



Why do Employees Prefer to Keep Silent? Is Fear of Managers and Management's Approach Causing Employees' Silence?

Research paper

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Received: 2023/11/04

Accepted: 2024/01/25

Abstract

This study aims to identify why and under what circumstances employees prefer to remain silent. The qualitative method was used to understand the reasons for the employees' silence, for which in-depth interviews were conducted. In this paper, 20 employees of the private sector in Kosovo were interviewed. Of the employees who were interviewed, seven of them are from the production sector, five from the service sector, three from the private education sector, and five from the trade sector. The interview data determined codes and categories, which were analyzed using the content analysis method. The data provided by the interview participants were analyzed through the MAXQDA 2020 qualitative data analysis program. Three categories with 21 codes mentioned in 263 cases were identified during data processing. The results show that the employees' fear of the managers and the management's approach is among the main reasons for the employees' silence. In addition, other reasons impacting employees' silence have been identified and presented in this paper.

Keywords: *the silence of employees, fear of managers, management approach.*

Employees are considered the main success factor in an organization (enterprise) and are also seen as a source of change, creativity, and innovation (Beheshtifar, Borhani, & Moghadam, 2012). These can only be achieved when employees freely express their ideas, knowledge, and opinions (Zehir & Erdogan, 2011). The emergence of ideas is also related to a healthy work environment. Undoubtedly, managers have a significant weight in

creating a healthy environment for the organization's employees. It is even argued that the manager's leadership style, which is mainly based on justice, motivates employees to feel free to express their ideas (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005). In other words, the role of the manager is vital because, through his leadership style, he influences employees to contribute to achieving organizational goals (Senger & Karcioğlu, 2022). Studies have also shown

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that employees feel free to express their knowledge, attitudes, and opinions on a particular issue or problem in organizations with a pluralistic culture (Yalçınsoy, Işıldak, & Bilen, 2017). Unfortunately, there are also situations where managers cannot create suitable conditions for employees for various reasons. To compensate for their shortcomings and inadequacies, managers refuse to receive support from employees and ignore their opinions. This is one reason managers want employees to stay quiet and not voice their opinions and concerns (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005). On the other hand, the behavior of managers can also affect the appearance of silence. These behaviors can be presented in two forms: fear of receiving negative feedback from their subordinates or ignoring subordinates' feedback. Managers who maintain high distance may bias their employees into believing they know the best and most accurate about the organization (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). The inappropriate style of managers and unwillingness to create suitable conditions and environments for employees can result in the appearance of employee silence as a phenomenon. Employee silence directly affects various processes in the organization. Silence is even an obstacle for the organization's management to provide vital information to the organization. For example, improvements in work processes cannot be carried out if employees are unwilling to share information. Withholding information from employees will cause the appearance of various problems, which can become obstacles to many organizational processes (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Likewise, studies have shown that the authoritarian behavior of managers has evoked negative emotions in employees, such as anger, hostility, and fear (Duan, Bao, Huang, & Brinsfield, 2017). In addition, it leads to degeneration within the organization and reduces employee motivation and confidence. It is essential to understand the reasons that lead to organizational silence so that these negativities do not occur or are prevented (Dedahanov, Kim, & Rhee, 2015). As was emphasized above, valuable employees who contribute to the success of businesses are people who create change and innovation using their creativity. Businesses in the globalized world need employees who can clearly express their ideas, but employees

also look for organizations with facilities where they can express themselves freely. Increasing employee motivation and increasing productivity in an enterprise is possible by eliminating organizational silence (Liu, Wu, & Ma, 2009).

The phenomenon of silence as a problem was addressed in the 1970s in Hirschman's paper called "Exit, Voice and Royalty". In the years 1980 to 2000, in addition to silence as a concept, other concepts, such as speaking, reporting problems, complaining, etc., have been researched (Yaman & Ruçlar, 2014). Even though many studies have been conducted in this field, researchers think many studies should be conducted to determine why employees are silent (Brinsfield, 2012). Considering the various factors that influence employees' silence (Duan, Bao, Huang, & Brinsfield, 2017) researchers became more curious to identify these factors. Silence as a phenomenon is considered a complex process, including emotions, thoughts, and other factors that make understanding difficult. Due to these features, it is difficult for the organization to understand why the employees are silent (Üçok & Torun, 2015). For this reason, in this paper, to identify the reasons for the silence, we conducted direct interviews with private sector employees in Kosovo, aiming to shed light on this unaddressed phenomenon in the Republic of Kosovo. The concept of silence is a complex process involving many emotions, thoughts, and interactions with other organizational dynamics. For this reason, the correct understanding of the reasons for employees' silence in organizations is considered essential to find the most appropriate practice for managing organizations.

