

Course Name: Organizational Behaviour: Individual Dynamics in Organization

Professor Name: Prof. Dr. Abraham Cyril Issac

Department Name: School of Business

Institute Name: Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Week – 12

Lecture – 01

Lecture55: Understanding employee voice and silence

Thank you. Hello students, namaskar. Welcome back to the last module of this course Organizational Behaviour, Individual Dynamics in Organization. In this module we will look into something which is quite research now. It is a hot topic in terms of the academic research that is going on in OB. It is nothing but employee voice and silence.

Now for lecture 1 I will try to elaborate to you what is exactly employee voice. So let us understand employee voice and silence first, then we will go into the detail about the construct and about the concept as such.

I am Dr. Abraham Cyril Issac. I am a faculty at the School of Business, Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati. So, the theme of the lecture is “voice can emerge as one of the reactions to dissatisfaction at workplace.” I repeat voice can emerge as one of the reactions to dissatisfaction at workplace. So, we will try to discuss this, understand this, elaborate this over this lecture. Let us understand the employee voice.

Now before going through the session itself, in your organization take a minute and think of all those instances where you wanted to tell something, you wanted to raise your opinion, you wanted to raise a suggestion but you were not doing it maybe for n number of reasons, maybe from the fear of authority or it could be because of lack of confidence you have or maybe because of the lack of support from your co-workers or maybe the way that the co-workers or the superiors undermine you, socially undermine you, ridicule you. So there are lot of apprehensions that may have been in their way when you were actually thinking of expressing yourself in a committee meeting or in a team meeting or in a let us say a general body meeting whatever be the level of the discussion be. So please understand this is a concerning topic, this is a topic which has to be given due importance and that is why we have included this and this is one of the key differentiators of this OB course specifically. We have tried to include two such aspects, one was in the previous module if you had observed, we have looked extensively into knowledge hiding. We are also now looking into employee voice as such.

So let us understand this, when you look into specifically employee voice it is nothing but informal and discretionary communication. It is nothing but informal and discretionary communication by an employee of ideas, suggestions, concerns, information about problems, opinions, work related issues to persons who might be able to take appropriate action with the intent to bring about improvement to change. If we look into the entire concept of employee voice and typically this we have seen in the previous module of knowledge hiding also. I cannot rely totally on a text book because text books have not come out in this topic. It is still under research, it is still under the evolving stage so we tend to look into the support or look for the support of sound empirical research.

So this is where we first address the definition of what do you mean by employee voice. It is essentially communication, it is essentially communication of ideas, information, it is with respect to the concerns, your suggestions, everything is involved or encompassed within the umbrella of what is known as employee voice and why you need to give it, it may be because of the work-related issues, it may be because of how you want to improve the system, how you want to understand the organization, if it is moving in a wrong path let us go for a correction, all these bona fide intentions are behind your employee voice. So this is what employee voice is. When you look into the topic itself, it emphasizes on importance of allowing and encouraging. So, we are looking into some sort of extraneous motivation here when you are being allowed or encouraged to do something, allowing and encouraging employees to contribute the thoughts and ideas regarding various aspects of organizations.

So the basic presumption is that given a chance you and me in an organization would prefer to be silent. Please understand this, the logic why you have to be encouraged or motivated in the first place is that there is a presumed understanding or there is a presumption that given a choice we would like to tend or we would like to remain silent. Now think of situations where your personality factor or any of your trait goes against the very spirit of remaining silent. So, all these situations are actually making the problem or making the issue of employee voice or typically employee silence more complicated, more complex. So let us break it down.

