



THE IMPACT OF ACQUIESCENCE SILENCE ON COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY OF WORK TEAMS

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Abstract

This study examined the extent to which acquiescent silence affects the collaboration and creativity of employees within the banking sector. For the study, social exchange theory was adopted as the theoretical framework. The study focused on staff with full employment in deposit money banks in the South-South states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, and Rivers. Focus would be on Rivers, Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom. The choice of these three cities and states was informed by proximity to the researcher. Preliminary investigation shows that a total of one thousand, four hundred and forty-one (1441) management and subordinate staff are in the eighteen (18) selected deposit money banks. The determination of the sample size was done using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table and the result was 302. Multiple regression was used to test the null hypotheses. Our findings revealed a significant relationship between acquiescent silence and both collaboration and creativity. The study further recommended that organizations need to ensure that both managers and employees have the necessary support to be creative and understand how to use it in their particular job situation.

Keywords: *Acquiescent, silence, collaboration, creativity, banks*

Introduction

Work teams can exist for performing organizationally relevant tasks, maintaining a certain degree of interdependence in terms of goals and tasks, that manage and maintain their boundaries, and that are immersed in an organizational context which limits their activity and influences the extent of their interchange with other teams within the organization (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003). Organizational success will to a great extent depend on how effectively teams can carry out their responsibility while working towards achieving pre-determined organizational goals and objective. As organizations move from more structural settings towards team work, emphasis are shifting towards how to make these teams more effective and more efficient than what was previously obtainable in traditionally structured settings (Balee, 2017). Teams provide diversity in knowledge, attitudes, skills and experience, whose integration makes it possible to offer rapid, flexible and innovative responses to problems and challenges, promoting performance and improving the satisfaction of those making up the team. This is the result of what has been called the wisdom of crowds: increased capacity for achieving various types of performance made possible by the interaction of team members (Salas, Rosen, Burke & Goodwin, 2009). Thus, the success of organizations and the overall production of knowledge depend to a large extent on the effectiveness of teams (Wuchty, Jones & Uzzi, 2007).

However, teams do not always act in this way, and sometimes fail to achieve the high performance expected of them (Sims, Salas & Burke, 2005). In fact, everyday experience tells us that in many cases teams, far from being mechanisms for capitalizing effectively and satisfactorily on collective effort, turn into black holes that relentlessly consume the physical, mental and emotional energies of their members. This tends to involve their wasting a great deal of effort to attain their goals – if indeed those goals are even met at all. Therefore, the challenge for research and intervention involves the effective integration of the contributions of qualified and expert people which can provide added value to the organization. Nor must we overlook the important role of the design of the organizational context in which teams exist, which should facilitate the creation of structures and lines of support, communication, consultation, feedbacks and rewards that complement the internal functioning of the team (Aritzeta & Alcover, 2006; Hackman, 1998).

At the same time as organizations have increased their experience in the use of teams, there has also been a significant increase in research aimed at the development of methods and theories for measuring the effectiveness of work teams (Goodwin, Burke, Wildman & Salas, 2009). This has brought with it a proliferation of models and constructs that attempt to describe, understand and explain the functioning of work teams, though their theoretical and methodological diversity has hindered the integration and consolidation of the results obtained (Weingart & Cronon, 2009). For example, following the review by Cannon-Bowers, Tannenbaum, Salas and Volpe (1995), more recently, Salas, Stagl, Burke and Goodwin (2007) identified 138 proposals from different disciplines that set out to define the group processes and skills involved in the performance and effectiveness of teams. And although there have been attempts to reduce this considerable dispersion – such as the imaginative proposal of Salas, Sims and Burke (2005), who suggested the possibility of identifying a construct similar to the Big Five related to team work –, it seems

we are a long way still from achieving such integration (Salas & Wildman, 2009; Weingart & Cronon, 2009).

Over the last forty years, teams have come to be considered as a central element in the functioning of organizations. This has been facilitated, at least partly, by a series of studies reporting the positive relations between team-based working and the quality of products and services offered by an organization (Gibson, Porath, Benson & Lawler, 2007). However, it has been the pressures deriving from the need to develop new business models in dynamic, uncertain and complex environments and the need for innovation that have led to a demand to adapt work structures traditionally revolving around individuals and to adopt organizational designs geared to change and based on teams (Lawler & Worley, 2006; West & Markiewicz, 2004). And indeed, this trend has been observed in all types of employment context, both private and public, including in the military (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006).

