

Even the silent one's speaks- Organisational silence and its antecedents

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Listen to the silence; it has so much to say - Rumi



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to review the concept of organisational silence and explore the factors influencing organisational silence. The current study will consider other factors which are revealed through gap in existing literature.

Research Design/ Methodology: The paper is based on literature review. The paper suggests that employee silence is pervasive in organisation but it is neglected for number of reasons. It is often said that an organisation is known by the people who work for it. But many times these people who are considered to be an asset for the organisation do not contribute through their knowledge, experience and suggestions. Which give rise to the concept of employee silence collectively known as organisational silence.

Findings: People while working in the organisation depends upon one another to seek more information & validate their views & also influence each other. This social influence forces people to modify their views & conform to others views, which give rise to the concept of social conformity. Social conformity forces people to modify or suppress their views and conform to others belief in order to be accepted in organisation. If people find that majority shares their views then they speak up else they are forced to remain silent. The study revealed that apart from organisational and individual factors, perception of other people also affects one's ability to speak up.

Originality: Previous studies on organisational silence focussed on organisational factors such as organisational support, top management & supervisory support, justice climate, lack of communication opportunities and individual factors such as fear, lack of experience in organisation, personality of employee but there is dearth of research on how perception of people in organisations affects one's ability to share opinion or information. The current study considered how perception of people in the organisation affects one's ability to share his /her views, forces him / her towards conformity and create a silence climate in the organisation.

Paper type: View Point and Conceptual

KEYWORDS Organisational Silence | Employee Voice | Knowledge | Experience | Suggestions & Social Conformity

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Introduction

Turbulent business environment and emergence of competitors makes it imperative for companies to improving their products and services. Organisations that value creativity through employees' suggestions & ideas believes in promoting the development of a climate which encourages creativity within the working environment. An organisation can face the turbulent environment only when its employees make collective efforts by providing suggestions, ideas or share their views. If employees are provided with the voice opportunities then voice from below will increase and organisation will get input from employees as well. Employees are valuable asset for every organisation and they must be treated like that way only. But quite often employees feel hesitant in sharing their opinion, viewpoints and information which is required to make informed decision. Voice in organisation enables the leaders in the organisations to get required information to make timely decision. It allows the management in detecting errors and taking action timely (*Greenberg and Edward 2009, pg no. 175*). Top management needs information to make strategic decisions. But it is often found that employees feel hesitant in sharing the required information and keep the information themselves. So to meet the requirement of the changing environment, organisations require people who are responsive, can take initiative, & speak up. Employees are considered to be the reservoir of information. Organisations nowadays have become more demanding from the employees in terms of their participation in sharing information, taking initiative in speaking up. (*Vakola & Bouradas, 2005*)

There may be many reasons behind such silence behaviour of employees such as lacking information, confidence, trust & communication opportunities which leads to silence behaviour among employees. *Premaux and Bedeian (2003)* conducted research on 118 telecommunication employees, in their study they found that employees engage in silence behaviour because of the fear of being punished making employees to remain silent instead of sharing their ideas, opinion and suggestions about the organisational concerns. Silence not only signify objection and dissent but it may also results from lack of information or voicing opportunities. *Pinder & Harlos (2001)* in their conceptual study discussed that the silence behaviour of employees brings people closer and pushes them apart by creating differences; it both harms people and heals people. It helps in providing information and hiding information. It is active thinking and sometimes signals no thought. It conveys dissent or assent opinion.

Organisational silence: -

The term silence in context of organisation was initially studied by *Herschman (1970)* as employee silence which was considered as employees loyalty. It indicates employee loyalty, though they may be dissatisfied but remain silent hoping the situation would get better in future. Later it

was studied by *Johannesen (1974)* but then in year 1975 *Noelle & Neumann* discussed the concept of silence as spiral of silence resulting from belief that one's opinion, behaviour and attitude gets affected by others perception. Public opinion matters in opinion expression as individuals' work in an environment which influences their attitude and behaviour. If any discrepancy exists between people's opinion, then the awareness of that discrepancy makes the individual stay away from discussing that topic and makes individual to prefer silence in order to avoid conflict. It was *Morrison & Milliken (2000)* who gave the first definition of organisational silence (*Baran & Giderles, 2017*).

Silence results from to intentional withholding or failure to communicate important inputs, ideas, suggestions, information (*Morrison, 2012*). Silence doesn't mean lack of information or suggestions. It means not speaking up when one is having relevant important information, concern about a problem or divergent viewpoint which should be shared. Silence is often described as absence of sound and absence of speech or non-exhibition of a behaviour that could be understood clearly (*Van Dyne, 2003*). Silence also results from a situation when employees consciously hold back important inputs or information rather than unintentional failure to communicate or when employees have nothing to say. (*Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon & Wilkinson, 2011*)

This behaviour is very difficult to understand & study as opposed to more overt and obvious behaviour (*Johannesen, 1974*). Employees remain silent because they feel that their voice is falling on deaf ears which give rise to mum effect (*Greenberg & Marissa, 2009 pg. no. 175*). Initially silence behaviour of employees was considered to be a sign of loyalty but it involves holding back of ideas, information, suggestions by employees which act as a destructive force for both the employees and for the organisation (*Kumar & Govindarajo, 2015*)

