

## Organizational Silence: A Barrier to Organizational Change

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** *There is little empirical evidence regarding the nature of Organizational Silence (OS) and its components. So, the purpose of this research is to identify the types of OS and its effects on Organizational Change (OC) at Sadat University in Egypt.*

**Design/methodology/approach:** *To assess OS, refer to (OS questionnaire, Schechtman, 2008; Brinsfield, 2009), and OC (OC questionnaire Dunham, et al., 1989; Lussier, 1990; and Kursunoglu & Tanriogen, 2009). Out of the 692 questionnaires that were distributed to employees, 420 usable questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 60%. Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) was used to confirm the research hypotheses.*

**Findings:** *Results indicate that supervisors' attitudes to silence, top management attitudes to silence and communication opportunities are associated. The research has found that there is significant relationship between OS and OC. Also, the research has found that OS directly affects OC. In other words, OS is one of the biggest barriers to OC of the employees at Sadat University in Egypt.*

**Practical implications:** *This research pointed to the need for organizations to adopt a culture which encourages and urges employees to speak in the labor issues and the non-silence in order for the administration to be able to realize these issues and try to solve them first hand in order to prevent their aggravation.*

**Originality/value:** *There is little empirical evidence in the literature aimed at defining, analyzing, and coping with OS. It has an impact on the ability of organizations to detect errors and learn. Therefore, organizational effectiveness is negatively affected. This research aims to measure the effect of OS on OC. Based on the findings of this research, some important implications are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *organizational silence, organizational change*

### **1. Introduction**

Organizational Silence (OS) is considered as a threat against Organizational Change (OC). It is underlined that many employees do not communicate with their superiors about several issues despite their awareness and it is an obvious contradiction that many organizations experience. OS, which can be defined as withholding opinions and concerns on organizational issues, is a significant topic to be researched (Çakıcı, 2007; 2010).

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. In a changing world, organizations need employees who express their ideas, who are responsive to the challenges of the environment, who are not afraid to share information and knowledge and who can stand up for their own and their team beliefs (Liu et al., 2009).

OS is interpreted as a collective phenomenon which is a potentially dangerous hindrance to OC and development and also as a significant obstacle to the development of a pluralistic organization (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

The phenomenon of Employee Silence (ES) affects the failure of change programs implemented by management (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). This phenomenon also hurt people's spirit of innovation and it is an obstacle to question management actions (Perlow & Williams, 2003). This phenomenon also causes the continuation of the illegal actions in the organization. Hence, these types of actions are not prevented (Maria, 2006).

OS and OC are very important subjects for organizations to reach the desired objectives. In this context, our study focuses on the relationship between OS and OC. The study is structured as follows: Section one is introductory. Section two presents the literature review. Section three discusses the research methodology. Section four presents the hypotheses testing. Section five explains the research findings. Research recommendations will take place at section six. Section seven handles the research implications. Limitations and future research will take place at section eight. Conclusion will be provided at the last section.

### **2. Literature Review**

#### **2.1. Silence**

Silence can be used by an authority to get subordinates to think for themselves, or to create independence in those who hang onto dependency relationships. This type of positive use of silence is quite familiar to persons expert at directing independent study or thought. It can also be a tool for planned ambiguity in an attempt to enhance creativity. Silence can also fulfill a strategic role as a form of communication intended to affect others (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Silence is an active, conscious, intentional and purposeful behavior. Early definitions of silence equated it with “loyalty” and the assumption that nothing was wrong if concerns were not being voiced. But researchers today have shown that a climate of silence can work against desired organizational outcomes (Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Aylsworth, 2008).

There are three silence dimensions. Firstly, silence can be intentional. Employees remain silent even if they are aware of the problem and know of a better solution. Secondly, silence can be defense mechanism. Employees can remain silent in order to protect their personal interests or not to openly contradict others. Thirdly, silence can be a collective decision of employees; a collective reaction of not sharing ideas, thoughts, or knowledge with others (Park & Keil, 2009). Silence can convey approval and sharing or disfavor and opposition, thus becoming a pressure mechanism for both individuals and organizations (Bagheri, et al. 2012).

## **2.2. Types of Silence**

Below are the four types of silence (Pinder & Harlos 2001; Van Dyne, et al., 2003; Briensfield 2009; Perlow & Repeing; 2009; Cakici 2010; Alparslan 2010; Bogosian, 2012).

### **2.2.1. Acquiescent Silence**

Acquiescent silence (AS) relates to occasions where employees chose not to express relevant ideas, information and opinions based on resignation which suggests disengaged behaviour (Kahn 1990).

AS is synonymous with employees who are essentially disengaged and are unwilling to take steps to enact change (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

AS is described as an intentionally passive silent behavior. AS is withholding relevant ideas, information, or opinions, based on resignation. AS suggests disengaged behavior that is more passive than active (Van Dyne, et al. 2003).

AS is the withholding of information, views, opinions and ideas in the face of developments in the organizations.

AS is a passive behavior. In the case of AS, employees approve the status quo, do not want to speak up much, and do not attempt to change the organizational circumstances. This attitude requires remaining silent purposefully and not being involved in developments. The reason that lies behind employees' failure to speak out is the belief that it will not make a difference even if they do speak out (Karacaoglu & Cingoz, 2008).

### **2.2.2. Defensive Silence**

Defensive silence (DS) is based on an employee's personal fear of speaking up. This can be termed as quiescent silence (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

DS is described as deliberate omission of work related information based on fear of reprisal. DS is intentional and proactive behavior that is intended to protect the self from external threats. In contrast to AS, DS is more proactive, involving awareness and consideration of alternatives, followed by a conscious decision to withhold ideas, information, and opinions as the best personal strategy at the moment. DS as withholding relevant ideas, information or opinion as a form of self protection, based on fear. DS differs from the previous form in that defensive silence involves the individual weighing up the alternatives and making a conscious choice to withhold ideas information and opinions as the safest option for the individual at that point in time (Van Dyne, et al., 2003).

DS is a proactive and conscious behavior with the urge of self-protection against external threats (Karacaoglu & Cingoz, 2008).

### **2.2.3. Pro Social Silence**

Prosocial silence is withholding of work related information for the benefit of others including the organization. Pro Social silence as intentional and proactive behaviour that is primarily focused on others.