The concept of silence is a complex process involving many emotions, thoughts, and interactions with other organizational dynamics. Accordingly, the correct understanding of the reasons for employees' silence in organizations is considered essential to find the most appropriate practice for organizational management. Identifying the factors that cause silence will help managers better manage the organization's processes. Professional organizations often encourage their employees to present their opinions, suggestions, and concerns because, according to the leaders of these organizations, the voice of employees is

critical in enhancing the organization's performance (Fast, Burris, & Bartel, 2014). Therefore, we think that this article will contribute to managers in better managing various processes in the business. We also consider that the problem addressed in this paper can be a starting point for other researchers who can deal with other spheres of this phenomenon. Likewise, during the literature review on employees' silence, no publication was conducted with employees in organizations operating in Kosovo. Due to this fact, we consider that this paper enriches the literature in this field.

Considering what was stated above, in this paper, we have been trying to figure out how to answer research questions, which are presented below. The first goal of this paper is to find out the reasons why the employees of an organization remain silent. Does fear of managers cause employees to remain silent? The other goal is to identify which managers' actions influence employees to decide to remain silent. The interview questions of this paper are based on the questions of this research, which are presented below. The research questions are considered the core of the research design. The research questions are related to all other components of the research design (Maxwell, 2022):

RQ1: Why do employees remain silent in the organization they work for?

RQ2: How can fear impact the silence of officials?

RQ3: Which actions of managers cause the silence of employees?

Following this paper, the literature review part is included, in which we present facts from this field's literature to provide theoretical support for this paper. In addition to the part of the literature review, the part of the research methodology is also presented, with subheadings that explain the research process, the method of data analysis, and the findings of this study. The last part includes the discussion and conclusion, where an attempt is made to explain the relevance of the findings to the research questions of this study.

Literature Review

Silence is a conscious action of employees who do not show their concerns or proposals that can contribute to the

advancement of the organization (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Although in the past, silence was interpreted as a positive phenomenon, over the years, silence has been described as a problem (Korkmaz & Aydemir, 2015). Silence as a concept is defined as the inability to express information, ideas, or thoughts, while voice is defined as conveying information and expressing thoughts. What is essential here is to know whether these silent behaviors are conscious or unconscious. The employee's silence may be due to a lack of knowledge or opinion about certain issues (Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003).

In the past, silence was defined as the obedience and approval of employees towards the organization's management. In contrast, today, silence is defined as a reaction or disagreement of employees to practices and policies in the organization (Ölçer & Coşkun, 2022). According to Bagheri et al. (2012) employee silence is a situation in which employees voluntarily or involuntarily withhold information that may be useful to the organization (Bagheri, Zarei, & Aeen, 2012). Although employee silence sometimes helps reduce information overload and various interpersonal conflicts among managers, to various researchers, silence is considered a behavior that has more negative than positive effects (Wang & Hsieh, 2013). The silence of employees as a phenomenon is defined as a non-productive behavior resulting from a rigid organizational structure (Srivastava, Jain, & Sullivan, 2019). Similarly, although at first glance, silence may seem like a behavior of being closed to communication, silence is a style of communication. Silence is not limited to stopping talking; silence is also not writing, not listening, distancing, and not caring about things around (Nikmaram, Yamchi, Shojaii, Zahrani, & Alvani, 2012).

The approach of the organization's management, as well as its managers are among the many factors that cause employee silence. Undoubtedly, there are other factors, but mainly, these are the result of the management's approach. Below, we will present facts from the reviewed literature to find theoretical support for this paper. Many organizations are caught in an apparent paradox in which most employees know the truth about some issues and problems within the organization but do not dare to tell this

truth to their superiors (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). The silence is examined in two basic dimensions. The first one is not related to the employees' will, but it is the result of the top-level managers, the enterprise's organizational culture, or the result of the management style. Meanwhile, the second form of employees' silence is entirely of their own volition, and the assessment is not related to the management's approach; in other words, it is with the employees' awareness and as a result of their choice (Blackman & Sadler-Smith, 2009).

Employee silence is considered a behavior that has implications for the individual and the organization. At the individual level, employees' silence results in low commitment, resistance to organizational changes, lack of satisfaction in the workplace, and poor performance. Meanwhile, at the organizational level, silence influences the reduction of the organization's performance and is an obstacle to innovations (Yao, et al., 2022). As a result of numerous studies, at the end of the 1990s, another concept of organizational sound and silence emerged as the "deaf ear syndrome," which is also defined as organizational passivity. This situation is treated as an organizational norm/rule in which employees do not express their dissatisfaction directly. In this context, it seems that the "deaf ear syndrome" results from the lack of organizational policies, the ambiguities of organizational processes, the ignoring of employees, and the accusation of employees in case of giving feedback in certain situations (Harlos, 2001). There is no doubt that silence will harm the employee on the one hand and the organization on the other hand. Employees who believe that they will be harmed due to the expression of existing problems do not express these problems within the organization due to fear. In other words, due to fear and not being considered problematic employees, they do not express their ideas; this way, they are considered as employees who do not contribute to the organization's development (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

