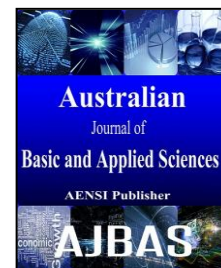




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The Impact of Organisational Silence on Job Stress, Organisational Commitment and Intention to Leave Among Expatriate Employees

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ABSTRACT

Though such studies have come out with several causative factors, fewer researches have explained the link between a state of mind of an employee, leading pass through a phase of organisational silence, where he/she will be confronted with the precipitated symptoms of high job stress, low organisational commitment and high-level readiness to leave from an organisation. The objective of this paper is to establish the link between organisational silence and other variables like job stress, organisational commitment and employee's intention to leave among expatriate employees. The study also tests the moderating relationship of gender. Organization silence is explained with the path analysis of high job stress, low organisational commitment and intention to leave with gender being the moderating factor in relationship. The study indicates the need of strong organisational and managerial system that align with the expatriate value system which in turn has an effect on expatriate commitment to the organisation.

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INTRODUCTION

It is a widely accepted fact that employees are the greatest asset of any organisation. Being good to and generous with employees yields the best of productive output for an organisation. Yet, the constant ongoing debate in the field of organisational behaviour is the question what causes an employee to be silent in an organisation. Is it the leadership, work culture, or style of management that generates a fear among the employees to be silent? Pinder and Harlos (2001) defined silence as the absence of voice as it has its own form of communication, involving a range of cognitions, emotions or intentions such as objection or endorsement.

The concept of silence in organizations was initially considered as a sign of loyalty; however, it is presently regarded as a negative behaviour because employees consciously conceal knowledge on organizational issues (Çakıcı, 2010), i.e. withholds his/her constructive ideas, suggestions and frank thoughts about the organization, which can positively or negatively affect the development of organizations. Silence is a powerful and destructive

force for both employees and organisations, as it underlines an "escalating level of dissatisfaction" among employees. The assumption that silence implies agreement is a longstanding (albeit misunderstood) guideline of social interaction. Communicating one's assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge is a requisite for effective operations within today's rational systems. The social contributions of voice can be seen in organizational processes of managing agreement (Harvey, 1974), conflict (Pondy, 1967), sense making (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Weick, 1995), knowledge (Davenport & Prusak, 2000; Nonaka, 1994), and innovation (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995; Baer & Frese, 2003; Sanz-Valle *et al.*, 2011; Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2011) amongst others.

According to Morrison and Milliken (2000) the process of silence has been systematically developing in organizations and its continuity depends on the organizational conditions that foster the process. According to Dyne *et al.* (2003) and Van Dyne, Ang & Botero (2003) organizational silence is classified into three groups: acquiescent silence, defensive silence and pro-social silence. In

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acquiescent silence, the employee is aware of his/her silence and knows that there are various options on the current situation but still remains silent due to a feeling of being unable to make a difference. This kind of silence which expresses limited awareness and acceptance without questioning is also part of the employee compliance (Şehitoğlu & Zehir, 2010). Defensive silence refers to the employee's passive but conscious behavior displayed for self-defense and preventive purposes due to the fear of consequences of speaking out. Defensive silence is intended to protect oneself against external threats. It is an intentional, defensive and forward-looking behavior (Dyne *et al.*, 2003). Silence for the benefit of the organization (positive pro- social silence) is the absence of voice in the employees in regards to dedication and cooperation due the motive of protecting the organization and / or colleagues (Şehitoğlu & Zehir, 2010; Erenler, 2011).

Organizational silence is not an individual behavior; it is also a 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 (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). It 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). Organizational silence is regarded as a hindrance for organizational change and development. In an article entitled "Get Talking" author Chris Penttila (2003) says, employee silence is killing innovation and perpetuating poorly planned projects that lead to defective products, low morale and a damaged bottom line. Organizational silence can also exhibit an undesirable example to the new employees, who see experienced employees as role models. Rather than to resist the culture of organizational silence, the new employees accept and normalize the undesired organizational circumstances (Tutar, 2007 & Aktan, 2006). As such, it is extremely important for the managers to create an appropriate and supportive environment which encourages their employees to express their concerns, ideas and different views (Brinsfield, C., 2009; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Erenler, 2010).