Pro Social silence involves conscious decision making by an employee, Pro Social Silence arises from a concern for others instead of fear of negative personal consequences (Korsgaard et al., 1997).

Pro social silence as the refusal to express ideas information or opinions so that others in the organization might benefit from it. This silence is motivated by the desire to help others and share the duties. It is considerate and focuses on others (Podkasoff et al., 2000).

Pro social Silence is "withholding work-related ideas, information, or opinions with the goal of benefiting other people or the organization-based on altruism or cooperative motives." This form of silence is intentional, proactive and other-oriented. In other words, primary priority of an employee who decides to remain silent is not himself but the external factors such as the organization or his colleagues (Van Dyne et.al., 2003).

Like Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), Pro-social Silence is intentional and proactive behavior that is primarily focused on others. Like OCB, Pro-social silence is discretionary behavior that can not be mandated by an organization. Like DS, Pro-social silence is based on awareness and consideration of alternatives and the conscious decision to withhold ideas, information, and opinions. In contrast to DS, Pro-social silence is motivated by concern for others, rather than by fear of negative personal consequences that might occur from speaking up (Van Dyne, et al. 2003).

#### **2.2.4. Protective Silence**

Protective silence is where employees can be silent and accept decisions of higher level management. One of the most important causes of silence is the good relationship between the organization and employees. Therefore, employees prefer to be silent instead of telling what is wrong in their organizations. For that reason silent employees never share their opinion to solve conflict in the organization (Morrison & Milliken, 2003).

Protective silence is where employees can be silent and accepting about decisions of higher level management to avoid causing any problem in their organization because they believe that to share their thoughts may compromise the success of the organization. It is not an only image problem, it is also a problem related to maintaining their good relationships within the organization. (Perlow & Repenning, 2009, Alparslan 2010).

#### **2.3. Organizational Silence**

OS can remain prevalent when management proudly speak of empowerment and the development of more open lines communication (Spreitzer 1996).

OS has been defined as "consciously refrain from expressing ideas, information and beliefs about work." OS may result in lack of feedback, information and ideas and alternatives analysis and thus the organization is damaged from organizational processes of low effectiveness. OS occurs when employees intentionally withhold their opinions and knowledge about organizational problems. In other words, employees might prefer to withhold their knowledge, ideas and suggestions, which might promote organizational development. OS 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 (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

OS is a behaviour that despite their capacity to modify or correct issues in an organizational situation and to have significant behavioural, cognitive and/or emotional evaluations, employees do not talk these issues with relevant individuals. OS is a reaction of employees; although they are normally able to bring and sustain change to workplace, they remain reluctant to share their behavioral, cognitive, or emotional assessments on workplace related issues. In other words, OS means that the employee withholds his opinions and suggestions about the work of the organization problems (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

OS means the presence of a common perception among employees limiting their participation in providing their knowledge about the issues and policies of the Organization (Nennete, 2002).

OS is deliberate prevention of information and opinions by the staff of the organization (Van Dyne, et al, 2003).

OS occurs due to the fundamental beliefs held by managers including; manager's fear of negative feedback and a set of implicit beliefs held by managers that lead to organizational structures, processes and managerial practices that impede the level of silence within an organization (Rodriguez, 2004).

OS refers to the employee's failure to participate views and suggestions on important labor issues and choosing to remain silent (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005).

OS refers to the collective phenomenon of comment or to very little action in response to the major issues facing the organization (Henriksen & Dayton, 2006).

OS is a variable which can prevail about barriers to effectiveness, commitment and performance (Beer 2009).

OS is a behavioral choice that can deteriorate or improve organizational performance. Excluding its emotionally difficult expression, silence can convey approval and sharing or disfavor and opposition, thus becoming a pressure mechanism for both individuals and organizations (Gambarotto & Vammozzo, 2010).

OS can be beneficial in some cases, these are: decrease of administrative information overload, reducing interpersonal conflicts and storage of secret information. Despite these, OS is rather regarded as a harmful phenomenon for both the employee and the organization (Tikici et al., 2011).

The most common factors causing OS are; the culture of inconsistent treatment of employees, climate of silence, organizational culture, administrative issues, negative feedback by management, prejudice, personal characters of managers, lack of trust, risk of talking, risk of isolation, bad experiences in the past, fear of damaging relationships, characteristic differences, cultural issues, values and norms and fear of management power (Demir & Ozturk, 2010; Eroglu et al., 2011).

OS broadest sense materially includes any situation where the information is not transmitted from the sender to the receiver (Kostiuk, 2012).

## **2.4. Organizational Silence Factors**

There are multiple views about the factors leading to OS (Schechtman, 2008), because of its many different determinants or causes, as follows: (1) support of the top management of silence, (2) lack of communication opportunities, (3) support of supervisor for silence, (4) official authority, and (5) the subordinate's fear of negative reactions (Brinsfield, 2009).

### **2.4.1. Support of the Top Management of Silence**

The role of top management is instrumental in the success of the business organizations. The availability of a high degree of confidence in the administration reduces concerns of speaking freely about the problems and issues of labor. Climate of confidence in the top management reduces the feelings of uncertainty (Weber & Weber, 2001). The attitudes and values of the top management may contribute greatly to the formation of a climate of silence, as some organizations prohibit employees from saying what they know or feel (Argyris, 1997). The top management practices may lead to increased levels of silence within the organization. These practices are represented in two factors (Morrission & Milliken, 2000).

#### **2.4.1.1. Managers' Fear of Negative Feedback**

The top management may be afraid of getting negative feedback information from the subordinates, as it may feel threatened as a result of this information, particularly, if they involve its members personally or their work. Because of that, those members would eschew this information, and even if it reached them they would neglect it or question the credibility of the source, believing that the feedback from the bottom may be less accurate and less legitimate (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005).

#### **2.4.1.2. Managers' Implicit Beliefs**

Silence increases when the top management is in an ivory tower prohibiting it from seeing the actual reality because of lack of access to information, or due to welcoming the good information rather than, the negative (Van, Dyne, et al, 2003).

Thus, the support of of top management of silence leads employees not to talk about work issues. Besides, the administration may describe employees who talk about labor issues as problems makers (Milliken, et al., 2003).

