

THE IMPACT OF EMPLOYEE SILENCE ON COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOR IN THE TELECOMMUNICATION SECTOR IN EGYPT: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT: *There is a limited number of research studies focused on investigating the relationship between employee silence and counterproductive work behavior especially in the telecommunication sector. Thus, this study aims to examine the impact of employee silence' dimensions on counterproductive work behavior in the telecommunication sector in Egypt. The participants in this study were 231 including both managerial and executive employees. The relations between sub-dimensions of employee silence and counterproductive work behavior are tested with correlation analysis and SEM Partial Least Squares. The results of this study have shown that as there was a positive and significant impact between acquiescent silence and counterproductive work behavior. Also, there was a negative and significant impact between prosocial silence and counterproductive work behavior, while the relationship between quiescent silence (defensive) and counterproductive behavior was not supported as the results have shown a negative and insignificant results. The reason for the different results is because some employees may be silent although they do not engage in any anti-work behaviors.*

KEYWORD: employee silence, counterproductive, work, behavior

INTRODUCTION

As modern organizational environments diversify in different forms, the communication processes within them become more and more complex. As a result, employees have been identified as the main crucial source to the success of organizations and they are recognized as organizations' sources of change, creativity, learning and innovation (Cetin,2020). However, some employees, when they are asked by their management, they often feel insecure about expressing their own views and opinions due to the fact they feel that their opinion and suggestions may affect the existing balance and organization or managers or even affect them negatively (Sharu & Manikandan,2019) .

This feeling of insecurity of employees causes them to remain consciously or unconsciously silent (Ozkan et al., 2015). But even though ,in a changing world, the main priority for organizations is to have employees who express their ideas freely ,

respond to the demands of the external environment, are not afraid to share any information and knowledge and they are loyal and committed to their organizations (Harlos & Knoll,2018).

Moreover, beside such threats concerning organizational functioning and improvement, employee silence may lead to offensive violations that end up with counterproductive work behaviors (Salin et al., 2014). Stanley et al. (2005) viewed counterproductive behavior as a major obstacle to organizational change. In general, these behaviors can be seen as an outcome of distrust and a feeling of frustration and hopelessness , as a result, such a feeling towards the organization can lead to different forms of anti-work behaviors like mobbing, bullying, cynicism...etc (Harlos & Knoll, 2018).

Meanwhile, in this paper the researcher will discuss if any of the different dimensions of employee silence can lead to any form of counterproductive work behavior inside the organizations.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Since employees are regarded as a source of competitive advantage, innovation and learning as they are considered the strategic factors through which to achieve organizational goals, although, many of them choose to be silent and not to convey their valuable opinions and concerns regarding any issue in their organizations (Cinar et al.,2013). As a result , this affects both the overall organization and also the employees' themselves (Harlos & Knoll,2018).

Employee silence

Employee silence Is a phenomenon which takes place in the organization when employees don't want to express their thoughts, which can be regarded as an indicator of problem they have toward their organization (Brinsfield, 2009).

Accordingly, employee silence as a phenomenon can be defined as “the intentional withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individuals behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his/her organizational circumstance to persons who are perceived to be capable of affecting the change or redress” (Pinder & Harlos, 2001,p.334).

While, Dyne et al. (2003) argued that there are three main motivations for employees to remain silent; acquiescent, quiescent and prosocial in which, employees who are acquiescently silent “they do not speak up because they have a belief that if they speak up and express their opinions it will not be valued by anyone. Employees who are quiescently or defensively silent withhold information and opinions because of self-protection and fear emotions (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Lastly, employees can also be motivated to be silent in order to benefit the organizational members and the organization as a whole by holding back job-related information, feelings, or thoughts (Milliken et al., 2003; Dyne et al., 2003). The prosocial silence, devotion, and cooperation depends on the work-related ideas, information and ideas, are stored for the benefit of the organization or other colleagues (Podsakoff,2000).