Similarly *Whiteside & Barclay (2014)* Conducted a study in 2 different groups with total employees of 399 to find out the impact of justice climate on employee silence, the study revealed that silence behaviour of employees is greatly affected by the fair treatment at the workplace but very few studies have empirically studied this. The authors' defined organisational silence by taking forward the meaning of silence defined by Morrison & Milliken, such as withholding work related information like knowledge of weak processes, illegal behaviour, work conflict, disagreement with any organisational decisions. Organisational silence is different from organisational voice where in employee desire to express his viewpoints, Ideas & information but in former the employee intentionally keeps information and ideas to himself/herself either to protect him or her or to avoid any futile efforts. Silence is also different from whistleblowing which is a practice of disclosing and any wrong doing, illegal,

immoral or illegitimate practice in the organisation but the motive of organisational silence is on withholding of wide range of organisational information (*Whiteside & Barclay, 2014*). Organisational silence only arises when organisational members deliberately withhold information. Therefore all those situations wherein an employee fails to communicate important information because of lack of complete information doesn't amount to or signify organisational silence. Quite often employee reluctant to share information as it could be viewed as negative or threatening (*Morrison, 2014*)

Organisational silence need not be verbal, it can be nonverbal also or physical, which indicate the tendency of employees not writing, not being available in meeting and not responding. It's a behavioural attitude which involves suppression of information, withholding of ideas, information, suggestions by individuals in an organisation about organisational affairs (*Jahangir & Abdullah, 2017*). Similarly *Bhageri, Zarei & Nikaen, 2012* is also of the view that organisational silence is a behavioural choice which improve as well as deteriorate the performance of the organisation. It not only conveys the information but also indicate disfavour. Earlier silence behaviour used to be considered as a sign of loyalty but in an organisational context it is not so. It indicate problem, sign of discontent, dissatisfaction (*Baran & Giderler, 2017*). Organisational silence prevents management from receiving information which might improve the performance of an organisation or solve the organisational problem (*Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon & Wilkinson, 2011*)

Organisational silence not only means not sharing information, not speaking but it also means not being present, not writing and hearing and ignoring things (*Tahmasebi, Mohammadreza and Aghaziaratti, 2013*). As per *Hazen (2006)* it may also involve censoring, suppressing, trivializing, marginalization and exclusion.

The way people express their opinion in the organisation is also affected by their estimate of majority people opinion. People are powerful source of influence. They influence, educate & strengthen us at the same time they weaken us. (*Nemeth, 2009*)

According to *Bowen & Blackmon (2003)* employees in organisation won't hesitate in sharing their concerns, ideas & suggestions when they believe that their ideas & inputs are supported by others. Similarly if they believe that they aren't supported they remain silent. Similarly *Noelle & Neumann* in their study "spiral of silence" revealed that horizontal pressure from employees in the organisation & fear of being isolated forces employees to remain silent and go by majority opinion. This fear of isolation forces people to practice conformity which is more psychological in nature & indicate emotional state associated with speaking up.

This concept of conformity in explaining silence behaviour among employees is neglected by previous researchers. Earlier studies underestimated the role of social conformity in explaining why people get influenced by majority opinion and suppress their own opinion even when they know they are right.

Social Conformity & Organisational Silence

Conformity involves people agreeing with the majority opinion even if it is wrong. (Mc. leod, 2016). The concept of conformity was first studied by a psychologist "Jenness" in 1932, which he studied with the help of an experiment. The result of experiment revealed that nearly all participants changed their initial estimates in order to fit in the group and to avoid fear of being neglected. But it was Solomon Asch who conducted famous conformity experiment in year 1950 which revealed that people usually conform to the group opinion or belief in public but privately they negate or disagree with their views.

So people around us in the organisation do influence our thinking and our ability to share opinion & behaviour. This social influence forces people to change their views and alter or modify their own behaviour in order to be accepted by others. This social conformity forces employees to suppress their own opinion or ideas, views and suggestions and go by others. This silent behaviour of employees indicate herding behaviour and make the content of the information weaker which further makes employees fail to criticize the available information thereby making the dominant opinion to prevail and accepted. The term "herding behaviour" was coined by French sociologist Le Bon in 1895 & later political economist Veblen in year 1899. Further if employee consider not to follow the others opinion, then the employee must be ready to bear its cost. The cost may range from psychological distress leading to dismissal and it might also affect the professional career of the employees. (*Cueni & Frey, 2012*).

The social conformity can be informational or normative. Informational social conformity arises when people accept any information from others as evidence. Whereas normative social conformity arises when people accept information to fulfil the expectation of others. Individuals will express their opinion & views only when they perceive their opinion to be dominant one else they remain silent. (*Scheufele & Moy, 2000*).

Social conformity forces people to suppress their opinion & views on finding out that their opinion & views lies with minority opinion thereby leading them towards silence. So people scan the climate of opinion before deciding to speak out. People usually practice conformity behaviour when they don't know about the correct behaviour or because of anxiety about fitting in the group.



Moreover study conducted by **Goncalo & Duguid in 2011** stressed that conformity pressurises implementation of any new idea but it suppresses generation of new idea. Similarly another study conducted by **Tartaglione in 2017** asserted that human being is a social animal, willing to follow group even when the group provide wrong answer. Such people are cause of concern for the organisation who suppress or change their opinion if they believe that they are different from others. This conformity behaviour forces people in organisation to suppress their creative ideas because of fear of challenging higher authority. According to **Cialdini & Trost (1998)** individuals who fear criticism, seek approval from peers & increasingly monitor themselves and are more inclined to become conformist. Sometimes people deliberately withhold important information in order to take revenge. (Tripp, Bies & Cremey, 2019).

Therefore we can say organisational silence involve with holding or not expressing or suppressing ideas, suggestions, information, opinion or conforming to others ideas, suggestions, opinions out of fear or in order to avoid criticism, desire to be accepted and liked by others or to take revenge from others.