### **2.4.2. Lack of Communication Opportunities**

Contact is essential to the effectiveness of any organization. It represents the transfer of information verbally or using other means for the purpose of persuasion and influencing the behavior of others. Among

the most important functions of the communication process is that it provides individuals with the necessary information for the purpose of decision-making, as it represents an outlet to express feelings, opinions and trends. It is an important means to satisfy social needs of individuals (Robbins & Judge, 2013).

The more contact opportunities within the organization, the greater participation and expression of opinion on issues and problems of the work, as employees have the opportunity to make suggestions, which increase the degree of career belonging and involvement of employees (Smidts, et al., 2001).

#### **2.4.3. Support of Supervisor for Silence**

The supervisor's behavior creates a microcosm climate of silence at the level of the department where he works, where subordinates do not trust that supervisors will not directly or indirectly punish them because of their talk on their mistakes in the work. Therefore, subordinates tend to silence (Spreitzer, 1996; Sugarman, 2001).

The subordinates' silence is influenced by trends and tendencies of the supervisors to silence rather than trends and tendencies of top management. Therefore, when the supervisor listens to his subordinates, they will consider him a role model, and tend to involve themselves in labor issues and talk about it. This is because the supervisory relations have a tremendous impact on the performance and career paths of subordinates as well as on rewards from the organization (Sparrowe & Liden, 2005).

The relationship of supervisor's strength and stature to silence or talking can be analyzed in two ways: on the one hand, the subordinate may tend to talk more than keep silence with a strong supervisor, because this subordinate believes that the supervisor has the ability to resolve any problem or issue related to work. Here, subordinate find it useful to talk in the presence of supervisor who has the powers to solve work problems within the organization (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

On the other hand, the freedom to express dissenting opinion may be restricted when working under the leadership of a supervisor with prestige and power, because the subordinate tends to the option of silence due to fear of the negative impact of expressing the dissent opinion (Turner & Pratkanis, 1998).

In spite of that, power and status of the supervisor can increase or decrease the silence of subordinates, but many researchers assert that subordinates are more sensitive to the risks of talking more than the benefits, in the presence of a strong supervisor. It can be concluded that silence could increase in the presence of a powerful supervisor (Edmondson, 1996).

#### **2.4.4. Official Authority**

Officialdom is the degree by which the activities carried out by employees are formed within the organization, through the adoption of several measures. These procedures are usually written, and associated with the presence of work evidences and records identifying the behavior of employees, the tasks to be achieved and regulations controlling the work progress within the organization (Moorhead & Criffin, 2004).

Officialdom is based on the strength of the position or location in the organizational structure. Dealing follows specific orders and a bureaucrat approach through decision-making centralization, and the use of regulations to deal with the problems and issues of work. At this point, the organization lacks an effective mechanism for information feedback. This is because there are few upwards communication channels because heads believe that the views of the subordinates are unimportant and therefore tend to silence (Ashford et al., 1998).

#### **2.4.5. Subordinate's Fear of Negative Reactions**

The fear of the reaction may lead employees to believe that talking about work problems might deprive them of their jobs or upgrade to higher positions within the organization (Milliken, et al, 2003).

### **2.5. Organizational Silence Effects**

There are several implications of OS, as silence is of a significant impact on individuals and the organization. In spite of that, the silence study results have not been paid but little attention from the management literature (Bogosian, 2012).

Because of the inconsiderable research efforts in this area, a number of researchers tried to interpret the effects of OS. Silence affects the decision-making process of the organization, in the sense that the quality of the decision depends on the need to have knowledge of the employees' suggestions, and vice versa. Silence negatively affects the organization in the sense that it prevents information feedback, which leads to poor ability to detect and correct errors (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

There are negative impacts of OS. They are (1) poor participation of employees in decision-making because of the lack of the channels or opportunities of communication, (2) reducing dealing with conflict or dispute in an effective manner, and (3) weakness of the employees' capacity to learning and self-development (Lowe et al., 2002).

OS does have implications and consequences on the climate of trust within the organization, because it leads to poor relations of trust between employees due to lack of dialogue between them (Willman, et al., 2006) OS correlates negatively with three dimensions of organizational trust. This means that the more silence means less trust (Nikolaou, et al., 2011).

OS has a negative impact on the removal of inadequacies and mistakes occurring in the organizational activities as well as on the establishment of a healthy feedback mechanism. In an organization without feedback mechanisms, mistakes turn into a mechanism of carrying out activities or become more severe. Intra-organizational factors such as an established decision making mechanism, managerial incompetence, pay inequity, organizational inefficiencies, and poor organizational performance result in ES and become a barrier to the making of a decision that may be for the good of the organization (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

## 2.6. Organizational Change

Change can be defined as the process of analyzing the past to elicit the present actions required for the future. Any alteration in activities or task means change in organization (Dawson, 1994).

OC comes at the forefront of the academic and managerial environment (Pettigrew et al., 2001).

Soparnot (2011) maintains that change variables may be mutually defined in a series of interrelating elements (actions, reactions and interactions).

Diversity of the organization in its environment and the interaction of the technical and human activities that had interrelated dimensions in the organization have been revealed by OC (Cao et al., 2000).

It may be difficult to change attitudes once they have been learned, maybe due to resistance to change from within (Dunham et al., 1989).

Resistance to OC may result from one or a combination of factors such as substantive change in job, reduction in economic security, psychological threats, disruption of social arrangements, and lowering of status. Nonetheless, the attitude of individuals toward change may differ. Some are more resistant to change while others are more receptive (Dawson, 1994).

The three types of individuals' or groups' response to OC are the affective, cognitive and instrumental. Affective response refers to the feeling of being linked to satisfaction or anxious about change. Cognitive responses are opinions relating to usefulness and necessity and about knowledge required to handle change. Instrumental responses refer to actions already taken or which will be taken to handle the change (Elizur & Guttman, 1976).

Dunham et al. (1989) suggested that there are three types of attitudes toward change; affective, cognitive and behavioral attitudes toward change.

- **The affective component** consists of the feelings a person has toward an attitude object, which involves evaluation and emotion. It is often expressed as like or dislike for the attitude object.
- **The cognitive component** consists of the information a person possesses about a person or thing which is based on what a person believes to be true.
- **The behavioral component** concerns the way a person intends to behave toward an attitude object.