When employees withhold their ideas and feedbacks, this affects both themselves and their organization alike (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). At the individual level, higher levels of stress, lack of motivation and other negative emotions such as feeling weak or worthless are observed (Çaylak & Altuntaş, 2017). At the organizational level, employees' silence might result in lower performance and productivity and decrease the levels of commitment (Harlos & Knoll, 2018). Those employees' who remain silent are more likely to experience negative behaviors such as anger and shame and another negative behaviors toward the organization all these behaviors are forms of counterproductive behavior (Yıldız, 2013).

Usually employees have purposes behind their silence, as they do not share their opinions, ideas or information about issues they face at workplace which inhibit improvement and development (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

There are several reasons for silence in the organization that emerge from different factors, as it can be observed that the self-esteem a person has a great effect on the formation of his/her individual behaviors at the workplace (Le Pine, Dyne 1998). In another word, employees whose self-esteem is high make more effort to bring about a change, whereas, employees whose self-esteem is low they have an abstain from behaviors that may cause them to be in a defenseless state, as a result, they avoid expressing their ideas due to the risk that they think they will perceive (Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003). (Brinsfield, 2009). Undoubtedly, lack of experience is a factor that hamper speaking out (Milliken et al. 2003).

In addition, the nature of personality as neurotic personality traits increase silence whereas being extroverted decreases silence (Brinsfield 2013). Beside these, of course the emotional state such as, emotional breakdown or psychological lethargy that a person may feel will lead to be silent (Whiteside & Barclay 2013)

Employees may remain silent in a working environment where the culture of fear and intimidation prevail and they seem to be reluctant to interfere in any organizational policies and administrative power (Clapham & Cooper 2005). Also, Some managers want to avoid any negative feedback about them because they don't want to be perceived as unsatisfactory. Thus, they create an organizational climate that inhibits any negative feedback from their subordinates (Morrison & Milliken 2000; Tangirala, Ramanujam 2008).

Leadership practices also have an impact on silence and speaking out. Especially transformational leadership approach that can decrease silence and boosts the self-confidence of the employee (Valentine et al. 2006). This in turn, shows a high perceived level of organizational support that can strengthen the climate of confidence, increase positive feedback and eliminate silence of employees (Wang & Hsieh 2013)

Fortunately, Researches show employee speak up when they psychologically feel safe (Botero & Dyne 2009; Brinsfield 2013). The employee needs to get this feeling from his/her managers because the immediate superior –the employee is directly in his/her

sphere of influence- has a greater influence on the emergence of silence (Perkins, 2014). This in return, creates a climate of confidence, enables the emergence of different approaches to problems, different values and suggestions, and speeds up career development by enhancing work performance (Eby et al. 2000).

However, not every case of non-communication represents employee silence; it may only consider a conscious decision from the employees to hold back important opinions, information, concerns and questions (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Hence, employee silence does not describe the unintentional ability to communicate or engage in the organization that might result from mindlessness or having nothing even to say (Dyne et al., 2003).

In contrast, (Dyne et al., 2003) agreed that silence has been perceived as the contrast of voice. However, employee silence is not an absence of voice (Knol et.al.,2021). As well as, scholars have stressed the notion that an individual may remain speechless when he or she has nothing meaningful to say. (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Dyne et al., 2003).

Counterproductive work behavior

At work, employees can react freely and exhibit a wide range of behaviors, but employers expect that these behaviors will benefit the firm and will involve them in the fulfillment of their duties and undertaking other various activities to foster the success of the organization (Bojarska,2015).

However, employees also may behave inappropriately and harm the firm and their coworkers, the causes and types of such behavior have been a subject of interest in many organizational psychology studies. Collectively, such actions are known as Counterproductive Work Behavior (Spector & Fox.,2010).

Meanwhile, earlier researchers have given different expressions to the term deviance workplace behavior such as counterproductive workplace behavior , antisocial behavior organizational misbehavior, workplace sabotage, worker resistance, dysfunctional behavior and non-complaint behavior among others, “Bad Behavior” in Organizations including theft, sabotage, abuse, and aggression (Zhang et al.,2019).

Also, Harlos & Knoll (2018) argued that these acts can be expressed as bullying, emotional abuse, cynicism and mobbing. Accordingly, Counterproductive work behavior has been studied from a variety of perspectives, using different terms to refer to a partially overlapping set of harmful acts, this includes aggression, deviance, retaliation and revenge (Baharom et al.,2017).