Antecedents and consequences of organisational silence:

Morrison and Milliken (2000) have sought to explain why silence is systemic in many workplaces, and the kinds of norms and forces that set it in process thus, reinforcing it. Pinder and Harlos (2001) argue that a climate of silence amongst employees are likely where speaking up is perceived to be futile or dangerous. These perceptions emanate from a management who act in a way that discourages communication from below, whereby management are intolerant of dissent; consequently employees are averse to voicing their concerns (Dutton *et al.* 2001). These perceptions, Morrison

and Milliken (2000) claim, are a product of managements' recalcitrance to receiving negative feedback about either themselves or a course of action associated with them. Whilst in another study, Milliken *et al.* (2003) cite silence as a product of resignation amongst employees due to a perception that their voice falls on 'deaf ears' (Pideri & Ashford, 2003; Van Dyne *et al.* 2003).

Complementing these ideas is Edmondson's (2003) work, which points to the importance of leaders in creating a voice climate wherein employees feel comfortable about raising problems. Huang *et al.* (2003) found that the openness of leaders is inversely proportional to the frequency of organizational silence; the more open the organization, the more likely the employees would express their opinions on issues. Zheng (2008) empirical research also suggested that employee's trust in the superior has significant negative influence on employee silence. In addition, the relationship between superior and subordinate is also an important factor that affects employee silence. Li & Ling (2010) study further suggests that perceived supervisor support would significantly improve employees' attitude towards the job and organization, and would increase their enthusiasm in breaking the silence and speaking up.

Clugston, Howell and Dorfman's research (2000) shows that when leaders conform to an authoritarian style and high power distance, employees are more likely to conform to authority, following instructions thus a higher silence behavior. Huang *et al.* (2003) also suggested that the culture of power distance is positively related to employee behavior of withdrawing views.

Another reason why people are sometimes silent about their concerns may be what psychologists have termed the "mum effect" (Rosen & Tesser, 1970). Research shows that individuals have a general reluctance to convey negative information because of the discomfort associated with being the conveyer of bad news (Conlee & Tesser, 1973). In his work on organizational learning, Argyris (1977) noted that there are powerful norms and defensive routines within organizations that often prevent employees from saying what they know. Other scholars note that organizations are often intolerant of criticism and dissent, and that employees may withhold information in order to not "rock the boat" or create conflict (Ewing, 1977; Redding, 1985; Sprague & Ruud, 1988). Research built upon Hirshman's (1970) exit, voice and loyalty (EVL) model has highlighted that while voice is an option for dealing with dissatisfying conditions, it is often not the option that is chosen (Withey & Cooper, 1989).

Employee silence is detrimental to employees, "as it manifests itself in absenteeism and turnover and perhaps bring about other undesired behaviors" (Colquitt and Greenberg, 2012: 311-312). Indifferent employees are often products of ignored

employee silence, tend to feel like cogs at machinery factories, developing the attitude “to *get along*, go along” (Joinson, 1996: 1048). Another example of such effects is articulated by researcher Tangirala (2008) who says that employee silence affects the personal well-being of employees, increasing the stress levels, and causing them to feel guilty, thus experiencing psychological problems and trouble seeing the possibility of change. Morrison and Milliken’s (2000) research shows that silence have

three types influence on employee: a feel of nebbish, lack of controlling and cognitive dissonance. When employees experience these feelings, it will affect employee’s work satisfaction, commission, work activeness and work press, eventually leading to resignation. Çakıcı (2010) categorised the reasons affecting organizational silence under two major titles: Fear and the perceived risk factors and Contextual factors (Table 1).

Table 1: The Reasons causing the Select of Silence in Organizations.

Fear and the perceived risk factors	Contextual factors
<i>The fear of being seen or labelled as a negative person</i> (e.g. complainer, trouble maker, intriguer, cry-baby, source of trouble)	<i>Individual factors</i> (e.g. lack of experience, low position, being external locus of control, low self-esteem, high level of concerns for communication, high level of self-adaptation)
<i>Fear of relationship damage</i> (e.g. disliked by the administrators, loss of recognition and support, loss of respect and image)	<i>Organizational factors</i> (e.g. the culture of injustice, deaf-ear syndrome, silence climate, hierarchical structure)
<i>Fear of revenge or punishment</i> (e.g. loss of employment, lack of promotion, change of work location or position, fear of increasing work load, reprisals)	<i>Administrative factors</i> (e.g. administrators do not support the culture of open talking, they are not open to different and new opinions, distant relations, mistrust towards the administrator, being unable to reach the administrator, tacit beliefs of the administrators, fear for negative feedback)
<i>Fear of isolation</i> (e.g. to be accused of inadaptability, loss of respect, confidence and feeling of attachment)	
<i>Fear of negatively affecting the others</i> (e.g. avoidance of making someone ashamed or upset or causing problems for someone)	

Research question:

In order to analyze the factors leading to employees silence in organisation this particular study poses following research questions.