The three types of attitudes; the cognitive, affective or behavioral, are more critical. OC should start by the cognitive or affective mode and then followed by the behavioral mode. The cognitive mode can be an effective mode to be addressed first because once a person has information and knowledge of the potential changes to be made, his or her feelings toward change may be changed to favor such changes. The cognitive component on attitude toward change can be challenging if not well communicated. This will be demonstrated by the behavioral mode of the person in responding to the changes.

## 3. Methodology

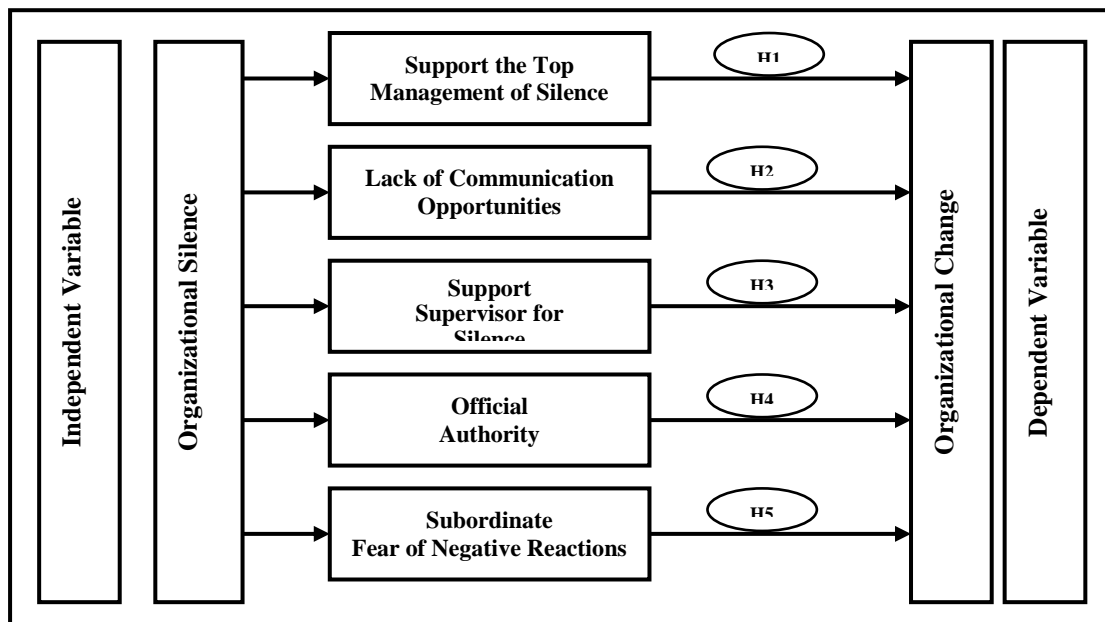
### 3.1. Research Model

The proposed comprehensive conceptual model is presented in Figure (1). The diagram below shows that there is one independent variable of OS. There is one dependent variable of OC. It shows the rational links among the variables. The research model is as shown in the following figure.

The research framework suggests that OS has an impact on OC. OS as measured consisted of support of the top management of silence, lack of communication opportunities, support of supervisor for silence, official authority, and subordinate's fear of negative reactions (Schechtman, 2008; Brinsfield, 2009).

OC is measured in terms of cognitive component, affective component and behavioral component (Dunham, et al., 1989).

Figure (1)  
Proposed Comprehensive Conceptual Model



### 3.2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The researcher found the research problem through two sources. The first source is to be found in previous studies, and it turns out that there is a lack in the number of literature reviews that dealt with the analysis of the relationship between OS and OC. This called for the researcher to test this relationship in the Egyptian environment. The second source is the pilot study, which was conducted in an interview with (30) employees in order to identify the relationship between OS and OC. The researcher found several indicators notably the important and vital role that could be played by OS. As a result of the discussions given above, the research questions are as follows:

- Q1: What is the nature and extent of the relationship between OS (support of the top management of silence) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt.
- Q2: What is the nature of the relationship between OS (lack of communication opportunities) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt.
- Q3: What is the statistically significant relationship between OS (support of supervisor for silence) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt.
- Q4: What is the nature and extent of the relationship between OS (official authority) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt.
- Q5: What is the nature of the relationship between OS (subordinate's fear of negative reactions) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt.

There are studies in literature that study OS and OC factors separately and within the frame of bilateral relation but there is no study that examines these two factors collectively at the Egyptian environment. This study aims to contribute to the literature by examining the research variables collectively and reveal the interaction between the research variables.

As a result of the discussions given above, the following hypotheses were developed to test the effect of OS on OC at Sadat University in Egypt.

- H1: OS (support of the top management of silence) of employees has no statistically significant effect on OC at Sadat University in Egypt.  
 H2: OS (lack of communication opportunities) of employees has no statistically significant impact on OC at Sadat University in Egypt.  
 H3: OS (support of supervisor for silence) of employees has no statistically significant influence on OC at Sadat University in Egypt.  
 H4: OS (official authority) of employees has no statistically significant effect on OC at Sadat University in Egypt.  
 H5: OS (subordinate's fear of negative reactions) of employees has no statistically significant impact OC at Sadat University in Egypt.

### 3.3. Population and Sample

The study subjects are employees at University of Sadat City in Egypt. The total population is 692 employees. The research population is illustrated in the following table:

Table (1) Distribution of the Sample Size

Faculty Members	Number	Percentage
1. Faculty of Veterinary Medicine	137	19.8%
2. Faculty of Tourism & Hotels	89	12.9%
3. Genetic Engineering Research Institute	117	16.9%
4. Faculty of Physical Education	174	25.1%
5. Faculty of Education	33	4.8%
6. Faculty of Commerce	55	7.9%
7. Faculty of Law	43	6.2%
8. Institute of Environmental Studies and Research	44	6.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>692</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Staff Members Affairs Department, Sadat City University, Egypt, 2014

Due to the small number of members of the research community at the University of Sadat City, it was decided to study this community using comprehensive inventory (Complete Numeration or Census) in order to get the highest percentage of survey lists. Table (2) provides more detailed information about the sample and the measures.

