study is conducted to identify the factors that help the supervisors to catch prosocial silence and to observe defensive silence by constructing a five point scale.	The study indicates that the factors that increase prosocial silence are supervisor tension and trust in employees. The factor that increases defensive silence is supervisor tension while the factors that reduces defensive silence are confederation of employees and trust in employees. This is an indication that voice and silence are statistically independent.
6.	Kutanis Ozen R., Ardic K., Uslu O., Karakiraz A	2014	Emotional Intelligence, Fear Based Silence And Trust To Manager: A Case Study	In this paper, the authors have surveyed 157 health personnel working in a dental clinic in order to find out the inter relationships between	The study concluded that there is a negative inconsiderable link between emotional intelligence and fear-based silence and a

				emotional intelligence, trust to managers and fear-based silence.	positive irrelevant relation between employees' trust to managers and fear-based silence.
7.	Eriguc Gulsun., Ozer Ozlem., Turac Sevay Ilkay., Songur Cuma	2014	The Causes And Effects Of The Organisational Silence: On Which Issues The Nurses Remain Silent?	This paper is based on a survey conducted among 137 nurses, to determine the reasons for remaining silent on particular issues, with the help of factor analysis.	It was found in the study that the nurses who are below twenty five years of age and who do not have experience of more than four years remain more silent than others. Also the study revealed that female nurses remain more silent than others due to the fear of being isolated and damaging valued relationships.
8.	Laeque Harris Syed., Bakhtawar i Zafar Nodia	2014	Employee silence as a determinant of organisational commitment: Evidence from the higher education sector of Pakistan	This study focussed on finding out the impact of employee silence on organisational commitment with reference to higher education sector of Pakistan. Organisational commitment is considered as the dependent variable while the independent variables are employee silence, acquiescent silence, defensive silence and prosocial silence.	With the help of correlation and regression analysis, it was found that there is a negative relation between the dependent variable (Organisational commitment) and the independent variables (employee silence, acquiescent silence, defensive silence and prosocial silence). That is, in the matters related to work, the more an employee chooses to or is forced to remain silent, less is their Organisational commitment.
9.	Umashank ar M., Padmavath y S.	2015	Relationship Between Employee Silence And Organisational Commitment In Health Care Industry	The authors conducted this study to identify the relationship between employee silence and job satisfaction using percentage, correlation and regression analysis. The dependent variable here is job satisfaction and the independent variables are acquiescent	The study reveals that only four independent variables (Normative Commitment, Defensive Silence, Continuance Commitment and Prosocial Silence) directly influence the dependent variable (Job Satisfaction). Also acquiescent silence and defensive silence are negatively

				silence, defensive silence, prosocial silence, affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment.	related to job satisfaction while normative commitment is positively related to job satisfaction.
10.	Dogu Gozde., Yilmaz Baki	2015	Study On Relationship Between Working Performance And Organisational Silence Among Employees Of Ministry of Youth And Sports Central Organisation	The study was conducted among 361 employees of Ministry of Youth and Sports Central Organisation, to explore the relation between work performance and organisational silence.	With the help of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), Barlett's test and correlation analysis, it was found that there is a meaningful and direct proportional link between organisational silence and work performance
11.	Jain K Ajay	2015	An Interpersonal Perspective To Study Silence In Indian Organizations: Investigation Of Dimensionality And Development Of Measures	The study determines the causes of silence of employees working in various organisations in the northern part of India using exploratory and confirmative factor analyses. The mediating role of job satisfaction in the relation between silence and turnover intention is also discussed here.	The findings indicated the four major facets of silence in India, particularly internal motivation, fear of retaliation, self-image and self-competence. Moreover, job satisfaction intermediates the consequence of silence on turnover intention. Results support the positive impact of silence on satisfaction
12.	Fard Gashtasebi Parastoo., Karimi Fariba	2015	The Relationship between Organizational Trust and Organizational Silence with Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment of the Employees of University	A survey among 180 employees of a University was conducted, with the help of correlation, to investigate the structural model connecting organisational silence and organisational trust with organisational commitment and job satisfaction.	The results of the study reported that organisational trust has a meaningful and inverse relation with organisational silence while it has a relevant and positive link with organisational commitment and job satisfaction. But, organisational silence had an inverse and relevant link with job satisfaction and organisational commitment

