



## **EMPLOYEE SILENCE: THE INVISIBLE COMPONENT THAT CAN SPEAK VOLUMES**

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### **Abstract**

Organizational trust and employee silence are the two basic parameters acting as a determiner for sound efficiency and performance of an organization. The purpose of current research is to determine the link between trust and silence behavior. Employee silence includes both acquiescent as well as defensive silence. Employee silence is the indicator in each and every organization which can affect the trust level among employees. This paper is based on survey of 102 employees working in four private hospitals in Punjab. Collected data has been analyzed with correlation and regression. The study suggested an unfavourable association among trust in organization and silence behaviour. However, strong negative relationship recorded in case of defensive silence as compared to acquiescent.

The result of this study can be useful for managerial implications so challenges or barriers can be eliminated encouraging the way forward post COVID-19.

**Keywords:** Silence, Organizational trust, Acquiescent silence, Defensive silence

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## 1 Introduction

In current dynamic, ever changing business scenario where organizations face severe challenges like pressure to meet changing customer needs, adapting according to their needs, continuously innovate in order to sustain in the market. To face these challenges, organizations regard employees as an asset and rely on them to sustain. From the employees perspective, they want to work in organizations where the employees are allowed to express their ideas promoting an environment of open communication, where they are allowed to show their talent, where the supervisors and the top management are supportive and trustworthy, where there is organization justice and fairness and the leaders help the employees to develop. When the people working in the organisation sense that there is lack of justice in the organization and in case, they express their views, they may face threat to their job or may be at the receiving end of the anger of the supervisor, the employee may prefer to remain silent in spite of expressing his views which may be detrimental for both the employees and the organization (Kaur, & Arora, 2022). Research shows that there can be various reasons due to which employees choose to remain silent. The reasons range from organizational injustice, High power distance, fear of damaging relationships, supervisor narcissism, destructive personality, lack of trust in supervisors, poor leadership, fear of victimization, lack of proper communication channels, lack of organization identification and poor administrative practices. (Seren et al., 2018; Lam & Xu, 2018; Wang et al. 2018; Wu, Peng & Estay, 2018; Kaur, & Arora, 2022).

Various forms of silence among employee has been listed has been listed by academicians in their in their researches-

**Acquiscent silence:** Acquiscent type of behaviour means to hold back relevant information as a result of low efficacy of oneself that expressing their ideas and views will not lead to any meaningful change (Seren et al., 2018)

**Defensive silence:** It means not sharing important information due to fear or to protect oneself (Milliken et al., 2003). For eg: If an employee thinks that if he expresses his concerns about an issue, he may be subjected to negative repercussions and criticism from his superiors, he may deliberately withhold the information.

**Pro-Social silence:** This happens when employee withholds the ideas and feelings so that to help others in the organization. So, this type of silence is basically a consequence of concern for others and to protect them (Van Dyne et al., 2003)

**Organization Trust:** Organization trust refers to the level of confidence of the employee or the positive expectations of the employees from the organization that its action will not have a negative impact on the employee or its action will be meaningful (Gambetta, 1988). Over the last few years, the concept of organization trust has acquired significance. It's among the most important aspects in deciding how people interact within a company.

## Literature review and Hypothesis

### Studies in regard to Employee silence

Duan et al. (2017) conducted an investigation in which a favourable connection has been suggested among silence behaviour and leadership of firms. Author conducted research among 16 firms in china and these firms own by state. The study explained that both safety and esteem facilitated the association among silence behaviour and authority. Srivastava, Jain and Sullivan (2019) conducted an empirical study to examine does emotional intelligence mediated the association among silence behaviour and exhaustion. This research was conducted on employees working at managerial level in Indian organizations and it concluded an unfavourable association among Job burnout and employees remaining silent. The study also concludes, Job burnout and employee silence relationship is mediated by emotional intelligence such that emotional intelligence positively affecting the employee silence while the job burnout negatively affected by the emotional intelligence. Yurdakul, Besen and Erdogan (2016) carried out a study in turkey to determine the antecedents and consequences of silence among nurses and Midwives (117) and the perceived results of remaining silent. The results of the study found that growth and career advancement restricted as employee silence which is very common prevailing among them.

