



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

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Abstract

This study examined the extent to which defensive silence affects the collaboration and creativity of employees within the banking sector. For the study, self determination 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 defensive 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: *Defensive, silence, collaboration, creativity, banks*

Introduction

Organizational Silence denotes circumstances where employees hold back potentially valuable information from the organization of which they are a part. Van Dyne et al. (2003) described silence as an employee's incentive to hold back or articulate proposals, information and views regarding work-associated developments. Silence is a communicative option that employees may choose to assume. Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) assert that the silence could be deliberate or unintended; information can be consciously held back by employees. Organizational silence involves a collective belief among employees that speaking up is imprudent. Employees learn that when they disclose information about subjects or difficulties, the organization garners all the advantages while they bear the costs. The employees are unwilling to talk about the issues that can be understood erroneously by the managers and perceived as a threat. Nevertheless as Milliken (2000) observes they are not oblivious of the problems and they converse about it among themselves when they are alone only they are unable to speak the truth to their supervisors and they feel obliged to stay silent. Organizational silence is not an individual behaviour; it is multiplied all over the organization. In reality it involves a broad-spectrum mind-set of employees; still, it has consequences for new organization members. Talking is discarded by employees due to precedence of negative incidents by those who have been in the organization for many years. New entrants follow the instance of the experienced employees and decide to stay silent to avoid damage. Aktan (2006) observes that employees suppose that there is no prospect of change in the unwanted organizational situations and consequently repudiate taking action; lose their self-assurance and suffer inadequacy and powerlessness. Aylsworth (2008) affirms that instead of defiance, they concede and normalize the unwanted organizational conditions. Van Dyne et al. (2003) introduced three types of silence as - acquiescent silence, defensive silence, and pro-social silence. Acquiescent Silence involves keeping back important ideas, information, or opinions, because of resignation. It implies disengaged behaviour that is more passive than active and is motivated by resignation, obedience and accent to anything.

Defensive Silence is holding back important ideas, information, or opinions as a method of self-protection, arising from fear. It is deliberate and practical behaviour aimed at self-protection from external threats. Van Dyne, et al. (2003) observes that contrary to Acquiescent Silence, it is more hands-on and entails consciousness and reflection of choices, added to a cognisant resolution to hold back ideas, information, and opinions as the best personal plan at the moment. Pinder and Harlos (2001) refer to quiescent silence as deliberate omission based on personal fear of the consequences of speaking up. It is motivated by self-protection. Pro-social Silence entails withholding work-related ideas, information, or opinions with the aim of profiting other people or the organization arising from altruism or cooperative motives. Van Dyne, et al. (2003) affirms that it is optional behaviour based on consciousness and reflection on choices and the cognisant resolution to withhold ideas, information, and opinions. It is motivated by concern for others, being interested in others and creating opportunities for collaboration.

The attainment of work goals is critical for individual and organizational success (Kanter & Brinkerhoff, 1981). The idea that task accomplishment satisfaction relates to affective states is consistent with affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Weiss and Cropanzano developed affective events theory to explain how discrete work events provoke emotional reactions that influence subsequent behavior and attitudes. We contend that daily self-evaluations of one's task accomplishment represent affective events that influence

employee emotions (Henkel & Hinsz, 2004). Indeed, Basch and Fisher (2000) found that goal progress, goal achievement (or lack thereof), and task problems were retrospectively identified by individuals as affective events impacting daily emotions. Further, satisfaction with goal accomplishment has been implicated in theories of behavioral self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1990). Thus, exploring how day-level satisfaction with task accomplishment relates to affect is an important next step in linking task performance with well-being.

