Study on Relationship Between Organizational Silence and Commitment in Iran

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Abstract: An organization employees' decision for withholding their opinions result in creating of organizational silence phenomenon. A phenomenon that lead to difficulties like an increase in a level of job dissatisfaction and a decrease in a level of organizational commitment. In this research, in addition to explain the association between dimensions of organizational silence climate and commitment among employees of faculties of humanities and management that have been divided into two categories of professors and employee officers, by correlation analysis, it has been attempted to explain the research variables and comparing them through independent-sample T test between these two groups. In this way, results of the research show that notwithstanding existence of correlation among perceived silence climate, employee silence behavior and organizational commitment and therefore supporting hypotheses of the research for both groups, strength of the relationships is different and the relationship between commitment and other variables of the research is stronger for professors. Also, further investigations through independent-sample T test support existence of differentiation in research variables for both groups as well. The results show that although perception of organizational silence climate is stronger among employee officers but amount of their organizational commitment is in a higher level toward professors.

Key words: Organizational Silence · Organizational Commitment · Silence Climate · Faculties of Humanities and Management · Professors' Commitment · Employees' Commitment

INTRODUCTION

Employees are regarded as major sources of change, creativity, learning and innovation, which are critical factors to the success of organizations. However, many employees choose not to voice their opinions and concerns about matters in their organizations. While in a changing world, organizations need for employees who express their ideas, who are responsive to the challenges of the environment, who are not afraid to share information and knowledge, who can stand up for their own and their team beliefs [1]. Discursive engagement in organizations involves complex microprocesses of talk and silence. Through talk, organizational members develop understandings of organizational policies and procedures, construct role identities, both organizational and personal and generally learn the rules of the game. Through silence, organizational members suppress concerns about difficult or troubling personal as well as organizational issues [2].

In primary descriptions, silence had been equaled by loyalty and stated that not to voice opinions and concerns, in fact is not a challenging problem but recent researches showed that a silence climate in organizations can be as opposed to desirable outputs like employees' job satisfaction and commitment to their organizations [3].

Organizational commitment is an important attitude in assessing employees' intention to quit and the overall contribution of the employee to the organization [4].

Organizational commitment is a variable which can be both independent and dependent, simultaneity. In fact, organizational commitment not only affects other variables but also touch by them.

As it is cited earlier, there are some researches that have mentioned the relationship between organizational silence and commitment. Some of them are related to Exit-Voice-Loyalty (EVL) literature. Rusbult *et al.*, (1982) and Farrell (1983) studies, for example, indicate that employees may show slack and disregardful behavior in some situations. This cause an atrophy in organizational

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relationships and alienated employees withdraw from committed organizational participation to more silent, alienative postures [5, 6]. Donaghey et al., (2011) explain how management attitude and behaviors can, through the design of particular institutional arrangements, perpetuate a climate of silence and affect organizational participations [7]. In this regard, Beer (2009) indicates that organizational silence, as some other behavioral variables, is a variable which can prevail about barriers to effectiveness, commitment and performance [8].

Similary, in other studies, Li-hong et al., (2011) and Nikolaou et al., (2011), perused this relationship in different environments, empirically. The result of these researches confirms others totally and shows that there is a significant negative relationship between silence and commitment in organizations [9, 10].

Based on this, whereas low levels of organizational commitment can result in harmful effects to an organization, it attempted to explain the relationship between organizational Silence and commitment in this research. In fact, it is attempted to answer this question that how a relationship is established between organizational silence and commitment for members of university consists of two major groups of heterogeneous.

Organizational Silence: Not only does silence mean not speaking, but it also means not writing, not being present, not being heard and being ignored. Further, silencing can refer to "quieting . . . censorship, suppression, marginalization, trivialization, exclusion, ghettoization and other forms of discounting [11]. Pinder and Harlos (2001) conceptualize employee silence as involving the withholding of 'genuine' expressions about organizational circumstances by certain organizational members from those who are in a position to change those circumstances [12]. Morrison and Milliken argue that organizational silence is the term used to refer to the collective-level phenomenon of doing or saying very little in response to significant problems or issues facing an organization or industry because of negative reactions [13]. In fact, when most of employees prefer to keep silence about organizational matters, silence becomes a collective behavior that is called organizational Silence [14].