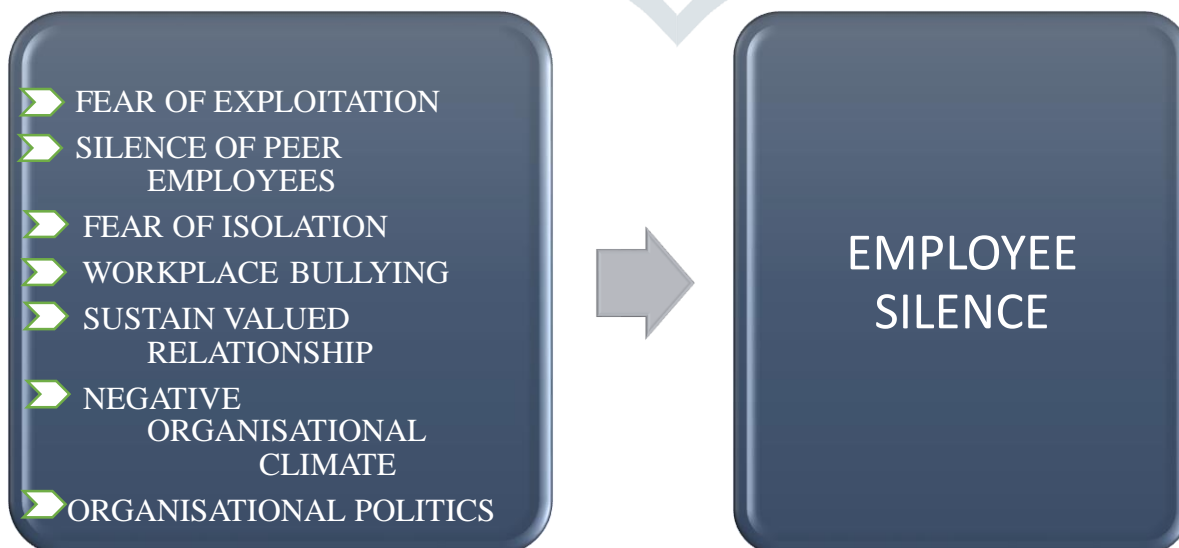
13.	Yilmaz E S., Cetinel Emine., Vysal Duygu	2016	The effect of organizational silence on job satisfaction: A research on bank employees	The study aims to find out whether there is any effect of organisational silence on job satisfaction level of employees and it also determines the relationship between demographic variables, organizational silence and job satisfaction levels with the help of correlation and regression analysis.	The study gives a meaningful conclusion that the silence in organizations have a significant impact on employees' job satisfaction level. Only a poor relation is found between organisational silence and job satisfaction.
14.	Khalid Jaweria., Ahmed Jaleel	2016	Perceived Organisational Politics And Employee Silence: Supervisor Trust as a Moderator	This paper is based on an investigation on a sample of 280 respondents including assistant professors, associate professors, professors, lecturers and research associates of seven big universities in two metropolitan cities in Pakistan, based on questionnaire.	The correlation and multiple regression analysis unveil the positive link between organisational politics and employee silence motives. Also it suggests that relational, defensive, ineffectual, diffident, disengaged and deviant motives in a political environment prompt employees to withhold information.
15.	Donovan Sean., Doyle Elaine., O'Sullivan Michelle., Garvey John	2016	Employee Voice And Silence In Auditing Firms	The present study discussed the voice and silence of employees in international auditing firms. Semi-structured interviews among eight managers and twenty employees were carried out.	The findings of the study revealed that the trainees and those employees appointed on contract basis have more tendency to remain silent on workplace problems. It was found that management was resistant to employee voice in regard to a change in working conditions or managers' performance.
16.	Pozveh Zamani Asghar., Karimi Fariba	2016	The Relationship between Organizational Climate and the Organizational Silence of Administrative Staff in Education	This paper estimated the link between organisational climate and organisational silence of administrative staff in Education Department in Isfahan by taking a sample of 220 staff.	With the help of correlation, multiple regression and multiple variance tests, it was found that there was a converse significant relation between organisational climate and organisational silence. The study