1. Does organisational silence positively related to job stress.
2. Does organisational silence positively related to organisational commitment.
3. Does organisational silence positively related to employees intention to leave.

4. Does gender moderate the relationship between organisational silence and organisational stress
5. Does gender moderate the relationship between organisational silence and organisational commitment?
6. Does gender moderate the relationship between organisational silence and employee’s intention to leave?

Six hypotheses were derived from the research framework (Figure 1).

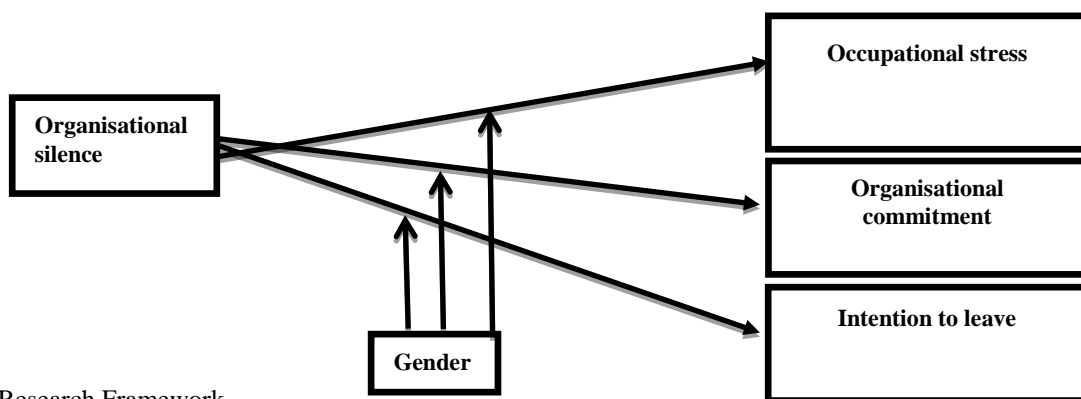


Fig. 1: Research Framework.

Methodology:

This research is cross sectional in nature where the purpose is to describe the influence of organisational silence on job stress, organisational commitment and expatriate intention to leave. The study follows descriptive study design as its plan of action.

The population selected for the study includes four manufacturing organisations in Penang, Malaysia. The study includes only the expatriate employees at supervisory level from South Asia countries. These supervisory level staff members act as managers though their nature of work is related to senior level workers. The respondents of the sample

were taken randomly from the industries where expatriates are engaged in supervisory cadre. The study follows a systematic sampling technique. The list of expatriates in the supervisory cadre was collected from the human resource department and even numbered employees were chosen in order to arrive at an appropriate sample size. The researchers approached almost 231 expatriate supervisory staff member from 4 industries in the region of Penang, where highest number of manufacturing units are located.

Measurement:

Measurement of Organisational Commitment:

Items were adapted from organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ) by Mooday, Steer, and Porter (1979). The instrument contains fifteen items, using a four point Likert scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The overall reliability co-efficient of the instrument yielded a Cronbach alpha of .85.

Measurement of Job stress:

Items were adapted from the Occupational Stress Index by Srivastava and Singh (1981). The scale consists of 46 items, each to be rated on the five point scale. Out of 46 items 28 are 'True - Keyed' and last 18 are 'False - Keyed'. The items relate to almost all relevant components of the job size which cause stress in some way or the other, such as, role over-load, role ambiguity, role conflict, unreasonable group and political pressure, responsibility for persons, under participation, powerlessness, poor peer relations, intrinsic, impoverishment, low status, strenuous working conditions and unprofitability. The reliability index ascertained by Split Half (Odd Even) method and Cronbach's alpha - coefficient for the scale as a whole were found to be .93 and .90 respectively.

Measurement of Intention to Leave:

In order to measure intention to leave the study adopted the questionnaire developed by Kumar and Govindarajo (2013). This particular instrument was developed in the context of factors relating to attrition among manufacturing sector for Malaysian workers. The variables use in the questionnaire "Intention to Leave Instrument" (ILI) which include, perceived alternative employment opportunity (PAEO), job hopping and employee turnover intention. These three variables have 4 items each, on a 5 point scale. Items like "I can easily find a job if I quit the job" with PAEO, "Switching jobs is a need of this era for betterment" with job hopping and "I may quit at any time" with employee turnover intention. The overall reliability co-efficient of the instrument yielded a Cronbach alpha of 0.821, 0.824 and 0.801 respectively.

Measurement of Organisational Silence:

In order to examine organizational silence, the scales developed by Vakola and Bouradas (2003) was used. 15 items were used to measure perceived organizational silence, 10 items were allotted to the broadness of employees' silence behavior of which 3 items had a reverse score and 5 items were considered for organizational commitment of which 1 item had a reverse score had. The overall reliability co-efficient of the instrument yielded a Cronbach alpha of .90.

