

EMPLOYEE SILENCE AND ORGANISATION PERFORMANCE: THE RELATIONSHIP

IBIRONKE, Adekunle Emmanuel¹, OKUDERO, Omoniyi, Gbolabo²,
ADERIBIGBE, Ebenezer, Adefisayo³, JOKOSANYA, Tolulope Al-Janat⁴

Department of Industrial Relations and Personnel Management, Faculty of Management Science, Lagos State University,
Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria ^{1,2,3}

Department of Counselling and Guidance Psychology, Faculty of Education, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria⁴

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Abstract: The study investigated the relationship between employee silence and organisation performance in Nigeria with particular reference to the Institute of Chartered Accountant of Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design and use the primary source of data collection. Data were collected from 100 employees of ICAN out of which 86 valid responses were used for the study analysis. Two research questions and hypotheses were raised in line with the study objectives. Data was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the two hypotheses tested in the study confirmed that employees' silence is significantly related to organisation performance. The study therefore concluded that employees in Nigeria work organisations prefer to keep quiet as a result of communication system and leadership style which in turn exert significant effect on performance. Therefore, it was recommended that management should trust that employees also care about what is best for the organisation and put in place policies on how management should treat employee's opinions to reduce fear that may have arise due to employees being victimized.

Keywords: Employee Silence, organisation performance, communication system, leadership style, Institute of Chartered Accountant of Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Measuring performance in service and training organisations where performance output is not measure in discrete numbers has always been aligned with quality of services rendered, timely response to enquiries, clients satisfaction, etc. however, it has was mentioned (Akhigbe, Felix & Ajiyenka, 2014) that service organisations failed in most of the times to meet with their expected performance level due some kinds of negative behaviours from their employees (Akhigbe, Felix & Ajiyenka, 2014)

Employees' behaviour is indeed a constant issue that calls for the attention of management and policy makers on almost daily basis in organisation life (Zehir & Erdogan, 2011). This is because employee behaviour has been identified as one of the major indicators for organisational success or otherwise (Zehir & Erdogan, 2011). This behaviour consists of anything an employee does in the work environment whether positive or negative (Akfopure, Ikhifa, Imide, & Okokoyo, 2006). The behaviours may directly or indirectly affect the work process. Employees are regarded as major sources of change, creativity, learning and innovation, which are critical factors to the success of organisations.

However, it becomes worrisome when employees choose not to voice their opinions and concerns (silence) on matters that has got to do with their organisations (Akhigbe, et. al 2014). While in a changing world, organisations need employees who will express their ideas, who are responsive to the challenges of the environment, who are not afraid to share information and knowledge, who can stand up for their own and their team beliefs (Owuor, 2014).

Fapohunda (2016) reported that employee silence occurs when employees whether deliberately or inadvertently hold back possibly valuable information from their organisations. This can occur if employees fail to speak up to supervisors or managers. In organisations, employees are frequently confronted by choices of sharing or withholding their ideas, opinions, and concerns and unfortunately in numerous situations, they opt for the secure reaction of silence, keeping back contributions of prospective value to others or thoughts that they crave to be able to express. The resultant effect of this is that situations are not promptly modified for the better. Silence falls into the category of employee behaviour.

Indeed, when there is a problem in the workplace, employees have two options: to remain silent or speak up. Unfortunately, many employees choose to remain silent because they do not want to share information that could be interpreted as negative or threatening. Employees typically remain silent about conflicts with co-workers, disagreements about organisational decisions, potential weaknesses in work processes, illegal or dangerous behaviours, and individual/personal grievances. Their silence keeps management from receiving critical information that would allow their organisations to improve or address problems before they have adverse or degrading effects (Fapohunda, 2016).

Employee silence is a problem for more than just virtual organisations. Within the past few years, employee silence has been happening more often in public sector than the private organisations. Organisations where it is assumed that no direct loss can happen to the employee such as Nigeria public sector and other governments establishments; should be especially mindful of employee silence. This is because mistakes caused by employee silence in these organisations can lead to the societal and image damage or serious economical loss to the organisation as well as the economy.