Counterproductive work behaviors is detrimental to the organization and to co-workers, it includes both breaking rules and laws, as well as social norms (Bojarska, 2015). Many authors show a negative relationship between these behaviors and work satisfaction and this is the seed of workplace deviance (Baharom et al., 2017).

Accordingly, Counterproductive work behavior can be defined as “any intentional behavior on the part of an organizational member viewed by the organization as contrary to its legitimate interests” (Hai & Tziner, 2014, p.2).

The relation between employee silence and counterproductive work behavior

Although employees are important for the success of organizations, however, when employees behave in ways that seems inappropriate or that go against the goals of the organization, these actions may involve behaviors damaging to inter-employee relationships, organizational productivity, efficiency and even the company image (Salin et al, 2014).

The silence of employees has an impact on their behaviors, that can appear in different form of an against work behavior, which are costly to both individuals and organizations (Bennett & Robinson, 2003). Employees who display counterproductive workplace behaviors are more likely to develop stress related problems , resign and to experience low self-esteem, increased lack of confidence at work and physical and psychological pains by way of illustration, dissatisfied employees are more likely to engage in theft behaviors (Kulas et al., 2007)

Literature linking counterproductive work behavior and employee silence has tended to focus more on identifying the predictors rather than explaining the outcomes, also, it concentrates more on the situational factors than individual one (Harlos & knoll,2018).

Accordingly, the research hypotheses can be postulated from figure 1:

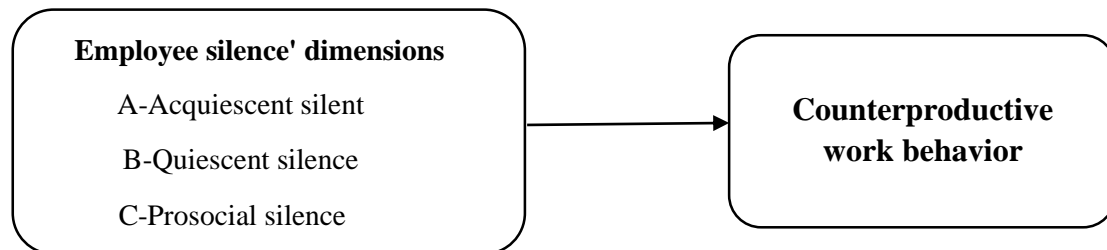


Figure 1. Relation between employee silence and counterproductive work behavior

H1: There is a positive and significant relationship between "acquiescent silence" and "counterproductive work behavior".

H2: There is a positive and significant relationship between "quiescent Silence" or "defensive silence" and " counterproductive work behavior ".

H3: There is a negative and significant relationship between "prosocial silence" and " counterproductive work behavior ".

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected using self-administered questionnaire in order to reach a wider geographical area. The questionnaire was originally developed in "English language version" and then it was translated into "Arabic language version" In order to make sure that the English version and the Arabic one are similar, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic and then re-translated back again to English to guarantee that all questions involved in questionnaire will have the same meaning.

The questionnaires were distributed through direct interview with the managerial and executive employees in the four selected telecommunication companies. This in turn would increase the response rate by collecting information from many respondents in an inexpensive way.

The researcher applied this study on the telecommunication sector in Egypt with its main four companies (Vodafone, We, Orange and Etisalat), because this sector is one of the most dynamic sectors of the Egyptian economy which continue to grow even during periods of turbulence. In the four previously mentioned telecommunication companies, the total number of employees are 31,900 employees located in Great Cairo and Giza. These employees are both from managerial and executives levels.

The research sample type is "Proportion stratified random sample". The sampling unit is "employees in both managerial and executive levels" exist in Great Cairo and Giza. Regarding distribution of the questionnaires, it has been distributed to 384 employees, actually only 231 questionnaires were collected, this is because of Coronavirus (COVID-19) and State of emergency in Egypt, as data were collected within that period in 2020, in which and all the telecommunication companies declared that employees should work from home. As a result, a very few numbers of employees work from the office with less than the normal working hours, so reaching the employees was a difficult process.