Table (2) Frequency Distribution Table of Demographics

Variables	Number	Percentage	
<b>1- Sex</b>	Male	220	52%
	Female	200	47%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>2- The Academic Degree</b>	Professor degree	70	16.7%
	Associate professor	102	24.3%
	Assistant professor	133	31.7%
	Lecturer	45	10.7%
	Demonstrator	70	16.7%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>3- Marital Status</b>	Married	313	74.5%
	Single	107	25.5%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>4- Age</b>	Less than 30 years	61	14.5%
	From 30 to 45	192	45.7%
	More than 45	167	39.8%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>5- Period of Experience</b>	Less than 5 years	203	48.3%
	From 5 to 10	138	32.9%
	More than 10	79	18.8%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 3.4. Procedure

The goal of this study was to identify the relationship between OS and OC at Sadat University in Egypt. A survey research method was used to collect data. The questionnaire included three questions,



relating to OS, OC, and demographic information of employees at Sadat University in Egypt. Data collection took two months. Survey responses were 60%, 420 completed surveys out of the 692 distributed.

### 3.5. Data Collection Tools

#### 3.5.1. Organizational Silence Scale

The researcher will depend on the scale developed by Schechtman, 2008; and Brinsfield, 2009 in measuring OS, which has been divided into five elements (support of the top management of silence, lack of communication opportunities, support of supervisor for silence, official authority, and subordinate's fear of negative reactions).

The 27-item scale OS section is based on Schechtman, 2008; and Brinsfield, 2009. There were five items measuring support of the top management of silence, six items measuring lack of communication opportunities, five items measuring support of supervisor for silence, five items measuring official authority, and six items measuring subordinate's fear of negative reactions. The survey form is used as the main tool for data collection in measuring OS at Sadat University in Egypt.

Responses are categorized using a 5-point Likert Scale for each statement, ranging from (1) “very ineffective”, (2) “ineffective”, (3) “neither effective nor ineffective”, (4) “effective”, and (5) “very effective”.

#### 3.5.2. Organizational Change Scale

The researcher will depend on the scale developed by (Dunham, et al., 1989; Lussier, 1990; and Kursunoglu & Tanriogen, 2009), in measuring OC, which has been divided into three main components (cognitive, affective and behavioral). The cognitive dimension of meaning in terms of changing views on the advantages and disadvantages, benefits, requirements, knowledge needed to manage change. The affective dimension refers to feelings associated with dissatisfaction and concern in making the changes. The dimensional behavior is the action taken or to be taken in future in the face of change or resist change. The 18-item scale OC section is based on Dunham, et al., 1989; Lussier, 1990; and Kursunoglu & Tanriogen, 2009. There were six statements for cognitive dimension, six statements for affective dimension and six statements for behavioral dimension. The survey form has been used as a key tool to collect data to measure OC at Sadat University in Egypt.

OC has been measured by the five- item scale of Likert of agreement or disagreement where each statement has five options. The informant should select the answer that suits his choice, where (5) indicates full agreement while (1) indicates full disagreement, with neutral degrees in- between.

### 3.6. Data Analysis

The researcher has employed the following methods: (1) Cronbach's alpha or ACC, (2) (MRA), and (3) F- test and T-test. All these tests are found in SPSS.

## 4. Hypotheses Testing

### 4.1. Evaluating Reliability

Before testing the hypotheses and research questions, the reliability of OS and OC were assessed to reduce errors of measuring and maximizing constancy of these scales. To assess the reliability of the data, Cronbach’s alpha test was conducted. Table (3) shows the reliability results for OS and OC. All items had alphas above 0.70 and were therefore excellent, according to Langdridge’s (2004) criteria.

Table (3) Reliability of OS and OC

Variables	The Dimension	Number of Statement	ACC
OS	Support of the top Management of Silence	5	0.9481
	Lack of Communication Opportunities	6	0.9237
	Support of Supervisor for Silence	5	0.8950
	Official Authority	5	0.8738
	Subordinate's Fear of Negative Reactions	6	0.8716
	<b>Total Measurement</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>0.9815</b>
OC	The Cognitive Dimension	6	0.9374
	The Affective Dimension	6	0.7365
	The Behavioral Dimension	6	0.8817
	<b>Total Measurement</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0.9201</b>

Regarding Table (3), the 27 items of OS are reliable because the ACC is 0.9815. Support of the top management of silence, which consists of 5 items, is reliable because the ACC is 0.9481. Lack of communication opportunities, which consists of 6 items, is reliable because the ACC is 0.9237. Furthermore, support of supervisor for silence which consists of 5 items, is reliable because the ACC is 0.8950. Official authority, which consists of 5 items, is reliable because the ACC is 0.8738. Subordinate's fear of negative reactions, which consists of 6 items, is reliable because the ACC is 0.8716. Thus, the internal consistency of OS can be acceptable.

According to Table (3), the 18 items of OC are reliable because the ACC is 0.9201. The cognitive dimension, which consists of 6 items, is reliable because the ACC is 0.9374. The 6 items related to affective dimension are reliable because ACC is 0.7365 while the last six-item variable (behavioral dimension) is reliable because the ACC is 0.8817. Thus, the reliability of OC can be acceptable.

Accordingly, two scales were defined, OS (27 variables), where ACC represented about 0.9815, and OC (18 variables), where ACC represented 0.9201.

**4.2. Correlation Analysis**

The researcher calculated means and standard deviations for each variable and created a correlation matrix of all variables used in hypothesis testing. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation values related to dependent and independent variables of this study and correlation coefficients between these variables are given in Table (4).

According to Table (4), the reasons of the employees' remaining silent was generated according to the respondents' answers. In order to determine what reasons affect employees to remain silent at work. Reasons were grouped under five factors. They are (1) support of the top management of silence, (2) lack of communication opportunities, (3) support of supervisor for silence, (4) official authority, and (5) subordinate's fear of negative reactions.