Studies have shown that silence has a negative impact on employees, resulting in decreased job satisfaction. The fact that employees do not share their knowledge consciously causes increased stress, and

consequently, they may experience physical and psychological problems (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Silence will prevent the emergence of new ideas, as well, by preventing the emergence of different points of view, and has a negative effect on the organization's development (Huang, Vliert, & Vegt, 2005). Also, the fear of exclusion from the circle of personnel is one of the factors for the employee to show silence by not showing information. So, exclusion is the cause of hiding feelings and thoughts in the workplace (Gkorezis, Panagiotou, & Theodorou, 2016). Therefore, exclusion can harm a person's ability to form or maintain positive relationships. This shows that there is a relationship between communication and employee silence (Salavatian, Anaraki, & Neyestani, 2017).

The reluctance of employees to talk about work-related issues appears to be associated with many significant individual consequences, as well as negative effects on the organization. Studies have shown that employees who intentionally cut off communication within the organization are exposed to stress and other negative emotions (Cortina & Magley, 2003). Apart from reducing the performance of employees by not using their various skills, silence also dramatically affects the reduction of job satisfaction and greatly impacts the reduction of commitment to the organization or company (Amah & Okafor, 2008). The silence of employees is seen as a major obstacle in the process of change and development of the organization. Employees who remain silent can face burnout syndrome and, over time cannot demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the work they do. This situation can lead to a decrease in the productivity and performance of employees and, therefore, the enterprise's overall performance (Doğan & Kir, 2018). The manager of the organization is the main person responsible for making necessary changes and improving the organization's quality. This is why the manager must create a suitable working environment for employees so that they can show their new ideas. The manager must also take into consideration the opinions and suggestions of employees, allowing them to freely discuss the problems of the organization (Prajogo & McDermott, 2005).

Research Methodology

The qualitative research method was used to find answers to this paper's research questions. The qualitative research method is a research method that follows certain steps to reveal perceptions and understand events in the natural environment with a realistic approach, using data collection techniques such as interviews, observation, and document analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). The qualitative method is preferably used to make detailed and in-depth assessments of a given situation (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2015). To discover the answers to the questions posed, data collection is required. In this context, the qualitative research method is the role of a tool that creates direct contact with certain individuals to collect data and analyze the data provided by interviews or observation (Merriam, 2009). The events are recorded in detail through the qualitative method, and an appropriate explanation is made. Quantitative research often does not look closely at this invisible world of context and processes, so qualitative research also has an advantage in this context. Qualitative research tries to bring the social world to life, making it multidimensional on two-dimensional paper. In this method, narratives are used to help readers imagine the "feel" of different people and places. They provide details that encourage readers to visualize in their minds through intense descriptions (Weaver-Hightover, 2021).

The preferred research model in this paper is the "case study." The case study is a model in qualitative research methods in which each process, event, subject, or person is examined and explained in detail in their context (Yin, 2018). A case study as a model aims to meet one or more people to understand a topic, phenomenon, or problem (Güler, Halıcıoğlu, & Taşğın, 2015) or to understand the views of the participants, namely the interviewees, about a certain event or phenomenon (Barlett & Vavrus, 2021). In the "case study" model, isolated cases are studied, namely an individual or a group of individuals, an organization, a community, a nation, etc., but through this model, in-depth analysis and description of the phenomenon or the problem is made (Merriam, 2009).

The reason for the selection of the "case study" model for this paper was to gain a deeper understanding (Creswell, 2016) of the reasons for employees' silence and to find out the specific parts of this phenomenon (Barlett & Vavrus, 2021) in organizations operating in Kosovo. The data provided through the "case study" will enable us to create a base so that we can then carry out other studies in this field, but by using other methods to discover the specific aspects of the silence of employees working in organizations in Kosovo. Another reason for selecting the case study is the possibility of describing the data and dividing them into topics (Creswell, 2016), which enables an analysis of a given study.

Sample Selection

The purposive sampling method was used in this study. In some cases, due to the purpose of the study and the knowledge of the researcher, the selection of the sample is made according to the purpose of the paper. This type of sampling is called a "purposive sample" (Temmuz, 2009). The purposive sampling technique is also defined as the judgment sampling technique. In this technique, the participant is consciously selected due to their qualifications. It is a non-random technique that does not require a specific number of participants. To put it briefly, the researcher tries to find people who can provide him with information based on his knowledge and experience (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). In qualitative research methods, the aim is to discover typologies. Therefore, in selecting the sample, people with knowledge and information related to the topic treated in a study are identified (Kara, 2021). Due to the nature of the work, 20 employees who are employed in medium and large enterprises are selected. The reason for choosing employees from medium and large enterprises is because, in these enterprises they can potentially have more such problems addressed in this study. Employees from different sectors were also selected in order to have a more general overview of the problem addressed. Of the employees who were interviewed, seven of them are from the production sector, five are from the service sector, three are from the private education sector, and five are from the trade sector.