When you look into employee voice specifically it includes matters such as policies, practices, work environment and even the decision making process. So extensively during this course we have discussed in every single module if I remember correctly how to be a part of the decision-making process and how the OBM as a discipline will help you in becoming a part of the decision-making process in your organization. This is what has been one of the key criteria or key parameter on which our discussions were based extensively over this course. When we look into specifically employee voice why we are

concerned is that employee voice is something which is related to policies, it is related to the work schedule, it is related to the operation schedule, how your work has to be done, how it has to be executed, what would be the precursors, what would be the antecedents, what would be the consequences of such an action if it is going wrong, what are the recovery mechanisms or how do you firefight the whole issue. All these aspects would need real time experience and the people who are not having experience if they are at the position of making decision and the people who are actually having the real time experience or understanding the nuts and bolts of what is going or what is to be decided are remaining silent it is essentially detrimental for the organization. So this is where employee voice and typically the concern regarding employee silence has become significant.

If you look into most of the organizations nowadays people are more concerned with their work they have done that they go home. So, there is a sense of indifference also that is percolating towards the workforce and unfortunately this is also detrimental to the organization. So, people who are being recruited, who are being selected to be an asset of an organization might not be changing themselves into liability but they are not proving themselves as an asset of an organization and if you are not with us you are against us if I take the concept then if you are not an asset you are surely going to be a liability for the organization. So, this is what you have to understand why there has been a tremendous focus on the research in aspects like employee voice and employee silence.

So let us look into the promoter voice and prohibitive voice two types of voice that are being understood by the literature in case of employee voice. When you look into promoter voice specifically it includes suggestions, ideas or constructive feedback. We are essentially looking into this part constructive feedback offered by employees aimed at improving work processes, enhancing performance or implementing positive changes within the organization. Now when you are looking into promoter voice it is essentially proactive contributions to enhance the organizational functioning. So, when you are in the mood to give suggestions and ideas or constructive feedback where the primary intention is for the upliftment of the organization to enhance the performance to streamline the work process all these aspects pertain to the primitive voice.

But when we look into something like prohibitive voice on the other hand employees expressing concerns pointing out potential risks or highlighting issues that might hinder the organizational functioning. Basically, it is sort of a warning mechanism or problems that could come up in the long run you are pointing out as an individual within the organization it is more of a prohibitive voice. It focuses on preventing or mitigating negative outcomes. So basically, it is sort of a goodwill that you are concerned for the organization it is more of the intention that you want the betterment of the organization and that is the primary responsibility of you and you have that up in your charts. This is a

reason for both if you see the primitive and prohibitive.

Only thing is that when you come to prohibitive voice it is more of you know you do not want the organization to end up in a bad state because of a bad decision. You do not want the organization to get into a bad financial position because of some bad collaborations. So you are raising your opinion, you are raising your viewpoint this happens to be or this is translated as what is known as prohibitive voice. So, I hope there is a certain clarity on what is voice, what is employee voice and what are the different types of voice and why the research of employee voice and typically employee silence is gaining prominence day by day. Let us understand the theory behind employee voice and this would be the most important aspect when we look into the theory behind employee voice it is nothing but the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect model.

When you look into the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect model which is also called as the EVLN model exit includes leaving the organization, transferring to another work unit or at least trying to get away from dissatisfying situation. So you are not happy with what is happening in the organization but you do not want to raise a red flag you are thinking that okay if I raise the voice it does not matter nobody cares I am going to go out of the organization or there could be also situations where you just think that I am no way concerned I have got a better job, I have got a better opportunity now whoever wants to take care of the organization let them do I am just quitting. So, there could be the prominent voice could be of exit. So, second important aspect here is voice. When you look into the theory behind employee voice this is significant because voice is an attempt to change rather than escape unlike the previous case from dissatisfying situations.

