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## **Effect of types of employee silence on job satisfaction and subjective well-being**

### **Abstract**

Employees can help an organization to flourish by contributing their constructive thoughts. However, employees withhold their expressions due to a number of reasons. Such a behavior which is termed as employee silence may lead to detrimental outcomes for the organizations and employees themselves. This paper attempts to examine the relationship between four types of employee silence, i.e. acquiescent, quiescent, opportunistic and prosocial silence, and subjective well-being directly and indirectly through the mediation of job satisfaction in employees working in banking sector of Pakistan. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis has been employed on the data collected from 275 employees. Results demonstrate that three types of employee silence i.e. acquiescent, quiescent and opportunistic silence have a negative impact on an employee's subjective well-being and job satisfaction but, prosocial silence has no relationship with subjective well-being. It is suggested that managers must adopt strategies and design programs to reduce employee inhibitions and eliminate silence behaviors.

**Keywords:** Employee silence, Job Satisfaction, Subjective Well-Being, Mediation

### **Introduction**

Organizations can attain excellence and sustainable growth through a culture of openness and knowledge sharing. Articulation of ideas and active participation of employees is integral for accomplishing organizational objectives but not all employees actively participate in sharing their opinions and views. (Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Employee silence is pervasive in organizations, yet the concept is elusive and has not received rigorous research attention. Morrison and Milliken (2000) first attempted to describe the concept of organizational silence. They described it as an element of organizational culture that creates such influential

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forces in the organizations which become the source of extensive preservation of information by employees. The concept of organizational silence was extended by Pinder and Harlos (2001). They operationalized organizational silence to reflect the concepts of acquiescent silence and quiescent silence (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Employee silence can be detrimental to organizational and individual functioning. This may lead to various consequences including a decline in innovation (Argyris & Schon, 1978), depression (Cortina & Magley, 2003), adverse impact on employee well-being (Shojaie, et al., 2011), less organizational commitment and lower job satisfaction (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005). Employees want to speak up in the situations where they experience dissatisfaction with their job (Caldwell & Carranco, 2010) or when they believe that there is a need for improvement in the workplace (Hirschman, 1970). When employees are given opportunity of voice; it results in some constructive outcomes which may include satisfaction and feelings of justice and motivation (Shapiro, Buttner, & Barry, 1994; Taylor, Tracy, Renard, Horrison, & Carroll, 1995). The health of employees and their satisfaction with their work are indicated by the emotions that they put across and experience. Previous researches have emphasized that feelings and emotions are the strong indicators of well-being and happiness (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). On the contrary, distressing emotions are associated with lower subjective well-being (Kahn, 1981).

According to Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) when employees feel that speaking up will lead to some sort of punishment, they prefer to remain silent. Not communicating and withholding knowledge and ideas can damage relationships (Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983). Highly committed and loyal employees always try to contribute their best efforts in attaining organizational success even if they are not fully satisfied with their job (Hirschman, 1970). However, employees lose affirmative attachment with the organization eventually when the management is less co-operative (Burris, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008).

This article attempts to contribute to the literature by identifying how four types of employee silence i.e., acquiescent silence, quiescent silence, prosocial silence, opportunistic silence contributes to an individual's subjective well-being. Employee silence (Brinsfield, 2013) and subjective well-being (Diener, 2000) are considerably recent concepts in organizational sciences and have yet to be examined in relationship to one another. Furthermore, this study aims to analyze the mediating role of job satisfaction. A better understanding of specific relationship among the constructs could lead to more efficient assessment and management of silence behavior in organizations.

## **Employee Silence**

The term employee silence was introduced by Pinder and Harlos (2001) after the emergence of collective-level phenomenon of organizational silence. Kish-Gephart et al., (2009, p. 165) defined employee silence as “the withholding of ideas, suggestions, or concerns about people, products, or processes that might have been communicated verbally to someone inside the organization with the perceived authority to act”. Pinder and Harlos (2001, p. 334) defined employee silence as “the intentional withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individuals behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his/her organizational circumstance to persons who are perceived to be capable of

effecting change or redress". In order to assess employee silence, four factor model proposed by Knoll and Dick (2013) has been used in this study. The authors have categorized employee silence as acquiescent silence, quiescent silence, prosocial silence and opportunistic silence; and have defined acquiescent silence as "passive withholding of relevant ideas, based on submission and resignation"; quiescent silence as "the active withholding of relevant information in order to protect oneself, based on the fear that the consequences of speaking up could be personally unpleasant"; prosocial silence as "withholding work related ideas, information, or opinions with the goal of benefiting other people or the organization based on altruism or cooperative motives"; and opportunistic silence as "strategically withholding work-related ideas, information, or opinions with the goal of achieving an advantage for oneself while accepting harm of others".