In data collection, the in-depth interview technique was used, which enables the collection of detailed data related to the phenomenon of the study. Initially, the time and place for conducting the interview with the participants in this study were determined, which were carried out in different periods of time. In order to reflect the real situation, preventing the preliminary preparation of the participants for the interview, no information was given regarding the topic of the study. In addition to the questions presented, the participants were asked to show any important events and situations related to the silence of the employees if they witnessed any cases.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to provide data for this research, interview questions have been determined based on the "research questions" presented in this paper. In order to find the most in-depth data about the research phenomenon or occurrence, semi-structured questions were assigned. Semi-structured interviews are such interviews that enable the collection of data that have similarities that enable comparisons to be made between the answers of the interviewees. Through the semi-structured questions, we can ask additional questions and, in this way, provide more data to find support for the "research questions" (Kara, 2021). The interviews were recorded with a voice recording tool. The duration of an average interview lasted about 45 minutes.

After the completion of all interviews, the data were transcribed to derive codes and categories more easily. The participants in the interview were guaranteed that the privacy data will not be presented in the report of this research. Content analysis was used in the analysis of the data obtained

from the interviews for this research. In this paper, tables with codes representing certain categories were created on one side, and the participants' opinions were presented on the other. All these categories and codes are to support the "research questions" which are posed in this paper. In the past, coding and analysis were done manually to discover connections between codes. But, after the 80s until today, programs have been used in order to facilitate the creation of categories, codes, and the performance of analyses. Also, through these computer programs, it is possible to find connections between codes (Güler, Halıcıoğlu, & Taşgın, 2015). In order to find the answers to the questions posed in this study, the data provided by the interviews were carefully analyzed, from which a series of codes and categories emerged, which were presented through tables provided through the program for analyzing qualitative data "MAXQDA 2020". In the tables below, the expressions or "codes" are presented, as well as the frequencies of the codes and their percentages within a category. In this paper, in addition to the data on the frequencies of the codes related to the treated topic, the opinions of the interviewees are also presented to find support for the "research questions" of this study. In these answers, the participants' names in the interview have remained anonymous, and instead of the name, a representative code has been set, e.g., Participant 1 = (P1).

Findings of the Study

In this part, the findings of the study are presented. The following tables are formed by the MAXQDA 2020 program. In this part, the statements of the interview participants who have shown different events related to the studied phenomenon are also presented.

Table 1.
Fear and perceived risk

Codes	Segments	Percentage
Fear of getting fired	28	23.93 %
Fear of being punished	21	17.95 %
Career hazards	17	14.53 %
Revenge of superiors	15	12.82 %
Getting criticized	10	8.55 %
Perceived as parties	9	7.69 %
The danger of being in the minority	6	5.13 %
Getting out of the comfort zone	6	5.13 %
Fear of creating bad opinions	5	4.27 %
TOTAL	117	100.00 %

The table above shows the list of codes that are in the "Fear and perceived risk" category. From the interviews that have been conducted with the employees, important findings have been provided that help us understand in which cases the employees decide to remain silent as a result of the fear and risk perceived by them. In this category, nine codes were identified, which were mentioned in 117 different cases during the interviews. In Table 1. it appears that the silence of employees is largely related to the fear of getting fired from the workplace, which is the first with 23.93% in this category. Meanwhile, the fear of being punished ranks second with 17.95%. The third, with 14.53%, has to do with employees' concerns about their careers. The table above shows other reasons for employees' silence. In order to understand more closely the reasons for the employees' silence, below are some excerpts from the interviews that took place:

Initially, some of the parts of the interviews that show the reasons for the employees' silence, which is the result of the fear of getting fired from the workplace, are presented. Participant (P12) explains this situation by saying: *"One of the owners of the enterprise has dismissed many of his colleagues because they opposed him due to some actions. On the contrary, the other owners are good and open to ideas, but because of this owner, a large part of the employees remain silent for fear of getting fired."* Likewise, the participant (P2) explains his concern about his future by saying: *"In the past, when I worked in another company, I was more spoken, and I was not silent in any way. But now I am 53 years old, and I cannot take the risk of speaking so freely. After this age, finding a new job is much more difficult"*. Participant (P16) shows his concern by talking about cases from his workplace: *"At the place where I work, there were such cases when some employees left as a result of their reaction. For this reason, I consider that I must remain silent in the place where I work. Unfortunately, our superior personalizes things a lot, even though a worker's feedback or showing an idea may not have a tendency."* Participant (P10) connected his silence with the fear of not renewing the work contract; he expressed himself in this way: *"I am afraid that it may have a negative impact because*

in our company we have one-year contracts, taking into account the difficulty of finding a good job." Participant (P11) explains the reason for his silence by linking this to the financial uncertainty about his future: *"I have a loan that I have to pay, that is why I am afraid that they may take revenge on me by firing me" so I prefer not to speak"*. Participant (P13) talks about the pressure exerted by the management and its influence in this form: *"We have so much pressure that we do not have the courage to say what needs to be said out of the fear of getting punished..."*.

