

Course Name: Organizational Behaviour: Individual Dynamics in Organization

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Week – 12

Lecture – 03

Lecture 57: Individual factors affecting silence

Hello students. Welcome back to the course on Organizational Behavior, Individual Dynamics in Organization. Today we move to the third lecture of the last module where we look into individual factors affecting silence. So, if you look into this particular last module and the previous one, there is a lot of background work in terms of sound empirical research but we do not have any particular textbook which actually defines the two constructs which is knowledge sharing, knowledge hiding as well as employee silence and employee voice. So, I take my support from this sound empirical research that is happening and the budding research literatures that is emerging out of the studies eminent scientists are conducting.

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So let us start with today's session with the thought “frequent silence is related to burnout.” I repeat frequent silence is related to burnout.

So burnout is a concept which we have discussed in couple of modules before this. So, we tend to relate frequent silence to burnout. Now let us understand what do you mean by silence. Now you might be thinking what is this professor telling, why we do not know silence or what, why is he claiming that or what is he trying to do. But in the context of organization and specific to OB, organizational behavior, silence has a different connotation, silence has a different meaning, silence has a different understanding altogether.

My attempt here is to introduce you to that level of understanding what silence actually means and what are the factors actually affecting silence or influencing silence. So let us understand the definition of silence. Silence is when employees withhold ideas. Now you should be very careful while reading this line because withholding ideas, withholding information, I think it rings a bell, it would be associated with knowledge hiding. But

again there is a subtle difference which I will explain.

Silence is when employees withhold ideas, information about problems or opinions on work related issues. So we are looking into a formal level of withholding of information. It is related to the workplace context. It is not related to any personal issues or any personal problems. It includes situations where employees do not speak up about errors, unfair treatment or behaviors that violate personal, moral or legal standards.

Now this is quite a definition. When we look at the first part, we tend to understand this because silence is what we have perceived it as withholding of ideas. It is nothing but withholding of ideas, information, opinions, mainly work-related context or work related aspects. But when you are critically looking at situations where employees do not speak up about the errors, about unfair treatment that they are being given in the organization, about favoritism, about prejudice, stereotyping, all these aspects you tend to remain silent or in other words you are not raising your voice that also qualifies as silence. So, silence has a typical, a deeper meaning when it comes to organizational context and this is what I want you to understand that silence is not opening your mouth or uttering something. It is always about withholding information, withholding ideas but also not speaking about something wrong that is going on in the organizations, some errors, some problems, some issues, all this pertains to silence.

But when we look into the silence research literature specifically, we come across two possible schools of thoughts or two particular perspectives. One is silence is considered as opposite end of the same continuum as voice. I am taking a bipolar continuum, one is in voice and other side would be silence. That is one school of thought or one perspective related to silence. But there is also another level of understanding or another perspective altogether where silence and voice are considered as distinct behaviors. They do not fall under the same continuum, they are not diametrically opposite aspects, it is totally mutually exclusive constructs altogether if you look into silence and voice. So please understand this, this is critical in terms of building up your understanding on silence as a construct and further silence as a concept. One is that there is voice then there is silence, absence of voice is silence. So that is one simple perspective that has emerged out of the research literature.

But again, silence need not have any association with voice, that is another school of thought. It is not that you are talking or not you are raising your voice or your opinion, it does not mean that you are silent. Silence is altogether a distinct concept, a different concept altogether. So this is, these are the two perspectives with which we try to build the understanding of employee silence. Now let us look into behavioral system and silence.

When we look into behavioral system and silence again I have given the reference in the slide itself. So when you look into the behavioral system and silence, voice reflects the behavioral activation system, there is something called as BAS and silence on the other hand reflects the behavioral inhibition system which is called as a BIS. So, there is this BAS which is behavioral activation system, more on as a functional word activates something and BIS is obviously the I qualifies as the inhibiting factor or the inhibition. So let us look into the first BAS. So, this system is associated with responses to rewards and pursuit of goals. So something which is as coming as a positive angle, it is responsible for activating behavior in response to signals of potential reward or non-punishment. So potential reward or non-punishment. So basically, again you are looking into the positive side of aspects. Individuals with a highly active behavioral activation system tend to be more sensitive to rewards, they are often goal oriented and are more likely to approach situations that are potential positive outcomes. So, when you are looking into those situations, when you are looking into critical aspects which are rewarding, which are goal oriented, which are target oriented, result oriented, the approach situation that can offer potential positive outcomes, you have a behavioral activation system and voice reflects this BAS typically.