So voice can be a very constructive response such as recommending ways for management to improve the situation or it can be more confrontational such as filing formal grievances or forming a coalition to oppose a particular decision. Now this is where I would have a small discussion here. So when you want to have or when you are in a situation where you think that the organization is not taking your opinion seriously or let us say you have tremendous ideas you would like to pitch in for the organization but the organization unfortunately is not giving you yours, it is not absorbing the ideas or it is not even open to change then you feel disappointed and most probably there are most of the individuals they tend to quit the organization they find greener pastures and they move on. But the people who are ready to fight, ready to stay back, ready to actually improve and take this as a calling to improve the organization as such what they do is they raise the voice and raising the voice is the difficult thing because many a time though it sounds good it also may end up confrontational, it can also create conflicts, it can because how dare he or how dare she this would be the thought that is coming to your mind or that is coming to the mind of the supervisor. So when you are actually looking

into such situations and you tend to see that the organization has to be you know a better organization in the future, so whatever goodness that emanates from this organization, whatever goodwill the organization possesses it is also translated to you as an employee of the organization rather in the opposite scenario if the organization is getting doomed there is mismanagement in the organization then you may also think of such situations where you were affected because you were part of the organization for some time.

So it is your prerogative, it is in your best interest that you raise the voice, it could be the rider is the caveat is that it could be confrontational but earlier the better. The third important aspect when we come to this model is particularly loyalty. Now loyalists are a different class, loyalists are employees who respond to dissatisfaction by patiently waiting some say they suffer in silence. Now there are lot of examples if you just take a second and think of in your organization or your work place you will see that there are lot of people who say that they are suffering in silence because they are patient for the problem to work itself out or to be resolved by others. So, they do not want to take the responsibility on to them.

The moment you raise voice please be also ready that you are going to face the heat. If you pray for the rain you have to be ready for the mud too. So please understand when you are actually looking into this particular situation where you are actually trying to raise voice there are much easier options one is to just quit, other is to just be loyal to the system be patient and loyalty does not exactly literally translate here. But moreover, loyalty here means that you are patient, you are just sticking on with the system hoping that one fine day somebody will come and change the system or it may get resolved time is the biggest healer. So it could be that may be in a days time, in a weeks time, in a years time, 10 years time, 20 years time may be not in your life time also but it may get rectified.

So there is a possibility it is utopian idea but still loyal is believed that there would be some rectification to the whole scenario but it will not start from you, it will not emanate from you because you do not want to take the heat, you do not want to take the lead, you do not want to take the extra responsibility and with responsibility authority comes and with authority responsibility comes. So, when you go back and look into the model there is a fourth option so exit, voice, loyalty and neglect. When you look into the fourth option which is neglect what you do is you start reducing your work effort, you paying less attention to the quality of the work included or you are part of production process or you are actually part of particular you know process industry, you will try to reduce the attention to quality, you will be more absent in your job and there will be lateness or lack of discipline from your part. So, it is generally considered as a passive activity that has negative consequences for the organization. So, if you think that voice and raising voice

would be confrontational, neglect also is detrimental for the organization maybe not in the short run but in the long run for sure. So when you look into the voice you have to understand this EVLN model, exit we have an option to exit, we have an option to raise voice, we have an option to be loyal and we have an option to neglect things. Now you belong to which category? This is what has to have a clear understanding or this is what should unravel with this course or this lecture at least. Where you want to see yourself? Are you the person who sees a problem and the first place runs away, he waits, he escapes or are you the person who is going to raise voice but please remember with voice comes confrontation, comes conflict, there might be professional jealousy, there might be situations that you are being socially undermined maybe not explicitly but implicitly, maybe not in front of everyone but behind your back. So all these possibilities do exist. So are you a person who are going to raise voice? There is a third option.

The third option is nothing but being loyal. Now being loyal does not mean that you are actually taking an action, it is more of an inaction, it is more of let us understand this as you know waiting for the best moment, being patient but you are not going to take the responsibility on yourself. You are hoping that somebody on someday will come and rectify the particular problem in hand. And the fourth option is neglect. This is not inaction. Please remember when you compare this with loyalty, loyalty is more of inaction but neglect is not inaction.