### **Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is one of the most researched concepts in the field of organizational psychology. Cranny, Smith and Stone (1992, p. 1) defined job satisfaction as "an affective (that is, emotional) reaction to one's job, resulting from the incumbent's comparison of actual outcomes with those that are desired (expected, deserved, and so on)". Locke (1969, p. 317) defined it as "pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating one's job values. Job dissatisfaction is the unpleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as frustrating or blocking the attainment of one's values". Weiss (2002, p. 175) defined it as "an evaluative judgment one makes about one's job or job situation."

Job satisfaction has been related to many evident workplace behaviors comprising of absenteeism, turnover, productivity, and organizational commitment (Clark, Georgellis, & Sanfey, 1998; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). Researchers have put emphasis on the significance of identifying the determinants of job satisfaction. Earnings, workplace socialization, working environment, working hours, participation, guidance and autonomy are all job or work related factors recognized to be affecting job satisfaction (Agho, Mueller, & Price, 1993; Georgellis & Lange, 2007). Studies ascertaining non-work associated factors upsetting well-being at vocation focus primarily on personality and work-life conflict (Dormann & Zapf, 2001; Eby, Maher, & Butts, 2010).

### **Subjective Well-Being**

Well-being is defined by Deci and Ryan (2008, p. 1) as "optimal psychological experience and functioning". Huppert, Baylis, and Keverne (2004, p. 1331) defined it as "a positive and sustainable state that allows individuals, groups or nations to thrive and flourish". The term well-being is multi-faceted and distinct theoretical frameworks have been developed to measure it. Well-being is commonly studied from two view-points: subjective and psychological assessment of well-being (Diener, 2006).

According to Diener (1984) the notion of subjective well-being comprises of three elements that collectively symbolizes the state of individual well-being.

*Life Satisfaction* provides a description of how a respondent assesses or judges his or her life in general. It is proposed to stand for an inclusive, insightful evaluation that an individual makes of his or her life (Diener, 2006). *Positive Affect* comprises of pleasing moods and sensations, such as delight and warmth. Major groups of positive or enjoyable emotions comprise those of low provocation (e.g., satisfaction), moderate arousal (e.g., happiness), and high arousal (e.g., ecstasy). It also includes providing constructive feedbacks to others (e.g., love) and expressing encouraging reactions to behavior (e.g., attention and commitment), (Diener, 2006). *Negative affect* comprises of moods and feelings that are unpleasant, and symbolize negative responses that people practice in response to their lives and surroundings. Main forms of negative reactions encompass irritation, sorrow, nervousness, strain, irritation, guilt, disgrace, and jealousy.

Amah and Okafor (2008) provided empirical evidence that job satisfaction is negatively related to employee silence behavior. Employees want to speak up in the situations where they experience some dissatisfaction with their job or when they believe that there is a need for an improvement in the workplace (Hirschman, 1970). When employees speak up and they are heard, it results in some constructive outcomes which may include satisfaction, a feeling of justice and motivation (Shapiro, et al., 1994; Taylor, et al., 1995). Other researchers explored that employees' use the voice to improve the state of dissatisfaction (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988; Withey & Cooper, 1989). Consequently it can be expected that if employees do not get an opportunity to present their ideas, they will feel dissatisfied about their work.

Job satisfaction is the most commonly studied form of work-related subjective well-being. Positive associations between job satisfaction and life satisfaction have been recognized in literature. According to the Zhao, Qu, and Ghiselli (2011) the persons who are happy and satisfied with their jobs are also satisfied with their life and experience greater job satisfaction. They infer job actions more optimistically by their affirmative sentimental temperaments toward life. Precisely, persons with high satisfaction with life have a tendency to be more pleased with their jobs than those with low satisfaction (Qu & Zhao, 2012).

Employee silence is damaging for the organizations as it becomes a source of high level of dissatisfaction among the employees and failing individual health (Shojaie, et al., 2011).

Based on findings about relationships among the proposed constructs, following hypotheses are formulated.

## **Hypotheses**

H1: Acquiescent silence is negatively related to Subjective Well-Being.

H2: Acquiescent silence is negatively related to Job satisfaction.

H3: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between acquiescent silence and subjective well-being.

H4: Quiescent silence is negatively related to Subjective Well-Being.

H5: Quiescent silence is negatively related to Job satisfaction.

