

# Effect of Age and Work Experience of Employees on Organisational Silence at Workplace



**Shivani Singh Chauhan**

Research Scholar,  
Deptt.of Psychology,  
University of Lucknow,  
Lucknow



**P.C. Mishra**

Professor and Ex. HOD,  
Deptt.of Psychology,  
University of Lucknow,  
Lucknow

## Abstract

Employee Silence is the phenomenon of growing attention in the field of Organisational Psychology. Individual differences of employees at the work place effect the degree and the rate with which employees influence the efficiency of the organisation. The phenomenon of Employee Silence is also expected to be influenced by the individual differences in the institutions. The present research paper is an attempt to explore various studies in the field of Employee Silence, and try to understand whether or not the two concerned personality variables of the employees, viz. Age and Experience of work effect the Silence at workplace. The results of the study "Employee Silence In Private And Public Sector Organisations" are also presented here. The sample consisted of 300 employees, who were grouped into the three levels of Age - lower (25-34 years), middle (35-44years), and upper (45-55years) age group. and also along three levels of Experience- lower(1-10 years), middle(11 to 20 years) and upper(21-31 Years)

**Keywords:** Employee Silence, Private and Public Sector Organisations.

## Introduction

The present research paper is an attempt to analyse that whether the age and work experience of employees have any effect on how silent or vocal they would be at the workplace. Before delving into the matter it is pertinent to briefly understand the phenomenon of Employee Silence.

Employee silence is a comparatively novel topic in the field of organisational psychology, it refers to situations where employees withhold information that might be useful to the organization of which they are a part, whether intentionally or unintentionally. This can happen if employees do not speak up to a supervisor or manager (Tangirala, 2008). Silence occurs when employees fail to bring important information regarding the organisation to the attention of their employer. They often feel uncomfortable or fearful or apprehensive in speaking up to their colleagues and bosses about organisational problems or issues that concern them, they withhold inputs that could be valuable to the organisation that they wish they could express.

Milliken and Morrison (2003) explain 'Employee Silence' as the phenomenon where employees often have to make decisions that whether to share ideas and opinions about organisation or to withhold those whether to speak up or remain silent, issue is, in many cases employees chose to keep silent and remain in the safe zone. The withholding of this information deprives organisation from possible improvements to process, projects and strategies being made. The consequences of employee silence are numerous in the organisation, It can cause minor muddles or problems that can snowball into larger problems that can threaten the organisation's future. Silence can cause escalating levels of dissatisfaction, indifference and alienation among employees apart from negatively affecting the productivity of the organisation.

## Aim of the Study

Aim of the study is to inquire the effect of variables - Age and Years of Experience of work of employees on Employee Silence in the organization.

## Review of Literature

### Some Studies on Effect of Age and Work Experience of Employees on Employee Silence

Demographic factors like age and experience have a role to play in determining how silenced or voiced an employee would be at the work place. However, not sufficient researches have been dedicated to this

topic, yet there are considerable studies to say at least that the effect is considerable.

Eriguc, Turac and Songur (2014) conducted a study titled 'The Causes and Effects of The Organizational Silence: On Which Issues The Nurses Remain Silent' that aimed at deciphering various factors that cause and affect employee silence in the organisation. According to the findings of their study the factors on which nurses were identified to be silent are administrator performance and working facilities, employee performance and administrative issues, responsibility, ethics and departmental performances. Among these five factors, differences were observed on responsibility factor, according to age groups and experience of work. Younger (below 25 years of age) and less experienced nurses were found to be more silent. Eriguc *et al.*(2014) included Responsibility as one of the factors regarding employee silence, and found that on the issues regarding the concerned factors which contributed to silence, nurses who were below 25 years of age continued to be more silent in comparison to the nurses above 26 years of age. They also found that nurses who had lesser experience of work (0-4) remained more silent than those who had an experience of 5 to 10 years, on the responsibility factor.

Another study conducted by Yangil and Beydilli (2016) titled 'The Relation between Organizational Silence and Personality Characteristics: A Study on Thermal Hotels'. The study tried to understand whether demographic variables create any difference in silence of employees and personality traits. The study unveiled that there is significant difference in the defensive silence dimension according to the age and educational level of the employees. Also, if the Big Five Factor Personality Traits is considered, significant differences were found according to age, gender and department variables.

Personality traits of employees create differences in how they manage themselves at the workplace, thus determining differences in silence level of employees. Some employees are especially uncomfortable conveying information about potential problems or issues to those above them.

Yet another study that can be given reference here which suggests that age of employees affect silence level is- 'An Exploratory Study Of Employee Silence: Issues That Employees Don't Communicate Upward and Why' by Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin (2003). The study emphasised on a variety of personal characteristics, organisational characteristics and relationship characteristics that affects the selection of employees to remain silent. These three set of factors were regarded by them as exogenous to the decision process. They propose, relative to older, more experienced, at higher ranks in the organisation; those who are young and less experienced or lower organisational ranked are likely to more see the negative outcomes associated with speaking up in the organisation. They are also more likely to fear that they lack the credibility to be taken seriously.