Neglect is you are intentionally neglecting whatever work orders are coming, you are intentionally neglecting the quality with which the product has to be made or the service has to be rendered or your day to day activities takes a hit in terms of the quality, in terms of the reliability, in terms of the way you perform. You had given 100 percent of your best efforts previously but now you start giving only 80 percent or 50 percent for that matter. So this is intentional and like the previous one which is the loyal factor which is more of passive way, more of unintentional aspect or unintentional consequences. So, remember we have exit, we have voice, we have loyal and we have neglect.

Now let us look into what is the association between voice and procedural justice. For that you have to understand procedural justice in your work experience. I am sure that you might have come across this but may be the clear understanding of the term might be varying and let us have this right now.

Procedural justice refers to fairness of the procedures used to decide the distribution of resources. It emphasizes providing individuals with an opportunity to voice their concerns, ensuring consistency in procedures and conveying decisions impartially.

So procedural justice is all about the procedure, about having a clear consistency in the procedure and conveying decisions without any favoritism. You are the person who is the

decision maker, he should be also the person who should take responsibility of the decision. He should be the person who should be responsible for the work undertaken also because of the decision. So, if there is mutually exclusive understanding between the authority and the responsibility involved, then you lack procedural justice for that matter. So, the perception of procedural justice enhances trust, it enhances acceptance within the organization and satisfaction with organizational outcomes. So this is what is critical when you consider or understand or try to understand procedural justice. Procedural justice in other words will be a critical factor in eliciting trust towards an organization, in increasing the acceptance of the organization or to bring satisfaction with the organizational outcome.

Now when you look into voice, voice also provides a value expressive function, employees tend to feel better after having an opportunity to speak their mind. So when you look or talk about procedural justice that there is a fairness in the procedure, there is impartiality in the decision making, there is certain involvement of every single individual even if irrespective of the levels or the hierarchies then there is procedural justice and this is supported by the very simple argument that if you are given the chance to raise the voice it actually reinforces the very understanding or the very existence of procedural justice. So that is the basic association between voice and procedural justice.

Now let us consider a hypothetical case scenario. At a marketing firm, employees noticed a recurring challenge in their work flow. The current project management system seemed outdated causing delays and miscommunication. So despite a few attempts to address it, the issue persisted. Concerned about the impact and deadlines and quality, a group of employees decided to voice their concerns.

Using the company's open door policy, they scheduled a meeting with the project management team and presented their observations and proposed solutions. They suggested implementing a new software tool that could streamline communication and task allocation. The project management team appreciating this employee input decided to conduct a trial of the new software based on their recommendations.

After the trial period, feedback sessions were held involving all team members. The majority expressed satisfaction with the new tool highlighting improved efficiency, clearer communication and faster task completion. Encouraged by the positive impact, the company decided to implement the software across all projects.

This scenario showcased the power of employee voice in recognizing and solving operational challenges. By actively listening to their concerns and suggestions, the company not only resolved an ongoing issue but also improved overall work flow efficiency, fostering a culture where employees feel valued and heard.

So, you tend to understand what exactly is the critical importance of feedback, in fact the importance of employee voice. Let us understand, when we talk about employee voice, you should not have a misunderstanding with whistle-blowing.

So when I have been so articulate about you know employee voice then you might get the opinion that employee voice is nothing but you know there is something wrong in the organization, you are just pointing it out, no. Please understand there is a subtle difference between employee voice and whistle-blowing. Let us understand this, when you look into employee voice and whistle-blowing, let us understand it from three aspects. One is the nature of the construct, second the intent to which it works out and finally the implication of each of this concept. When you look into the nature, employee voice as we have already seen and understood refers to the broader concept of employees expressing their opinions, ideas and concerns and suggestions within the workplace.

