

### Managing silence in workplaces

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There is a significant amount of literature on employees' voice and its relevance for both employees' well-being and organisational performance. This is not the case when it comes to silence in the workplace: this is a totally new, unexplored area. This book is timely due and focuses on recognising and managing silence in the workplace.

The book shows how the costs of silence are high: the lack of employees' voice in a crisis, when all the inner resources are called to back up the organisation, may result in an estimated cost of 7,500 USD. Furthermore, silence damages employees' morale as well as the relationships at work and has a solid impact on their turnover intentions. Besides, silence undermines error corrections and divergent thinking, affecting negatively the decision-making process and the corporate culture, thus decreasing productivity (Milliken *et al.*, 2003; Milliken and Morrison, 2003).

Above all, silence in the workplace is linked with employees' disengagement, which, in turn, affects productivity, innovation and knowledge creation in the workplace, hindering organisational change. Employees in the knowledge society are the key resource for generating intangible assets and every organisation desperately needs their engagement and participation (Morrison, 2011). Thus, unsurprisingly, the author of the book defines silence in the workplace as a "silent killer".

The main beneficiaries of this book are the managers of all kinds of organisations: private and public, for-profit and non-profit. The explicit aim of the author is in fact to help managers and HR consultants to deal with and effectively manage silence in the workplace.

There is a strong need for this, as managers quite often react to their employees' silence with inaction, assuming that this is a sign of consensus. The authors instead call on managers to manage silence in the workplace and facilitate communication among employees.

The first three chapters of the book are devoted to the presentation of the author's framework to develop a useful management tool. The book, rather than a multidisciplinary approach, develops a transdisciplinary framework. Indeed, the author develops a comprehensive approach to the issue of the silence in the workplace, drawing from elements of his reasoning from ethics, management, philosophy, work and organisational psychology.

The fourth chapter illustrates the different types of silence that can be observed in a workplace. From a manager's point of view, this chapter is fairly important as it outlines the different types of silence, so as to help them to manage their employees' silence in a decision-making perspective. This chapter clearly explains how employees' silence may take



different forms of behaviour: acquiescent silence (based on employees' resignation and disengagement, unwillingness to enact changes); defensive silence (based on employees' fear of expressing their own ideas, a sort of self-protection based on fear of possible negative consequences); prosocial silence (based on employees' desire to help other members of their same organisation, as their voice might prevent them from expressing their ideas or modify negatively their behaviour), or protective silence (based on employees' assumption that showing a different opinion from that of their manager or other members of the team might compromise the personal relationship or the smooth functioning of the organisation) (Pinder and Harlos, 2001).

Chapter 5 is fully devoted to the measurement and the assessment of silence, to develop successful ways to deal with it. The author wants to overcome the common conceptualisation of employees' silence as being simply the opposite of employees' voice, underlining that there is much more to be dealt with. Managers should "read" their employees' silence and seek to understand the different meanings behind their silence, as well as the factors that generate this phenomenon.

Finally, the sixth chapter presents interesting cases of application of workplace management in real-world contexts. The cases are taken from both the public and private sector, and evidence shows that employees often do not make their voice heard loudly because they need more time to think. Employees may also become silent in the workplace, whereas at the beginning of their relationship with their organisation they are more willing to express their voice. Employees' behaviours and attitudes change in light of their experience in the workplace. In fact, they do not express their opinion when they fear negative consequences or they feel that there is not a genuine interest in their participation (Donaghey *et al.*, 2011).

One big value of this book is that it brings together a conceptual framework, studies and practice. In this book, middle and senior managers, practitioners and organisational consultants will not find a list of things to do, but rather a useful toolbox for developing skills which will enable them to better promote employees' engagement and organisational communication.

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