Dimensions of Silence:-Silence in organisations depends upon silence motives. Silence may be of different types leading to different silence behaviour in employees.

Pinder and Harlos (2001) discussed two types of silence in organisation i.e. Acquiescent and quiescent silence. According to Pinder and Harlos acquiescent silence behaviour is generally passive in nature. When employees engage in acquiescent silence behaviour they have the feeling that their efforts to improve the situation are futile as there is nobody to hear the constructive voice. So employees intentionally withhold ideas, opinion, suggestions and problems. Acquiescent silence makes employees completely powerless as speaking up is considered as futile. (**Morrison, 2014**) (**Dyne, Aug and Botero, 2013**). Similarly quiescent silence occurs when employees feel hesitant to share ideas, information or opinion as a form of self-protection based on fear. It may be due to fear of consequences of speaking up (**Jain, 2014**). Fear of being considered as complainer or loosing respect, support from others, receiving negative performance review, not getting promotion or fear that others might get upset or getting fired are some reasons which make employees to protect themselves by not speaking up (**Morrison, 2014**). So there are negative repercussions that forces employees to remain silent (**Pinder & Harlos, 2001**)

According to **Van Dyne(2003)** silence can be:-

Acquiescent silence, quiescent silence and pro social silence (wherein the employees hide any confidential information or remain silent just to protect the organisation (**Gambarolita and Cammozzo, 2010**). Similarly **Brinsfield (2012)**

advocated that silence behaviour of employees can be studied as:-

Deviant silence: - wherein the employees engage in silence behaviour by holding back information purposely to harm the organisation.

Diffident Silence: - In this type of silence behaviour employees hesitant in speaking up because of lack of self-confidence and self-doubt.

Ineffectual silence: - when sharing ideas, opinion & concern is considered as ineffectual in making any change in the existing situation, employees prefer to remain silent.

Disengaged silence:- It's a silence behaviour based on feeling of failure to make a difference.

Defensive silence:- In this type of silence behaviour employees don't share information or give suggestions because of fear of punishment or retaliation.

On the other hand **Knoll & Dick (2013)** described silence dimensions as acquiescent, quiescent, prosocial, and opportunistic silence (wherein employee withholds opinion or information to promote his self-interest by misguiding others. Employees use silence as an opportunity to achieve personal goal. **Nafei (2016)** further discussed the silence behaviour of employees in organisation by classifying silence behaviour as acquiescent, defensive, pro-social and protective(in which employee remain silent and accept the decisions of higher level management because of good relationship between the organisation and employees (**Yesil, Otken & Beser, 2017**). According to **Gephart, Detert & Trevino (2003)** employees feeling of silence result from conscious decision of withholding their opinions and suggestions after careful analysis of cost and benefit of speaking up, which indicate deliberate silence. Similarly silence can be non-deliberate also when employee is faced with little or no time to respond. Other types of silence are:-

Schema Driven Silence:- which results from a situation where in employee experience high intensity of fear and have time also for deciding whether to voice the opinion or suggestion or not but choose to remain silent after careful analysis of past. Such behaviour is quite similar with deliberate form of silence. Hence despite having to reappraise the situation the employee chooses to remain silent as the intensity of fear of past unfavourable experience reduces the motivation of speaking up.

Deliberate defensive silence results from protecting oneself from dangerous situation. It results from a situation wherein the employee is provided with ample time to think over an issue.

Habituated Silence:- This type of silence is ingrained in the behaviour of an employee exposure to threatening situations which may increase the intensity of fear.

Further **Schenfele & Moy (2000)** in their conceptual study revealed that expression of one's opinion is largely affected by others perception. Social influence plays a prominent role in shaping our attitude & beliefs and affects the decision making ability. (**Levitan & Verhulst, 2015**). Social influence makes people to match one's attitude, behaviour & opinion with others due to social pressure. Such behaviour is very common among employees as they believe that voicing opinion or concern might displease others or speaking up is futile, which make people to align their opinion with majority to avoid fear of exclusion. The impact of social influence is such that it forces people towards conforming to others beliefs & opinion and suppressing their own opinion which ultimately suppresses creativity among employees. This results in another form of silence "**Conformity silence**" which means suppressing own opinion & accepting others opinion .

According to **Perlow and William (2003)** one of the reasons why employees remain silent in organisations may be to preserve relationship with others and get work done. **Hei, Nganling & David (2015)** in their research on 656 employees in 3 public universities found that silence conveys positive value if it is perceived as good behaviour and negative value when perceived as impolite gesture. Silence may also be used to show anger, discontent, uncertainty and sometimes people prefer to remain silent just to think over an issue. People often observe silence in those situations wherein they are viewed as inferior.

Organisational silence can be costly to the organisation as it results from lack of concern among organisational members regarding various issues an organisation is facing (**Deniz, Noyan, & Ertosum, 2013**). Researcher **Morrison and Milliken (2014)** conducted a conceptual study wherein they highlighted the fact that organisational silence act as an impediment to organisational change and development and create obstacle in the creation of the organisation which value differences among the employees and allow the employees to express their opinion and suggestion. Organisational silence prevents management from receiving information which might improve the performance of organisation or solve the organisational problem (**Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon & Wilkinson, 2011**)

Antecedents of Organisational silence:-

Organisational silence is treated as multidimensional in nature as it encompasses various issues. An employee may remain silent due to injustice he/she feels at workplace, behaviour of superior, defending himself or herself or

colleague or may not be able to share information or opinion because of fear of losing job or because of lack of experience or the employee may also feel that it is not worthy to share information or speak up on any matter.