The concept of silence is attributed negative meanings included introversion, introvert behaviors in psychology and inaction and intimidation of society in sociology; whereas in ethics and philosophy, it is associated with positive meanings such as keeping secrets and mediation (Afşar, 2013). In literatures, it is observed that the concepts of employee silence and organizational silence are used interchangeably for employee's silence (Park & Keil, 2009). This study considers both concepts in the same meaning as organizational silence. Morrison and Milliken (2000) define organizational silence as conscious choice of employees about not expressing their knowledge and ideas concerning organizational problems. According to another definition, organizational silence is the denial of an individual's behavioral, mental and emotional genuine expressions from others, who are capable of altering or fixing the situation (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). According to Bagheri, Zarei and Aeen (2012), organizational silence is the situation in which employees willingly or unwillingly keep information that might be useful for the organization.

It can be said that employees adopt silence after a process. There might be different motivations that push them to be silent (Milliken & Morrison, 2003; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003). On the basis of these motivations, the reasons for organizational silence can be dealt with in several different dimensions. Çakıcı (2007) analyzes the reasons for organizational silences with five dimensions: administrative reasons, the fear of isolation, operational reasons, lack of experience, and fear of ruining relationships. Van Dyne et al. (2003) define three dimensions: acknowledged silence, defense-oriented silence and silences for the good of the organization. Alparslan (2010) defines organizational silence as a four-dimensional structure consisting of self-defense and fear-oriented silence, indifference and submission oriented silence, pro-social tendency oriented silence and silence for protection of relationship. Kahveci and Demirtaş (2013) analyze organizational silence under four dimensions: emotions, source of silence, managers and isolation. This study draws from Tülübaş's (2011) study, which is largely based on Brinsfield's (2009) research consisting meticulously conducted dimensions in order to reveal organizational silence of bankers. These dimensions are: acquiescence, self-defense, protecting relationships with co-workers and supervisors, organizational regulations, and lack of self-confidence. The concept of acquiescence is associated with the fact that workers remain to be passive, as they believe that expression of their knowledge, ideas and thought is useless

(Ülker & Kanten, 2009). Employees, even they cannot remain silent, know that talking is meaningless; therefore, they strike such an attitude (Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003). Tülübaş (2011) describes this situation as passive recognition of the status quo. The dominance of bureaucratic mentality in some organizations might cause critical thinkers to bite back and prevent from expressing their opinions; in other words they retreat into organizational silence.

Self-Fear is an important factor, which defines the way of employee's behavior. During expression of opinions, employees might fear from facing negative outcomes; so they might be pushed to silence. For academicians, it is important to be promoted as a result of their scholarly work. Promotion for the case of academy and administration requires a long process and great efforts. For these reasons, academicians might not be critical about status quo in order to protect their careers and this applies to bankers as well. They may consciously prefer not to express their views and ideas. Employees might also remain silent due to the fear of exclusion, inability to be promoted and neglect of looking like a problem-causing person. Employees try to avoid from consequences that might occur when they speak out (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Employees instinctively try to protect themselves from problematic situations. Previous research showed that employees believe that they may lose their jobs, they cannot achieve promotion, they can face restrictions, they may be held responsible for the situation and they can miss out organizational rewards in case they do not remain silent (Brinsfield et al., 2009; Milliken et al., 2003). Employees might fall into silence not to be the troubled person within the organization, not to be embarrassed against their friends and due to the possibility that their opinions are not supported by others (Durak, 2014). Bowen and Blackmon (2003) also state that employees, who consider that their opinions are not backed by others, choose to remain silent. The reason for expression of opinions at the workplace is to acquire superiority in sharing of several resources and to influence the way of work upon one's request. Thoughts concerning the share of resources and the way of doing work can occasionally cause conflicts. Employees might prefer to be silent to avoid such a conflict.

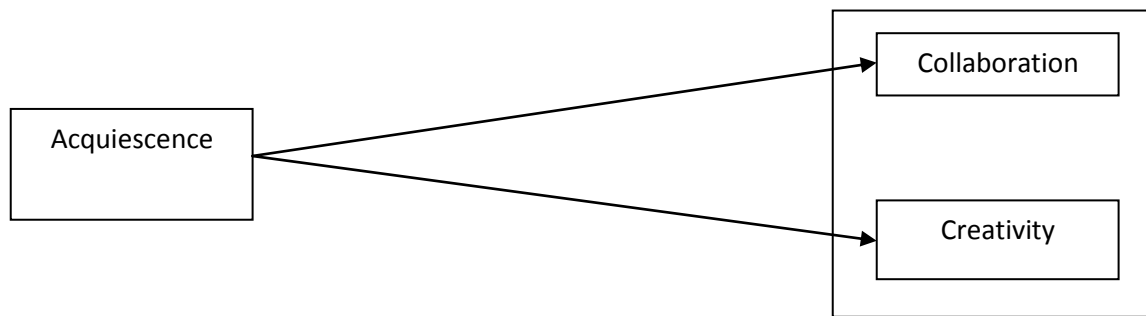
Preservation of valuable relations can be a significant reason for silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2003, p. 1355). When employees talk about a negative situation about the work, they might fear from deterioration of their relations with supervisors, they may believe that they can confront restrictions, they cannot be promoted and even they may lose their jobs; these fears lead to silence (Morrison, Milliken & Hewlin, 2003, p. 1462). Employees do not desire to be perceived as problematic individuals (Tülübaş, 2011). Studies indicate that transparency and publicity of top-level administration and perceived organizational support lead to a decrease of silence (Erenler, 2010). Two main views might exist for preservation of relationships with supervisors. First, employee can remain silent not to break their relationships with supervisors to protect themselves. This situation can be evaluated under the sub-dimension of self-defense. The other view consists of ideas to gain support of supervisors by remaining silent and maintaining relations with supervisors. Bankers' promotions depend on reports of superiors in most cases. Therefore, employees can prefer to be silent in order to get their superiors' support.