Participant (P7) expresses his opinion regarding the silence, emphasizing the reason for the silence related to the career of his colleagues: *"I can say that among the work colleagues there are those who are very ambitious for career advancement, taking into account the opportunities given to them due to the expansion of the company's capacities, it seems that very few of the employees can take risks by showing their opinions towards management policies. In other words, silence for them is a chance for the future"*. The participant (P19) describes the silence as an obstacle to the opportunity he has. He expressed himself in this way: *"I am at the stage when I have been given the opportunity to exercise the same position in the capital, namely in the main branch, which gives me other career opportunities. This is one of the reasons why I do not want to be finical person"*.

Likewise, the participant (P4) talks about the ambitions of his colleagues, and he explains how his colleagues, to achieve their goals, remain silent in order not to ruin their work: *"In the company that I work for, an internal competition for a managerial position will be opened, the colleagues who have applied for this position seem to be much more attentive and do not give feedbacks as they used to in the past"*. On the other hand, the participant (P9) has talked about a more specific case in which the expression of opinion has become the cause of being degraded; in a way, the management has punished the employee. He has explained the situation in this way: *"Silence makes me more confident in the position I hold. One of my colleagues was demoted in my company because she was too spoken. In other words, not being silent was a cause for the ruin of her career."*

Another reason for employees' silence is the fear of retaliation from their superiors. Regarding this, the participant (P6) highlighted that: *"If I speak what I think, I suspect that my superiors can harm me and take revenge"*. Next, the interviewee was asked an additional question to understand how the superior takes revenge on the employees. Meanwhile, the participant (P17) said in this regard: *"...in different forms, e.g., when I need to take leave during working hours, it may not be given permission to do so, or regarding the performance evaluation process, I may be evaluated as an employee who has not shown good performance"*. On the other hand, the participant (P2) also shows how his manager retaliates or punishes him: *"Raising our voice or not being silent is considered to have consequences for us, in many cases our manager has retaliated by putting pressure on us and mobbing us"*.

The following are other reasons for silence related to the fear that may result in the disruption of comfort. For this, the participant (P6) expressed himself as follows: *"I don't want to be mean to others and spoil my comfort, as long as others act in the same way. But if there were others who freely express their opinions, I probably wouldn't stay silent either."* On the other hand, the participant (P19) openly reveals the reason for the silence related to not spoiling his comfort and personal interest; regarding this he expressed himself this way: *"I have to be honest that the management of the enterprise has done me a favour by allowing me to be released from the workplace from time to time because I am a member of the board of a public institution. Therefore, in certain situations, I have no interest in being silent"*. From the fear of receiving various criticisms and reactions, the participant (P3) expressed himself as follows: *"...in some cases not being silent may be unacceptable to others and this may influence their reactions, this is the reason I prefer to be silent"*. With a slightly different point of view, the participant (P10) shows his situation in the face of silence or the expression of thoughts, he explains this situation in this way: *"Not being silent about certain problems is like a double-edged sword, on one side the mood of colleagues is being ruined, on the other side the mood of the management of the company. That is, every time you speak, you are being evaluated as a person who is taking sides, for*

this reason, silence seems more appropriate to me". The following are employee concerns or fears related to the potential for isolation or being part of a minority within the organization. Regarding this, the participant (P15) said: *"Sometimes we are forced to be silent in order not to be excluded from the personnel, not to create enemies from the personnel and other similar reasons"*. While the participant (P3) stated in this: *"...in non-democratic environments I can be alone, that's why I joined the majority..."*, he also explains his past experience *"In my previous workplace, I didn't keep silent, but as a result of not keeping silent in most cases I was left alone, I did not have a support from others, so in the company I work for now, I don't want to repeat the same mistake"*. Likewise, the participant (P5) shows his concern with his previous experience, saying: *"...due to the expression of ideas, which even though are beneficial to the company, made me look unsuitable to my superior. According to the information I have received, the ideas that I have presented have encouraged competition within the company, and this has become a cause for some to worry. For this reason, I have decided not to show any thoughts or ideas, even though these are in the interest of the company"*. In order not to look bad in the eyes of others, the participant (P14) decided to be silent, regarding this he expressed himself this way: *"Another reason for my silence is related to the behavior of other colleagues. In non-formal meetings, discussions on various problems take place continuously. But in meetings, almost no one dares to discuss the problems. In this case, I don't want to be bad either until others don't contribute for the good of the company."* Likewise, the participant (P20) shows the reason for silence by saying: *"... I stay silent because not being silent is becoming the cause of conflicts and misunderstandings"*. For fear of being misunderstood, the participant (P7) states that: *"I'm afraid of being misunderstood by others, that's why I think it's better to remain silent..."*. The data in Table 1 help us understand that the category "Fear and perceived risk" that was formed is the result of fear and risk perceived by the employees of these organizations (enterprises). From the codes presented above as well as from the statements of the participants in the interview, it appears that the vast majority