Pinder & Harlos (2001) conducted a conceptual study which revealed that employee silence is a response to injustice. When employees are mistreated at workplace, when there is climate of silence in organisation, which indicate that it is not fruitful to voice opinion, share concern, fear related with voicing opinion, organisational policies, belief of top management, communication opportunities and when employees experience deaf ear syndrome which indicate the failure on the part of organisation to respond to employees harassment, complaint, issues and concerns. All these factors generate injustice and create an atmosphere that discourage unjustly treated people breaking silence and improve their situation

Perlow & William (2003) in their Harvard business review asserted that silence often occurs due to differences in opinion or viewpoint. It is absolutely normal that different people may have different opinion, taste and belief. But what matter most is that one should recognize the variety of opinion, experience and knowledge. Therefore on the basis of experience and knowledge a person may differ from the rest. So it is the fear of loss of status which prompts people to remain silent. The authors also stressed on the fact that silence never resolve anything or erase difference rather create differences. Whenever we keep silent about some issues, we fill ourselves with anger, anxiety, stress and negative emotion.

In year **2003 Morrison, Milliken & Hewlin** conducted a conceptual study wherein they described organisational silence as intentional withholding of information by employees. According to authors organisational silence results from:-

1. **Fear:-** Fear experienced by employees with respect to being considered as complainer, damaging relationship with peers & superior, futility to make any difference in the situation, receiving punishment and fear of upsetting others.
 2. **Individual Characteristics:-** Organisational silence also results from lack of experience and tenure on part of employees.
 3. **Organisational characteristics-** such as organisational structure and unsupportive culture.
 4. **Poor relationship with supervisor-** if the supervisor is unsupportive or when the relationship is distant.
- Another study conducted by **Premeaux and Bedieian in 2003** revealed locus of control, self-esteem , top management openness and trust in supervisor as causes



of organisational silence. Similarly in year 2003, *Dyne, Ang & Botero* conduct a study which stressed on the fact that ethics and communication play very important role in the treatment of silence. Employees often remain silent on the issues or withhold information which is related with trade secrets, employee use moral standard in deciding whether to share information or withhold. Similarly employees also keep in mind what to communicate and what to withhold. Two years later *Vakola & Bouradas (2005)* conducted research on 677 employees and concluded that supervisor behaviour affect the work behaviour of employees in addition to attitude of top management and opportunities to communicate freely.

- Moreover if the top management is supportive and supervisor provides opportunities to discuss things along with open communication channels, all this will leads to better sense of belonging and improve the commitment level of employees in the organisation. Similarly in year 2003 *Perlow and Stephanie* asserted that employees may remain silent in organisations to preserve relationship with others and get work done. Further *Huang, Vlient & Vegt (2005)* focussed on formalised employee involvement i.e. participative decision making and climate provided by the organisation and encourages management to accept novel ideas, suggestions and even divergent views. In 2008 *Ehteijar and Yanardag*, in their research on employees in chain hotel found that employees remain silent because of the fear of receiving negative feedback from top management, belief which top management hold about employees, high power distance culture in organisation, organisational structure belief that speaking up is futile, lack of communication opportunities, supervisory attitude. Similarly *Anah, Chiwuba & Okafor (2008)* also support with the help of their research conducted on relationship among silence climate, employee silence and work attitudes that employee remain silent because of fear of getting negative feedback, climate of silence in organisation, top management attitude, supervisor attitude to silence and communication opportunities. Further in year 2009 *Gephart, Detert & Treuino* in their study identified that employees remain silent on the matter related with employee issue, managerial behaviour, organisational functioning and performance or patient care. According to the study employees afraid to speak up because of fear of being labelled as trouble maker. Fear is considered to be the prime cause of employee silence in organisation. It may be fear related with loss of job, loss of reputation, loss of respect, loss of promotion opportunities.
- *Briensfield (2009)* through its research on employee silence asserted that voice opportunities, fairness issues (when employees experience unfair treatment, ethical issues i.e. when someone else behave unethically, business issue

i.e. problem with organisational processes, personal career performance, disagreement with companies policies. Similarly *Gambarotto and Cammozzo (2010)* also advocate that fear of top management and fear of sharing knowledge and information act as a cause of employee silence in organisation. Later *Moasa (2011)* in his research concluded that opportunity to speak up and culture of injustice act as antecedents in organisation. The author is of the view that both voice and silence are considered as forms of communication, which are critical for social interaction. Voice without listening and acting is also lead to silence behaviour. *Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon & Wilkinson (2011)* through their research stressed on the fact that support of top management plays important role in influencing silencing behaviour among employees. Similarly *shojaie, Martin & Barani (2011)* in their conceptual study discussed 3 factors which affect organisational silence such as:-

a. Managerial factors:-

- Negative feedback
- Belief that management hold about employees, such as employees are not worthy to trust, they are self-interested.
- Supervisor failure to address the actual problem that exists within the organisation.
- When employees distrust their leaders

b. Organisational factors:-

- Decision making procedure, if the organisation has the tendency of following the centralization of decision making authority.
- Pay inequity
- Organisational inefficiency
- Poor organisational performance
- When organisation relies on contractual labour

c. Personality factors:-

- People remain silent when they fear that they will loose their job
- People remain silent to avoid embarrassment, confrontation, to show respect for others, modesty.
- Fear of damaging one's image.
- Being labelled as trouble maker
- Fear of punishment
- Negative impact on others.