In classical organizational structures, communication channels from down to top can be limited and insufficient (Ehtiyar & Yanardağ, 2008, p. 56). In such a situation, as employees believe that they are unable to change this structure within the organization, they may choose to remain

silent. In central organizations, whose structures represent bureaucratic hierarchy more, support for organizational silence is more probable (Durak, 2014). There is a common belief that some countries bureaucracy has a solid and centralist structure. In Turkish society, obedience to the authority is a significant phenomenon in determination of individual behaviors. When this general structure and limited and insufficient channels of communication within the organization are combined, it is expected that employees experience organizational silence that is based on institutional regulations (Aytaç, 2007).

Studies abound in the area of organizational silence and team effectiveness, but very few of these studies paid attention to the uniqueness of the Nigerian business environment which is what this work sets out to do by investigating the relationship between organizational silence and team effectiveness in the Nigerian banking industry.

Operational Framework



Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: Acquiescence silence does not relate with collaboration

H₀₂: Acquiescence silence does not relate with creativity

Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory

Exchange theorists advance a basic image of social structure as a configuration of social relations among actors (both individual and corporate), where the relations involve the exchange of valued items (which can be material, informational, symbolic, etc). Exchange theory increasingly has involved explicit consideration of social structure, as both product and constraint, typically in the form of networks of social relations. We will comment on the similarities and differences in the perspectives on social structure of three of the principal exchange theorists in historical progression.

Homans View of Social Structure

Homans' (1961, 1964) primary purpose was the study of the "sub institutional" or "elementary" forms of behavior. Homans developed a theory of social behavior based primarily upon behavioral principles of analysis. He took as the domain of his explanatory framework (1961), "the actual social behavior of individuals in direct contact with one another." He refers to this behavior as elementary and clearly distinguishes it from behavior that can be defined as obedience to the norms of a society (including role-related behavior). Role-conforming behavior was institutionalized behavior, thus actual behavior was defined by Homans as sub institutional. For Homans, social structures emerge from elementary forms of behavior and change over time in response to changes in this behavior by aggregates. (He does not address in any detail the complex interplay between micro level processes and aggregate level outcomes.) He argued that the similar behaviors of enough people can alter existing social structures and institutions and even, under some conditions, replace them. "Sometimes the great rebellions and revolutions, cracking the institutional crust, bring out elementary social behavior hot and straight from the fissures" (Homans 1961). His analysis of social behavior endures as a classic in sociology precisely because his vision of the underpinnings of social structure and institutional forms is straight forward and is linked so clearly to the actions of individuals (i.e. to their responses to rewarding and punishing circumstances).

Blau's View of Social Structure

While Homans' work is distinctly micro sociological in character, Blau's (1964) major treatise on exchange and power is an explicit statement of the micro-macro linkage problem, before micro-macro issues became a fashion-able topic in sociology in the 1980s (e.g. Alexander, Giesen, Munch, & Smelser 1987, Collins 1981, Cook & Shawn 1996, Huber 1991, etc). Blau's focus was the development of a theory of social structure and institutions based upon a sound micro foundation, a theory of social exchange. Two major features differentiate Blau's work from that of Homans. First, Blau did not base his theory of exchange upon behavioral principles; instead he introduced aspects of micro-economic reasoning into his analysis of distinctly social exchange. Second, recognizing that social structures have emergent properties, he ex-tended the theory beyond sub institutional phenomena.

Blau discusses processes like group formation, cohesion, social integration, opposition, conflict, and dissolution in terms of principles of social exchange. In his view various forms of social association generated by exchange processes over time come to constitute quite complex social structures (and substructures). The coordination of action in large collectivities is made possible by common values in the social system which mediates the necessary indirect exchanges. Thus, Blau's theory moves far beyond direct contact between individual actors, incorporating complex indirect exchange processes. Structural change in both small and large social structures is analyzed in terms of social forces like differentiation, integration, organization, and opposition. Blau and, subsequently, Emerson (1972a) both made power processes central to their analysis of the emergence of social structures and structural change.