Table (4) Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix of Constructs

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Support of the top management of silence	3.36	0.944	1					
2. Lack of communication opportunities	3.51	0.851	0.964**	1				
3. Support of Supervisor for silence	3.42	0.879	0.964**	0.933**	1			
4. Official Authority	3.50	0.821	0.975**	0.952**	0.960**	1		
5. Subordinate's fear of negative reactions	3.35	0.803	0.965**	0.964**	0.928**	0.935**	1	
6. Organizational Change	3.49	0.853	0.167**	0.184**	0.167**	0.200**	0.166**	1

**Note:** \*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

Based on Table (4), the first issue examined was the different facets of organizational silence. Among the various facets of organizational silence, those who responded identified the presence of a lack of communication opportunities (M=3.51, SD=0.851). This was followed by official authority (M=3.50, SD=0.821), support of supervisor for silence (M=3.42, SD=0.879), support of the top management of silence (M=3.36, SD=0.944), and subordinate's fear of negative reactions (M=3.35, SD=0.803).

The second issue examined was the different facets of OC (cognitive, affective and behavioral). Most of the respondents identified the overall OC (M=3.49, SD=0.853).

According to Table (4), OS dimensions have negative and significant relation with OC dimensions. The correlation between OS (support of the top management of silence) and OC is 0.167. For OS (lack of

communication opportunities) and OC, the value is 0.184 whereas OS (support of supervisor for silence) and OC show correlation value of 0.167. For OS (official authority) and OC, the value is 0.200 whereas OS (subordinate's fear of negative reactions) and OC show correlation value of 0.166.

Finally, Table (4) proves that there is a significant and negative correlation between OS and OC. So our hypothesis is supported and it can be said that there is a significant and negative correlation between OS and OC.

#### 4.3. Organizational Silence (Support of the top Management of Silence) and OC

The relationship between OS (support of the top management of silence) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt is determined. The first hypothesis to be tested is:

*There is no relationship between OS (support of the top management of silence) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt.*

Table (5) proves that there is a relationship between OS (support of the top management of silence) and OC at significance level of 0,000. The results of a structural analysis of the MRA, the direct effect of OS (support of the top management of silence) and OC is obtained. Because MCC is 0.263, it is concluded that there is enough empirical evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

Table (5) MRA Results for OS (Support of the top Management of Silence) and OC

The Variables of OS (Support of the top Management of Silence)	Beta	R	R <sup>2</sup>
1. Organization's management believes that its role is limited to the implementation of instructions.	0.322**	0.230	0.052
2. The organization is not interested in encouraging employees to express their opinions or suggestions concerning aspects of the work.	0.202	0.165	0.027
3. Management of the organization does not tend to serious discussion of the views and suggestions of employees.	0.242*	0.094	0.008
4. Management of the organization does not express gratitude to workers for their opinions and suggestions for useful work.	0.038	0.113	0.012
5. I do not feel comfortable when management of the organization is involved in solving a problem belonging to me personally.	0.129	0.155	0.024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MCC</li> <li>▪ DC</li> <li>▪ Calculated F</li> <li>▪ Degree of Freedom</li> <li>▪ Indexed F</li> <li>▪ Level of Significance</li> </ul>		0.263 0.069 6.155 5,414 3.78 0.000	
** P < 0.01      * P < 0.05			

#### 4.4. Organizational Silence (Lack of Communication Opportunities) and OC

The relationship between OS (lack of communication opportunities) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt is determined. The second hypothesis to be tested is:

*There is no relationship between OS (lack of communication opportunities) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt.*

Table (6) MRA Results for OS (Lack of Communication Opportunities) and OC

The Variables of OS (Lack of Communication Opportunities)	Beta	R	R <sup>2</sup>
1. There is no exchange of information among various departments and divisions within the organization.	0.038	0.201	0.040
2. The chances of communication among employees in other departments are not enough	0.057	0.136	0.018
3. Management of the organization does not notify the staff with the organization's important problems and issues.	0.232*	0.094	0.008
4. There is not enough channels of communication between employees and senior management of the organization.	0.338*	0.230	0.052
5. Management of the organization does not bother to hold meetings to discuss issues and matters relating to work.	0.042	0.165	0.027
6. My superiors at work do not possess the good skills needed for listening to my views and suggestions.	0.033	0.113	0.012
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MCC</li> <li>▪ DC</li> <li>▪ Calculated F</li> <li>▪ Degree of Freedom</li> <li>▪ Indexed F</li> <li>▪ Level of Significance</li> </ul>		0.263 0.069 5.135 6, 413 <u>3.01</u> 0.000	
* P < 0.05			

As Table (6) proves, the MRA resulted in the R of 0.263. This means that OC has been significantly explained by the 5 independent variables of lack of communication opportunities. Therefore, there is enough empirical evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

#### 4.5. Organizational Silence (Support of Supervisor for Silence) and OC

The relationship between OS (support of supervisor for silence) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt is determined. The third hypothesis to be tested is:

*There is no relationship between OS (support of supervisor for silence) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt.*

Table (7) MRA Results for OS (Support of Supervisor for Silence) and OC

The Variables of OS (Support of Supervisor for Silence)	Beta	R	R <sup>2</sup>
1. I hesitate to speak freely with my direct manager concerning a problem at work.	0.242**	0.209	0.043
2. My direct manager does not care about any negative information about my performance.	0.195	0.155	0.024
3. My direct manager sees any criticism against him a sort of challenging him.	0.257	0.165	0.027
4. My direct manager suspects the source of my information concerning my performance at work.	0.066	0.113	0.012
5. My direct manager sees the difference in opinion on the problems of working longer unhelpful.	0.068	0.057	0.003
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MCC</li> <li>▪ DC</li> <li>▪ Calculated F</li> <li>▪ Degree of Freedom</li> <li>▪ Indexed F</li> <li>▪ Level of Significance</li> </ul>		0.227 0.052 4.497 5, 414 <u>2.63</u> 0.000	
** P < 0.01			

Table (7) proves that there is a relationship between OS (support of supervisor for silence) and OC.

For the results of a structural analysis of the MRA, the direct effect of OS (support of supervisor for silence) and OC is obtained. Because MCC is 0.227, there is enough empirical evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

**4.6. Organizational Silence (Official Authority) and OC**

The relationship between OS (official authority) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt is determined. The fourth hypothesis to be tested is:

*There is no relationship between OS (official authority) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt.*

Table (8) proves that there is a relationship between OS (official authority) and OC at significance level of 0,000.