Further *Zehir & Erdogan (2011)* conducted research on 714 employees working in national and multinational companies to analyse the relationship between organisational silence, voice leadership in case of ethical leadership and

employee performance and found that leadership openness act as the most influential factor of employee voice behaviour. Leadership influence employee behaviour, improve employee performance and result in better communication and employee involvement is essential for organisational development. According to authors, ethical leaders make an effort to have fair choices, try to understand the follower's feelings, create an open and convenient environment which makes employees more positive and motivate them to make more positive and motivate them to make more contribution towards organisation success. In 2012 *Beheshtifar, Borhani and Moghadam* found out through their research that organisational silence is mainly occurs due to fear among employees, embarrassment, narrow conception of ethical responsibility, implicated friends for example when friends get involves in unethical behaviour, lack of opportunities for voice and lastly lack of organisational political skill. In 2018 *Abrow* conducted an empirical study on 346 employees in 3 public sector hospitals to assess how organisational politics leads to organisational silence through organisational cynicism, moderator role of perceived support and found that there exist a positive relationship between organisational politics and organisational silence. Organisational politics which indicate the actions of individuals to have control over important resources for the fulfilment of personal interest rather than organisational interest. In such situation employee view organisational or work environment as political one, which is viewed as injustice. It is often used by the management to keep things working and employees view it negatively. Further it can have negative impact on employees' attitude and behaviour leading to organisational silence. It forces employees to move towards self-interest and promotes indifference between the employees and management.

Further *Bhageri, zarei and Aeen (2012)* found out through their research that organisational silence occurs due to top management team character, organisational & environment characteristic, affecting employee interaction, management belief about employees, organisational structure and policies, management fear of negative feedback, demographic dissimilarity. Similarly *Panehi, Veiseh, Dinkhar & Kamari (2012)* conducted research on 260 employees and revealed that organisation create a climate which makes people feel that their opinion are not valued. Organisational silence is greatly affected by support provided by organisation. *Knoll and Dick (2012)* was also of the view that lack of interest by the management, immediate supervisor and a climate in organisation wherein conformity is valued and promoted and dissent is suppressed and neglected. Further *Timming & Johnstone (2013)* found out through their research that, why despite having channels of communication the employees feel hesitant to speak up. According to authors there are certain issues on which employees prefer to remain silent and at the same time there are issues on which employees don't mind in voicing their concern. Therefore besides communication

opportunities pay inequity, managerial incompetency and decision making procedure are the issues which are difficult to raise and discuss. The study revealed that authoritarian personality structure wherein the employee derives pleasure in obedience to the will of the employer. Such employees follow the directions of leaders and don't like the idea of participating in decision making when offered voice opportunities. *Karaca (2013)* also discussed in his study that fear of being labelled as trouble maker, losing respect and trust of colleagues, losing the job, risking promotion, fear of isolation because of lack of experience are some causes of organisational silence.

Similarly *Sehitoglu (2014) & Jahanbakshiar, Assadi & Nejadi (2015)* supported through their research that silence results from fear, it may be related with damaging relationship, losing job, weakening social ties within an organisation, unfavourable past experience. Further *Erigu, Ozer, Gor, Thrac & Songur (2014)* conducted research on 548 nurses working in public hospitals found that fear attached with speaking up. Individual factors such as lack of experience, low position, low self-esteem, high level of concerns for communication, high level of self-adaptation, organisational factors such as cultural of injustice, deaf ear syndrome, silence climate and structure of organisation, and administrative factors such as not supporting open talking culture, being indifferent to new opinion, mistrust towards administration, fear of negative feedback, lack of trust are some of the factors which inhibit silence among employees. In year 2014 *Morrison* suggested that apart from fear, lack of opportunities to express, riskiness of voice and relationship with superior such as abusive leadership, powerlessness, detachment, job stressors and social stressors, career risk or image, change resistant culture. All the above discussed factors pull employees towards silence. *Akuzum (2014)* conducted research on 357 elementary school teachers revealed that if employees are treated fairly by their superior and organisation, their social interaction improve and they perform beyond their role expectation. On the other hand, when employees are exposed to unfair treatment they prefer not to trust their organisation and stay silent whenever any problem occurs. An employee may also remain silent due to injustice he feels at workplace behaviour of supervisor, defending himself or colleague or may not be able to share information or opinion because of fear of losing job or lack of experience or he may also feel that it is not worthy to speak up (*Laeque & Bakhtawari 2014*). Similarly *Whiteside and Barclay (2014)* also supported with their study which was conducted in two different groups with total employees of 399 that employee silence behaviour is greatly influenced by fair treatment at the workplace which has significant effect on employee outcome such as emotional exhaustion, stress, physical withdrawal, and psychological withdrawal. On the other hand *Gambarotto & Cammozzo (2014)* was of the view that employees prefer to remain silent while sharing information with colleagues than silence due



to fear of top management. Similarly employees hesitant in voicing their opinion due to decision making process, culture and perceptions, management processes, conformance with general ideas, leadership style, organisational structure, organisational environment. (Tabatabaei, Mirghaed & Jooneghani, 2014)

