# An Empirical Study On The Influence Of Individual Factors On Employees' Silent Behavior

**Lingyun Wang, Xinrong Chen***

Associate Professor, School of Economics and Management, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Jiangjun road 29, Nanjing China

Undergraduate student, School of Economics and Management, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Jiangjun road 29, Nanjing China

*Corresponding Author: Xinrong Chen

*Abstract*—With the fierce competition among enterprises, enterprises increasingly need to quickly discover their own problems. Due to the widespread existence of employee silence, it is difficult for companies to find directions for improvement in the short term. Through literature review, this paper finds that employees' self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and sense of responsibility are factors that affect employees' silence from an individual perspective. The questionnaire survey data of 176 employees is used for statistical analysis, it's found that self-efficacy, job satisfaction and employee responsibility all have a negative impact on employees' silent behavior. The thesis puts forward relevant suggestions on how to improve employees' self-efficacy, job satisfaction and employee responsibility to reduce employees' silent behavior.

## 1 Introduction

The concept of employee silence was first proposed by Pinder Equals in 2001, which refers to when employees have the ability to change organizational performance, but retain their true views on the organizational environment's cognition, behavior, and emotional evaluation [1]. Affected by the traditional Confucian culture, the phenomenon of employee silence is also more prominent in Chinese corporate organizations. In organizing group relations, people are accustomed to pursuing the principles and concepts of "one who makes a mistake must be lost, silence is golden", "to protect oneself with wiseness", and "harmony, the world is beautiful" [2].

On the one hand, employee silence makes employees unable to feel the role and value in the organization, which causes negative states such as job burnout, low satisfaction, and cognitive dissonance (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Vakola & Bouradas, 2005) [3]; on the other hand, enterprise managers cannot obtain important information for decision-making or implementation in a timely and accurate manner, which reduces the efficiency and quality of enterprise decision-making (Morrison & Milliken, 2003) [4]. Therefore, employee silence has an adverse effect on employees or the company, which makes it extremely necessary to explore the factors affecting employee silence. Many studies have suggested that the individual characteristics of employees have an impact on their silent behavior (Cynthia Lee & Denise M. Rousseau, 2004; Patricia F. Hewlin, 2003), but most of them lack in-depth analysis and empirical testing. This article attempts to conduct an in-depth discussion on its impact and verify it through empirical analysis, so as to provide a more favorable basis for how organizations can reduce employee silent behavior.

## 2 Literature review and theoretical hypothesis

Through reading a large amount of literature, this article finds that the individual factors that affect employee silence are multifaceted. Duan Jinyun (2007) proposed the Big Five classification model of

personality factors: Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism [5] ; Ding Ning (2019) pointed out the impact of work insecurity and psychological ownership on employee silence; Niu Qili (2016) research shows that employee responsibility is negatively correlated with employee silence [6]; other studies have also confirmed that high-level over-qualification perceivers will think that their own opinion leaders will not ignore them, or that they have low organizational satisfaction without a sense of belonging and make silent behaviors (Geng Liyuan, 2017) [7]; while employees with a low level of power perception think that they have no voice or influence in the organization and choose to be silent (Morrison et al., 2015) [8]. Based on the above analysis, it is found that the main individual factors that affect employee silence are self-efficacy (Yang Wansu, 2018) [9], job satisfaction (Feng Qing, 2018) [10] and employee responsibility (Yu Guilan, 2016) [11].

### 2.1 The impact of self-efficacy on employees' silent behavior

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's self-confidence belief in self-ability when engaged in specific tasks. It is a concept of an individual's evaluation of their own abilities, representing a degree of self-confidence, and is an important part of psychological capital [12]. Scholars such as Kish-Gephart analyzed the reasons for employees' silent behavior from the perspective of social cognition, and found that it was mainly because employees often did not get good feedback after they put forward opinions or suggestions to the leader, so they would choose to remain silent most of the time. Improving employees' self-efficacy can effectively reduce the occurrence of employees' silent behavior [13]. Employees with a high sense of self-efficacy are very confident about their influence at work, are confident that their leaders will accept their opinions or suggestions, and believe that they can handle the relationship with colleagues well without worrying about being misunderstood by colleagues. Encourage them to actively express their ideas and reduce employees' silent behavior [14]. Conversely, low self-efficacy will choose to remain silent due to lack of confidence in their own abilities. In summary, hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Self-efficacy has a negative impact on employees' silent behavior.