For the results of a structural analysis of the MRA, the direct effect of OS (official authority) and OC is obtained. Because MCC is 0.285, it is concluded that there is enough empirical evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

Table (8) MRA Results for OS (Official Authority) and OC

The Variables of OS (Official Authority)	Beta	R	R <sup>2</sup>
1. My direct manager depends mainly on the official authority to influence subordinates.	0.253**	0.230	0.052
2. My direct manager draws on the method of threatening with punishment to guide the behavior of subordinates.	0.061	0.165	0.027
3. My direct manager accepts excuses of subordinates with difficulty when they commit negligence in their work.	0.168*	0.094	0.008
4. My direct manager directs the behavior of subordinates through compliance with laws and regulations.	0.007	0.113	0.012
5. My direct manager complies with laws and regulations in force when solving problems of subordinates.	0.129*	0.215	0.046
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MCC</li> <li>▪ DC</li> <li>▪ Calculated F</li> <li>▪ Degree of Freedom</li> <li>▪ Indexed F</li> <li>▪ Level of Significance</li> </ul>		0.285 0.081 7.294 5, 414 <u>3.78</u> 0.000	
** P < .01                      * P < .05			

**4.7. Organizational Silence (Subordinate's Fear of Negative Reactions ) and OC**

The relationship between OS (subordinate's fear of negative reactions) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt is determined. The fifth hypothesis to be tested is:

*There is no relationship between OS (subordinate's fear of negative reactions) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt.*

Table (9) MRA Results for OS (Subordinate's Fear of Negative Reactions) and OC

The Variables of OS (Subordinate's Fear of Negative Reactions)	Beta	R	R <sup>2</sup>
1. I feel afraid to inform my direct manager with the problems of work in the organization.	0.073	0.102	0.010
2. I don't tend to talking about the negative working conditions for fear of being held accountable.	0.285	0.165	0.027
3. I prefer to stay silent in order to avoid conflicts or disagreements with superiors.	0.027	0.155	0.024
4. I prefer to stay silent for fear of breaking my relationships with my colleagues.	0.114*	0.151	0.022
5. I prefer to stay silent not to be considered a problem-maker.	0.176*	0.094	0.008
6. My speaking of work problems could be harmful to my personal interests.	0.029	0.113	0.012
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MCC</li> <li>▪ DC</li> <li>▪ Calculated F</li> <li>▪ Degree of Freedom</li> <li>▪ Indexed F</li> <li>▪ Level of Significance</li> </ul>		0.218 0.048 3.445 6,413 <u>3.01</u> 0.000	
** P < 0.05			

As Table (9) proves, the MRA resulted in the R of 0.218. This means that OC has been significantly explained by the 5 independent variables of subordinate's fear of negative reactions. Therefore, there is enough empirical evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

### 5. Research Findings

The present study on analyzing the relationship between OS (support of the top management of silence, lack of communication opportunities, support of supervisor for silence, official authority, subordinate's fear of negative reactions) and OC at Sadat University in Egypt revealed the following results:

1. There is a significant relationship between OS and OC at Sadat University in Egypt. OS plays an important role in influencing OC. Also, OS contributes significantly to OC. In other words, OS is of the biggest barriers to OL at Sadat University in Egypt. Another study conducted by (Çakıcı, 2007; Çakıcı, 2010), concluded that OS is considered as a threat against organizational change and development.
2. This study concluded that the OS was negatively related with OC at Sadat University in Egypt. Overall findings from this study suggested that OS does affect OC. Another study conducted by (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Milliken & Morrison, 2003), concluded that silence is important to understand, not only because it has the potential to undermine the reporting of unethical and illegal practices, but also because it obstructs the effective OL. This constitutes a barrier to OC and development and suppresses pluralism, hence innovation and creativity.
3. There is a negative relationship between OS and OL of employees at Sadat University in Egypt. In other words, OS affects OL. Another study conducted by (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Perlow & Williams, 2003; Maria, 2006), concluded that ES affects the failure of change programs implemented by management.

### 6. Research Recommendations

1. Officials should work in the organization to create a culture that will encourage employees to speak, and not to keep silent regarding all critical business issues so that we can know their problems and try to resolve them.
2. The need to adopt a culture which encourages and urges employees to speak in the labor issues and the non-silence in order for the administration to be able to realize these issues and try to solve them first hand in order to prevent their aggravation.

3. The need to increase attention and action on the coherence of the Organization group, as well as the professional commitment and procedural justice because of its inverse relationship to silent workers. It has been found that the more these variables exist, the less workers keep silent.
4. Officials have to pay attention to develop effective channels of communication between them and the employees in the organization, to ensure the participation of employees in solving problems and issues of work.
5. The need for increased attention on the part of senior management to support the exchange of information and ideas with employees in the organization because its significant correlation effect is obvious to silence workers. The civil servant who feels that his heads do not care about his views would be more silent.
6. Building mutual trust between the direct superiors and their subordinates in a framework that allows the later to express their opinions and suggestions in a way which reduces their degree of silence.
7. Notes from the results of the study also showed significant correlation between the extent of adoption of the supervisors of the behavior of silence and silent workers. This means that supervisors ought to pay due attention to the opinions and suggestions of subordinates so that the behavior of silence may regarding many of the important issues in the organization may decline.
8. Officials need to adopt the democratic style of leadership, as this method leads to provide an atmosphere of work within which the subordinate can actively express his ideas and suggestions, which reduces the degree of OS.
9. Paying attention to officials in the organization, including the development of effective communication channels between workers, as well as transferring their knowledge and skills to those responsible for decision-making. This is reflected in increased confidence of senior management personnel lowering their silence about the critical issues in the organization.
10. Increasing the spirit of harmony between work groups, through increasing convergence between employees, in addition to reducing the level of conflict between them, which leads to a reduced level of silence within the organization.
11. Reducing the degree of job alienation among employees in the organization, so that it can encourage employees to speak and participate in matters and issues of work.
12. The need to create an organizational climate which encourages building good relations. This leads to a lack of fear of negative reactions in case of talking about labor issues and problems.
13. Good choosing or promoting heads to ensure the selection and appointment of heads who have a personal vision and an ability to influence the course of events, as this contributes to a high degree in reducing the OS.
14. Necessity of activating the role of employees' unions and representatives in the systematic expression of their opinions and suggestions in order to ensure balance between the interests of employees and the public interest.
15. It is necessary for the top management to pay attention for greater transparency in the provision of truthful information, as this significantly contributes to reducing the level of OS.