Concerning the scale used for measuring the research variables, the independent variable "Employee Silence dimensions" are measured by scale used in previous studies developed by Dyne et al (2003) and Knoll and Dick (2013).

While the independent variable "Counterproductive Work Behavior" the researcher depended on the scale developed by Bennett & Robinson (1995); Spector et al (2006). This measurement is based on 5 point-Likert type scale where: 1= "Never", 2="Rarely", 3="Sometimes", 4="Almost" and 5= "Always".

In order to avoid the common method and the non-response bias, the researcher depended on the methodological ways; as to avoid common method bias, each variable with its items (the independent and dependent variables) were separated in the questionnaire whereas in part one the independent variable and part two for the dependent one. In addition, to avoid the non-response bias, the researcher tried to send a reminder email to the respondent to remind them to answer the questionnaire in a regular period.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

After collecting the data using structural questionnaires in a single cross-sectional survey, the sample characteristics can be identified using the descriptive statistics. In addition, a correlation matrix can be applied to initially point out the direction and magnitude among the study variables. All these tests can be applied using "SPSS v.27". Finally, a Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) is incorporated to test the structural model using Smart PLS v.3.3.3.

The sample characteristics is reported according to the respondents' gender, age, experience tenure, and education level as follows:

Table 1. Shows the demographic variables of the respondents

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	206	89.2
Female	25	10.8
Age		
Less than 25	36	15.6
25- less than 35	185	80.1
35- less than 45	9	3.9
45- less than 55	1	.4
55 or more	-	-
Work Experience		
Less than 1 year	62	26.8
1 year and less than 3 years	150	64.9
3 years and less than 7 years	5	2.2
7 years and less than 10 years	14	6.1
10 years and above	62	26.8
Education level		
Less than University graduate	1	.4
University Graduate	220	95.2
Post graduate	10	4.3

Before being able to state that the questionnaire' scales are have an significant psychometric properties, assessing the scales are valid and reliable should be evaluated as follows:

Table 2. Measurement model validity and reliability

Construct	Constru ct reliabilit y	Convergent validity				
	CR	AVE	Acquiescent silence	Counterproductive work behavior	Prosocial silence	Quiescent silence
Acquiescent silence	0.942	0.802	0.896			
Counterproductive work behavior	0.96	0.756	0.129	0.869		
Prosocial silence	0.69	0.529	0.183	-0.248	0.727	
Quiescent silence	0.93	0.815	0.753	0.042	0.295	0.903

As can be concluded from table 2., since the AVEs of all constructs range between 0.507 and 0.815, which is higher than 0.5, hence the convergent validity per construct

is established. Relatedly, as the square root of each construct's AVE is higher than its correlation with each of the other constructs as in table 3., hence the discriminant validity is established according to Fornell-Larcker criterion. Finally, all construct reliability evaluation is passed according to the 0.6 cut-off point

Table 3. Multicollinearity assessment

Construct	Counterproductive work behavior
Acquiescent silence	2.824
Prosocial silence	1.361
Quiescent silence	2.796

Table 3. shows that the VIFs between the exogenous variables ranges between 1.212 and 2.824 which is less than the recommended level of 3. Hence, the multicollinearity between the independent variables does not cause a problem in the ongoing research.

Table 4. Spearman correlation test

Spearman correlation test	Acquiescent silence	Quiescent silence	Prosocial silence	Counterproductive work behavior
Acquiescent silence	1			
Quiescent silence	.784**	1		
Prosocial silence	.113*	.235**	1	
Counterproductive work behavior	<u>.101</u>	<u>.116*</u>	<u>.031</u>	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

As table 4 reveals (in italic and underlined values), the Counterproductive work behavior has a positive effect with all independent variables as the r coefficients range between 0.031 and 0.116. Only the significant positive relationship is with the Quiescent silence by 11.6% at confidence level 95%.