### 2.2 The impact of job satisfaction on employees' silent behavior

Studies at home and abroad have pointed out that the silent atmosphere in the organization will form a sense of depression and lack of freedom in work control, which is not conducive to the vertical and horizontal communication between individual employees and across departments, and affects the frequency and effect of feedback, in turn, it may affect the interpersonal trust and mutual relationship between employees, resulting in a decrease in their job satisfaction[15].When employees' job satisfaction is low, they tend to separate organizational goals from their own goals, and are unwilling to actively fight for organizational interests, thus increasing the possibility of silence [16]; and when employees' job satisfaction is high, they have a sense of control over their working environment. In order to enable them to complete their work more smoothly, they are eager to express their opinions and suggestions and get timely feedback [17], thereby reducing employees' silent behavior. In summary, hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Employees' job satisfaction has a negative impact on employees' silent behavior.

### 2.3 The impact of employee responsibility on employees' silent behavior

Employee responsibility is a very important factor influencing employees' silent behavior. Niu Qili's (2016) research shows that employees' sense of responsibility has a significant impact on employees' silent behavior [18]. When the individual is valued by the organization, the employee's sense of responsibility will be significantly enhanced, which will prompt the employee to believe that they have a responsibility to contribute to the organization, thereby reducing employee silent behavior [19]. At the same time, employees with a strong sense of responsibility have strong internal motivations, and employees who are regulated by internal motivations are more willing to

invest more time and energy in their work, and are willing to make extra efforts for the benefit of the organization, and advice is the most direct expression of this kind of effort [20]. In summary, hypotheses are put forward:

H3: Employee's sense of responsibility has a negative impact on employees' silent behavior.

## 3 Research methods

### 3.1 Measurement of variables

#### 3.1.1 Staff silence

This research is based on the employee silence scale developed and improved by Robert & O'Reilly (1974), Milliken (2000), etc., combined with the research of domestic scholars to summarize the measurement table of this article. Zheng Xiaotao (2008) divides employee silence behavior into tacit silence, defensive silence, and disregarding silence [21]. Tacit silence is a passive and negative reserved view of employees in anticipation of their inability to change the status quo, which means passive obedience, similar to the "frustration effect" proposed by Folger and Cropanzano [22]. Defensive silence is an employee's purpose of avoiding interpersonal estrangement in expressing opinions, and a more active and conscious self-protection adopted by employees for their own psychological safety; disregarded silence is a passive reservation of employees' low-level commitment and involvement in existing jobs or organizations[19].

#### 3.1.2 Employees' self-efficacy

Social cognitive theory believes that self-efficacy reflects the overall cognition of an individual's self-ability, which is the degree to which an individual believes that he has sufficient ability to accomplish something [23]. This article uses the self-efficacy part of the psychological capital scale compiled by Luthans et al. (Luthans et al., 2006) [24] to sort out the measurement table in this article, and analyze the three dimensions of employee silence.

#### 3.1.3 Employee Satisfaction

The concept of job satisfaction was first proposed by Taylor in 1912. It is affected by many factors. From the perspective of psychological components, it includes cognitive evaluation and emotional feedback on work; from the different aspects of characteristics, it includes a series of job-related job satisfaction [25]. This study uses the scale developed by Tsui [26], combined with employee silence, and treats job satisfaction as a single-dimensional concept for measurement.

#### 3.1.4 Employee's sense of responsibility

As an important psychological quality, sense of responsibility has attracted attention from all walks of life. Morrison and Phelps (1999) believe that responsibility is a perception that employees are personally obligated to bring about constructive change; Fuller, Marler & Hester (2006) believe that responsibility is that employees think they should work hard and actively provide constructive opinions to the organization. In this study, the responsibility perception scale developed by Morrison and Phelps was used, combined with this study, a measurement table was designed and investigated.

#### 3.1.5 Control Variables

This paper selects three factors: gender, position characteristics and the nature of the unit of the survey object as control variables. Women are more concerned about what others think of themselves, and are more inclined to use smiles or nodding to encourage cooperation and improve relationships (Brinsfield, 2009) [27], while under the influence of Taylor's scientific management theory, organizational development emphasizes control and competition, independence, etc., and these characteristics are more easily expressed by men (Buzzanell, 1994) [28]; higher-ranking employees will have a stronger sense of psychological security, which will curb the occurrence of employee silence [29]; In private enterprises or foreign companies, employees have stronger self-identification and psychological belonging, and employees have fewer silent behaviors, while state-owned enterprises are more rigorous and most employees choose to be silent [30].