Whereas when you come to the BIS, the behavioral inhibition system with response to punishment, potential threats or novel situations. So, these are the particular areas where we tend to be silent or where behavioral inhibition system BIS sets in. So, it works as a sort of stop signal, a sort of a caution, a sort of pause causing individuals to inhibit behavior or avoid situation that might lead to negative outcomes. So, you are looking into situations where you can actually get into potential threat from your boss or your co-worker or you are looking into or moving into uncertain territories, region or zone of uncertainty, maybe it is new to you, maybe it is new to the entire organization, maybe you are heading a new unit, a new strategic business unit altogether. So, all these situations may warrant silence more than voice, but it cannot be an exhaustive and sweeping statement, rather it depends on the context.

So those with the highly active behavioral information, sorry behavioral inhibition system are more sensitive to potential punishments or negative outcomes which might make them more cautious, more risk averse and prone to anxiety in uncertain or potentially threatening situations.

So, when I am looking into BAS, it is reflected by voice whereas silence on the other hand reflects the BIS. BAS is more positive in terms of the spirit, it is more related to reward, the pursuit of goals, the result orientation, the goal orientation whereas BIS on the other hand is inhibitive, it reflects more of silence, it is related to punishment, potential threats or uncertain or novel situations. So, this is what both the systems actually mean. Now let us look into emotions and silence.

So these are some of the tenets I have taken from some of the research works which give you an idea of where and how silence exists and what are the ramifications of employee silence in the organization. So first is less silence in the presence of anger. Now this is common sense, if you are angry you might tend to stay silent, you do not want to talk that time, you do not want to have any other interactions because possibly you feel that if you start raising the voice then it may get out of control. So, in an organizational setup the presence of anger is always a certain encouraging factor for voice. So, you tend to be less silent in the presence of anger.

So when you look into the first factor emotions and silence, the first factor is less silence in the presence of anger. So, when you are in a mood of anger, when you are angry you tend to know yourself. It is common sense that when you are angry you cannot control your emotions that much, you tend to raise your voice and you corroborate it with less silence. You tend to see sometimes you might be you know you might have thought about raising this opinion time and again but you were very much in control over your emotions. But some of the other day you had some release of some pent-up feelings, you are very angry and you just took it out on somebody or you relate it with more of voice and less silence.

Positive relationship between depression, disappointment, dejection and silence is also critically verified by different studies. When you actually are silent, it is common sense that there is some issue that is bothering you and the studies have technically solved the puzzle and they have categorically stated that there is a positive relationship between depression, disappointment, dejection and silence. When you look into another aspect power, power and silence, individuals are more likely to remain silent when they feel lacking in power. So generally when people speak off, generally when people raise their voice, there is some level of power that is guiding them. It is true. You have some authority, you tend to show off that authority, you have some authority, you tend to you know disclose that authority or try to gain that particular authority over the people given to you or assigned to you or in other case you feel that if you have the authority and you are failing to actually raise the voice, it in turn is a failure to the authority vested on you or authority given to you and you may be deemed as a poor leader, as a person with poor leadership skills. So, to ascertain that you are a born leader or you are a good leader, you tend to raise your voice. This tendency diminishes when they believe the recipient of their input is receptive and open minded because you do not have to raise your voice to somebody who is a well-behaved person or he is obedient or he is open minded or he is receptive. You tell something, he imbibes it or she imbibes it or absorbs it and does exactly how it is supposedly to be done. But unfortunately, when you feel or when you come across people who are not actually you know very open minded, you tend to raise

your voice against them. This is the relationship, this is the association power he is having with silence.

Now let us typically because we are touched upon the leadership ability here, let us critically look into the leader behaviour and silence specifically. When you are looking into the leader or leadership, there is a positive relationship between a abusive supervision and silence. So that means in other words we have to understand because time and again in this module as well as in the previous I am using this positive relationship. What exactly it means is that there is a stronger abusive supervision then people are or employees are more silent.

The leadership defines your voice to a certain extent and when it comes to the mediation we have discussed in the previous module about the mediation and moderation mediated by such states as emotional exhaustion. So basically, A is related to B, this relationship might be mediated by C. So there is a path that A is going to B, it is such that that A can also go through B or A should be going through C. So, this is what mediation and moderation specifically, mediation specifically mentioned I have clarified it in the previous module but just so that there is no disengagement here. I would like to mention that when abusive supervision is there, when your supervisor is more abusive it is natural that your silence increases or you are more silent and it is obviously mediated by your emotional exhaustion as a psychological state.