of them are related to the management of the organization or their managers. These facts presented above enable us to make a connection between the research question,

from which it appears that the main reason for the employees' silence is fear, but that this fear is based on management or managers or organizations.

Table 2.

Management approach

Codes	Segments	Percentage
Autocratic attitudes of superiors	31	32.29 %
The desire to have control over everything	17	17.71 %
Not accepting mistakes	14	14.58 %
Lack of genuine communication	14	14.58 %
Decision imposition	8	8.33 %
Lack of trust for employees	7	7.29 %
A management approach that takes sides	5	5.21 %
TOTAL	96	100.00 %

The table above presents important data related to the reasons for employee silence as a result of the company's management approach. In this table, there are 7 codes which were mentioned in 96 different cases during the interviews. From the findings, it is understood that in this category the autocratic attitude of the superiors is the first with 32.29% causing the silence of the employees. The desire for control is the second in a row, with 17.71% that has been highlighted throughout the interviews. This code is also related to the autocratic approach that has caused the silence of employees. The lack of proper communication is the third in a row, with 14.58%, which is an indication that poor communication is an obstacle to the emergence of new ideas or even giving remarks by employees that could be in the interest of the organization. Superiors' not accepting mistakes is also the same as the previous code, that is, with 14.58%, which is an argument that superiors do not like to be criticized or receive remarks from their subordinates. In this category, other codes are mentioned less, but there is no doubt that these are also important factors that affect the silence of employees, which are presented in this table. For this category, as well, only some parts of the interviews are presented to enable a better explanation of this category: Participant (P2) explains how the management's approach influences him to remain silent; regarding this, he expressed himself as follows: *"I regret to say that in my workplace we have an autocratic decision-making approach and that everything is concentrated in a few individuals... at the*

same time, the punishment mechanism works against those who are speaking their minds. Considering this situation, I, as well as other colleagues, prefer to remain silent". Likewise, the participant (P8) connected his silence with the autocratic approach of the management, saying that he is not given space to express his opinions, he expressed himself in this way: *"The owner of the firm is such that he does not allow us to express our opinions in any form, even though I have a long experience in this sector, but my ideas or remarks are not taken into account, for this reason, I remain silent".* Participant (P7) tells how his superior intends to have control over everything and influences on his silence, he expressed it this way: *"Our manager is the one who tries to control everything in the company, pretending that he knows everything and does not take into account the opinions of others. As a result of the manager's approach, most of us prefer to be silent."* Participant (P5) tells another approach of the management that forced the employees to be silent: *"I believe that no one is perfect; the management of enterprises can also make mistakes and omissions. In the first stages that I started working here, I tried to give my remarks based on my previous experience, but what I have noticed is that the management does not accept that they can make wrong decisions or make concessions, etc. This situation made me step back, not making an effort to intervene".* Participant (P9) presents sound communication as an important factor that affects the silence of employees: *"In the company that I work for, there is a*

disconnection between the management and other employees, which is an indicator of the lack of sound communication. This situation made us silent; more specifically, we do not know where to address our problems or ideas that contribute to the advancement of the enterprise. When we show any concern to the superior, he tells us that we do not have the competence for this, etc. ... I think that the problem is in the way of management". Participant (P2) qualifies the imposition of decisions as an unpleasant thing, which affects the silence of employees: *"Almost all decisions that weight the future of the enterprise, are taken without consulting the interested parties or people who have skills in certain fields, and who can contribute by stating their opinions. Because of this approach, it seems reasonable to me to remain silent because there is no reason to speak..."*. Participant (P10) connects the silence of the employees with the lack of trust in the employees, saying: *"The management does not trust us, they don't even consider what we say for the good of the company, that is why I prefer to remain*

silent". Participant (P1) shows how the management takes the side of only some employees: *"Managers make discriminations between employees, they value some employees more, and they don't take some of them under consideration at all. This caused me to get irritated and I do not want to express myself about it"*. In another case, it seems that employees prefer to remain silent if their opinions conflict with those of management.