H6: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between quiescent silence and subjective well-being.

H7: Prosocial silence is positively related to Subjective Well-Being.

H8: Prosocial silence is positively related to Job satisfaction.

H9: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between prosocial silence and subjective well-being.

H10: Opportunistic silence is positively related to Subjective Well-Being.

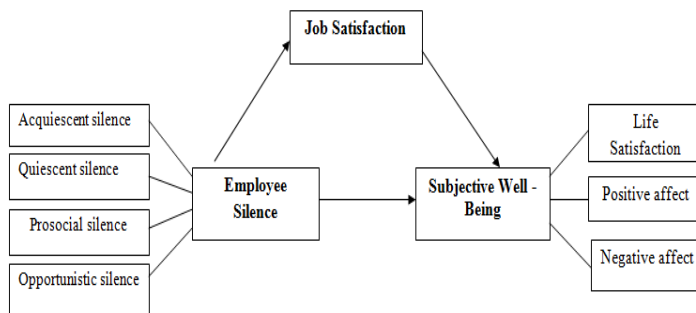
H11: Opportunistic silence is positively related to Job satisfaction.

H12: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between opportunistic silence and subjective well-being.

H13: Job Satisfaction is positively related to Subjective Well-Being.

### **Schematic Diagram**

The hypothesized model is shown in the schematic diagram in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Hypothesized Model*

### **Method**

#### **Sample**

The study sample included two public, four private and three Islamic banks operating in Lahore. The survey required the respondents to report their gender, age, position, qualification and number of years in current position. 68.7% of the respondents were male and 26.5% were female (5% did not respond). 55.3%

respondents aged between 20-30, 29.1% between 31-40, 7.3% between 41-50 and 1.1% between 51-60 (7% did not respond). The respondents with graduate degree were 29.8 %, 58.2% had post-graduate degree, 1% had intermediate degree and 2.5% had other professional degrees (8% did not respond). The major respondents of this study were executive officers (56.4%) with position breakdown as follows: (2%) assistant managers, (24.4 %) managers, (1%) senior managers and (2 %) regional managers (14% did not respond).

### **Assessment Measures**

Data was collected using adopted self-administered questionnaires. Respondents were asked to rate the statements by using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= “strongly disagree” to 5= “strongly agree”.

**Employee Silence:** Four forms of employee silence were measured through twelve statements, taken from the four-factor model by Knoll and Dick (2013). The Cronbach’s Alpha for Acquiescent silence scale was 0.85, for quiescent silence scale: 0.84, for opportunistic silence scale: 0.76 and for prosocial silence scale: 0.85.

**Job Satisfaction:** Job Satisfaction was measured through five statements, taken from the model presented by Judge, Locke, Durham and Kluger (1998). It is a short form of the scale originally created by Brayfield and Rothe (1951). The Cronbach’s Alpha for this scale was 0.60.

**Subjective Well-Being:** Two scales were used to measure SWB, one is used to measure life satisfaction and the other is used to measure positive and negative effects. Life Satisfaction is measured through five statements taken from SWLS (satisfaction with life scale) prepared by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985). The Cronbach’s Alpha for this scale was 0.69. Positive and negative affect were measured through twelve items taken from SPANE (Scale of positive and negative experience) developed by Diener et al., (2009). The Cronbach’s Alpha for this scale was 0.87.

### **Procedure**

A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed in nine different banks including two public, four private and three Islamic banks of Lahore using non-probability convenience sampling technique. Table 1 shows the frequency of valid responses for each bank.

Out of 350 distributed questionnaires, 310 were returned. The response rate was 88%. During data preparation, each respondent was identified with its bank name. Bank 1-9 were coded as 1-9 respectively.

Table 1  
*Distribution of Questionnaires and Response Rate*

Banks	Distributed	Returned	Not Returned	Response Rate	Valid Responses
Bank 1	60	58	2	96%	47
Bank 2	20	16	4	80%	16

Bank 3	60	57	3	95%	51
Bank 4	40	31	9	77%	25
Bank 5	80	65	15	81%	56
Bank 6	35	31	4	88%	28
Bank 7	25	23	2	92%	22
Bank 8	15	15	0	100%	14
Bank 9	15	14	1	93%	14
Total	350	310	40	88%	275

## Results

The relationship among four forms of employee silence and subjective well-being was analyzed directly and indirectly through job satisfaction with the help of Hierarchical multiple regression while controlling for the control variables.