Now this relationship is strengthened in the context of factors that might lead employees to expect more favorable treatment, let us say favorable treatment in the sense like gender similarity. So, you feel that okay there is some level of favoritism, some level of partisan behavior associated with this, so this relationship could be strengthened in those contexts. When you are looking into aspects like manager narcissism and knowledge hiding increase employee silence by leading to less trust and higher disengagement. So, you might not have any difficulty at this point because you have gone through the module in knowledge hiding. So what happens specifically here is that when your manager is narcissistic or he is prone to knowledge hiding, it could be any hiding, just recall you are playing dumb, evasive hiding, rationalized hiding etc.

And these typical aspects increase employee silence because you feel that there is no point in telling anything to the manager. When the manager itself is narcissistic he is not going to listen, he is not receptive, he is not open minded, so he thinks or she thinks that they are the epitome of success or epitome of the entire organization. So there is no point in actually initiating even a discussion with them, so that actually gives you a thought that I should remain silent. Basically, you feel or you come across a person who is let us say habitual knowledge hider if I can use the word, you tend to seek knowledge he or she might be actually trying to withhold even if after request that is what knowledge hiding

is. In those situations, also you tend to be silent, there is no point in actually having an open discussion with such individuals.

So basically what we understand here is in the context with high power distance there is a strong emphasis on hierarchy, respect for authority and an normative belief that certain individuals or groups hold more power, prestige or status compared to others. So, then there is such a gradation, such a differentiation existing people tend to remain silent. So this is what we can understand typically from the leader behaviour and silence. Now let us specifically as part of OBM, organizational behaviour management, let us look into silence from the work context. Contextual cues about one's status and work also influences silence.

So when you are looking into an organization, organization prestige is high but organizational support is low. So, you are working for a, let us say you are working for a private organization which is highly recognized, highly celebrated, the organizational prestige is very high but within inside the organization you know very well that the organizational support is very poor. Anything happens they will just turn off the contact with you and you might be replaced in a second. So, such situations the individuals experience ambivalent identification which actually triggers or manifests in higher silence. So you do not, even if you are working in an organization you know that is highly recommended, highly celebrated, people you know are looked higher with respect if you are part of that organization but within that organization, inside that organization you are very particular, very clear to the fact that the organization support is least or they might turn down in case of or you know turn down any request in case of any support requested or required you are having a mixed feeling.

You generally tend to be silent. In fact you are not even trying to raise any voice or opinion because if anything goes south then things will not go according to what you wish and the organization will be the first entity to vanish. So, in such situations, in such work context you tend to feel or tend to remain silent. When you also look into the context of work, a group of people collectively believes about speaking up, their shared ideas, they can predict why some individuals stay silent. So even when considering their personal views of the workplace atmosphere and how open their managers are, so there is a certain level of, I will not say it is a group thing but rather there is a group thumping or emerging over individual preferences or individual personal views because they think that a group of people collectively believe about speaking up and they can predict this can actually relate or show us that why some individuals typically they choose to remain silent or they want to remain silent because they ultimately feel that even if the workplace atmosphere is open their managers are very much open to suggestions and views but still we as individuals might not be able to make a difference in opinion so it is always better,

it is always advisable to remain silent. So that remaining silent about poor quality conditions may stem up from the occupational ideologies that equate loyalty with not speaking up.

So basically when you are part of an organization this would be more critical to startups and initial organizations in the in its initial days or initial life cycle actually. So, when you are a part of this organization you tend to see there are some difficulties, there are some problems, there are some issues but how do we address those issues? How we can actually rectify those issues and you are not taking a lead or you are not taking the manager or the concerned person a heads up about those issues but you choose to remain silent because you feel that the whole group might come against you or there might be an underlying understanding that the more you are silent the more loyal you are. If you are raising the voice there are some organizations there are typically some managers also introspect within your organization there are typically some managers also who feel that this person is too much of you know sensitive to problems he is always raising issues, he is very fussy, he is problematic you are given adjectives because of the simple reason that there is a serious concern and you are raising your voice. So many a time you have to understand that people remain silent for the fact that there is an underlying philosophy in the organization that more silent you are more loyal you are to the organization. So please understand it does not actually becomes a truth that more loyal you are you will be more silent it is not the fact.