Statement of the Problem

Previous studies on employee silence such as (Fapohunda, 2016; Miliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2010; Umar & Hassan, 2015) have posited the perception that workers felt their voices were not needed and respected. It was established that even though the workers had views that are valuable as compared to senior or managerial colleagues, they did not enjoy equal attention (Umar & Hassan, 2013).

Umar and Hassan, (2015) reiterated that ignoring employee in participation by the management constituted one of the foremost reasons for silence in company governance. Previous studies have been conducted on employee silence for instance (Morrison, 2015) carried out a study to identified factors that induces silence among workers and came out with four distinct factors which include leadership style, organisation culture, communication system, organisation structure but did not relate the indicator on work related variables to identify whether those factors of employee silence will affect work related behaviour such as performance, commitment, turnover intention and so on.

Employee silence has been common in many organisations not just in Nigeria but worldwide. For example, a study on US organisations by Miliken, Morrison and Hewlin, (2010) indicates that it is worrisome explaining the prevalence of employee silence at workplaces, it was estimated that less than 5 percent of all workplaces in US would be classified as having high involvement in their workforce. Many organisations have been struggling to relate the issue of employee silence and performance as well as commitment as Detert and Burris, (2007) pointed out that few organisations have made effort to consider why employee are less involve in organisational matters, perhaps because they have failed to understand the significant opportunity that lies in front of them that satisfied employees tend to be more productive, creative and committed to their employers. Therefore it is in this regard that this study seeks to analyze the relationship between employee silence and performance of employees.

The above mentioned studies differ from the present study in context and focus. There is a dearth of research into employee silence with relation to training and research institution. Most of these few studies have pursued a general approach looking for factors influencing behaviour and then using the findings to draw conclusion on employee silence (Detert & Burris, 2007; Milliken et. al., 2003), and these studies have not consider the position of some peculiar organisation factors such as communication system, leadership styles, organisation structure, culture etc as indicators for employee silence. Therefore, this study will test the relationship between these indicators and organisation performance in Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN).

Those studies done previously have not specifically covered the relationship between employee silence and organisation performance amongst employee in training and research institution such as Institute of Chartered Accountant of Nigeria (ICAN). Therefore, providing a gap hence necessitating this research, it is in this regard that this study seeks to analyze the relationship between employee silence and performance of employees in ICAN.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to determine the relationship between employees' silence and performance of employees in ICAN. In line with the operationalized measures mentioned above, the specific objectives of the study are:

- i. To examine the relationship between communication system and organisation performance in ICAN.
- ii. To investigate the relationship between leadership style and organisation performance in ICAN.

Research Questions

In line with the objectives of the study, this research study will provide answers to the following questions;

- i. What is the relationship between communication system and organisation performance in ICAN
- ii. What is the relationship between leadership style and organisation performance in ICAN

Research Hypotheses

The study shall use the following hypotheses to test this study, the hypotheses shall be in the Null form.

Hypothesis One:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between communication system and organisation performance in ICAN

Hypothesis Two

H₀: There is no significant relationship between leadership style and organisation performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarifications of Employees' Silence

Morrison and Milliken (2000) explain employee silence as the hard choice made by employees within some organisations to keep their thoughts and opinions quiet and shut themselves away from company decisions. Silence doesn't only mean people silence, but also includes not writing, not being present at work, negative attitude, not being heard and avoidance of organisations members. Silence within organisations refers to quieting, censorship, marginalisation, trivialisation, exclusion and other forms of discounting (Hazem, 2016) and blocks the communication channels which helps employee interactions (Vakola & Boudaras, 2015).

Ironically organisational silence can remain prevalent when management proudly speaks of empowerment and the development of more open lines communication (Spreitzer, 2015). Although definitions vary, there is agreement that employee silence involves the intentional withholding of questions, ideas, concerns, information or opinions by employees concerning issues relating to their job and organisation (Briensfield, 2009; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2005).

Essentially, employee silence is an inefficient process which can negatively impact all facets of an organisation. Silence can manifest itself in various forms, such as collective silence in meetings, low level participation in suggestion schemes and low levels of collective voice (Maria, 2006). According to Morrison and Milliken (2000) silence occurs due to the fundamental beliefs held by managers including; Managers' fear of negative feedback and a set of implicit beliefs held by managers that lead to organisational structures, processes and managerial practices that impede the level of silence within an organisation (Rodriguez, 2004).