Senge (1999) describes this silence climate in a change context indicating that organizations operate in a ''silo'' mentality in which people tend to handle problems in their own functional areas, ignoring the difficult interaction between the silos. As a result, people tend to

discuss these issues only in private, in ways that reinforce the climate of dissatisfaction and guarantee that they remain confidential and, therefore, not for discussion. Senge (1999) continues that some managers have lived for so long in environments where fear, intimidation and silence are the norms, that they can not imagine an alternative way of working and behaving. This limited capacity for openness results in remaining silent, reinforcing the existing dissatisfying situation and creating ''silent'' norms and behaviors for the newcomers [15].

In fact, organizational silence is an inefficient process which can waste all organizational efforts and may take various forms, such as collective silence in meetings, low levels of participation in suggestion schemes, low levels of collective voice and so forth [1].

There are many reasons for keeping silence. Morrison and Milliken (2000) claim to have conceptually identified organizational variables that are conducive to silence, their propositions are summarized in the following table:

Employees' silence is so dangerous for organizations because it leads to indifference among some employees during the time. Indifferent employees are individuals who are Indifferent toward their work, their employers, quality of their work and totally, their organization [17]. Indifferent employees who are often the result of ignoring people's silence, cause extension of "be Indifferent" attitude. Extension of this attitude hurt both employees and organizations.

Organizational Commitment: Commitment is studied in a broad scope. Several initial studies and some important researches in organizational literature behavior points out employees' commitment to employer called as organizational commitment and it is defined as a profound belief on organizational aims and values and propensity to do a remarkable attempt for organization and a powerful demand for the continuance of membership in the organization [18]. There are two insights on organizational commitment. The first one considers commitment as an affective issue or view. According to this theory, people recognize their identity through organization and are committed to retain their organizational commitment in order to pursue their aims. In the second attitude, it is believed that commitment is a behavioral issue. According to it, individuals have powerful commitment to organization in certain conditions. On this basis, individuals stay in organization and committed to it due to their investments [19]. Organizational commitment has a critical impact on organizational performance [20]. In this

line, Bateman and Strasser state that the reasons on studying on organizational commitment relate to: (1) employees' behavior and performance efficiency, (2) attitude, affection and cognition paradigms such as job satisfaction, (3) job traits and employees' role such accountability and (4) personal traits such as age and proficiency [21]. Also, there are various factors which play role in increasing or decreasing on organizational commitment:

- An individual expresses more on organizational commitment when he/she possesses higher level of responsibility and independence in his/her job and the job is not repetitive. In the contrary, lower job opportunities leads into more job-related tensions and ambiguities as well as tendency to show lower commitment level.
- When it is possible to find a better job, the ideality of such alternatives cause lower personal commitment.
- Older and experienced employees and those who are satisfied with their performance tend to higher on organizational commitment levels than others.
- Those individuals who are satisfied with their supervisors and the equality in assessing their performance and feel that organization pays more attention to their amenities enjoy higher on organizational commitment level.
- More employees' contribution in decision-making, more on organizational commitment [22].

In fact, individuals with high organizational commitment show three characteristics:

- They accept organizational aims and values in high levels.
- They seriously tend to attempt on achieving organizational goals.
- They are highly interested in staying and continuing their work in the organization [15].

Theory and Hypotheses: Although organizational Silence is a destructive organizational process that can obtrude high cost on organizations but the current level of research on organizational silence indicate: (1) the latent or subjective nature of silence makes it inherently difficult to either quantify or qualify without the proper lens to recognize or interpret it; and (2) the hierarchical constructs of organizational structure and power suggest that employee silence may occur too far from top

management's detection and therefore may inhibit an awareness of its presence [23]. However, some researchers describe organizational Silence based on three dimensions of top management attitudes to silence, supervisor's attitudes to silence, communication opportunities and also, employee silence behavior:

Top Management and Supervisor's Attitudes to Silence: managers/supervisors feel threatened by the prospect of examining their own role, responsibility and performance. They feel defensive and fear the idea that their performance may not be always adequate and that their salaries cannot be justified. As a result, they project the blame of any problems away from themselves and they preferred to negatively comment on their subordinate's behaviors, unclear goals or organizational inefficiencies. This type of behavior creates a silence climate where employees cannot trust that their managers will not penalize them directly or indirectly for revealing mistakes or for questioning their course of actions.

Communication Opportunities: Here are related to openness and trust in communication, information sharing, perceived feelings of having a voice and being taken seriously.

Employee Silence Behavior: Here is related to employee's decision for withholding opinions and concerns about the organization matters [15].

As regards the research purpose to explanation of relationship between silence climate and organizational commitment, we hypothesize that:

H1: The perceived lack of top management openness to voice will be related to the likelihood and extent of employee silence behavior.