In fact if you are actually looking for the betterment of the organization for the improvement of the organization you need to speak up of the concerns of the issues. I will discuss about the strategic part in the next lecture but please note that it is remaining silent is not an option in those situations.

Now let us address the big thing in this particular lecture which is outcomes of silence. What do we get after remaining silent? When we look into outcomes of silence there is negative emotional consequences associated with silence there is no doubt about it. When you are looking into the research literature on silence it has categorically revealed that accrescent silence there is two silence two types of silence accrescent silence and defensive silence.

Accrescent silence evoked feelings of anger while defensive silence triggered both anger and fear in response to hypothetical scenarios. This will be clear once we understand what are these two types of silence. So, one is accrescent silence a form of silence where individuals remain quiet or refrain from speaking up not because they agree or support a particular situation but rather due to a sense of resignation or acceptance of circumstances they believe they cannot change. So, there is a certain element of learned helplessness.

When you are looking into situations like accrescent silence specifically you are or you have understood or you have a strong sense of resignation or you are accepted the fact that this is beyond my control.

Accrescent silence means I even if I talk it is not going to change the situation. Even if I raise the voice which I have done previously you might have justifications for not raising your voice or being silent. Even if you raise your voice it is not going to change the system. So, there is a certain learned helplessness that has come to you or that has crept in here. In such situations where you feel that there is no point in raising actual concern because neither there is organizational support.

Moreover there is this hidden understanding that if you are raising your voice it might be construed that you are not loyal to the system you are a rebel to the organization. So please understand this is one aspect of silence. \

Second is that you are looking into is defensive silence. Defensive silence is a form of silence where individuals choose not to speak up or share their thoughts due to fear, concern about potential negative consequences or a perceived threat to their well-being or status. So when you are looking into learned helplessness or the accrescent silence it was that individuals were voluntarily stating that are voluntary remaining silence whereas defensive silence is they have this understanding typical understanding that has set on them that if they are speaking up or they are going to share their thoughts and ideas it might be that it can cause potential negative consequences or the organizations might feel a perceived threat may raise a perceived or may raise a threat and the individuals may feel a perceived threat for even their well-being and status.

So this is what will ensure that they have to remain silent and this is what is called defensive silence. So, there are these two types of silence which I think you should know which emerges as outcomes of silence. When you look into outcomes of silence and this is where we relate it with the theme of today's lecture. What happens if you remain silent? You know that there are different understanding which we have already portrayed that you remain silent, you tend to reflect as more loyal, you tend to don't come under the radar of being rebel or something but please understand one thing, please remember one thing frequent silence, you are frequently silent on something it is related to burnout. You have this learned helplessness emerging but moreover there is a burnout because you feel that the organization is not taking care of it.

You are a person who wants to dictate, who wants to identify this issue and actually want to put it up, put it out to the higher management but again you are worried. You are quite clear that the organization is not going to address this because of n number of reasons but

whatever be the reason be frequent silence is a cause or is actually a factor which can lead to burnout.

Now when you are looking into the outcomes of silence specifically, low assertiveness and high perceptions of climate of fear increases silence stemming from abusive supervision. So we have tried to relate abusive supervision with silence already in terms of research understanding but we have to also understand that low assertiveness and high perceptions of you know of climate or psychology of fear or a fear psychosis would actually increase your disposition towards a silence or you remain silent in such critical situations. So silence also explain the relationships such as workplace ostracism and even emotional exhaustion. So this is what silence can give you as an outcome.

So here we tried to understand what exactly implies silence is. We started from the basic understanding that there are two schools of thought. One is to consider silence as diametrically opposite to something which is voice. Bipolar continuum it exists in two different zones but there is another school of thought which I think I relate it with more employee voice and employee silence are distinct aspects. There are not much of connection associated with both of these two factors.

But remember one thing if your organization thinks that remaining silent is a mark of, is a reflection of being loyal, it is wrong. If you have a personal understanding that you know I don't need to speak up here because my manager might think in a wrong way, my manager might think in a different way and I might be considered as a rebel or not loyal to the organization. Please understand that that's a wrong understanding. You need to talk, you need to raise your voice, you need to speak up because silence will otherwise lead to burnout.

Thank you for listening to me patiently. See you in the next class. Till then take care. Bye bye.