Further Jain (2015) conducted an exploratory research which revealed that emotions of employees such as guilt, anger and regret, nature of employees (obedience & conformity), personality traits such as introvert character, self-image maintenance perspective, self-esteem (people with high self-esteem see themselves as worthy, capable, fundamentally good whereas low self-esteem people see themselves as inept, incapable. Therefore people with low self-esteem are more prone to silence behaviour, low internal motivation in front of superior and act as antecedent causing organisational silence apart from silence due to superior-subordinate relationship, top management attitude and communication opportunities. Embarrassment, fear, narrow conceptions of ethical responsibility, bad experience in past, lack of organisational political skill are the factors as per Akbarian, Ansari, Shaemi & Keshtyari (2015). Whereas Orjeo & Anier hosseni (2015) conducted research on 260 members of staff and managers of medical science university and found that organisational culture is the important factor that can change the phenomena of silence. Organisational culture acts as a competitive advantage & helps the organisation in achieving the success. An effective organisational culture can break the silence climate and improve the participation of employees in information sharing and ultimately help the firm in improving financial and non-financial performance. If workers are working in unjust workplace that also affect their silence behaviour (Demiralay & Loreu, 2015). Apart from organisational culture, Alparslan & Erdem (2015) self-esteem of a person, lack of experience, low status or position in the hierarchical structure, leadership practise or style, supervisor attitude, communication opportunities, working in peaceful environment, lack of trust in senior management causes employees to remain silent. The study revealed that nurses remained silent because of indifferent attitude of management. Similarly if employees don't feel safe while sharing their viewpoint, they may decide to remain silent in order to avoid being victim of transmission of bad news and to maintain harmony in environment which give rise to mum effect, similarly abusive leadership also affect silence behaviour (Pachico, Monize & Calderia, 2015)

Donovan, O'Sullivan, Doyle, & Garvey (2015) conducted study which revealed that management avoid receiving feedback from their employees as any information or feedback received from employees is seen as less accurate and simultaneously employees also feels that it is waste of efforts to share the feedback when management is disinterested in employee voice. In order to receive genuine

feedback from employees, organisations should practice open communication culture. If there is a closed work culture, it will only bring high anxiety and a feeling of fear which increases the chance of silence, increase the level of dissatisfaction and indicating an intension to leave the organisation. (Kumar & Govindarajo, 2015). Naefi (2016) proposed that attitudes and values of top management, managers fear of getting negative feedback from the employees, managers implicit belief, lack of communication opportunities, supervisory support, official authority, employees fear of getting negative reaction has significant bearing an employee silence behaviour. Willingness to listen by top management promotes voice behaviour of employees. (Nechanska, Hughes & Dundon, 2018)

Further Parcham & Ghasemizad (2017) conducted research on 311 employees of university of medical science & health care headquarter which revealed that dimensions of the organisational culture such as organisational involvement, organisational adaptability, organisational consistency and organisational mission has a significant positive effect on organisational silence. If organisation strengthens its corporate culture, it will help in reducing organisational silence. Improving the organisational culture indices will help in developing an atmosphere for expression of ideas, criticism and voice which will help in eliminating silence behaviour in organisation. Personality of an individual also affects his silence behaviour. Introvert individual exhibit acquiescent and defensive silence, whereas extrovert ones tend to show pro-social silence behaviour (Yangil & Beydilli, 2016). The more an employee receive support from the organisation, the more an employee is inclined towards sharing an idea, suggestion and take active part in organisational learning. (Yeloglu, Fidamboy, Serpoush & Ozturk, 2016). It was also stressed in a study conducted by Kiewitz, Restubug, Shors, Raymend, Garcia & Tang (2016) on 320 employees of a large manufacturing organisation that employees prefer to remain silent when they work under abusive supervisor because remaining silent helps them in saving their resources to cope with abusive or toxic leader. Employees who experience abuse from supervisor cannot avoid supervisor as they have to depend upon supervisor for the resources so they start practicing the behaviour of self-defence. By engaging in the behaviour of self-defence, employees engage in defensive silence because they don't want to further damage the relationship with the supervisor. But it was also suggested in the study that not every employee will engage in silence behaviour. It depends upon assertiveness, which is the tendency to speak out for own interest and concern when faced abusive supervision. Low assertive employee who don't expect positive outcome of speaking up may indulge in more silence behaviour in order to damage the relationship with superior further. Similarly if there is climate of fear in the organisation it will intensify fearful reaction from subordinates towards abusive supervisor which again prompt

employees to engage in defensive silence. Top management and supervisor plays important role in either encourage or discourage the silence behaviour among employees (Magota, 2016) (Moghadam, Amiresmarli, Amini, Moen, Gharbarnijad & Akhlaghinsad, 2018). Similarly team structure and team climate, interpersonal level(i.e leader-follower or co-workers) also affect silence climate among employees (Knoll, Wegge, Unterraines, Silva & Johnson, 2016).

Further Shirvani, Arab, Karmani, Delavari and Kaini (2018) conducted research on 354 employees of general hospital of Tehran University of medical science wherein they asserted that style of management has a role to play in affecting organisational silence. According to the study there are 4 types of managerial styles i.e. participative management(which believes in delegating authority and power to employees) Imperative management(Where in manager believes in behaving in authoritative way) compassionate or Benevolent management(where in major decisions are made at upper level but there will be delegation of authority to some extent and lastly consultative style(under this management shows trust and confidence towards employees). The study revealed that when manager uses imperative management style the employees avoid expressing their opinion, concern and problem and remain silent because of fear of punishment. Similarly when manager uses exploitative authoritarian and benevolent authoritative leadership style then organisational silence is common. According to Hou and Yuan (2019) compare to men, women tend to encourage cooperation and improve relationship by smiling. So women show more relational silence than men, personality trait of employees, value orientation, protecting self or others from harm, superior subordinate relationship, organisational silence climate, organisational justice are some of the antecedents that causes organisational silence. Employee remains silent in those situations where employee experience weak public support. Employees analyse the environment before speaking up express only those opinion which is represented by majority of people than minority one. Similarly when employees strongly feel the public support system in organisation, they express their opinion confidently (Centinkaya & Karayel,2019)