In the past few years much research has been done on the concept of employee silence with the result that it is now recognized that employee silence can occur in response to a wide variety of situations. Van Dyne (2013) and Greenberg and colleagues (2017) described the possibility that employee silence can occur as a result of apathy or malicious intent. Whilst attempts have been made to investigate employee silence empirically none of the assessment tools have actually

addressed the current concept of employee silence (Brinsfield, 2009). Academics have described employee silence in four different forms based on employee behaviours they include; acquiescent silence, defensive silence, prosocial silence and protective silence. (Brinsfield 2009; Cakici 2010; Perlow & Williams 2013; Pinder & Harlos 2001; Van Dyne, 2013)

Acquiescent Silence: In this case the concept of silence relates to occasions where employees chose not to express relevant ideas, information and opinions based on resignation which suggests disengaged behaviour. Pinder and Harlos (2001) explain silence as the opposite of voice and of form inaction that is often interpreted as endorsement and passive acceptance of status quo. Thus silence is synonymous with employees who are essentially disengaged and are unwilling to take steps to enact change.

Defensive Silence: Defensive silence is based on an employee personal fear of speaking up. This is termed as “Quiescent Silence”. (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Morrison and Milliken (2000) described organisational fear as being the main of result of fear. Van Dyne (2013) describes defensive silence as a form of withholding relevant ideas, information and opinions as a form of self-protection, base on fear. Defensive silence 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.

ProSocial Silence: Van Dyne (2013) explains ProSocial silence as withholding work related ideas information or opinions with the goal of benefiting other people or the organisation. ProSocial silence is described as intentional and proactive behaviour that is primarily focused on others. ProSocial silence involves conscious decision making by an employee, ProSocial Silence arises from a concern for others instead of fear of negative personal consequences.

Protective Silence: Perlow and Williams (2013) explain that maintaining a good relationship between the organisation and employees is one of the most important causes of silence. Employees mostly prefer to be silent instead of telling what is wrong in their organisations thinking others may not agree with them. For that reason silent employees never share their opinion to solve conflict in the organisation. Another form of protective silence is where employees can be silent and accepting about decisions of higher level management to avoid causing any problem in their organisation because they believe that to share their thoughts may compromise the success of the organisation.

Causes of Silence in Organisation

Silence comes up when people cannot contribute freely on issues of concern about the organisation. Morrison and Milliken (2010) pointed out that many organisations are caught in an apparent paradox in which most employees know the truth about certain issues and problems within the organisation yet dare not speak that truth to their superiors. Fundamentally, they believed that organisational silence is an outcome that owes its origin to managers' fear of negative feedback and a set of implicit beliefs often held by managers. However, many studies on this topic have emphasized on the causes of silence that are within the organisation such as;

First, co-workers can influence organisational silence through reward such as recognition or friendship or even punishment like isolation (Stephen & Judge, 2007; Cakici, 2008). They can also establish norms or rules on how others should react to situations in the organisation.

Second, management beliefs and actions are also a major cause of silence. Management's implicit beliefs about employees are that they are self-interested and untrustworthy.

Third, silence can also result from the characteristics of the organisation as depicted in their structures and culture such as communication system and leadership styles (Sayğan, 2011). For instance, silence is less prevalent in a pluralistic organisation that values and reflects differences among employees and that allows for the expression of multiple perspectives and opinions (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

Conceptual Clarifications of Organisation performance

In today's competitive environment and highly unstable economic conditions, it has become vital for the organisations to look for new ways to increase the performance of their employees (Zivnuska, 2004). These circumstances have an effect on the attitudes of employees and their behaviours towards their work and in return also affect their performance. Many

organisations have understood this and have adopted policies that will induce performance of the employees which has given organisation a lot of benefit in return (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2005).

Performance can be improved by employing abilities to generate new ideas and use this ability to build relations and processes of work (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007; McAdam & McClelland, 2002). The performance of the organisation can be enhanced by introducing the human resource policies in the organisation (Davidson, 2003; Karatepe, Yorganci, & Haktanir, 2009).