### 3.2 Data collection

This study mainly issued questionnaires for employees of enterprises, and adopted a combination

of online and offline methods. A total of 176 valid questionnaires were collected. The overall reliability coefficient of the questionnaire Cronbach's α value is 0.930, the questionnaire has good reliability; the KMO coefficient value of the questionnaire = 0.908 > 0.8, and the P. value of Bartlett's sphericity test is < 0.05, which shows that the research data has good validity.

### 3.3 Data analysis

### 3.3.1 Descriptive statistical analysis

Calculate the average number, standard deviation and correlation coefficient of the corresponding data of each influencing factor, and understand the average level of the sample data on each factor and the hypothetical relationship between variables. As shown in Table 1 below. It can be seen from the table: the relationship between employee silence behavior and employee self-efficacy (r=-0.348, p<0.05), the relationship with employee job satisfaction (r=-0.122, p<0.01), and the relationship with employee responsibility (r=-0.179, p<0.05) was significantly negatively correlated.

### Table 1 Descriptive analysis of factors affecting employee silence

| Variable | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1Gender | 0.53 | 0.5 | - | | | | | | |
| 2Age | 29.83 | 5.85 | -0.058 | - | | | | | |
| 3Education level | 2.59 | 0.73 | -0.06 | -0.209** | - | | | | |
| 4Years of work | 2.88 | 0.9 | -0.156** | 0.333** | -0.457** | - | | | |
| 5Employee silence | 3.2 | 1.01 | -0.082 | -0.073 | -0.091 | 0.006 | - | | |
| 6Self-efficacy | 3.61 | 0.96 | 0.074 | 0.081 | 0.032 | 0.039 | -0.348* | - | |
| 7Job satisfaction | 3.87 | 0.9 | 0.199** | 0.194** | 0.144* | -0.009 | -0.122** | 0.527** | - |
| 8Employee responsibility | 3.85 | 0.97 | 0.08 | 0.222** | 0.206** | -0.013 | -0.179* | 0.522* | 0.211** |

Note: **p<0.01, *p<0.05

### 3.3.2 Regression analysis

Research uses SPSS 21.0 to perform regression analysis on the constructed model. The results are shown in Table 2. Model 1 only adds the control variables gender, job level, and unit nature; Model 2 adds self-efficacy to Model 1 to test the relationship between self-efficacy and employee silence; Model 3 adds job satisfaction to model 1 to test the effect of job satisfaction on employees' silent behavior; Model 4 adds employee responsibility on the basis of Model 1, and examines the influence of employee responsibility on employees' silent behavior.

### Table 2 Regression analysis of factors affecting employees' silent behavior

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | 0.128 | 0.038 | 0.97 | 1.059 |
| Job level | 0.142** | 5.766 | 0.000** | 1.062 |
| Nature of the unit | -0.185* | 0.245 | 0.807 | 1.004* |
| Self-efficacy | | -0.205** | | |
| Job satisfaction | | | -0.422* | |
| Employee responsibility | | | | -4.303** |
| $R^2$ | 0.198 | 0.126 | 0.1 | 0.126 |
| Adjustment $R^2$ | 0.181 | 0.088 | 0.034 | 0.088 |
| F | 11.7 | 3.326 | 1.507 | 3.345 |

Note: **p<0.01, *p<0.05

From the results of regression analysis, it can be seen that the correlation coefficient between employee self-efficacy and employees' silent behavior is -0.205, P<0.01, indicating that the two are negatively related, and H1 is verified; the correlation coefficient between job satisfaction and employees' silent behavior is -0.422, P<0.05, indicating that the two are negatively correlated, and H2 is verified; the correlation coefficient between employee responsibility and employee silent behavior is -4.303, P<0.01, indicating that the two are negatively correlated, and H3 is verified.

### 3.3.3 Discussion of results

According to the above statistical analysis, the following research results can be obtained:

(1) Self-efficacy is negatively correlated with employees' silent behavior.

The stronger the employee's sense of self-efficacy, the more positive they have about their own abilities, and they tend to put more effort and endurance on one thing until they achieve their goal, and they are more likely to have motivation to make suggestions. People with high self-efficacy enjoy the satisfaction after conquering difficulties and dare to take risks and try. They generally believe that the external environment is controllable and that individuals have the ability to change their environment [31], and they will be more active in providing advice and suggestions. Even if employees with low self-efficacy can find problems, they lack confidence in the innovation and feasibility of the proposed solutions and suggestions. They are afraid of not being recognized by their superiors, colleagues and the entire organization. They are also worried about conflicts with others. More inclined to remain silent, and therefore inclined to give up their own ideas.