Table 2 shows the correlation of key variables of study. As reflect and square root is used to transform subjective well-being so the signs of the variables correlating with subjective well-being will be reversed. There is a comparatively weak negative relationship between acquiescent silence ( $r = 0.42$ ), quiescent silence ( $r = 0.35$ ), opportunistic silence ( $r = 0.30$ ) and subjective well-being. Prosocial silence and subjective well-being are not correlated ( $r = 0.07$ ). A weak negative correlation exists between acquiescent silence and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.38$ ), quiescent silence and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.38$ ) and opportunistic silence and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.27$ ). A very weak negative correlation ( $r = 0.15$ ) exists between prosocial silence and job satisfaction. A strong positive correlation is found between job satisfaction and subjective well-being ( $r = -0.65$ ).

Table 2  
*Correlation, Mean and Standard Deviation of Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	M	SD
Acquiescent silence	1	.67**	.38**	.44**	-.38**	.42**	2.38	.97
Quiescent silence		1	.40**	.56**	-.38**	.35**	2.42	1.00
Prosocial silence			1	.27**	-.15*	.07	2.87	1.01
Opportunistic silence				1	-.27**	.30**	2.19	.87
Job satisfaction					1	-.65**	3.40	.63
Subjective well-being						1	3.63	.53

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

All the control variables (working years, Qualification, Department, Gender, Position, and Age) were entered in the step 1 followed by acquiescent silence, quiescent silence, prosocial silence and opportunistic silence entered independently and job satisfaction was entered in step 3. As reflect and square root is used to transform subjective well-being so the signs of the variables correlating with subjective well-being will be reversed.

Table 3 indicates that a negative relationship exists between acquiescent silence and subjective well-being ( $\Delta R^2 = .14$ ,  $\beta = .38$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Hypothesis 1 supported). Acquiescent silence was negatively associated with job satisfaction ( $\Delta R^2 = .31$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Hypothesis 2 supported). After controlling for mediator, the significant relationship between acquiescent silence and subjective well-being did not become insignificant ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In addition, the variance accounted by mediated model ( $R^2 = .49$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was more than the variance accounted by direct model ( $R^2 = .18$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (see table 3) which proves that job satisfaction partially mediated the relationship (Hypothesis 3 supported).

Table 3 indicates that a negative relationship exists between quiescent silence and subjective well-being ( $\Delta R^2 = .10$ ,  $\beta = .33$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Hypothesis 4 supported). Quiescent silence was negatively associated with job satisfaction ( $\Delta R^2 = .32$ ,  $\beta = .10$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Hypothesis 5 supported). After controlling for mediator, the significant relationship between quiescent silence and subjective well-being became insignificant ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $p > .05$ ). In addition, the variance accounted by mediated model ( $R^2 = .47$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was more than the variance accounted by direct model ( $R^2 = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (see table 3) which proves that job satisfaction fully mediated the relationship (Hypothesis 6 supported).

Table 3 indicates that no relationship exists between prosocial silence and subjective well-being ( $\Delta R^2 = .00$ ,  $\beta = .03$ ,  $p > .05$ ) (Hypothesis 7 not supported). Prosocial silence was negatively associated with job satisfaction ( $\Delta R^2 = .42$ ,  $\beta = .00$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Hypothesis 8 not supported). After controlling for mediator, the significant relationship between prosocial silence and subjective well-being became insignificant ( $\beta = .00$ ,  $p > .05$ ). In addition, the variance accounted by mediated model ( $R^2 = .46$ ,  $p > .05$ ) was more than the variance accounted by direct model ( $R^2 = .04$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (see table 3) which proves that job satisfaction fully mediated the relationship (Hypothesis 9 supported).

Table 3  
*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Subjective Well-Being*

Model	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable (s)	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	B
1	SWB	(i) CVs	.04	.04	
		(ii) CVs	.18*	.14*	.38*
		+AS			
		(iii) CVs	.49*	.31*	
		+AS			.19*
		+JS			-.61*



*Types of Employee silence, SWB & Job Satisfaction*

2	SWB	(i)	CVs	.04	.04	
		(ii)	CVs	.14*	.10*	
			+QS			.33*
		(iii)	CVs	.47*	.32*	
3	SWB		+QS			.10
			+JS			-.64*
		(i)	CVs	.04	.04	
		(ii)	CVs	.04	.00	.03
4	SWB		+PS			
		(iii)	CVs	.46*	.42*	
			+PS			-.00
			+JS			-
5	SWB					.68*
		(i)	CVs	.04	.04	
		(ii)	CVs			
			+OS	.09*	.05*	.23*
6	SWB	(iii)	CVs	.47*	.38*	
			+OS			.09
			+JS			-
						.66*
7	SWB	(i)	CVs	.04	.04	
		(ii)	CVs			
			+JS	.46*	.42*	-.68*