In addition, table 4 shows the correlation coefficients among the independent variables (Values in bold). Since the correlation coefficients among the independent constructs ranges between 0.113 and 0.784 which is less than 0.9. Hence, the multicollinearity among the independent variables is not an issue in the current research (Pallant, 2011).

To this end, the structural equation modelling can be applied to test the direct and indirect relationships at the conceptual model.

Furthermore, to test direct relationship in the research hypotheses, a bootstrapping procedure of 5000 subsamples has run. table 5 shows the results of the path coefficients at the structural model.

Table 5. : Path coefficients

Path	Beta	P Values	Result
H1 Acquiescent silence -> Counterproductive work behavior	0.252	0.077	Supported *
H2 Quiescent silence -> Counterproductive work behavior	-0.190	0.134	Not supported
H3 Prosocial silence -> Counterproductive work behavior	-0.362	0.010	Supported ***
H4 Opportunistic silence -> Counterproductive work behavior	0.212	0.013	Supported **

* Significant at 0.1 and confidence level 90%,

** Significant at 0.05 and confidence level 95%,

*** Significant at 0.01 and confidence level 99%,

Table 5 reveals that the Acquiescent silence has a significant positive effect on the Counterproductive work behavior by 25.2% at confidence level 90%. Hence, H1 is supported. However, the Quiescent silence has a non-significant negative effect on the Counterproductive work behavior by 19% at confidence level 95%. Hence H2 is not supported. Moreover, the prosocial silence has a significant negative effect on the Counterproductive work behavior by 36.2% at confidence level 99%. Hence H3 is supported. Likewise, the Opportunistic silence has a significant positive effect on the Counterproductive work behavior by 21.2% at confidence level 95%. Thus, H4 is supported. Finally, the whole structural model can explain the change in the Counterproductive work behavior by $R^2 = 31.7\%$.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of the current study is to examine the relationship between employee silence and counterproductive work behavior, fortunately, the findings provide a significant support for the hypothesized model, as, the first hypothesis has been supported as there was a significant positive impact of "Acquiescent silence" on the "Counterproductive work behavior" by 25.2% at confidence level 90%. While the second hypothesis has been rejected as the "Quiescent silence" has a non-significant negative impact on the "Counterproductive work behavior" by 19% at confidence level 95%. This may be because, "Quiescent silence", may result only in being silent, but may not affect the employees' general relationship to their organization. As a result, employees maybe unsatisfied in the organization but they still value other aspect. As a result, they do not engage in any counterproductive work behaviors.

However, regarding the third and fourth hypotheses they have been accepted, which in return support the previously mentioned hypotheses.

Implication to Research and Practice

Telecommunication companies should develop policies for initiating and maintaining an ongoing communication and/or engagement between employees each other and between their supervisors and managers. Such engagement or communication will positively impact employees and accordingly will enhance their job positions,

responsibilities, and work atmosphere as well. Moreover, companies should nurture an inclusive employees identity that can react flexibly to the changing environment and can overcome obstacles professionally. Also, the current study highlight a mandatory problem which is employee silence phenomena that can disturbance and lead to failure of any organization due to its consequences ,as the study showed it can lead to counterproductive behaviors with different forms in that situation ,organization should be aware that the solution start by focusing on its employees ,knowing their problems and try to solve it.

CONCLUSION

Silence behavior is a negative trait that could be harmful to the organization where the silent employees work and that could be harmful even to employees themselves, and it should be eliminated. The results of the study is consistent with previous studies as it has been confirmed that employee silence has an impact on counterproductive behaviors in its different forms in the telecommunication companies in Egypt. Even though ,some employees may have a defensive silence or in another word they feel fear to harm themselves but they do not engage in anti-work behaviors , the reason could be because although they are silent but overall they value their organizations and they do not want to contribute in any harmful behaviors

Future Research

Its recommended to study the reasons and factors behind the silence of employees it may could be a personal factors, organizational and situational,...etc. Also counterproductive behavior, as mentioned in the theoretical background, some employees engage in an anti-works behaviors because of a personal traits they have, so investigating the reasons behind such behaviors would be more effective. Also, adding different mediators and m moderators can add in-depth to the future research, Applying this study in different sectors to benefit them,

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