(2) Job satisfaction is negatively correlated with employees' silent behavior

Individuals usually want to have a sense of control over their environment. When employees are satisfied with their environment, their psychological pressure is relatively small, and they will be willing to communicate within the organization. When the communicating parties trust each other and cooperate sincerely, it will undoubtedly increase the job satisfaction of employees. When employees are satisfied with their work, they naturally have a sense of intimacy with the organization and want to contribute their ideas to the development of the company, which makes employees more willing to express their ideas.

(3) Employees' sense of responsibility is negatively related to employees' silent behavior.

The theory of social exchange believes that social exchange is based on trust. Based on the trust in the organization and development prospects, employees will persevere and complete their work with due diligence, hoping that the organization will reward them for their diligence at some point in the future [11]. Therefore, employees with a high sense of responsibility will actively put forward their own views based on the consideration of responsibility for the organization and future returns, and it is not easy for employees to be silent. Moreover, employees with a high sense of responsibility often have a lofty sense of mission for the success of the organization (Nikolaou et al., 2008) [32], and regard organizational affairs as their own responsibility. They are often more willing to express their views in the organization to promote the success and development of the organization. Conversely, employees who have low sense of responsibility and low participation will choose to remain silent.

## 4 Conclusions and implications

### 4.1 Conclusions and recommendations

Through literature review, theoretical analysis and empirical testing, this study has obtained the conclusion that employee self-efficacy, employee satisfaction, and employee responsibility are all negatively related to employees' silent behavior. Companies can reduce employees' silent behavior through the following measures.

### 4.1.1 Reduce employees' silent behavior by improving their self-efficacy

Enterprises should establish a complete individual ability training plan system, focus on the knowledge training of employees, continuously improve their

knowledge reserves, and continue to improve their professional level and work ability. At the same time, it helps employees set reasonable and effective goals, allows employees to better grasp the direction of their efforts at work, and eliminates blindness at work, thereby greatly improving work efficiency and self-efficacy [33]. In addition, companies must establish a good working environment, a positive working atmosphere, and harmonious co-worker relationships for employees to promote the reduction of employees' silent behavior.

### 4.1.2 Reduce employees' silent behavior by improving their job satisfaction

In modern society, employees generally expect to have a safe and comfortable working environment. Companies should meet their needs for working conditions and corporate environment. When employees' expectations of the company are met, employees will be more proactive in providing advice and suggestions for the company; for industries and companies with good development prospects, the satisfaction of employees will increase accordingly. In order to have more room for promotion in the company, employees break their silent behavior, thereby bringing greater profits and business opportunities to the company [34]. Therefore, companies should also focus on their own development and provide sufficient space for employees' own development and career planning. In addition, organizations and managers should strive to create an effective and supportive communication and feedback mechanism, adopt a permissive and encouraging attitude towards the "voice" of employees, and gradually reduce employee silence.

### 4.1.3 Reduce employees' silent behavior by improving their sense of responsibility

Companies should pay attention to cultivating employees' sense of responsibility, encourage employees to actively help others in the organization, establish good interpersonal relationships with colleagues, and jointly create a good working environment; encourage employees to actively provide opinions on the problems of the company to avoid huge losses and show employees' sense of responsibility for the company; mobilize employees to make innovative suggestions, optimize the organizational structure and work processes in a timely manner, and let employees regard the promotion of enterprise development as their responsibility. At the same time, managers provide rewards for the constructive behavior of employees, which helps to enhance employees' sense of responsibility, which in turn encourages employees to be more willing to issue suggestions on issues in the company and reduce silent behavior.

### 4.2 Limitations and Prospects

This article has research limitations: First, this research adopts a cross-sectional research method, but it takes a certain time for employees to form silent behavior. At this time, the reason for silent behavior may be the result of individual feelings in the previous stage; second, the sample size is small, the sample source has limitations, and the sample selection may also have availability bias; third, the study did not consider the interrelationship between variables. In the next step of the research, we should pay more attention to the interaction between variables and use more comprehensive theories and cases to discuss employee silence behavior; fourth, employee silence is not only a management problem, but also a psychological problem, and its influencing factors are also extensive, so other factors can be further considered in the later research.

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