H2: The perceived lack of supervisor's openness to voice will be related to the likelihood and extent of employee silence behavior.

H3: Employee's silence behavior will be related with communication opportunities.

H4: Perceived silence climate dimensions are related with organizational commitment.

H5: Employees' silence behavior is related with organizational commitment.

MATERIAS AND METHODS

In present study, the population consists of professors and employee officers of Tehran faculties of humanities and management by using ranked random sampling method. It includes 313 professors and 187 employee officers. By using limit society sampling formula, statistical sample includes 55 professors, 50 employee officers (totally 105). To increase extendibility, 125 questionnaires namely 65 for professors and 60 for employee officers were distributed. Overall, 121 questionnaires namely 62 for professors and 59 for employee officers were gathered and analyzed.

Data was collected by using a standard questionnaire. In order to examine organizational silence and organizational commitment variables, the scales of Vakola and Bouradas (2003) was used. Thus, in mentioned questionnaire, 15 items are allocated to perceived organizational silence variables of which three items had reverse scores, 7 items were allotted to the broadness of employees' silence behavior and 5 items were considered for organizational commitment of which 1 item had reverse score. Overall, a 27-item questionnaire was used in which the questions related to the perceived organizational

silence and organizational commitment were measured in a continuum from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The first four items of the broadness of silence behavior were measured in a continuum from 1 (never) to 5 (always) and the remained three items were measured by 1 (very difficult) to 5 (very easy). By using chronbach alpha for 27 items, questionnaire reliability was calculated as 0.904.

Data Analysis and Research Findings: In order to examine the assumptions of two communities, the Pearson′s correlation test and SPSS 16 software was used and then the results were compared with each other.

Table 1 outlines the correlation coefficients of professors' sample. It shows that there is a mean and significant relationship between organizational commitment and other research variables in confidence level of 99%. Also, the relationship between perceived silence climate variable and its aspects with the broadness of silence behavior in professors' sample is lower than other studied relations.

Table 2 outlines the correlation coefficients of employee officers' sample. It shows that although there is a significant relationship between commitment and other research variables, it is in a low level. Meanwhile, the

Table 1: Reasons for silence [16]

Organizational silence	Organizational voice
Managers from financial or economic backgrounds	Managers from different backgrounds
Management team is uniform in backgrounds	Managers are a diverse group
Managers value hierarchies and harmony	Management values democratic decision-making and protest
High level of difference (e.g. gender, age) between management and employees	Lower level of difference between management and employees
Management emphasis on control and efficiency	Management's embrace of control and efficiency less emphatic
Organization operates in low-munificence environment	Organization is relatively resource abundant
Organization is in a stable industrial sector	Organization in newer and more volatile area (e.g. Internet)
Top managers hired from outside the organization	Top managers make their way through the organization
Organization relies heavily on contract labor	Organization gets the job done with it's own staff
Organizational structure has centralized decision making	Management devolves decision making
Organizational structure less likely to have formal upward feedback mechanisms	Management fosters formal feedback from below
Management reacts negatively to feedback and less likely to solicit it	Management encourages feedback from subordinates
Mid to lower level employees able to directly interrelate,	Mid to lower level employees enjoy wide and dense social interactions at work

Table 2: correlation coefficients among research variables in professors' sample

	Organizational commitment	Silence behavior	Silence climate	Top managers' attitude on silence	Supervisors' attitude on silence	Communication opportunities
Organizational commitment	1					
Silence behavior	0.634	1				
Silence climate	0.658	0.461	1			
Top managers' attitude on silence	0.542	0.350	0.849	1		
Supervisors' attitude on silence	0.591	0.451	0.906	0.611	1	
Communication opportunities	0.618	0.423	0.904	0.648	0.777	1

All coefficients are significant in confidence level of 99%

Table 3: correlation coefficients among research variables in employee officer s' sample

	Organizational commitment	Silence behavior	Silence climate	Top managers' attitude on silence	Supervisors' attitude on silence	Communication opportunities
Organizational commitment	1					
Silence behavior	0.325*	1				
Silence climate	0.299*	0.682**	1			
Top managers' attitude on silence	0.091	0.563**	0.796**	1		
Supervisors' attitude on silence	0.276*	0.529**	0.871**	0.534**	1	
Communication opportunities	0.378**	0.595**	0.784**	0.421**	0.555**	1