Methodology

Survey design was adopted for its descriptive nature, causal relations, and power to draw inferences from particular to general through the use of statistical control and appropriate test statistic. Specifically, explanatory and cross-sectional survey through the use of self-reported questionnaire was adopted; the choice of this design was informed by the nature of the phenomena of interest. For instance, change is best investigated in a given context defined as conditions and participants. The explanatory survey measures antecedent factors that cause change (cause-and-effect); thereby, leading to building and/or validating theories as well as predicting and controlling the phenomena under investigation. The cross-sectional study measures the snap short of opinions of management and subordinate staff of banks in the South-South region of Nigeria.

More specifically, we focused on staff with full employment in deposit money banks in the South-South states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, and Rivers. Focus would be on Rivers, Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom. The choice of these three cities and states was informed by proximity to the researcher. Preliminary investigation shows that a total of one thousand, four hundred and forty-one (1441) management and subordinate staff are in the eighteen (18) selected deposit money banks. The determination of the sample size was done using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table and the result was 302. Multiple regression was used to test the null hypotheses.

Data Analyses and Findings

H₀₁. There is no significant relationship between acquiescence and collaboration.

Coefficients^a

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | |
|-------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|---------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | .945 | .270 | | 3.498 | .001 |
| | Acquiescence | -.411 | .031 | -.364 | -13.397 | .000 |
| | collaboration | -.560 | .024 | -.638 | -23.460 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Collaboration

From the above table, the standardized coefficients of -0.364 for acquiescence shows a negative relationship between acquiescence and collaboration. The t-statistics value of -13.397 is seen to be greater than ± 2 at a probability value of 0.000 which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This therefore leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of its alternate form that there is a significant relationship between acquiescence and collaboration.

Hypothesis two

H02. There is no significant relationship between acquiescence and creativity.

Coefficients^a

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | |
|-------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|---------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 6.920 | .259 | | 26.709 | .000 |
| | Acquiescence | -.145 | .029 | -.148 | -4.918 | .000 |
| | Creativity | -.637 | .023 | -.838 | -27.867 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Creativity

From the above table, the standardized coefficients of -0.148 for acquiescence shows a negative relationship between acquiescence and creativity. The t-statistics value of -4.918 is seen to be greater than ± 2 at a probability value of 0.000 which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This therefore leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of its alternate form that there is a significant relationship between acquiescence and creativity.

Conclusion

From the underlying analysis the study observes that, acquiescence as a dimension of organizational silence shows a negative and significant relationship with the collaboration of employees. This shows that an increase in acquiescence of employees would lead to a corresponding decrease in the workplace collaboration of employees. Collaboration involves participants working together on the same task, rather than in parallel on separate portions of the task. Therefore negative acquiescence affects interactivity. Another marker of true collaboration is the quality of interactions, especially the degree of interactivity and negotiability (Dillenbourg, 1999). Interactivity refers to the extent to which interactions influence participants' thinking. This finding goes in line with other literature (e.g., Javeline, 1999; Johnson, Kulesa, Cho, & Shavitt, 2005) who observed a negative relationship between acquiescence and collaboration.

Acquiescence shows a negative but significant relationship with the creativity of employees. This shows that an increase in acquiescence of employees would stimulate and lead to a corresponding increase in the workplace creativity of employees. When employees or teams are in silence they tend not to act in ways that will favor the organization, and sometimes fail to achieve the high performance expected of them (Sims, Salas & Burke, 2005). In fact, everyday experience tells us that in many cases teams, far from being mechanisms for capitalizing effectively and satisfactorily on collective effort, turn into black holes that relentlessly consume the physical, mental and emotional energies of their members. This tends to involve their wasting a great deal of effort to attain their goals – if indeed those goals are even met at all. This therefore accounts for the negative relationship observed here. This finding coincides with the review by Cannon-Bowers, Tannenbaum, Salas and Volpe (1995), more recently, Salas, Stagl, Burke and Goodwin (2007).

Recommendations

- i. How employees perceive organizational support matters a great deal to sustaining creativity. When employees believe it is present they not only believe they will be creative, but they believe their manager will support them and they will reengage creatively after they are interrupted. When there is a lack of support for creativity they are more inclined to be interrupted creatively. Therefore, organizations need to ensure that both managers and employees have the necessary support to be creative and understand how to use it in their particular job situation.
- ii. Managers of firms should put in place meaningful and consistent organizational support for creativity. Just saying that you think it is important is not enough. It needs to be visible, tangible, and culturally relevant to each employee in each part of the organization; e.g., the R&D department needs one type of support and operations need another, but both need to feel like their leaders will prioritize creative work and give them the right tools, resources and environment to be successful creatively.
- iii. Ensure that managers understand how organizational support converts into individual employee creative job expectations and that they can effectively translate these expectations for their employees.

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