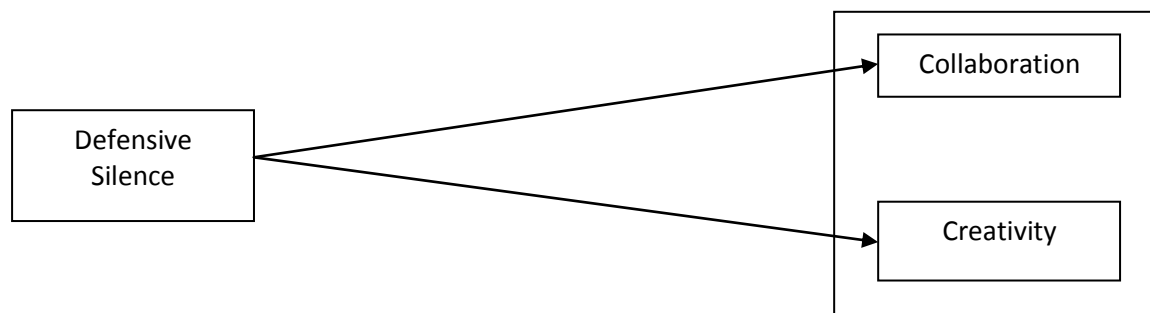
Support for the idea that task accomplishment satisfaction impacts affect stems from previous work looking at goal accomplishment. Henkel and Hinsz (2004) found that individuals who attained their goals experienced more positive affect and less negative affect than did individuals who did not attain their goals. Similarly, Ilies and Judge (2005) found that performance feedback impacted subsequent affect (which predicted subsequent goals), with positive feedback resulting in positive affect and negative feedback resulting in negative affect. Though the results of these studies are suggestive, the potential generalizability of these findings is limited because the tasks used were laboratory based. Further, these studies did not assess satisfaction with task accomplishment, which prevents inferences about the links of task accomplishment satisfaction with affective reactions.

Addressing some of these limitations, Harris et al. (2003) utilized a 2-week daily diary study with a sample of 22 call center workers and found that daily goal attainment predicted daily affect (e.g., pleasurable affect, activated affect). Though this study utilized an applied sample in a naturalistic setting, it was limited in that (a) goal attainment pertained to abstract, need-based activities (e.g., good performance, being able to influence work) rather than concrete, occupation-specific work activities; (b) negative affect was not examined; (c) the level of satisfaction with attainment was not assessed; and (d) the role of person-level constructs was not considered. The current study addressed each of these limitations and took the additional step of distinguishing between tasks that are more or less central to the work role. As Peplau (1992) noted in regard to service providers, for example “The behavior of the nurse-as-a-person interacting with the patient-as-a-person has significant impact on the patient’s well-being and the quality and outcome of nursing care”. As such, nursing tasks that require more extensive nurse–patient interaction are more central to the occupation and may have greater implications for patient outcomes. We contend, in line with role-based identity theory (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Burke, 1991; Thoits, 1999), that the accomplishment of more central work tasks may have greater effects on employee well-being.

According to role-based identity theory, individuals have socially constructed definitions of their work roles, with some tasks being more directly important to a sense of role accomplishment and other tasks being more indirectly relevant. As Thoits has noted, sources of stress that implicate central aspects of an individual’s self-concept should be more predictive of outcomes than those that affect less central features. Focusing specifically on nursing, Aiken et al. (2001) provided a descriptive look at the frequency with which nursing tasks were performed in a sample of 43,329 nurses working at 711 hospitals in five countries (United States, Canada, England, Scotland, and Germany). High percentages of nurses from each country reported having to frequently perform indirect care tasks that do not require nurse–patient interaction (e.g., charting, reviewing test results) as well as direct care tasks that require such interaction (e.g., comforting and/or talking with patients). Aiken et al. theorized that not completing direct care tasks could be detrimental to well-being. Building on Thoits’s (1999) view of identity and the fact that nurses’ caring interactions with patients

and their families constitute an essential feature of nursing practice (Bolton, 2000; Woodward, 1997), we propose that dissatisfaction with the completion of tasks associated with direct, rather than indirect, patient care would be experienced as more problematic. Though we expected that daily task accomplishment satisfaction would relate to changes in affect, it was not clear whether the effects would be the same for positive and negative affect or whether one affective response would be more strongly impacted. Goal attainment and task satisfaction have been linked to positive affective reactions (Locke & Latham, 1990). However, research on the negativity bias (Ito, Larsen, Smith & Cacioppo, 1998) and the asymmetry effect (Taylor, 1991) has shown that negative events “elicit more physiological, affective, cognitive, and behavioral activity and prompt more cognitive analysis than neutral or positive events” (Taylor, 1991, p. 67).

Operational Framework



Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: Defensive silence does not relate with collaboration

H₀₂: Defensive silence does not relate with creativity

Theoretical Framework

Self-determination Theory

The various conceptual models within traditional humanistic psychology share a central tenet: the fundamental value of the actualization of human potential. Both Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961) developed optimistic theories that underscore the capacities, opportunities, and innate trajectory of human beings toward personal growth and psychological well-being. Self-determination theory (SDT), developed more recently, has refined and advanced the optimistic perspective of traditional humanistic psychology by placing importance on the centrality of the self as a causal agent in human functioning. It stands in sharp contrast with deterministic and reductionist paradigms favored by contemporary psychological science, such as applied behavior analysis and cognitive neuroscience (Sheldon, Joiner, Pettit, & Williams, 2003). However, research has shown that a

positive life orientation in the absence of tangible accomplishment is linked to negative psychological, interpersonal, and real-world outcomes.