Morrison & Milliken (2000) were among those who focussed not only on individual level factors but also focussed on organisational level factors leading to organisational silence. These authors conducted a conceptual study wherein they highlighted the fact that organisational silence act as an impediment to the organisational change and development. The authors came up with the conclusion that managers fear of negative feedback, manager's implicit belief (that management knows best about organisational issues and can discuss issues and take organisational decision in a better way. When management hold such opinion about employees they will certainly discourage / suppress any voice that comes

from below. Organisational and environmental variables -when the focus is more on efficiency and control in the organisation, than the managers may view honest opinion as more threatening and destructive for the organisation. Similarly organisation structure- if the organisation is using tall organisational structure, having number of levels, then the managers at the top will be less likely to communicate and built employees. If the organisation is following the tendency to bring in top managers from outside instead of promoting from within the organisation, then it will increase the gap between top management & employees. If organisation holds belief that employees are self- interested, not knowledgeable, doesn't know what is best for the organisation, then certainly top management will not want to involve employees in decision making, which will indicate a signal that disengagement is bad. And lastly direct effect of demographic dissimilarity- if the employees at the lower level feel that employees at the higher level are like themselves only, they will feel that they are fairly represented and will engage in the behaviour of voice. On the other hand if they feels that employees in the position of power are different, they will fear that they are under represented at the top and may conclude that organisation doesn't value the input of people like themselves which will enhance the belief among employees at lower level that it is more risky when there is high degree of demographic dissimilarity between top and lower level management. Similarly fear of retaliation and desire to maintain harmonious relationship with colleagues suppress the voice (Henriksen & Daylon (2006).

All the studies conducted between 2000-2020 focussed on the Top management support, supervisory support, communication opportunities, perceived organisational injustice , leadership style or behaviour, fear, position of employee in organisational structure, workplace ostracism (perception of being ignored and isolated by individual group) and individual characteristics such as lack of experience, lack of confidence, personality traits (introvert character or extrovert character), self-image maintenance perspective, self-esteem & gender as an antecedent of organisational silence. But it was Noelle & Nuemann who proposed the theory of "spiral of silence" in 1975 which helped in explaining that other people's perception do play a role in influencing an individual's willingness to express his/her opinion. The authors further discussed public opinion as social control which can be freely expressed without any fear of social isolation. If a person's opinion is shared by the members of a particular group, it gives confidence to the person to speak out or share his/her opinion publicly. Similarly people whose opinion falls in minority become more cautious of their thoughts which force them to change their behaviour and remain silent. (Neumann, 1991).

This change in behaviour leads to conformity that is people agreeing with majority opinion even if it is wrong. The earlier



studies underestimated the role of conformity processes in explaining why people get influenced by majority opinion. This social conformity might lead to serious consequences for employees in organisation. No previous study considered this fact how social influence leads to suppression of opinion, ideas or information. Which give scope for future research.

Thus it can be concluded that apart from organisational factors such as organisational support, top management support, supervisory support, communication opportunities, climate of injustice, organisational politics, psychological contract breach, trust and individual factors such as individual personality, lack of experience in organisation, fear, self-esteem perception and gender, social conformity also act as an antecedents of organisational silence, which forces people to suppress own opinion, idea, information and opt to conform to others opinion thereby resulting in silence behaviour.

Impact of organisational silence:-

Organisational silence can be detrimental to the organisation as it results from lack of concern among organisational members regarding various issues an organisation is facing (Deniz, Noyan & Ertosun, 2013). Organisational silence reduces the ability of employees to share their opinion which leads to stress, dissatisfaction among the employees (Tahmasebi, Mohammad & Aghaziaratti, 2013). According to Yurdakul, Besen & Erdogan (2016) organisational silence hinders the improvement and development of the organisation. It greatly affects the decision making ability in the organisation as it prevent people from sharing information, suggestions and ideas, which ultimately affects the development of the organisation. (Panahi, Veiseh, Dinkhar & Kamari (2012). If silence persist it can have a psychological impact on individuals leading to feeling of humiliation, anger, resentment and shut down their creativity (Morrison, 2014).

Organisational silence has a negative effect on employees. Employees may feel useless, being used, fear of not being valued. They may start taking pills and consuming alcohol. It may not only affect their personal but also psychological well-being. All this lead to low job satisfaction and commitment & ultimately will lead to low motivation and increased stress. (Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon & Wilkinson, 2011). So organisational silence has a role to play in ensuring employees commitment to the organisation. If the factors which increase the silence among employees get reduced then employee silence can also be eliminated, which will further enhance the sense of security among the employees, leading to increase in the commitment level of employees in the organisation. (Laeq & Bakhtawari, 2014) On the other hand if it is not managed properly it may have impact on the personal well-being of the employees and will lead to turnover intention among employees (Knoll & Dick, 2012)

Similarly Kumar, Alagappa & Govindarajo, 2015 conducted study on expatriate employees working in 4 manufacturing concerns, to assess how organisational silence affects job stress, organisational commitment & intention to leave and concluded that organisational silence is positively related to job stress and employees intention to leave.

Moreover silence not only affects the individual employee but it also affects the entire organisation. It may affect the decision making and error correction in organisation. It block creativity and innovation, it prevents any feedback be it negative or positive which is required for change in the organisation. Organisation wouldn't be benefitted from employee intellectual. Similarly problems could also not be identified, lack of feedback and lack of timely availability of information would therefore lead to inefficiency in decision making. It limit the knowledge sharing (Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon & Wilkinson, 2011). The silence behaviour exhibited by the employees slowdown the process of information sharing, which leads to deficiency in the knowledge flow in the organisation (Yeloglu, Fidamboy, Serpoush & Ozturk, 2016)

Further Perlow & William, (2003) in their Harvard business review pointed out that organisational silence not only affects the employees in the organisation but also senior managers or bosses when they are supposed to give negative feedback regarding employee performance. They also feel uncomfortable in expressing their differences with the subordinates especially when the organisation follow or place more value of being polite and avoid confrontations.