Employees with voices in the organisation are not only efficient and high performing (Davidson, 2003) but are also responsible and are able to share it equally to the success of the organisation (McAdam & McClelland, 2002). It has been suggested by Sonnentag and Frese (2004) that employee capacities can only be increased if leadership plays its role in allowing all inclusive leadership practice that allow employees to have a voice in organisational development. Coordination helps the individuals to work with flexibility, to accept change and due to all these positive aspects several goals can be achieved (Day, Gronn & Salas, 2004). With an open communication environment, business decisions and matters are discussed openly in an organisation, it ensures the trust of the employees and delivers a message to them that they are trusted by the organisation (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Social Exchange Theory of Thorndike's (1935) as presented in his work development of Reinforcement Theory. The social exchange theory is often used to examine various aspects of employee reciprocity including employee silence (Hopkins, 2002). This theory proposes that "gestures of goodwill" are exchanged between employees and the organisation as well as between subordinates and their supervisors when particular action warrants reciprocity (Hopkins, 2002). The obligations imposed by the norm of reciprocity may vary with the status of the participants within a society (Baron & Kreps, 2006). Integral to both social exchange and reciprocity is the fact that individuals are connected through mutual dependencies. This dependency is a characteristic of the relationship between the employees and the organisation.

The social exchange theory and the norm of reciprocity explain the analogy of maintaining the balance of social exchange between employees and the organisation. Some researchers have suggested that silence fits into two categories. The first category consists of those behaviours that directly impact the balance of the social exchange between employees and the organisation, that is, employee silence directed toward the organisation. The second category is made up of those silence behaviours that have an indirect impact and are directed toward individuals (Lee & Allen, 2002). Lee and Allen (2002) rationalised this position by arguing that because silence is a deliberate attempt to maintain the balance in a social exchange between employees and the organisation, Hence, employee silence is more likely to be a direct function of what employees think about their work characteristics. In contrast, employee silence primarily addresses and focuses on the individual at the work place.

Relationship between Employee Silence and Performance

Employee Silence can be very dangerous for an organisation. Employee silence leads to a lack of concern among employees. Unconcerned employees may ignore their organisations values and this can cause a lack of commitment and poor performance in their duty (Joinson, 2016). This attitude always carries a heavy price for both employees and organisations.

Employee Silence is described as the withholding of any genuine information and ideas about individual behavioural, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his/her organisational circumstance to persons who are capable of affecting changes. Employee Silence differs from organisational silence in that the latter is mainly occurs at an organisational level whereas the former occurs mainly at an individual level (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Employee Silence can always be the result of an Employee belief they have been the victim of injustice.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used the survey research design in studying the interplay between the variables of the study. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) noted that, the survey research is concerned with "setting objectives for data collection, designing the study, preparing a reliable and valid survey instrument, administering survey, managing and analyzing survey data, and reporting

the results. The study made use of questionnaire as a means of gathering useful and accurate data relating to the topic under study. The population of the study comprised of staff of Institute of Chartered Accountant of Nigeria in Oyingbo, Lagos State, Nigeria. Available reports from the human resource department shows that the staff population of ICAN is 150 staff

Table 1: Staff Spread in ICAN Office (January 2020)

Categories	Numbers of Staff
Management staff	38
Senior Staff	53
Junior Staff	59
Total	150

The purposive sampling technique was employed because the technique enables the investigator to purposively select participants based on researcher knowledge about the population. A sample size of 100 was determined with Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. Therefore the sampled respondents for the study include 100 Individual for the sample size.

The primary data was obtained through the administration of questionnaire to the respondents. The hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation with the aid of (SPSS) computer software for the analysis. The face validity which is a type of content validity test was adopted for the study instrument.

Self administered questionnaire was used as an instrument to capture the perceptions of respondents regarding employee silence and organisation performance. A 12 items related to employee silence and performance adapted from the study of Zehir and Erdogana (2011) was used for data collection. The instrument had been subjected to a reliability test and the Cronbach alpha values obtained for the test was 0.836, indicating the suitability of the instrument. Further data analysis on the study hypotheses were carried out using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

From the one hundred (100) questionnaires administered to the participants from the selected organisation of study, only eighty-six (86) of the returned instruments was found valid and was then used for the analysis as shown below:

Test of Hypotheses

The hypotheses stated earlier are empirically tested using the responses from the research instrument administered.