This paradox has been described in the literature as the tendency in contemporary society to emphasize positive illusions. Positive illusions appear to make life more satisfying in the short term, but in fact lead to negative consequences in the long run (Schneider, 2011). For example, the emphasis on cultivating self-esteem in students in educational settings, which originated with the broader self-esteem movement (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003) must be accompanied by real academic growth grounded in real academic achievement for psychologically beneficial outcomes to unfold. Of course, positive illusions can produce a sense of well-being in educational settings, but as Viktor Frankl (1969) noted, genuine and lasting well-being is the result of a “life well-lived”. Thus, without real accomplishments there can be no eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

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

Hypothesis one

H₀₁. There is no significant relationship between defensive silence and collaboration.

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	11.082	.368		30.130	.000
Defensive silence	-.181	.042	-.188	-4.344	.000
Collaboration	-.828	.032	-1.106	-25.494	.000

a. Dependent Variable: collaboration

From the above table, the standardized coefficients of -0.188 for defensive silence shows a negative relationship between defensive silence and collaboration. The t-statistics value of -4.344 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 defensive silence and collaboration.

Hypothesis Two

H0₂. There is no significant relationship between defensive silence and creativity.

Coefficients^a

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

a. Dependent Variable: Creativity

From the above table, the standardized coefficients of 0.638 for defensive silence shows an adverse relationship between defensive silence and collaboration. The t-statistics value of 23.460 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 defensive silence and creativity.

Conclusion

Defensive silence shows a negative and significant relationship with collaboration of employees. This shows that an increase in Defensive silence of employees would reduce and lead to a corresponding decrease in the workplace collaboration of employees. Acquiescence is an indicator of the lack of organizational support manager support and preparedness. It can be identified that; Lack of organizational support is well aligned with lower levels of perceived organizational support, as would be expected, and with lower levels of manager creative-supportive behavior. Conversely, this interrupter was not nearly as well aligned with lower levels of all the employee collaboration characteristics. Lack of manager support to prepare the employee to do collaborative work is well aligned with lower levels of both manager factors of expectations for collaborative work and supportive behavior. Lack of preparation to collaborate was similarly aligned with all the factors in the model, but only at very minimal levels. Lack of skill to complete collaborative tasks is moderately well aligned with lower levels of collaboration. This findings tallies with those of previous literature that have clearly discussed the downside of employee productivity such as Sharma and Sharma (2014), Cato and Gordon (2009) Morales et al., (2001) and Obdulio (2014).

Defensive silence also displays a negative and significant relationship with the creativity of employees. This shows that, when leaders display Defensive silence, this leads to lower workplace creativity of employees. Gephart-Kish et al. (2009) suggested that defensive silence should be categorized with regard to the level of fear experienced by the employee (low-high) and to the amount of time employee has to take action (short-long). 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). This finding results from employee fears. For example, an employee may experience a low level of fear when he reflects on going to talk to the boss about suggestions for improvement. In this situation, the employee has time enough to deliberately and consciously determine the costs and benefits of speaking up (in case he wants to), to consult others and to evaluate different strategies instead of speaking up (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009). This therefore affects their creativity. For example, for an individual who developed fear of talking openly to his leader due to a past negative experience, he is unlikely to check again if there are still threats by speaking up (contributing, that way, for the climate of silence) (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009).

Recommendations

The study recommends that board of trustees of deposit money banks do the following

- i. Have the manager work on establishing a trusting relationship beginning in the creativity preparation phase through how they assist the employee in preparing and then throughout the execution phase by playing close attention to the tone and content of their interactions with the employee.
- ii. Help employees to interpret and apply the organizational expectations and support features to their own job by having them articulate what they expect creatively, what they think the creative expectations and opportunities are of their job and how they believe it will add the most value.
- iii. Individually tailor the organizational supports that the employee most needs based on their reported creative preparation needs. Individual needs could vary from learning how they can establish more autonomy, establishing parameters for more dedicated creative work time or coaching on how to balance work priorities.

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