Analysis and Results:

Hierarchical regression model was used to analysis the responses from 231 foreign supervisors, the results are discussed below.

Hypothesis 1: Organisational silence will be positively related to job stress.

Table 2: Relationship between Organisational Silence and Job Stress.

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig.
1	.516	.266	.41123	.264	111.6711	1	230	.000

The result in table 2 indicates that there is significant positive relationship between organisational silence and job stress of expatriate

supervisors ($r=.516$, $n=231$, $p<0.01$) thus, the first hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Organisational silence will be positively related to organizational commitment

Table 3: Relationship between Organisational Silence and Organisational Commitment.

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig.
1	.592	.350	.40300	.346	339.121	1	230	.000

The result in Table 3 indicates that there is significant positive relationship between organizational silence and organizational commitment of expatriate supervisors ($r=.592$,

$n=231$, $p<0.01$) thus, the second hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Organisational silence will positively relate to employees intention to leave.

Table 4: Relationship between Organisational Silence and Intention to Leave.

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig.
1	.581	.338	.41335	.336	318.117	1	330	.000

There is significant positive relationship between organisational silence and intention to leave among expatriate supervisors ($r=.581$, $n=231$, $p<0.01$), the third hypothesis is also accepted (table 4)

Hypothesis 4: Gender will positively moderate the relationship between organisational silence and organisational stress

Table 5: Moderating relationship of gender between Organisational Silence and Job Stress.

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig.
1	.499	.249	.37330	.248	160.33	1	388	.000

The results indicate that gender positively moderates the relationship between organisational silence and job stress among expatriate supervisors ($r=.499$, $n=231$, $p<0.01$) (Table 5), thus, the fourth hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 5: Gender will positively moderate the relationship between organisational silence and organisational commitment

Table 6: Moderating relationship of gender between Organisational Silence and Organisational Commitment.

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig
1	.501	.251	.39180	.250	280.012	1	388	.000

The result indicate that gender positively moderates the relationship between organisational silence and organisational commitment among expatriate supervisors ($r=.501$, $n=231$, $p<0.01$), thus the fifth hypothesis is also accepted (Table 6).

Hypothesis 6: Gender will positively moderate the relationship between organisational silence and employee's intention to leave

Table 7: Moderating relationship of gender between Organisational Silence and Intention to leave.

Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig.
1	.489	.239	.44112	.238	270.001	1	388	.000

The result in the table 7 indicates that gender positively moderate the relationship between organisational silence and intention to leave among expatriate supervisors ($r=.489$, $n=231$, $p<0.01$) thus, the sixth hypothesis is also accepted. All six hypothesis was accepted at a significant value of $p<0.01$, thus supporting the findings of previous studies.

Discussion:

The objective of the research was to establish the relationship employee silence with job stress, organisational commitment and intention leave; the findings indicate a positive relationship. Furthermore, the gender of the expatriate supervisors moderated the effect of organizational silence on with job stress, organisational commitment and intention to leave. This may indicate that organizational silence is not cultural based rather a psychological contract between the employee and management.

The expatriates stay in a host country companies are dependent on several organisational and

individual factors. Various past studies have used the term "expatriate adjustment" to refer to a process through which an expatriate comes to feel comfortable with a new environment and adapts to it (Huang, Vliert & Vegt, 2005). Expatriates ability to adjust is more than just a matter of psychological well-being in a foreign country, but also a significant process to the success of international assignments. How far the top management entertains openness in the organisation will further imbibe the expatriate members in the organisation, where they can voice their needs and want.

When an expatriate brought into an organisation, there is a high expectation between both parties; signifying a high probability of conflict between employees' expectation in relation to an open culture, where there is a high collective consciousness, team work, participatory work with high support from the management. As pointed out by Erbacher, D'Netto & España (2006) level of support means the extent to which the company, including both the parent company and the host company, provide support to the expatriate, in terms

of financial compensation, family support i.e. schooling for the children or adequate housing and to general support such as counselling services and mentoring.

Expatriate employees working in a foreign country have an expectation of open communication between the organisation and themselves. A closed work culture will only bring about a higher level of anxiety and fear among the expatriate employees whether it is appropriate to voice out or not. This denotes that higher the organisational silence the higher the job stress experienced at work. The lower the trust, the expatriate employees have in relation to benefits obtained from the organization, added on with a closed work culture only reinforces low level of organisational commitment. This leads to perceptual gap in relation to the performance levels of the expatriate employees in the organization, which is directly related to their commitment towards the organisation and work.