			Department		suggests that organisational procedures and objectives are the best predictors of organisational silence.
17.	Kirrane Melrona., O'Shea Deirdre., Buckeley Finian., Grazi Adele., Prout Joanne	2017	Investigating The Role Of Discrete Emotions In Silence Versus Speaking Up	This article inquires into the contribution of discrete emotions in decisions of employees to remain silent or to speak up. The authors conducted three studies using both experimental and qualitative research methods.	The study disclosed that among the various reasons to remain silent, fear is the most important emotion related with silence behaviour and anger is considered as an antecedent of speaking up while less intense anger results in staying silent.
18.	Rai Aparna., Agarwal A Upasana	2018	Workplace Bullying And Employee Silence: A Moderated Mediation Model Of Psychological Contract Violation And Workplace Friendship	The study delved in to the outcome of workplace bullying on employee silence by collecting data from 835 employees working in different Indian organisations.	The results of the study uncovered the positive relation of workplace bullying with relational, defensive and ineffectual silence. It also suggests that the bullying-silence relation is mediated by psychological contract violation.
19.	Emelifeonwu Chukwue meka Jude., Valk Reimara	2018	Employee Voice And Silence In Multinational Corporations In The Mobile Telecommunications Industry In Nigeria	Authors interviewed 30 employees in order to explore the employee silence and voice in Nigerian telecommunication industry based on purposive sampling technique.	An exploratory qualitative case study reported that fear of victimisation is the basic reason behind the silence of employees. It was also found in the study that the execution of a culturally amended voice mechanism within the organisation has promoted employee voice and thus in turn resulted in improved organisational performance.
20.	Korkmaz Erdogan	2018	The Relationship Between Organisational Silence And Allen Meyer	In the study, correlation and simple linear regression analysis were done to examine whether organisational	The study reveals that there is a relevant positive relation between organisational commitment and

			Organisational Commitment Model: A Research In The Health Sector In Turkey	commitment has a relevant effect on employees' silence behaviour. For this examination, 120 people were chosen from public health sector in Turkey.	organisational silence. That is, when organisational commitment increases, organisational silence also increases.
21.	Karabay Melisa E., Sener Irge., Tezergil Seher A	2018	Ethical Climate as a Mediator Between Employees' Organisational Silence Behaviours And Their Trust In Leader: An Empirical Research On Insurance Sector Employees	Authors have made an attempt to study the effect of trust in leaders on employees' silence intentions considering a mediating role for ethics. The survey was conducted among 811 employees of various insurance companies in Turkey and the silence variants taken in the study are acquiescent silence, prosocial silence and defensive silence.	The hierarchical regression technique found that the silence behaviour of employees is negatively affected by trust in leaders. The study supports that ethical climate in organisations plays a full mediating role in the relation between trust in leader and overall organisational silence and prosocial and acquiescent silence behaviour, while it plays only a partial mediating role in the link between trust in leader and defensive silence behaviour.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Based on the literature review, following conceptual model is developed.





## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Employee silence as a concept is a new one and can be approached from different perspectives. This paper tries to find out the reasons why employees remain silent in different situations. The causes of employee silence are silence of peer employees, workplace bullying, effort to sustain valued relationships, organisational politics, negative organisational climate and fear of exploitation and isolation. A conceptual model is also framed for better understanding.

The literature suggests that the studies that are conducted so far are not enough to make any conclusions. Some of the concepts in this area of study are vague. Also, samples chosen for the studies are small in number which in turn may not give accurate results. From the above reviews, it is observed that the findings of certain researchers contradict those of others. The relationship between organisational silence and organisational commitment are stated as positive as well as negative by different authors. Also, there appears to be a weak link between silence behaviour and the profession. It is also noted that the authors use the terms organisational silence and employee silence identically in different situations. Likewise, there arises some sort of uncertainty in the studies on employee silence. Thus, in order to make the concept more logical, further studies need to be undertaken from different dimensions of the topic.

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