

# The Review of Employee Silence

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**Abstract.** This paper reviews the concepts and dimensions of employee silence through reviewing the existing literature, and comparatively explores the relationship and difference between employee silence and employee voice. In addition, this study explores the influencing factors of employee silence from three aspects: individual, leadership and organization, and reviews the effect of employee silence from both individual and organizational levels.

## 1. The Concept, Dimension of Employee Silence

In recent years, more and more scholars have carried out research on employee silence behavior, and they have achieved a consistent definition of employee silence: employees have the ability to change organizational performance, but retain the understanding of organizational environment, as well as emotional evaluation behavior [1]. Therefore, the precondition of silence is that individuals have some knowledge of things or have corresponding solutions. Behaviors that are not known or expressed intentionally do not fall into the category of employee silence [2,3]. Scholars divide employee silence into different dimensions based on silence motivation. The specific dimensions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 dimensional of employee silence

Writer and Time	Dimension	Source
Pinder & Harlos(2001)[1]	quiescent silence	《Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management》
	acquiescent silence	
Van Dyne et al.(2003)[2]	acquiescent silence	《Journal of Management Studies》
	defensive silence	
	prosocial silence	
Detert & Edmondson[4]	single dimension	《Academy of Management Journal》
Zheng et al.(2008)[5]	acquiescent silence	《Acta Psychologica Sinica》
	defensive silence	
	disregardful silence	

## 2. The Difference Between Voice and Silence

Voice and silence seem to be opposite concepts—voice means not to be silent. Voice refers to the individual's behavior of providing questions related views, ideas, worries and information to leader or other members [4]. To understand why employees are reluctant to put forward key points of view, we should not only understand the lack of situation conditions to promote voice, but also test the impediments to employee silence [6]. So it seems that silence and voice are two concepts which are both similar and different [4]. The difference between employee voice and employee silence is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 The difference between employee voice and employee silence

	voice	silence
<b>concept</b>	Individual provides with ideas, concerns, and information about a problem to leader or other member	Individual retains the understanding of organizational environment, as well as emotional evaluation behavior
<b>motivation</b>	Expressing opinions or promoting organizational development	Self-protection, avoiding useless efforts or other motivation
<b>influence factor</b>	For example: active personality is positively correlated with voice, but not with silence	
<b>Influence effect</b>	Improve organizational performance	Obstructing information flow and reducing the quality of decision-making

### 3. Related Research

#### 3.1 Influencing factors of employee silence

Demographic characteristics are one of the factors affecting employee silence. For example, compared with men, women tend to encourage cooperation and improve relationships by smiling or nodding, so women show more relational silence than men. In addition, the influence of personality traits and value orientation on silence has also been verified by scholars at home and abroad[3,7]. Protecting oneself or others from harm is one of the main motivations of employee silence. Therefore, individual's perception of environmental psychological safety will inevitably affect the silence behavior.

Superior-subordinate guanxi decides the risk and benefit of voice, and also becomes an important determinant of employees remain silence [3]. In addition, there is a significant positive relationship between supervisor attitude and employee silence [8]. Narcissistic leaders tend to decide their own solutions to problems and adopt fewer suggestions from employees, leading to employees tending to retain their own views and thus more silence [9].

The organizational silence climate fits the motivation of employee silence and has significant positive effects on acquiescent silence, defensive silence and opportunistic silence. Organizational justice not only predicts employees attitudes and behaviors, but also is an effective factor to improve employee silence [10]. The model of employee silence is shown in Figure 1.

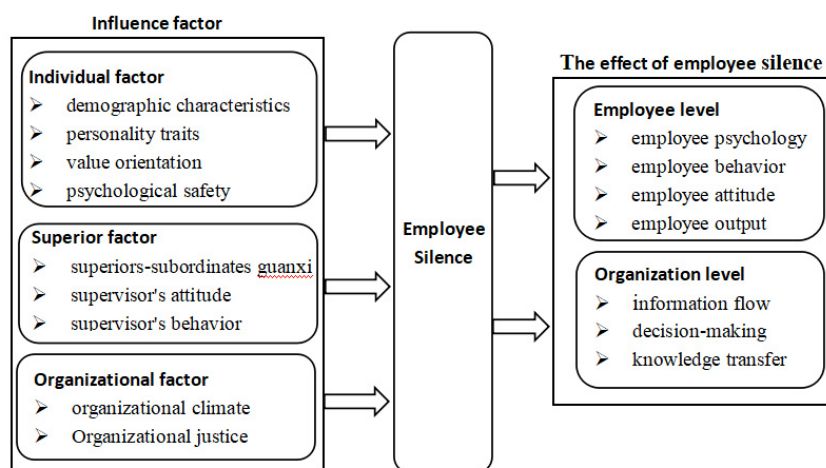


Figure 1 the model of employee silence

#### 3.2 The effect of employee silence

More and more scholars pay attention to the study of the antecedents of employee silence. In contrast, there is little study on the effect of employee silence. Previous research on the effect of employee silence mainly discusses the impact of employee silence on employee psychology and performance, and discusses the impact of employee silence on organizational process.

Employee silence produces stress, cynicism, discontent and disengagement, which in turn

reduces employee happiness and organizational commitment. In addition, employee silence will also lead to emotional exhaustion, withdrawal, turnover behavior, and decline job satisfaction, employee engagement, employee performance, creativity and productivity [11]. In addition, employee silence hinders the effective flow of information, destroys the effective transfer of knowledge and information within the organization, reduces the decision-making ability of the organization, and then reduces the performance of the whole organization.

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