### Studies in regard to Organizational Trust

A study on organizational silence in Iran among 131 employees of Tehran Municipality selected by using Random sampling suggested a negative correlation between employee supervision and organisational trust. This study highlighted the need for further investigation regarding the significance of silence among the employee as a mediator upon the effect of parameters such as job satisfaction on organizational commitment (Saeed and Karim, 2016). Dedahanov and Rhee (2015) suggested a negative correlation between employee remaining silent and organisational trust in southern part Korea. After the findings of this study,

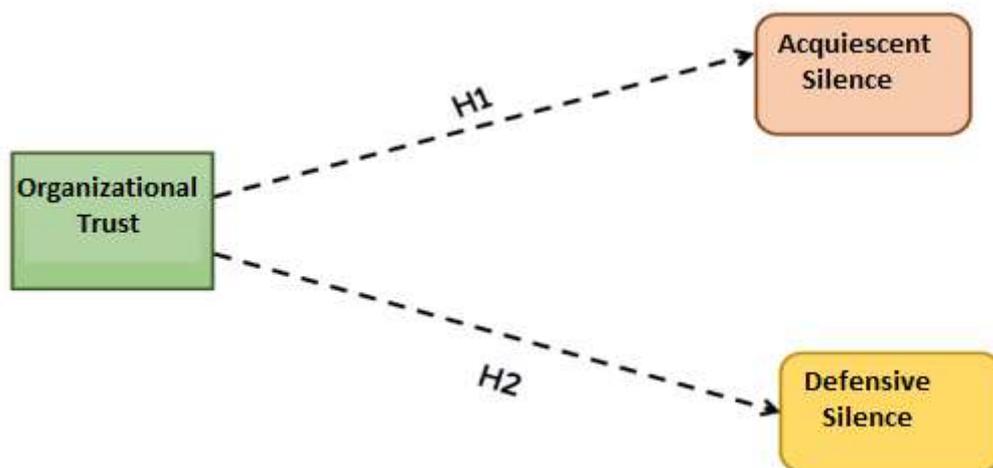
recommendations were made to other forms of silence and various types of commitment.

A study on employee silence among 180 university employees concluded adverse association among the trustworthy behavior of management and silent behaviour of workers. Additionally, there is significant and unfavourable link between silent

behavior, work contentment and organisational committedness. Results suggested future research in context of other universities or organizations. So that the conclusion can be generalized (Fard and Karimi, 2015).

### Proposed Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Proposed Framework of the research



Source: Author's own

#### 1.1 Hypothesis:

**H1:** There is existence of a negative correlation among trust in organization and acquiescent type of silence behaviour.

**H2:** There is existence of negative correlation among trust in organization and Defensive type of silence behaviour.

## 2. Methodology Section

### Objectives of present research

- A. To study associations between trust in organizations and silence behaviour in selected private sector hospitals.
- B. To study the impact of organization trust on acquiescent silence.
- C. To study the impact of organizational trust and defensive silence.

### Data collection

The area of the study was selected on the grounds of having maximum number of population and the highest subscriber base in major cities of three regions of Punjab (Majha, Malwa and Doaba). The population for the present study was confined to healthcare employees (Doctors and Nurses) working in 4 private hospitals. Approximate 160 contacts were attempted, 58 of them didn't

respond. The total number of responses received was 102 which count as 63.75 % size of the sample. The respondents participated in this survey by clicking the link of the questionnaire developed using survey administration application. The link was shared via e-mail.

### 3.3 Measures

Detailed literature review was done to search for related scales (Starnes, Truhon and Carthy; Brinsfield, 2013) and on the basis of that a questionnaire was designed consisting of 30-items (10 items related to organizational trust), (10 items related to acquiescent silence), (10 items related to defensive silence) measured on scale of 7 points likert which describes and means 1 is "Strongly disagree" and at 7 it means "Strongly agree".