Dyne, Ang and Botero (2003) in their research study also suggest that personality factors that knowledge, experience, ability and age do substantially have influence on the silence level of employees and thus more research should be conducted to bring out more clarity regarding the exact relationship. Thus, by reading all these previous studies it is clear that, differences in silence with respect to age and experience in organisation is a true phenomenon.

In the present research study titled 'Employee Silence In Public And Private Sector Organisations', silence of the employees was analysed as a part of the study, along the three levels of Age of employees- lower (25-34 years), middle (35-44years), and upper (45-55years) age group and also along three levels of Experience- lower (1-10 years), middle (11 to 20 years) and upper (21-31 Years). The profile analysis results show that there are differences in various dimensions of silence with respect to age and work experience of employees. The analysis of three levels was made for both public and private sectors separately on the sample size of 300 employees (150 of private sector and 150 of public sector).

Lower age group of public sector consisting of employees of age 25 to 34 scored high on Supervisors' Attitude, indicating that employees of this group find their supervisors attitude quite favourable and supportive towards them, and they report to be well treated by their supervisors. While in private sector lower age group was found to very committed to their jobs. In the middle aged employees attitude towards work, the personality factor that result in silence at workplace seems to be playing a greater role in private and public sectors. This age group in private sector also reports that the norms and conventions of their organization promotes silence. Not only middle aged employees but also higher age group (45 to 55 years) scored low on Silence as Tradition in the private sector, indicating that for mature employees it is hard to break the norm and standup against convention that have now become very much the part of work culture that results in their silence. (The scoring system is such that - Lower the score, higher is the employee silence level and vice versa).

Employees of higher age group in Public sector reported the Communication system of their institution to be working fairly well. Employees of higher age group in the public sector was found to be high in concern regarding: Fear to loose Job. Probably, employees at this stage tend to become more cautious and diplomatic while dealing with their senior officials, and abstain themselves from any kind of situation with their supervisors that can lead to any kind of adverse affect on their job. Supervisors convey direct or indirect signals to employees that they should concede to their decisions if they wish to keep their jobs and further their careers. Lastly, the scores of higher aged employees in private sector for the variable 'Trying to Avoid Embarrassment' indicate that they are comfortable in sharing their views or opinions with their supervisors and co workers in the

organization. Maturity in age and increased familiarity with the supervisors seems to be playing role here.

Out of three age groups, viz upper, middle and lower, employees of lower age group seem to be better in voicing opinion and sharing the information, as they did not scored low on any variable of employee silence, plus they scored high on variables of Supervisors Attitude and Commitment in public and private sectors respectively. Results from a recent study by Inceoglu, Segers and Bantram (2012), which examined age-related differences in work motivation, suggest a "shift in people's motives" rather than a general decline in motivation with age. That is, it seemed that older employees were less motivated by extrinsically related features of a job, but more by intrinsically rewarding job features.

Further the relationship of experience of work in the organisation with Employee Silence was analysed along the three levels of experience viz. Less experience (1-10years), medium experience (11-20years) and high experience(21-31years) group. It was found that in private sector not only less experienced employees but also middle and high experienced employees report that voicing of opinion is not much expected and appreciated in the culture of their workplace. And there are certain conventions followed, which make it difficult for them to go against the flow, thus they prefer remaining silent. There are certain factors specific to private sector that certainly results in increased silence pertaining to this variable. Regarding medium experienced group (11 to 20 years) of employees of the sample it was found that they experience poor communication system in their organization. This group in public sector reported need for betterment in the communication pattern to improve the performance of employees.

Secondly, employees with medium experience of their jobs in public sector tend to be more concerned regarding their job security. They were found to be choosing silence rather than risking their job. The anxiety of employees regarding job security not only hampers organizational efficiency, but also employee's psychological and physical health. How do Employees deal with situation of uncertainty, how they handle the psychological stress and what coping strategies they adopt have far reaching effects on organisational effectiveness and employees' health.

The score for high experienced group (21-31 years) of public sector was high on the factor of Transparency. The high scores of private sector employees for the factors of Trying to Avoid Embarrassment and Fear To Loose Job indicate that they do not feel hesitant in putting forward their opinions related to job to their colleagues or supervisors, neither do they feel much insecurity about the job. Highly experienced employees are comfortable in expressing their view in the

organization. The discomfiture and hesitation of speaking up probably faded away as the experience increased. The study does not show much variability for Age and Experience regarding the ten factors of silence taken for the study, however it does emphasises variability on certain factors like Supervisors Attitude, Commitment, Silence As Tradition, Trying To Avoid Embarrassment and Fear To Loose Job.

Age and experience of work thus play determining role in factors like expertise, enthusiasm, job satisfaction, efficiency etc. and thus in Employee Silence too. The extent and pattern of influence are however discovered different in different studies. It remains a potential topic of further researchers in Employee Silence.

#### **Conclusion**

On the basis of above results following conclusions can be drawn:

Variability along the five out of ten factors of Employee Silence, which are, 'Supervisors Attitude', 'Commitment', 'Silence as Tradition', 'Trying to Avoid Embarrassment' and 'Fear to Loose Job' was found high. That is to say Age and Experience level of employees influence significantly these five factors of silence. Also various researches as mentioned in the study above suggest that the two concerned variables of personality do have role in influencing Silence of employees.

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