Conclusion:-

Silence is the most powerful scream, it should be considered seriously. Silence is often associated with respect for others, loyalty, decorum. But it can be costly to the employees as well as to the organisation, as it generate a feeling of anger, fear, humiliation and guilt. If it is not expressed for a long time, it can lead to loss of creativity and productivity. Employees in the organisation feel meaningless and powerless at work, their feeling of commitment deteriorates and they distance themselves from the organisation. Therefore this work alienation leads to loss of community and connectedness with the organisation, which leads employees to engage in silence behaviour. When work alienation increases then employee intention to leave the organisation also increases. When talented workforce leaves the organisation, it may lead to operational gap and affect business development.

Any organisation can reach the better position only when the knowledge, ideas, suggestions which are intentionally hidden should be expressed. Organisational silence act as a silent killer which kills the innovation and creativity of employees in organisation, leading to stress, dissatisfaction and loss of commitment among employees which can work in

the process of transforming an organisation. Thus employees should receive right support from their organisation, right organisational climate, so that they can take active part in organisational learning by sharing the knowledge. Employees play a pivotal role as they contribute in the success of the organisation by their knowledge, opinion and ideas. But sometimes they prefer to remain silent which act as detriment in the organisational prosperity. So we can say that one of the barriers for organisational growth is the lack of creative ideas, information and suggestions, lack of trust which is described as organisational silence.

Similarly social environment also influence people attitude towards opinion expression. People are importance source of influence and affect the way other people express their views. Such social influence pushes people towards conformity which makes people to change or suppress their views and give rise to silence climate in organisation. Though social conformity indicates cooperation but it also reduces generation of new information as people tend to follow others & suppress their own views. It also reduces individual's ability to reason or question things or opposing views. It suppresses the creativity & innovation among employees and ultimately affecting organisational learning, organisational change, development & overall functioning of the organisation (Yung Leng, 2018). Social conformity cannot be ignored as people Influence each other while working together. But it can be reduced by encouraging individual & constructive thinking among employees, by giving them a chance to identify problems & offer solutions. The concept of social conformity require further research as there is dearth of research as to how people in organisations influence each other's ability to speak up while working together.

Silence exist in every organisation as majority stays silent, so it is imperative on the part of the management to identify the reasons for silence and try to solve them. If management ignore employees silence then it can lead loss of vital information and creativity. The cost of silence may be tangible or intangible. Those who are silenced will be less likely to identify with the organisation, which can lead to stress, anxiety, job dissatisfaction and lack of organisational commitment.

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Annexure 1

Submission Date	Submission Id	Word Count	Character Count
15-Oct-2020	D93600108 (Urkund)	10000	68335



Urkund Analysis Result

Analysed Document:	organisational silence conceptual paper (2) (1) (1).docx (D93600108)
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Significance:	10 %

Sources included in the report:

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**Reviewers
Comment**

Reviewer Comment 1: The significance of the study can be seen from the fact the previous researches on the theme have focused mainly on studying impact of few organisational factors as well as individual factors on the organisational silence. Whereas, this paper makes an attempt to study the impact of perception of people in the organisation affecting their ability to share opinion, view or information towards conformity and thus creating a silent climate in the organisation.

Reviewer's Comment 2: This is review based paper explaining the concept of organisational silence and coming out with its antecedents. A good and significant number of literatures are reviewed by the authors as well as mentioned in the references. The paper provides a strong base for conducting an exploratory study on the theme.

Reviewer's Comment 3: The authors have done really thorough research on the theme that is reflected by the number of references cited in text. Identifying the factors affecting organisational silence is found to be imperative on the part of management as ignorance of that can lead to loss of vital information and creativity among the employees.

Madhulika. P. Sarkar and Deepika

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Conflict of Interest: Author of a Paper
had no conflict neither financially nor academically.

**Editorial
Excerpt**

The article has 10% of plagiarism which is the accepted percentage as per the norms and standards of the journal for the publication. As per the editorial board's observations and blind reviewers' remarks the paper had some minor revisions which were communicated on a timely basis to the author (Madhulika & Deepika) and accordingly all the corrections had been incorporated as and when directed and required to do so. The comments related to this manuscript are noticeably related to the theme "**Organisational Silence and its Antecedents**" both subject-wise and research-wise. Employee silence is pervasive in organisation but it is neglected for a number of reasons. Employees are considered to be an asset for the organisation which if they do not contribute through their knowledge, experience and suggestions in turn gives rise to the concept of employee silence collectively known as organisational silence. The study aims to review the concept and factors affecting organisational silence. Findings of the study concludes apart from organisational and individual factors; perception of other people are also found to affect one's ability to speak up and majority of the employees share their views when others speak up else, they are forced to remain silent. Overall, the paper promises to provide a strong base for the further studies in the area. After comprehensive reviews and editorial board's remarks the manuscript has been categorised and decided to publish under "**View Point**" category.

Acknowledgement

The acknowledgment section is an essential part of all academic research papers. It provides appropriate recognition to all contributors for their hard work and effort taken while writing a paper. The data presented and analyzed in this paper by (Madhulika & Deepika) was collected first handily and wherever it has been taken the proper acknowledgment and endorsement depicts. The author is highly indebted to others who had facilitated in accomplishing the research. Last but not least endorse all reviewers and editors of GJEIS in publishing in a present issue.

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