Hypothesis One:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between communication system and organisation performance in ICAN

Table 2: Correlation analysis of the relationship between communication system and organisation performance

		Communication System	Organisation performance
Communication System	Pearson Correlation	1	.685**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	86	86
Organisation performance	Pearson Correlation	.685**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	86	86

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis from the correlation table above shows that the p-value < 0.01 (at a 2-tailed test). This means that the result is statistically significant at 1% confidence level. The r value 0.685 (69%) shows that there is a strong positive relationship between communication system and organisation performance in ICAN.

Hypothesis Two

H₀: There is no significant relationship between leadership style and organisation performance.

Table 3: Correlation analysis of the relationship between leadership style and organisation performance

		Leadership Styles	Organisation performance
Leadership Styles	Pearson Correlation	1	.879**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	86	86
Organisation performance	Pearson Correlation	.879**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	86	86

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above shows that p-value < 0.01 (at a 2-tailed test). This means that the result is statistically significant at 1% confidence level. The r value 0.879 (88%) shows that there is a strong positive relationship between leadership styles and organisation performance in ICAN.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**Relationship between communication system and Organisation performance**

The impact of communication system as a cause of silence on organisation performance has been examined with the help of Pearson Correlation analysis where the coefficient 0.685 was obtained at p-value < 0.01 (at a 2-tailed test). This means that the result is statistically significant at 1% confidence level and there is relationship between the tested variables. On the causes of silence as tested in the hypothesis, the study found that it was normal for employees not to speak up or to omit some parts when raising an issue in the organisation when the communication system of the organisation was perceived not healthy enough to guaranty fair and objective treatment. While on the causes of silence in individuals the study found that majority of respondent agreed that speaking up was pointless. The study also found that fear of not being promoted, stigmatisation, losing employment and retaliation from executives and co-workers, as well as employees feeling that they lacked the right to talk, contributed to silence in individuals. The results of findings corroborates with the studies of Burke and Ng (2006) that stated that employees view organisational politics differently in many ways and somehow causes silence in the employee so as not to get fired in the politics.. Researchers like Ram and Prabhakar (2010) are also of the view that public sector employees are more prone to negative experience because of the cultural practices in most public sector and the use political methods like personal relationships, etc., for their own advantage.

Relationship between Leadership style and Organisation performance

The second hypothesis which tested the relationship between leadership style and organisation performance shows a significant relationship. This finding suggests that leadership practice in any organisation has a dire consequence on the organisation as a whole. Most of the respondents for this study relate that in situations where they felt that they could not raise an important job-related or organisationally-relevant issue with their boss or others above them in the organisational hierarchy. Thus, it seems as though deciding to be silent about issues or concerns at work may be a fairly common choice for employees in organisations (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

The results revealed that employees said that they felt uneasy speaking about to the superior because many of them can be seen as forms of bad news carrier for the recipient of the message. The result suggests that, in the eyes of many employees, discussing such issues with bosses is perceived as risky and often futile. The result also indicates that employees often view dissent as something that is not welcome in their organisations (Redding, 2012). These results are consistent with research on the mum effect (Tesser & Rosen, 2017), which shows that people do not like to convey bad news as well as with research showing that employees are often uncomfortable conveying negative feedback and information (Athassiadis, 2013).

5. CONCLUSION

The study investigated the relationship between employee silence and organisation performance in Institute of Chartered Accountant of Nigeria. The study indicates that silence is prevalent in most organisations. Furthermore, Silence among workers are caused by ranges of factors that include organisational culture, communication system, leadership styles, organisational politics which in turn exert significant effect on performance. The common conclusion from the study is that communication system and leadership styles affect workers behaviours in related areas that affect job performance which in turn forced the disadvantaged ones to keep mute hence breed negative work attitudes.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion, it is recommended that:

- i. Management should trust that employees also care about what is best for the organisation and therefore be given some listening ears.
- ii. Organisations should introduce some kind of friendly policies on how management should receive and treat employee's opinions so as to reduce fear in the employees.
- iii. Management should device ways of making employees more engaged in the organisational matters.

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