From the codes in Table 2, as well as the statements of the participants in the interview, it appears that the silence of the employees is a result of the approach of the management as well as of the managers. The autocratic attitude of managers, the lack of genuine communication, discrimination against employees, not involving employees in decision-making processes or ignoring them by not allowing them to express their opinions, and lack of trust in employees are among the main factors of employees' silence. These data also present the answers to the research question presented in this paper.

Table 2.

Acceptance of silence

Codes	Segments	Percentage
The belief that there is no benefit in expressing ideas	26	52.00%
Submission to superiors	9	18.00%
Lack of experience	6	12.00%
Silence as a result of low position	5	10.00%
Self-deprecation	4	8.00%
TOTAL	50	100.00 %

The table above shows 5 codes, which were mentioned in 50 different cases. These are some of the reasons why these employees have decided to remain silent. In general, this category mainly includes pessimistic thoughts stemming from not being able to make changes or contribute to the enterprise. In the "acceptance of silence" category, the first rank is that employees do not believe that expressing ideas can be useful, and this constitutes 52%. Meanwhile, the second in a row is 18.00%, it is related to individuals who, for various purposes, submit to their superiors and prefer to remain silent. The employees' silence is also related to their experience, position, and self-confidence. These are the other three codes in this category. Compared to the other two codes, these codes were not encountered as much

during the interviews but still had an impact on the employees' silence. We have presented some of the employees' statements for this category, as well:

Participant (P2) expressed pessimism towards the management, saying: *"Unfortunately, it seems that there is no possibility to make changes due to the rigid attitudes of the management. Therefore, I think my silence is reasonable due to the impossibility of making changes. Even if I raise my voice about a certain thing, I can look bad in the eyes of my superiors, that's why I prefer silence."* Likewise, the participant (P6) tells how his status can be jeopardized if he speaks, expressing the opinion that speaking does not do any good: *"I believe that there is no use if I speak, it can even harm me more, ... I look bad*

either in the eyes of the owner or even my colleagues". Similarly, the participant (P10) emphasizes that the expression of thoughts will not contribute to any change, regarding this he expressed himself this way: "One of the reasons I remain silent is that whatever I say cannot change the managers' beliefs...". Participant (P3) provides information that the reason for his silence is based on the fact that the management of the company does not give him space in the various decision-making processes; therefore, he considers that there is no benefit if he expresses himself on a particular issue, for this reason, she said: "I remain silent when I do not believe that something can change in a good direction... I do not want to embarrass myself when it is known that when meetings are held, they are only for formality and usually decisions are made much earlier ". Another form of silence is when employees submit to the superior without contradicting him in any situation. Regarding this, the participant (P5) talks about some of his colleagues saying that: "when the company is in good condition or when the right decisions are made, it is very natural that there are no objections and reactions, but there are specific cases when some of the company's employees remain silent even though the decisions are to their disadvantage. These employees seem to have submitted themselves to their superiors under all circumstances. I think that this form of submission is not appropriate; a person should have dignity". In another situation, it seems that the reason for the employee's silence is the result of a lack of experience in a certain field; for this the participant, (P20) says: "I usually stay silent on topics that I don't have much information on, or I'm not sure about... I don't want to put myself in a bad position in front of others when I have dilemmas about a certain topic." While the participant (P1) relates his silence to the position he has, he says, "I would have liked to speak, but I remain silent for fear of accidentally making a mistake or saying inappropriate things. Considering that there are people who are in higher positions and with more experience in the company, this is preventing me from speaking". Participant (P18) relates his silence to his character, saying: "Actually, I think that I have ideas and thoughts that are beneficial to the company, but since I am a little bit introvert, I don't want to speak on any platform."

Likewise, the same person in another case expressed himself this way: "I often think that I am worthless enough to take my thoughts into account... that is why I think it is better to be silent."

Although Table 3 does not fully answer the research question of this paper, some of the codes indicate that the primary source of employee silence is the approach of management and managers. The code "belief that there is no benefit from expressing ideas", which constitutes 52% of this category, is the result of the managers' approach. Likewise, the statements included in this part are important evidence proving that the employees' silence is related to the management of the organization.

Discussion

The person within the organization is considered the most critical factor that cannot be replaced by other factors. For this reason, the organization's management must identify the elements contributing to employee motivation. Because an organization with motivated employees will be able to contribute to increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization (Güney, Akalın, & İlsev, 2007). Undoubtedly, employee motivation is also related to the work environment. An environment where there is freedom of expression is an indicator of the existence of healthy communication. Because employees' free expression within the organization is an essential tool that helps improve the work environment, which can simultaneously increase employee satisfaction (Bovee & Thill, 2020). In other words, the willingness of employees to express opinions is directly related to the work environment (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003) which is mainly provided by the management.