*All coefficients are significant in confidence level of 95%

**All coefficients are significant in confidence level of 99%

Table 4: average comparison test of both communities

|						Confidence interval of the differences	
Research variables	Respondents' category	N	Mean	SD	t -value	Low level	High level
Silence climate	Professors	62	2.3763	0.88197	-2.537	-0.66380	-0/08182
	Officers	59	2.7492	0.72210			
Silence behavior	Professors	62	3.1083	0.49195	1.278	-0.06761	0.31326
	Officers	59	2.9855	0.56130			
Organizational commitment	Professors	62	2.6129	0.96487	-2.308	-0.70032	-0.05354
	Officers	59	2.9898	0.82914			

Confidence level 95%
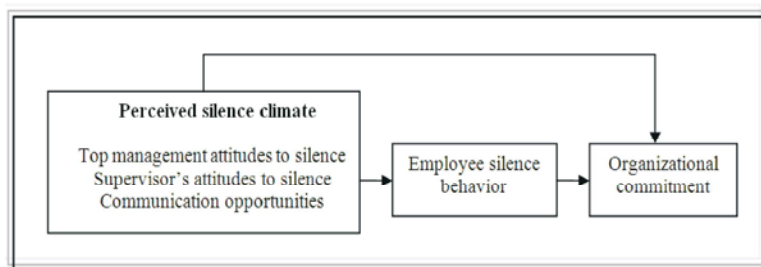
Fig. 1: Hypothesized model

relationship between perceived silence climate variable and its aspects with the broadness of silence behavior is more notable for this sample than the relationship between commitment and other aspects.

As seen in Tables 1 and 2, although research hypotheses are supported for both communities and, in some cases, there is no significant difference on observed correlations between both groups; there is a remarkable difference between correlations on organizational commitment and other research elements. In this line, although there is a relative powerful correlation between mentioned elements and organizational commitment, this correlation is neither justifiable and nor ignorable in employee officers community. Vice versa, although there is a relationship between perceived silence climate variable and its aspects with the broadness of silence behavior in employee officers' community, it is a low level relationship in professors' community.

To the same reason and due to a tangible difference between both communities and in order to study both groups in terms of differences in the rate of research variables, average comparison test for both communities is used.

As observed in Table 3, the average rate of both groups is different in terms of respondents' groups. Considering low and high levels, one can conclude that average difference of both communities is zero for perceived silence climate and commitment variables. Therefore, the first community (professors) is smaller than employee officers' community on these two variables.

Regarding silence behavior broadness the average difference is not significant and this means that there is no significant difference between both communities on this variable.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Overall, one can say that the results of this research on the existence of significant relationship between organizational silence and commitment are aligned to the previous researches. Yet, what makes this research different from others is to study the influence of members' type (professors and employee officers) on severity of the relationship. According to the obtained results, it seems that despite of confirming hypotheses, there is a noteworthy difference between two groups of respondents on severity of the relationship. Based on this, while the relationship between organizational commitment and silence behavior broadness is moderate for professors, it is low for employee officers and while the relationship between perceived silence climate and silence behavior broadness is low for professors, it is moderate for employee officers. How such differences are justifiable?.

Average compare test of both communities for all research variables has highly clarified the reasons of such a difference. Initially, as the results of the test show, the rate of perceived silence climate among professors is less than employee officers while the rate of silence behavior has no significant difference between both groups. Here, one can argue that the reason is professors' more independence-seeking than employee officers inside organizations (schools). So, it is for the same reason that in contrary to employee officers' community, the level of relationship between perceived silence climate and its aspect with silence behavior is low in professor group. The result reminds that contrary to employee officers, the reasons for professors' silence behavior broadness is likely not inside the organization but it is relate to external factors that cause professors' silence behavior. Secondly, it raises the issue of weak relationship between silence and commitment among employee officers compared to this relationship among professors where it is observable in average compare test and it is justified well because of professors' lower commitment than employee officers. In one hand, it shows professors' profound sensitivity to silence climate enounced by low commitment levels and is justifiable by professors' social prestige as an informed class of the society. On the other hand, it expounds employees' commitment correlates to other factors than organizational ambience such as job characteristics and internal/external incentives by considering existed literature.

Anyhow, the relationship between perceived silence, employees' silence behavior broadness and organizational commitment are certain and it is necessary to pay special attention to such relations in certain communities like professors if we want more committed staff. In this line, efforts to eliminate or weaken elements which lead into silence behavior and climate in employees' various groups and classes through fundamental initiatives such as expanding the factors of a open culture outside the organization or society as well as regular and principal changes in organizational system/structure and moving toward improving the attitudes of top organizational authorities can help to eliminate silence behavior in employees' various groups and to improve variables such as fruitful and effective commitment.

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