In a closed culture, employees engaged in a silent mode of work without any clamour, facing low hardiness in relation to their work and organisation. According to Maddi (1999) the three hardiness attitudes of commitment, control, and challenge influences and enhance the mood and performance of person experiencing stressful situation. Individuals exhibiting low hardiness show increased signs of depression as well as anxiety and distress (White, Absher & Huggins, 2011). The dissatisfied employees usually express their dissatisfaction and may wish to leave the organisation without any clamour. Pinder and Harlos (2001) examined the relationship between theoretical concepts of voice and silence as proposed by Hirschman (1970) as a means to reflect how employees express a sense of dissatisfaction. Pinder and Harlos (2001) suggest that Hirschman's (1970) concept of silence reflects a bifurcated means of understanding employee's concerns in essentially a simple binary either/or manner. That is, the organizations either recognize employee dissatisfaction by voice when employees express themselves by speaking up or through exit when employees leave the organization.

The findings also provided some insightful finding on the moderating role of gender. The male employees were more assertive and aggressive compared to the female employees; leading to a more tolerant acceptance of rejection and discontents. Yet, the male expatriate expressed low-level commitment to assigned tasks since there is a lack of affective commitment with the work or organisation. Discontent with this organisational environment, the male employees were less committed and had intentions to leave the organisation compared to female employees. Female employees are more prone to high job stress compared to male employees as they struggle to handle the rejection and discontentment from the management. Nonetheless, the female expatriate employees generally exhibited

a higher organizational commitment than the male employees. The intention to leave was attributed to factors such as poor work culture reflected by the ill-treatment from the top management, rigid top - down communication, less freedom at work, feeling of insecurity, poor welfare facilities lack of openness, poor reward system etc. Organisational silence is the part of a weak culture and has either a direct or indirect effect on the job stress, organisational commitment and expatriate intention to leave from the organisation.

Implications:

The findings of the research have identified the following implications. This study has far-reaching policy implications towards expatriate employee's silent way of adjustment in the manufacturing industries in a region Malaysia. There is a strong association between organisational silence and expatriate employees' intention to leave the organisations. Expatriate employees are assets for an organization particularly in the area of knowledge gap and issues related to transfer of knowledge in industries.

Common reasons given by expatriate are associated with the expectation gap between personal, managerial and organisational factors. The management should pay heed to these factors, which had led to employee silence in organisation. The employees silence has far reaching consequences at work and organisation. On the long term, high stress and low-level organisational commitment influences the production and business performance. When talented expatriate employees leave the organisation, it may lead to operational gap and business development issues. A strong work culture that's focused on proper understanding of the expectations of the expatriate employees need to be ensured to tap the talent of expatriate workers and developing better visibility of an organization.

The result further indicates that expatriate female employees are more vulnerable to organisational silence compared to male employees. The female by nature have more submissive behaviour compared to male employees. The female employees continue to stay in organisation despite the high stress and low commitment compared to the male employees, which has an impact on organisational performance. The male employees are more assertive and look for alternative options even if it means leaving the present organisation. These difference in the intention leave among the male and female employees need to be further looked into by the management in order to retain talented staff members. The management should be aware of the gender variations in their response towards work and work organisation that would further support them to develop a congenial environment matching the expectations of each other.

Lastly, the study also indicated that the cultural factor do not play a role in influencing organizational silence, the three main factors i.e. job stress, organizational commitment and intention to leave seem to cut across cultural values. However, further studies need to be done to explore this phenomenon as the sample of study here were from the South Asia countries, perhaps they differ from the western countries counterparts.

Conclusion:

This empirical research on organisational silence indicates that the expatriate employees have a fear in voicing out because of both weak organisational culture and managerial factors. The fear element develops into strong disappointment among the expatriate employees and leads to high-level of stress. The job stress in turn has a significant effect on the employee's commitment to work and organisation. Collectively, the expatriate silent behaviour ends with their intention to leave the organisation.

The study extends hidden information related to the gender variation among the male and female employees in relation to organisational silence. It is envisaged, in this context that that there is a need for an organisation culture which ensure gender neutrality in voicing concerns and need. The element of fear needs to be removed in order to get proper feedback about the work and employee's expectation. Strong work cultures, which entertain employee openness, meeting the expectations, may bring better employee performance and organisational image.

Limitation:

This research has some limitations. The study had only incorporated the expatriate employees from the manufacturing industry in region of Penang, Malaysia; therefore the generalization of the study is limited. The study has incorporated expatriates from various South East Asia countries working in Malaysia, the attitude of such expatriates and their variation need to be further studied with their country of origin.

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