Undoubtedly, employees' free expression is a value for the organization, but it cannot be achieved so easily due to various factors. One of the obstacles to employee expression is the fear of management in general or the fear of managers. Fear directly affects the employees' behavior and their way of thinking. Anxiety and fear can be one of the causes of employees' silence. These behaviors can be related to an individual's sense of psychological safety. Personal perceptions, thinking styles,

and human behaviors can be influenced by fear, although fear as a phenomenon is considered an emotional phenomenon, which is underestimated in the organizational literature (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, & Edmondson, 2009). However, the research results argue that fear is one of the main reasons for employees' silence. This is also argued by Morrison & Milliken (2000), emphasizing that by raising the voice for a certain issue, it will not be possible to reach any positive conclusion, even though, according to them, the employees are afraid that their status in the organization will be jeopardized. The silence of the employees is also related to fear due to the possible reactions that may come as a result of speaking their minds (Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003). Likewise, Scheufele and Moy (2000) point out that employees constantly try to control themselves in their environment because of the danger or fear of isolation. They express their opinions only when they find other people who share the same opinions (Scheufele & Moy, 2000).

Of course, there are other reasons for employees' silence. Some of these are related to the "benefit-cost" theory, in which employees, before speaking about a certain topic or activity, make a calculation comparing the benefits with the costs that may be caused by not remaining silent. According to this theory, employees who do not remain silent may face a cost of loss of energy, loss of status within the organization, increased workload in the workplace, and increased obligations as a result of changing procedures (Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003). It can be said that in most cases, the silence of employees may be due to the fear of receiving negative feedback from managers (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). As a result, employees may change their behaviors and choose to remain silent according to the demands and conditions of the environment. So, employees stay quiet to adapt to the work environment (Çakıcı, 2010). From all the facts that have been presented from the literature reviewed for this paper, it seems that the work environment, which is mainly the result of the management of the organization to a large extent, can affect the silence of the employees.

Conclusion

This study was done to see the reasons for employees' silence, with special emphasis on the understanding that the approach of management and managers have a role in employees' silence. In addition, through the method used in this paper, it is intended to deeply understand different situations and the narratives of the participants so that researchers in this field can open new doors for other studies. From the data provided by this study, answers to the research questions of this study have been provided to a large extent. First of all, this study provided findings that helped us get to the core of the problem, understanding in depth the reasons for employees' silence. These data have also provided answers to this paper's other two research questions. So, it is understood that the interviewed employees' main concern stems from the management and managers' approach. Because the approach of a large number of the managers has caused fear in the employees, the employees, instead of expressing their concerns or ideas that could benefit the organization, have decided to remain silent out of fear. The results have generally shown that the fear of getting fired, receiving punishments, without the possibility of career advancement, the revenge of superiors as a result of the autocratic approach of managers and many other factors are the main indicators of the findings of this paper. All these may have consequences for the organization's performance. This is why the managers of these organizations are themselves responsible for the improvement of this situation.

When employees perceive that they have high support from management, they are less anxious and freely express their opinions about problems related to their work. Perceiving high support from management enables employees to be more committed and express their ideas more clearly (Wang & Hsieh, 2013). This support can be achieved with healthy communication because in such an environment, employees will give positive feedback instead of being silent, contributing to the solution of various problems (Cetin, 2020). Managers are the key people who ensure the formation of open communication in the organization. They should support open communication

and create an approach that will encourage their subordinates and enable them to raise their voice in organizational matters (Çakıcı, 2010). The fact that managers are clear in their decisions and practices enables employees to have a perception that their superiors value them and provide support through sound communication (Polatçı, 2015). Otherwise, communication in the organizational environment may deteriorate, and as a result, the phenomenon of silence may appear within the organization (Ürek, Bilgin Demir, & Uğurluoğlu, 2015).

Without a doubt, organizations will be able to ensure the continuity of their activity if they meet these day's needs. Among these needs is healthy cooperation with employees, giving them free space to express their ideas and opinions, even if they are negative. Even if all the conditions and opportunities are provided to the employees in an organization, but on the other hand, they are not given the necessary importance, the organizations will not be able to achieve their goals and objectives. To enhance the productivity and performance of employees and accomplish the goals and objectives of the organization, it is essential for employees to freely express their thoughts, even if they are negative. By avoiding silence, the organization can strive towards improvement. Therefore, the management of the organization must provide employees with such an environment so that they dare to express their ideas and thoughts on work issues.

The most important limitation of this research is that it was limited to 20 participants due to time constraints. Additionally, we propose applying a quantitative research method to ensure statistical results to identify other reasons for employees' silence for the upcoming research. However, another study can be designed to review the same issues from the perspective of the managers and this way to secure more thorough data on this phenomenon.

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