\*: Significant at 0.05 level of significance

CV= Control Variables; AS= Acquiescent silence; QS = Quiescent silence; PS = Prosocial silence; OS= Opportunistic silence; SWB= Subjective Well-Being; JS= Job satisfaction

Control Variables: Working years, Qualification, Department, Gender, Position, and Age

Table 3 indicates that a negative relationship exists between opportunistic silence and subjective well-being ( $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Hypothesis 10 not supported). Opportunistic silence was negatively associated with job satisfaction ( $\Delta R^2 = .38$ ,  $\beta = .09$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Hypothesis 11 not supported). After controlling for mediator, the significant relationship between opportunistic silence and subjective well-being became insignificant ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $p > .05$ ). In addition, the variance accounted by mediated model ( $R^2 = .47$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was more than the variance accounted by direct model ( $R^2 = .09$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (see table 3) which proves that job satisfaction fully mediated the relationship (Hypothesis 12 supported).

Table 3 indicates that subjective well-being had a positive association with job satisfaction ( $\Delta R^2 = .42$ ,  $\beta = .68$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Hypothesis 13 supported).

## **Discussion**

The results of this study revealed that two forms of employee silence i.e. acquiescent silence and quiescent silence are negatively related to subjective well-being. These findings are supported by numerous researches (Gross & Levenson, 1997; Richards & Gross, 1999 ; Knoll & Dick, 2013; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). These studies show that self-silencing due to fear of negative consequences of speaking up weaken health and well-being of an individual. Moreover, it was observed that opportunistic silence is also negatively related to subjective well-being. These findings are opposite to the research of Knoll and Dick (2013) which indicated that when employees feel that remaining silent will provide them with personal advantages and may spare them from workplace conflicts; it results in enhanced individual well-being. In investigating the mechanisms through which employee silence exerts its effect on subjective well-being of individuals; results indicated that silence behaviors decreases the satisfaction of the employees with their job which in turn reduce their subjective well-being, thus indicating the presence of a mediation mechanism. It was found that that job satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between acquiescent silence and subjective well-being and fully mediates the relationship between quiescent silence and subjective well-being and opportunistic silence and subjective well-being.

The results obtained show that prosocial silence is not related to subjective well-being. These findings are opposite of the research of Knoll and Dick (2013) which indicated that employees who opt to remain silent to protect their important relationships should not experience a decline in their well-being. In addition, prosocial silence is negatively related to job satisfaction. These findings also contradict with the research of Knoll and Dick (2013) which indicated that silence is not detrimental when employees feel that remaining silent will be beneficial for their personal relationships.

As with every research enquiry, this study has some inherent limitations. First, this is a cross-sectional study which prohibits the understanding of causal relationships among variables. Longitudinal studies should be conducted in future to get precise and consistent results. Second, limited types of employee silence have been investigated in this research; i.e. acquiescent silence, quiescent silence, prosocial silence and opportunistic silence. Literature has reported some other types of employee silence. This provides additional avenues for researchers to understand how other types of employee silence relate to subjective well-being. Third, this study has been conducted on a specific sector. Future studies should be conducted to validate this relationship in other professions and can incorporate other variables as a moderator or mediator to examine the relationship between different types of employee silence and subjective well-being.

The results of this study add to the body of knowledge on subjective well-being about the impacts of different types of silence on it. The silence climate in an organization can cause damage to the workers' job satisfaction and well-being. This research is beneficial as it provides the basis for further theoretical development and provides the implications for management of the organizations to improve their employees' subjective well-being.

Managers can enhance employees pride in their respective profession by providing them constructive feedback. So, for successful growth of organizations the managers should know about the circumstances in which employees are reluctant to take part in the conversations. This research provides insights related to how silence motives and behaviors of employees affects the subjective well-being of employees directly and indirectly through the mediating mechanism of job satisfaction. Management teams seeking the help of this research would be able to deal with the issue of silence in employees. It would help the management to identify which type of silence causes negative outcomes in the organization and can overcome that issue of silence by taking some measures. The findings recommend that managers can reduce the silence climate in their organizations by enhancing both organizational commitment and professional attachment of employees. They can boost employees' morale to speak up in work related matters by increasing their organizational pride and satisfaction with work. As evident from the past studies that workers with high subjective well-being perform well on job (Judge & Klinger, 2008); administrators can boost the performance of the employees by creating an environment of sharing creative views and ideas.

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