## 3. Data analysis and Results

Collected data has been entered in SPSS software version 20 and analyzed using tools and techniques eg. Regression analysis and correlation analysis.

### Analysis of data through Regression tool

Table 1 highlights the summary of organizational trust and acquiescent silence. Results suggests R squared is .385 which means that there is 38 percent variation in Acquiescent silence due to organizational trust. That means, one unit change in trust will have an impact of .38 unit change in Acquiescent silence.

Table 1: Model Summary

Trust and Acquiescent silence						
Model Summarization						
Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Squared	Standard Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.621 <sup>a</sup>	.385	.379	18.358	62.719	.000 <sup>b</sup>
a. Predictors: (Constant), Trust_total						

Table 2: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	64.432	4.265		15.106	.000
	Trust_total	-.621	.078	-.621	-7.920	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Acquiescent silence						

With significance probability of  $0,000 < 0,05$  , the calculated value of t for trust variable is -7.92 as shown in Table 2. The results also reveal a negative value of trust in organization (B= -.621). This

means that increase in trust in organization will lead to decrease in acquiescent silence and vice versa ( negative relationship) thus hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Table 3: Model Summary

Trust and defensive silence						
Summarization of Model						
Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Squared	Standard. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.708 <sup>a</sup>	.502	.497	18.265	100.727	.000 <sup>b</sup>
a. Predictors: (Constant), Trust_total						

Table 3 shows a model summary for organizational trust and defensive silence. Result conclude that R squared is .502 that suggests a 50 percent variation in defensive silence due to organizational trust.

That means, one unit change in trust will have an impact of .50 unit change in defensive silence indicating a Moderate effect.

Table 4:Coefficients

Model		Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Standard Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	75.482	4.244		17.786	.000
	Trust_total	-.783	.078	-.708	-10.036	.000
a. Dependent Variable: defensive silence						

With significance probability of  $0,000 < 0,05$  , the calculated value of t for trust variable is -10.036 as shown in Table 4. The results also reveal a negative value of trust in organization (B= -.783). This means that increase in trust in organization will lead to decrease in defensive silence and vice versa (negative relationship) thus hypothesis 2 is accepted.

### Correlation Analysis

Table 5 presents the correlation analysis to test Hypothesis 1 and 2.The outcomes of the study showing negative association at moderate level ( $r = -.621$ ) among the organizational trust and acquiescent silence.Therefore, study advocated the Hypothesis 1 that there is a negative impact of trust

on acquiescent silence in the organization. Furthermore, conclusion of the present research also supported the second hypothesis: there is a

adverse impact of organizational trust on defensive silence. Its relationship in form of correlation recorded ( $r = -.708$ ).

Table 5: Correlation Analysis (N=102)

		Trust_total	Acquiescent silence	Defensive silence
Trust_total	Pearson Correlation	1	-.621**	-.708**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0
	N	102	102	102

### Limitations and Future research

Although the current research investigates the relationship of trust in organizations with dual form of silence behaviour- acquiescent and defensive behaviour. Other forms which include pro-social silence were excluded from the current research. Future studies can investigate the association among trust in organization and other types of silent behaviour. Secondly, the research study is confined to healthcare sector. So future studies can be carried out in different sectors or industries like I.T, Banks, Education sector.

### Academic contribution and Managerial implications

Existence of employee silence is a threat and can lead to risk to patient safety. Hence, it becomes very important to the management of the hospitals or health care organizations to continuously evaluate and address the risks that lead to employee silence. Therefore, the results of the present study will make contribution towards the literature related to employee silence and organizational trust as it aims to provide insights to know the association between the two constructs. The study will contribute in making the managers more aware about the significance of building organizational trust so that there are less instances of employee silence. The awareness will help in pushing the managers to promote their employees so they can raise their voice.

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