It encompasses you know both formal and informal channels, so you are getting some idea or getting some platform to raise your opinion, raise your idea or sometimes even concerns. It is not only always a rosy picture, it is sometimes that you have to raise some concerns, in this way the organization is going to get doomed, let us not do that, let us make it a more you know deliberative mechanism. So, all these discussions will actually look into or try to make the organization or the performance of the organization more robust. So, it could happen through formal and informal channels

But contrastingly whistle-blowing is nothing but the disclosure of illegal, immoral or illegitimate practices to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action. So, you are not discussing it internally, you are actually calling it out in the public, it could be illegal, it could be immoral, it could be illegitimate practices, but somewhere you are concerned about the organization and you want somebody to take a heed of it and some corrective mechanisms need to happen otherwise you are worried about the organization and the basic way it is run, you are really concerned about that and you are trying to take a lead in a corrective mechanism and this would be the first step.

Now, it is a formal disclosure please understand unlike what we have seen in case of employee voice because there are some informal channels which also actually trigger rather encourage people to raise their voice, but when it comes to whistle blowing it is a formal disclosure usually made to a higher authority or a regulatory body or most probably to the public because many a time you see that there could be an nexus between the organization and the authorities or may be regulatory bodies might not be that fair in terms of the treatment, there might be issues of natural justice all those issues will actually lead the people to go to the public and say whatever they want regarding the wrongdoing within the company. So, this is basically the nature of the two different concepts both employee voice and whistle-blowing.

Now, let us look into the intent, the second point when you look into the intent employee voice the intention behind employee voice is often to improve processes, foster innovation, enhance communication and contribute positively to the organizational growth. So, this is what intent of employee voice is, but unfortunately or surprisingly whistle blowing is a very important blowing is driven by the need to expose the wrongdoing that could potentially harm the organization. Please remember there is there might be a chance that it might harm not a chance certain level of certainty that the organization reputation will take a hit no doubt about it, the public or the stakeholders.

So, it is not only the organization those who are associated with the organization like the public or the stakeholders might also be affected and that is just common sense. So, the primary goal is to bring attention to illegal or unethical practices and prompt corrective actions. So, you are basically concerned with the organization, but you do not have any other option there are no formal or informal channels to raise your opinion, raise your concerns as a last resort you have resorted to whistle-blow. So, this is what the intent of whistle blowing is and this is what differentiates employee voice from whistle blowing.

Now, let us look into the implication of both these factors. When we look into employee voice, employee voice when encouraged and valued contributes to positive work culture, it contributes to increased engagement and better decision making. So, this has been a point as I have already mentioned time and again we tend to try to underscore this. So, basically, we look into employee voice as a positive mechanism and the consequences are also positive. When we come to whistle blowing on the other hand, whistle blowing can have significant consequences both for individual making the report and the organization while it can lead to necessary investigations and the rectification of issues. So, if we think it in a positive manner there could be a possibility of necessary investigations and the task or the issues might be rectified.

It might also result in legal proceedings and unfortunately damage to organizations reputation and personal repercussions for the whistle blower. Because once you are an individual who has you know called out the organization in public, mostly whistle blowing happens in public you must have noticed that. So, once you are an you are an individual you might be frowned upon, you might be ridiculed, you might be even isolated they might the co-workers might you know actually separate you from the meetings because your trustworthiness or you know the way you are a part of the group might all come under a radar. So, all these issues might come up, but please understand no way I am advocating against whistle-blowing. But the thing is employee voice is more significant. There are formal and informal channels where you can raise your voice, where you can raise your opinion, but are you the person who is willing to raise the voice for the betterment of the organization or are you just a person who wants to exit or are you the person who just want to be loyal thinking that on one fine day somebody will

come as a miracle and rectify the whole issue or whatever pertaining to the organization the concern you have raised or you are having or you might be the person who is neglecting things thinking that okay I cannot do anything, but I am not going to give my 100 percent for this. So, being a practitioner of organizational behavior management I would certainly advice be the person who is raising the voice. No doubt that you will be ridiculed, there might be confrontations, there might be conflicts, but if your intention is a betterment of the organization then nobody can stop you. On that note we will end this class. We will see you in the next class with more on employee voice and employee silence. Thank you for listening to me patiently. Thank you.