## 7. Research Implications

The findings of the study should contribute to managers and practitioners becoming more aware of ES. In addition, management should encourage employees to express their relevant ideas, information and opinions.

The ambiguity of the role or tasks of the employee leads to role conflict, which contributes to an increasing climate of silence.

Therefore, the clarity of the role and duties of the employee lead to a sense of employee comfort and some kind of harmony or balance between the formal role and the role expected, which helps reduce OS (Deci, et al., 1989).

The nature of silence behavior makes it difficult to break. This may be due to the fact that OS may be a result of lack of confidence in the organization.

It may be difficult to restore that trust in a short period of time. This is because breaking silence and transition from a climate of silence to one that encourages talking may need a revolutionary or radical change of system (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

Silence climate has an impact on the ability of an organization to detect errors and learn. Therefore, organizational effectiveness is negatively affected. ES behaviour can also create stress, cynicism, and dissatisfaction (Tamuz, 2001).

Breaking silence needs a vision which can provide a climate that helps in engagement and talking. Silence can be overcome through (1) encouraging employees to talk about work issues and choosing the appropriate time for that, (2) increasing employees' exchange and circulation of new ideas, (3) coordination between different departments and divisions within the organization, (4) provision of good channels of communication between the employees within the organization, (5) paying attention to the moral of the employees within the organization, (6) provision of organizational support for the exchange of ideas associated to labor issues, and (7) encouraging employees to creative thinking within the organization (Piderit & Ashford, 2003).

Another way of breaking silence would be through the keenness of the leaders of organizations to fight or prevent any impediments to the transfer or exchange of upwards information relating to problems and issues of work (Edmondson, 2003).

Top managers and supervisors have to create a workplace where employees will feel safe to express their views and will be encouraged to offer their ideas and suggestions.

Therefore, top managers and supervisors should develop attitudes and engage in behaviours that would create a psychologically safety net for their employees. (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005).

There are some tools that can be used for the purpose of breaking OS. They are (1) the need to motivate employees to talk and provide their opinions and suggestions about work problems, (2) developing effective communication channels which support exchange and transfer of ideas and information, and (3) the need to employ and attract talented employees especially those who have high levels of organizational commitment. This is because these employees have a high tendency to speak and participate in labor issues. Thus, OS can be reduced or faced focusing on the selection and retention of this distinctive quality of the staff (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005).

Finally, employees are regarded as major sources of change, creativity, learning, and innovation, which are critical factors to the success of organizations. Also, employees choose organizations in which they can express themselves (Liu, et al. 2009).

## **8. Limitations and Future Research**

There are some limitations of this study. They are (1) data was gathered from one private sector in Egypt. Therefore the findings of this research need to be evaluated with this in mind. The survey answers are related to the perception of employees at that moment, (2) the respondents are unwilling to answer the questionnaires accurately. Therefore, before distributing questionnaires among respondents, we attempted to describe the positive effects of the results of this research on their work-life quality and satisfying their needs, (3) the current study is about cause and effect relationship among research variables; maybe there are other factors that affect research variables, which need to be identified.

Although the current research has contributed to the study of the determinants of silence, the field is still open to continue and complete research in this area. There are several areas for future research. They are (1) identifying factors affect ES; (2) identifying the effects of ES on job satisfaction and organizational commitment (3) identifying the effects of leadership style on ES, (4) identifying the effects of demographic variables on ES, (5) identifying the relationship between organizational culture and OS, (6) identifying the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and OS, (7) identifying the relationship between organizational success and OS, (8) identifying the relationship between organizational excellence and OS, (9) silence motivations (defensive silence, relations supportive silence, de facto silence, the silence of negligence) in service organizations, (10) the relationship between silence and organizational justice within business organizations, (11) comparing determinants of silence in the production and service organizations, and (12) the relationship between the determinants of OS and work involvement.

## **9. Conclusion**



Based on the findings of this study, OS is evident in many organizations. This study expanded on previous research which conceptualized OS.

Moreover, the empirical evidence gathered makes a strong case for conceptualizing and examining OS. Additionally, this research demonstrated that this covert and seemingly ambiguous phenomenon can be measured. Although more work is needed in the area of OS, it appears that this research has effectively set the stage for further empirical examination.

In this research, most of the employees felt that the common reasons for ES are derived from administrative and organizational factors. They think that their ignorance or not to speak up about work-related problems and organization-based issues are because of executives' attitudes and behaviors.

These results are consistent with the previous researchers who found that the most common reason for choosing to remain silent is "administrative and organizational reasons". The managers hold the key role on ES since they determine the policies and organizational decisions. They have the power to establish an internal mechanism in order to remove any administrative and organizational reasons for ES allowing employees to speak up explicitly (Cakici, 2008).

It is often believed that the employees do not have suitable experience in perceiving main issues.

The managers believe that the employees are encouraged to speak plainly. On the other hand, they use various methods to silence the opposite employees (Panahi, et al. 2012).

OS, with its various meanings, is one of the significant issues of organizational behavior management. ES, which is used as a counterpart to concepts such as employee withdrawal, lack of confidence, or social silence etc., has been a research subject for many local or global academics who study organizational behavior.

However, the difficulty of analyzing silence is the biggest limitation and drawback of research in this field. The concept has both personal and organizational characteristics. However, it is possible to define OS as ES about or inability to express their opinions that may affect the organizational activities (Yıldız, 2013).

Therefore, top managers and all other employees should have confidence in each other, build relationships on mutual respect, distance between the superiors and subordinates should be decreased and establishment of healthy feedback mechanisms should be ensured (Yıldız, 2013).

OS makes the employees feel that they are unvalued (Nikolaou et al, 2011). Since the OS makes employees feel less involved in work, deterioration or depersonalization is created and people suffer emotional exhaustion.

Managers should not create an organizational climate in which employees are afraid of negative feedback. When employees fear the managers negative feedback, they may avoid the expression of their ideas, opinions, and even mistakes (Tahmasebi1, et al., 2013).

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